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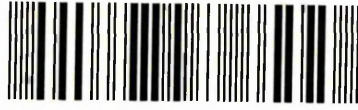
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**Integrating the experiences and identities of Irish mature
student primary teachers**

Anne M. Dolan

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the
Degree of Doctor of Education.**

September 2008

Abstract

In the contemporary context of lifelong learning, studies of the experiences of female mature students in colleges of education, particularly in Ireland, are limited. This qualitative study of six female full-time mature student teachers in Ireland is rooted in a multifaceted theoretical framework, which incorporates symbolic interactionism, critical realism and critical theory. It is based on a framework for analysing teacher education which incorporates three levels - the *micro* (the level of individual aspirations, interactions and micro political struggles), the *meso* (including the departmental and institutional contexts within which teacher education takes place) and the *macro* (broadly the national, European and international context within which teacher education and schooling occurs). Three themes emerge from the data which the author portrays as three stages of development in the life of the student teacher: (a) presentation of self, (b) self in transition, and (c) redemption of self. Significantly, at various periods in their college life these women struggled with their own identities, adopted the persona of a student, experienced the difficulties of juggling responsibilities and divergent roles, and faced the challenges of identity in transition as their initial identity of primary teacher emerged. This study has highlighted the instrumental reasons for mature student teachers undertaking the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. Each woman voluntarily adopted an identity as a mature student in the long term interests of becoming a primary school teacher. In the process, their own identity was compromised in order to satisfy the requirements of the B.Ed. programme. The challenges which these women faced demonstrate the contradictions between policies and practices at *micro*, *meso* and *macro* levels in teacher education from the perspective of the mature student. My study concludes with a set of recommendations which aim to improve the experience of mature female student teachers in Ireland and mature students generally.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Padraic Kenna and my two daughters Emily and Laura.

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Studying for a doctorate can be a lonely enterprise. However, I was extremely fortunate in that two of my colleagues, David O Grady and Paddy Fullam, completed the doctorate programme with me. Their participation enhanced my experience as they travelled to Sheffield with me, shared their expertise over dinner and endless coffee breaks and provided lots of practical assistance. They were incredibly generous with their time and they provided much needed motivation to continue during the low points.

I would like to thank all of my friends and members of my family who provided support and assistance. A special word of thanks is due to my mother who continues to support my educational endeavours. She was always available to provide a helping hand and she often minded my children when I sat before the computer.

During my studies, my father died and my two children were born so several life changing events happened simultaneously. There were times when it would have been easier to withdraw from the doctorate programme. These real life events will always remind me how challenging it is for mature students to return to full time education. Therefore, the heroines of this study are the fantastic women who gave up some of their valuable time to share their stories with me. I will endeavour to improve educational experiences for mature students on their behalf.

Finally, this work would not have been possible without my husband Padraic Kenna. Padraic did everything possible to help me complete my doctorate studies. On the practical side, he made sure that the computer and printer were always working; he ensured that I had access to paper and ink and he organised the ordering and collection of library books. He brought the children on numerous day trips to give me space to write and he took on the bulk of parenting duties when I was unavailable. On an intellectual level, he discussed my ideas with me, proofread my scripts and offered invaluable suggestions. Most importantly of all, he believed in my ability to complete this journey and I know that it would never have been possible without his love and dedication.

Candidate's Statement

I confirm that this thesis is the sole work of the author.

Anne Dolan

Introduction

Lifelong learning features prominently in educational policies at national, European and international levels (European Commission, 2000; DES, 2000). The impact of these policies on mature students¹ has received some attention (Bowl, 2003; Merrill, 1999). However, the implications of these policies on mature student teachers in Ireland has not been investigated to date, and thus represents a significant gap in the literature.

This qualitative study of the experience of six female full-time mature student teachers in a college of education in Ireland is informed by a multifaceted theoretical framework which incorporates symbolic interactionism, critical realism and critical theory. It is based on a framework for analysing teacher education adopted from Murray and Maguire (2007:289). The literature review and data analysis work together in an iterative manner, enabling both aspects of the research process to inform each other throughout. Three themes emerged from the data, which I have identified as: Presentation of Self; Self in Transition and Redemption of Self.

The data was collected through three in-depth narrative interviews whereby each woman had an opportunity to reflect on her experience as a mature student teacher. The interviews showed that these students began their B.Ed. programme with strong identities which had evolved from their varied and interesting life stories. Yet, during their time in college, these identities became cumulatively compromised to varying degrees, depending on the unique circumstances of each individual student. These women struggled with their own identities, adopted the persona of a student, experienced the difficulties of juggling responsibilities and roles, and faced the challenges of identity in transition as they advanced towards the first signs of an emergent identity as primary teacher. Since these women ambitiously sought to become primary teachers, they were, in a sense, more willing to deal with the difficulties posed by the self in transition as mature student teachers. However, in an era of lifelong learning, it is strongly argued that educational

¹ The term 'mature student' refers to a student aged 23 or more years on January 1st of the year in which he/she registers. While all students in third level institutions are adult, this study specifically focuses on the issues and needs of mature students.

institutions should adopt a more adult-friendly approach if they wish to enrol and retain high numbers of mature students. This approach must ostensibly recognise and value the experiences of mature students, as well as nurturing and affirming their identities. Mature students also need generous practical help to deal with the transient nature of returning to study.

While the study itself focuses on the micro experiences of the mature student, it is designed to inform teacher education initiatives and policies at meso and macro levels as informed by critical realism (Layder, 1993) and Murray and Maguire's (2007) framework. The study concludes with a set of recommendations designed to improve the experience of mature students in general and of mature female student teachers in particular.

Outline of Thesis

To protect the identity of the students, the college which was attended by the students is referred to as St. Catherine's College of Education. The structure of this dissertation is set out in Figure 1.1. Chapter one sets the scene for this research providing a rationale for choosing this topic. This chapter also includes the research question with objectives and a statement demonstrating the originality of this endeavour. Chapter two provides an overview of the literature from the interrelated fields of adult education, mature students and lifelong learning. Chapter three continues with a review of the chosen theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and critical realism. Chapter four outlines methodological assumptions and associated methods adopted in the exploration of the research question. This chapter also addresses such issues as the identification of participants, ethical matters, research methods, interview techniques and data analysis procedures. Chapter five presents the findings of the study through emergent themes and related data analysis. Chapter six continues the analysis with one of the stories which emerged from the study. Chapter seven provides a meta analysis of the data in relation to the theoretical framework. Chapter eight presents conclusions and recommendations arising from the study. Chapter nine concludes with an overall evaluation of the study.

Figure 1.1 Structure of the Dissertation

Introduction		
Chapter One: Setting the Scene		
Chapter Two: Literature Review		
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework		
Data Chapters		
Chapter Four: Methodological Assumptions and Methods	Chapter Five: Overview of Themes and their Analyses	Chapter Six: Cathy's Story
Chapter Seven: A Meta-Analysis of the Data in Relation to the Theoretical Framework		
Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations		
Chapter Nine: Evaluation of Study		

Chapter 1. Setting the Scene.

1.1. Introduction

As a mature student myself, I am interested in the experiences of mature students generally and mature female students in particular. It is this interest which has brought me on this journey of inquiry. This chapter sets the scene for my research study. It describes the aim, objectives and guiding values of the research process. A claim to originality is highlighted and a brief note about my own biography is included. The chapter also refers to the broader context of lifelong learning within which the study takes place. My study operates on three different levels (Murray and Maguire, 2007) i.e. the micro level of the student, the meso level of the institution and the macro level of Irish and International policy. These levels in turn provide an over arching framework for the study.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

This is a study based on the experiences of six female, mature, B.Ed. students from one college of education in Ireland. It is a symbolic interactionist study, as it focuses on how each student interacted with self in her role as student and how she interacted with all aspects of the college environment. The study is qualitative in nature based on the students' stories, as they were told through the process of three in-depth interviews for each individual student. The data collection took place at the end of their three-year degree programme.

My study is based on a framework for analysing teacher education adopted from Murray and Maguire (2007:289). This framework uses three levels or spaces – the micro (the level of individual aspirations, interactions and micro political struggles), the meso (including the departmental and institutional contexts within which teacher education takes place) and the macro (broadly the national, EU and international context within which teacher education and schooling occurs). The framework informs all stages of the study, from data collection, to data analysis, to the formulation of final conclusions. However, the primary focus is on the micro level, i.e. the lived experiences of mature students. The stories which are constructed by the students based on their lived experiences, i.e. the micro level, are

utilised to inform and understand policy and procedures adopted at both meso and macro levels. The study, therefore, expands outwards i.e. from the micro to the macro and contracts inwards, i.e. from the macro to the micro, at different stages throughout the dissertation. The interdependent nature of macro and micro phenomena (Layder, 1993) in the context of mature students will also be addressed through a critical realism perspective.

This study focuses on the experiences of adult learners, i.e. mature student teachers who were enrolled on a Bachelor in Education programme at the time of data collection. While all students in third level institutions are adult, this study specifically focuses on the issues and needs of mature students. In Ireland, a student is classified as a 'mature student' if he/she is aged 23 or more years on January 1st of the year in which he/she registers. The research aims to assess experiences of female mature students as lifelong learners in a formal third level setting. It is proposed to problematise and conceptualise lifelong learning in the context of a group of students, who are currently grappling with the demands of learning while also attending to their daily commitments as adults. In contributing to a greater understanding of lifelong learning as it is being experienced, the research will inform policy on a macro level in Ireland, as well as policy at individual, third level institutions on a meso level. The research will be of interest to those working in the field of adult education in general and with mature students in particular. It will be of particular interest to a recently formed organisation known as *The Network of Irish Mature Student Officers* (NIMSO)².

This research project has evolved largely out of a personal interest in adult education and in the experiences of mature students as they grapple with the highs and lows of academic endeavour. As a mature student myself, I have battled with these highs and lows

² The Network of Irish Mature Student Officers (NIMSO) was formally established in Autumn 2003. It is comprised of Mature Student Officers and Access Officers (with responsibility for mature students) from the state-funded institutions within the higher education sector in Ireland. The Network aims to increase the successful participation of mature students in higher education. It aims to improve access to information about opportunities for mature students in higher education, to promote and share research on mature students, to act as a lobby group, to share best practice, to initiate joint projects, to co-operate with all the stakeholders in the promotion of lifelong learning in Ireland and to inform policy at both institutional and national level regarding mature students.

throughout my academic career to date. As a lecturer on the B.Ed. Programme, I have been constantly impressed with the level of commitment and dedication demonstrated by mature students. However, I have also suspected that the course has represented a significant struggle for many mature students as they endeavour to meet the requirements of two 'greedy institutions', college and home (Edwards, 1993). Mature students undertake the same B.Ed. degree programme as school leavers, with no consideration given to their individual circumstances or to their previous life experiences.

I believe that there is an anomaly in the Irish education system. While EU and Irish Governmental policies are committed to lifelong learning and to increasing the participation of mature students, the number of mature students in Ireland remains below the EU average (DES, 2005). For those students who decide to enrol onto the B.Ed. programme, it appears to me that the nature of this participation is problematic for those students. Since I became a lecturer on the B.Ed programme, I have had many conversations with mature students and I have become aware of the sacrifices they make to participate on this course and the hardship they endure. Essentially, government policies to increase participation are at variance with practices and procedures at institutional (meso) levels. If policy makers in Ireland are serious about facilitating increased participation by mature students, there is a need to understand the current experience of mature students with a view to adapting and improving current practice. It is my intention that this study will go some way to serve this purpose.

My working life has been spent in various types of education settings including many years as a mature student. Having spent several years working as a primary teacher, I took a career break and worked in Africa for two years as a lecturer in teacher training. On my return to Ireland, I worked in different areas of education including development education and adult education. In 1999, I started my current job as a lecturer in teacher education. My career to date has encompassed practical experience in both formal and non-formal education. I am particularly interested in exploring avenues through which both formal and non-formal approaches to education can work together simultaneously. Arising from my involvement in primary and adult education and from my experience in

Africa, I have become interested in critical approaches to education. I am essentially a lifelong learner and it is from within this perspective that my study takes place.

This research is informed by and builds upon previous studies based on mature students (Bowl, 2003; Inglis and Murphy, 1999; Fleming and Murphy, 1997; Lynch, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993). While this study will not solve all problems for mature students and adult learners, it will nevertheless assist policy makers, educators and administrators in third level colleges to understand the experiences of mature students and to tailor their programmes accordingly. It is my intention that this research will generate some very practical recommendations with a view to making degree programmes more 'adult friendly'. If these recommendations are implemented, they should greatly assist the learning experiences of our mature students in an era with an ever-increasing emphasis on lifelong learning. Research in the context of a professional Doctorate in Education is designed to contribute to professional practice (Lester, 2004; Wellington and Sikes, 2006). It is, therefore, my intention that this research will build upon previous research to improve the educational experiences of mature students in Ireland, as I hope to publish the findings of this study in education journals.

1.3. Claim to Originality

The literature review in chapter two highlights the limited amount of research which has been undertaken in the area of mature students in Ireland (Lynch, 1997; Fleming and Murphy, 1997; Inglis and Murphy, 1999). Research on mature primary student teachers is even more limited (Duncan, 1999), and there are no studies available on mature student teachers in Ireland. This research is unusual in that it specifically looks at the experience of mature student teachers in the context of lifelong learning. It brings together theories from formal and non-formal education and it critically assesses the full-time provision of teacher education for mature students, i.e. the three year B.Ed. programme, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism informed by critical realism and critical theory.

One of the unique aspects of this research is that it is conducted within the Irish teacher education system, which is quite different to any other context internationally, including

teacher education in England. Teaching is portrayed as a less attractive career option in England (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003), unlike Ireland (Coolahan, 2002) where teaching is a highly regarded career choice. Irish pre-service teacher education is characterised by a distinct shortage of critical research (Deegan, 2008; Hall et al., 1999) unlike England where pre-service teacher education has received unprecedented attention from policy makers³. There are more mature students studying primary teaching in England. Comparatively, students in English colleges show more variation in age, with some aged over 40 years, while the majority of Irish first year teacher students are in their late teens. Hall et al. (1999) suggest two reasons for this scenario. Traditionally, recruitment to teacher education courses in Ireland has been buoyant, with the demand for places far exceeding supply, and the majority of places have been assigned to early school leavers. Significantly also, second chance education is a stronger feature in the English system.

To date, Irish higher education policy has focused predominantly on the accommodation of the younger age group of 18-23 years. Mature students are, therefore, underrepresented in full-time higher education by comparative standards (OECD, 2006). In the British higher education system, on the other hand, adults comprise just approximately 50 per cent of the total undergraduate student programme, including part-time and full-time students (Merrill 1999). Therefore, my study highlights the widening participation debate specifically in an Irish context.

While this study builds upon and is informed by related studies such as Duncan (2000) and Bowl (2003), it is nevertheless original for a number of reasons. Both the cohort of students interviewed and the researcher are Irish. This study has been informed by a theoretical framework informed by both symbolic interactionism and critical realism. It is also informed by a theoretical approach which has evolved from contemporary sociological debates around self and identity. One other related study dealing with student

³ The *Journal of Education for Teaching* contains many examples of research on pre-service education in Britain.

teachers is informed by a different theoretical framework. Duncan's (2000) study was informed primarily by ethnography. My study is also different in that I situate the research in the context of the lifelong learning agenda, whereby, I bring together the two fields of adult education and teacher education which inform the research process and final outcomes. The study is also original in line with symbolic interactionist thinking. This research is based on the interaction of the researcher with self, with six mature students and with related literature, each of these factors bringing their own contribution to *the definition of the situation* (Charon, 1989).

Mature primary student teachers in Ireland are different to student teachers in other jurisdictions because they are products of the Irish education system and because, as student teachers, they are completing their studies in a context which is inherently different for a number of historical, religious, cultural and political reasons (Coolahan, 2003; Killeavy, 1999). Therefore, the context of this study, i.e. the specific college environment and the unique features of teacher education in Ireland also endorse the originality of this research project. The unique feature of Irish teacher education is discussed in more detail in chapter 2. From a critical realist perspective, if one is to change the setting (Layder, 1993), then the nature of the research changes. Mature student teachers have not featured in Irish research to date. Therefore, this research identifies and attempts to address a gap in the literature from the perspective of Irish teacher education in a manner which is informed by research in other countries.

1.4. Aim of Research and Guiding Values

The research is qualitative in nature and endeavours to establish an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of life as a mature student in one college of education in Ireland. The study is based on the narratives of six mature students. A short biographical note about each student is included in appendix one. The ultimate aims of the study are to learn about and to understand the experiences of mature student teachers and to devise interventions for promoting lifelong learning in third level colleges. This will be done by focusing on the self of the mature student teacher in the context of her interaction with herself, with her colleagues, with college staff and with the college as an institution (which includes

rules, procedures etc.) and with society in general. The research study has been designed to address the following question:

How does the experience of a full time B.Ed. programme impact on the construction of the self for female mature students and what are the implications of this for mature students themselves, for educators in teacher education and for policy makers in the context of an agreed policy commitment to lifelong learning?

A symbolic interactionist perspective has been adopted to explore the self of the mature student. A more detailed overview of symbolic interactionism is provided in chapter three. The concept of the self is explored at the micro interactionist level of the experience of the mature student as she interacts with herself, her colleagues, her tutors and the college (meso level). The implications from the analysis of the data will be set out in a set of long term and short term recommendations. This symbolic interactionist study evolves from the stories of six mature students. My research has been informed by a set of values which are very much in line with critical theory, feminism and adult education. These values include democratic values, a sense of care and compassion, recognition, respect and trust. In order to explore the research question of this study, the following objectives have been adopted on three levels:

Micro

- To learn about the experiences of mature female student teachers in one Irish college;
- To discover how the self of the students interacted with their peers, the staff, the college and the course throughout their time as registered students;
- To explore the identity of the students and the process through which this identity has evolved;
- To ascertain examples of negative and positive learning experiences as described by the participants themselves; and
- To investigate evidence of an adult education philosophical approach to curriculum, teaching and learning as experienced by the participants.

Meso

To make recommendations to colleges of education, and indeed other higher education institutions, with a view to making their programmes more 'adult friendly'.

Macro

To investigate the policy of widening participation from the perspective of mature students;

To examine the experience of mature students through the macro lens of gender;

To inform policy discussions on the perspectives of mature students, thereby, providing an opportunity for policy to be formulated from a more realistic premise;

To make practical recommendations to policy makers and practitioners concerned about lifelong learning.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a rationale for my study of mature student teachers. It sets the context of the research through outlining the research question, the aim and objectives of the study. Objectives are set out for each of the three different levels (Murray and Maguire, 2007), i.e. the micro level of the student, the meso level of the institution and the macro level of Irish and International policy. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of literature in related fields starting with the macro level review of literature dealing with the policy context. The literature review for the meso level will deal with teacher education in Ireland and its institutions. The chapter will conclude with a review of literature dealing with the micro level, i.e. the mature student.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Murray (2002) utilises a literature review to demonstrate the need for a particular piece of research by highlighting ‘the gap’ which exists in related research. While conducting this study, I have become aware of the considerable gap in the literature regarding the needs of mature student teachers in Ireland. This literature review provides a framework for structuring my qualitative study (Murray and Maguire, 2007) while reviewing other research conducted in the field. It also situates the current project in the kinds of debates which are raised in the literature (Creswell, 2003).

By exploring the micro experiences of mature primary teachers, the study sets out to inform those involved in the planning and delivery of teacher education in Ireland and internationally (at meso levels, i.e. institutions and at macro levels, i.e. national and international policy). This takes place in the context of the lifelong learning agenda, a policy commitment which has been agreed at Irish, European and international levels (European Commission, 2000, DES, 2000). Layder (1993) contends that an analysis of micro issues; in this instance, the experiences of mature students, without incorporating the social reality of macro phenomena, is both naïve and limited.

This study, therefore, moves from the micro experience of the mature student to the macro policy context of education with a view to informing policy in the context of lifelong learning. The literature review, however, begins with the macro level and finishes with the micro level i.e. the mature student. This review is presented in a number of sections in line with Murray and Maguire’s (2007) framework. Section 2.2. presents an overview on mature students and their participation rates in higher education in Ireland. Section 2.3. deals with the macro policy level at international, EU and Irish levels. Section 2.4. deals with the meso level of teacher education in Ireland and the institutions involved and section 2.5 deals with the micro level of the mature student. As this study specifically explores theories of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ in relation to mature students, section 2.6. explores the literature on these interrelated concepts.

2.2. Overview: Mature Students and Participation Rates in Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland

Adults register as mature students for degree programmes in Ireland for many reasons. These can include the quest for a qualification, a desire to return to education, a professional requirement to up-skill, or more commonly for employment reasons. In Ireland, a student aged 23 or more years on January 1st of the year in which he/she registers, is deemed to be a mature student. In 1995, the Irish Government abolished the payment of fees for students attending university courses. Under the "Free Fees Initiative", the Government now pays the tuition fees of students who meet relevant course, nationality and residence requirements as set down under the initiative. However, a "registration fee" of approximately €1,000, at the start of the academic year, is payable by students for most courses; this fee is intended to cover student examinations, registration and services.

Although the number of students participating in third level education in Ireland has increased dramatically, the number of adult or mature students however, has not increased to the same extent. While the numbers of mature students in the Irish university sector are continuing to increase nevertheless, Irish rates of participation from mature students still remain behind the EU average (OECD, 2006). Table 1. demonstrates the increased participation of mature students as a percentage of the total number of new entrants. The proportion of new entrants that were aged 23+ (mature) has increased to 9 per cent of all new entrants in 2004/05. However, mature students currently only form 5 per cent of the full-time Irish student body (OECD, 2006). Mature students feature more strongly among the part-time student body, but part-time students are not eligible for fee remission. It is widely acknowledged that these levels of participation need to be further increased (HEA, 2006).

Table 1. Mature New Entrants to HEA Funded Institutions 1998/99-2005/06

<i>Year</i>	<i>% of New Entrants 23 +</i>
1998/99	6.90%
1999/00	7.50%
2000/01	6.60%
2001/02	8.30%
2002/03	9.20%
2003/04	10.00%
2004/05	9.00%

(Source: Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2006))

In recent years, ambitious targets and policy commitments have been made on the issues of lifelong learning, widening participation and access to higher education for non-traditional students (Greenbank, 2006; Duke and Layer, 2005; Duke, 2005). In Ireland, current targets propose that mature students, as a proportion of full-time entrants, should increase to 10 per cent of total entrants by 2010, and by 25 per cent by 2015 (HEA, 1995; Commission on Points System (CPS) 1999).

2.3. International and National Policy: Macro Level Review of Literature

2.3.1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of the national and international policy context in relation to lifelong learning and adult education. The terminology associated with lifelong learning is critiqued. Issues concerning the 'widening participation' agenda are also explored including access, accessibility, barriers to learning and gender.

2.3.2. Lifelong Learning: Policy Context

'Lifelong Learning' has become a prominent fixture in educational policy in recent years in many countries around the world (Aspin, 2001). It remains high on the agendas of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization and the European Union (EU). The European Commission defines lifelong learning as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving

knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective' (European Commission, 2000: 3). Lifelong learning has implications, not only for adult education, but also for all those involved in primary education; for colleges of education, for universities, for all students including mature students, for teachers and indeed for school children. It is particularly important for those involved in primary education, because of the tremendous potential of teachers, to positively nurture or negatively demolish a love of learning. Furthermore, the fundamental importance of teacher education institutions in the context of the lifelong learning agenda has been highlighted in the literature (Longworth and Davies, 1996; Day, 1999). The OECD emphasises a '*cradle to grave*' perspective for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning embraces all learning, including that which takes place both formally and informally within organisations, universities, and indeed colleges of education. Thus, lifelong learning is about learning to be, learning to do, learning to work and learning to learn (Delors, 1996).

The EU's commitment to lifelong learning was also highlighted in its *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* following the Lisbon European Council Meeting held in March 2000. According to the *Memorandum* (European Commission, 2000:3), 'lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become a guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts'.

In Ireland, there has been unprecedented activity in legislation and in the production of policy and discussion papers, both in terms of lifelong learning in general and adult education in particular. The publication of the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (DES, 1995) launched a major debate on education in Ireland, which continues to date. The OECD (1997) *International Adult Literacy Survey* highlighted alarming rates of adult illiteracy in Ireland. According to the survey, approximately 500,000 Irish people have very low levels of literacy i.e. these people have difficulty conducting tasks such as reading directions, helping children with their homework and applying for a job (Morgan et al., 1997).

Section 12 of The Universities Act, 1997, directs third level institutions to facilitate the process of lifelong learning. In the later 1990s, the first ever Green Paper on Adult Education, *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (DES, 1998) was launched, followed by the publication of the White Paper, *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000). Legislation was introduced to initiate reform of the Irish system of qualifications with the Qualification (Education and Training) Act 1999. This was followed by the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority, which in turn, introduced the *National Qualifications Framework* in 2003.

In addition, a number of significant reports have been published which focus on aspects of lifelong learning within higher education. These include *The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education* (DES, 2001); *Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective* (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000); *The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends and Issues with Particular Reference to Ireland* (Skilbeck, 2001); *Report on Symposium on Open and Distance Learning* (HEA, 2000); *Higher Education and the Challenge of Lifelong Learning* (Fleming, Collins, Coolahan, 1999); and *Policies, Action and Procedures for the Promotion and Facilitation of Access, Transfer and Progression* (NQAI, 2003). These reports have collectively highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and have suggested a range of recommendations for improving access for non-traditional students.

2.3.3. A Critique of Lifelong Learning

According to Longworth and Davies (1996:3) 'lifelong learning concepts will change the way in which we see our social, educational and business needs over the next 70 years'. However, in spite of all the rhetoric, are we any closer to developing real measures, which develop lifelong learning in a sustainable way? According to Field (2000), the development of concrete measures and their actual implementation has lagged substantially behind the language and ambition of the policy community.

Some commentators agree that the term itself is problematic. According to Frost and Taylor (2001:51), 'lifelong learning is in danger, as a concept, of becoming both a cliché

and an empty, rhetorical label: motherhood and apple pie, all things to all people'. Other commentators such as Coffield (1999) and Osborne (2003) believe that the term 'lifelong learning' is so all-encompassing that it is in danger of losing all meaning.

According to Henkel (2001:277), lifelong learning is a contested term. She argues that even though concepts, such as the learning society and lifelong learning, were strong themes in some key British national reports of the 1990s (DFEE, 1996; Dearing, 1997; Fryer, 1997), lifelong learning remains largely 'a matter of rhetoric and adjuration'. Authors such as Murphy (2000:175) call for a more critical analysis of lifelong learning in the context of the changing political economy of international relations. He sees lifelong learning as 'a manifestation of the industrialisation of education', which does not occur in a benign context. Murphy essentially calls for a critical theory of lifelong learning within a world that is shaped by the forces of capitalism.

In order to convert the rhetoric of lifelong learning into reality, Chapman and Aspin (1997:27) argue that a 'substantial reappraisal' of all education goals, programmes, and procedures is required. Therein, according to the authors, 'lies the major challenge for governments, policy makers and educators as they grapple with ways of conceptualising lifelong learning and realizing the aim of lifelong learning for all' (Chapman and Aspin, 1997:27).

2.3.4. The Adult Learner and Adult Education

Experience plays a significant role in learning for both children and adults. However, it is the amount, diversity and nature of this experience which distinguishes the learning of adults from that of children. Specific characteristics of adult learners have been documented in the literature (Jarvis, 2004; Houle, 1992). Adults bring a range of previously acquired knowledge and experience to new learning situations. It is generally safe to assume that adults can assume responsibility for their own learning. This idea is described in the literature as 'self-directed learning' (Knowles, 1984; Brookfield, 1985; Candy, 1991). The adult learner brings a range of beliefs, values and attitudes to the learning environment. Even for the full-time student, the learning commitment is generally

part-time as they combine their learning roles with family responsibilities and in some cases employment duties. Learning is more likely to occur when the material is linked to the experience of the individual. The personality and physical state of the learner are key components which directly affect the quality of learning. Malcolm Knowles was responsible for popularizing the term 'andragogy' a term which he defines as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1980). Alan Rogers (1992:29) usefully defines adult education as follows:

...all planned and purposeful learning opportunities offered to those who are recognised and who recognise themselves as adults in their own society and who have left the formal initial education system (or who have passed beyond the possible stage of initial education if they were never in it), whether such learning opportunities are inside or outside the formal system, so long as such learning opportunities treat the learners as adults in decision-making, use appropriate adult learning methodologies and styles and allow the learners to use the experience for their own purposes and to meet their own needs.

Rogers' definition differentiates learning 'inside or outside the formal system'. Traditionally adult education has been associated with the non-formal sector. According to Tight (1996:68), non-formal education is about 'acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognised education institutions'. Today, many of the participants in adult education come from this sector, i.e. community development, the women's movement and environmental interest groups. University programmes and degree courses are offered as part of the formal education system. While formal education has traditionally been associated with a hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system running from primary school through to university, non-formal education has been associated with learner centred, flexible, participatory, practical, bottom up approaches to learning. Adult education has also been characterised by more radical approaches and methodologies, which critically challenge the very nature of knowledge and 'ways of knowing' (Connolly et al., 2007). Thompson (1996), for example, distinguishes between 'merely useful knowledge', the kind of knowledge which keeps people in their place and supports the status quo and 'really useful knowledge' that enables people to both understand the root causes of the circumstances in which they find themselves in order to make changes. The transformative and

emancipatory nature of adult education has been widely articulated in the literature (Mezirow, 1991; Thompson, 1996; Mayo, 1999; Connolly et al. 2007).

As lifelong learning has become part of the policy discourse at national and EU levels, there are increased calls for new approaches to formal education. There is some evidence of this in Ireland in relation to curriculum reform taking place in primary and second level education. However, this is still insufficient for those who perceive education from a critical feminist standpoint. Lynch (1989) for example, highlights the key role which education plays in the reproduction of the status quo. Sugrue and Gleeson (2004) also highlight the lack of progress which has been made in promoting equality and justice in the Irish education system.

Therefore, certain tensions remain between formal and non-formal education theorists. Some critics argue that recruiting adults into traditional formal education programmes constitutes *lifelong schooling*, as opposed to *lifelong learning* (Cross, 1981). On the other hand, studies such as Hyland and Merrill (2003) have examined the possibilities of bridging the gap between college and the community. Moreover, as more and more of the university student population are adults, there is a need for higher level institutions in Ireland to learn from the practices and the literature of the adult education sector. Resistance to the facilitation of the needs of adult students will ultimately have to change due to demographic reasons and lifelong education policies.

Authors such as Collins (2000) call for the democratisation of higher education. Other authors (Bourgeois et al., 1999; Duke, 1992; 1997) argue that we need to completely reframe our idea of 'a university' in the context of lifelong learning. This call for a transformation of the university has been supported by several authors. Frost and Taylor (2001:51) argue that lifelong learning if taken seriously 'implies a radical reordering of higher education, indeed of education generally'. Kokosalakis (2000:253) writes that 'lifelong learning cannot just be an appendix to what universities have always been doing'. Duke (1992:515) introduces the concept of the *Learning University* where adult continuing education or extension work which previously existed on the margins moves

‘out of its box’ and increasingly transforms the university’. Tight (1993) suggests that it makes no sense to seek to increase levels of participation by adults without changing the nature of the higher education experience. As West (1996:204) points out, ‘the arrival of large numbers of adults into higher education might tilt the pedagogic and epistemological balance towards a dialogical and more integrated learning culture’.

2.3.5. Widening Participation and Access

Many argue that higher education policy is overly concerned with young school leavers and the provision of initial higher education programmes (Duke and Layer, 2005). However, Government policy in both Britain and Ireland has recently endeavoured to widen access and increase participation in third level education. This has resulted in a growing literature on the subject of access to higher education (Merrill, 1999; Preece, 1999; Bowl, 2003), particularly in a British context. While there is an overt policy commitment to widening participation, there is considerable debate about what this actually means (Duke and Layer, 2005). Five groups feature prominently in the international access debate. These include low socio-economic status, mature age, ethnic and minority groups, women and girls and students with a disability (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000).

2.3.6. Access and Barriers

Higher education institutions in Ireland have been relatively slow in taking up lifelong learning as a central policy concern, although, access for mature students has featured prominently in recent debates on Irish Higher Education. Much of the literature has tended to focus on the kind of boundaries that exist between adults and higher education institutions (e.g. Morris, 1997; Martin and O’Neill, 1997; Inglis and Murphy, 1999). There are a myriad of reasons for low participation rates among mature students. Historical factors, Ireland’s demographic profile, government policy prioritising education for school leavers as well as our relative neglect of mature students, compared to other OECD countries, have reduced the number of opportunities available for mature students. According to the Council of Europe (1999:3) an access policy is one ‘that aims both at the widening of participation in higher education to all sectors of society, and ensuring that

this participation is effective (that is, in conditions which ensure that personal effort will lead to successful completion'. Wright (1989:99) makes a useful distinction between access and accessibility as follows:

Access

The first approach tends to dwell on mechanisms for access – in doing so, this approach concerns itself first and foremost with such issues as the provision of special access courses, the encouragement of more flexible admissions policies, and the recognition of prior learning, whether or not certified.

Accessibility

The second type of approach, while also concerned with making easier the entry into higher education of potential students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds aims, above all else, at increasing the general accessibility of the higher education system as a whole, at identifying and overcoming the multifarious factors which make it remote, or unattractive, to the majority of the English population.

Inglis and Murphy (1999) take up these two aspects of access and accessibility in their study. The challenge facing third level institutions according to Inglis and Murphy in regard to mature students is two-fold: making the institution more accessible on the outside to mature applicants, while also transforming the college on the inside to make it more accessible to those mature students who have managed to gain entry.

In Ireland, considerable work has been undertaken by higher education institutions to develop new systems and adapt exiting procedures to meet the needs of a diversified student body. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, which was established in 2003, works with all publicly funded institutions offering higher education programmes. The Office oversees policy and practice in educational access and opportunity for learners who are under represented in higher education – those with a disability; socio-economically disadvantaged learners; those from the Traveller community; ethnic minorities and mature students.

The development and introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications, since 2003, is also facilitating and encouraging increased access for students. It is supporting measures which accredit and recognise prior learning. However, while some universities

have initiated interesting pilot studies, there still remains a lot to be done in terms of mainstreaming the recognition of prior learning. This is borne out by Murphy (2003) who asks whether the university sector in Ireland is ready to publicly access and accredit personal learning from outside the academy. The answer appears to be an emphatic 'no, not yet' (2003: 410).

2.3.7. Gender

All of the participants in this study are women reflecting the gender of the majority of mature students in Ireland. Indeed, it is impossible to explore issues relating to mature students participating in higher education without reference to gender. Concepts such as lifelong learning remain intensely gendered (Gouthro, 2005, Leathwood and Francis, 2006). According to Leathwood and Francis (2006:1), 'gendered patterns of access, participation and outcomes, albeit differently configured in different contexts, remain stubbornly persistent across the field of lifelong learning'.

The gendered dimension of 'caring' has also been highlighted in the literature (Lynch 2007). Being loved and cared for is essential for survival throughout human life. Therefore, the actual work of caring is a vitally important element of society. Caring is a multifaceted set of endeavours which can be simultaneously rewarding and burdensome. According to Lynch (2007:557), caring 'not only involves all of the senses, it also engages the mind and body in a complex range of interlocking practices and thought processes'. Nevertheless, caring is low status work generally undertaken by poorly paid, undervalued and in most cases, female members of society. Lynch (2007) argues that the work of caring is largely invisible in society today, e.g. people who are working full-time as carers at home (mostly women) are not defined as working. Much feminist inspired work has highlighted the importance of caring as work, work that needs to be rewarded and distributed equally between men and women (Lynch, 2007; O'Brien, 2007). An unequal distribution of this work has had significant implications for carers' (mostly women) access to education, employment, training opportunities and participation in voluntary activities. This inequality is further compounded for those who do manage to overcome these obstacles, where timetables and lack of childcare facilities in a range of

organizations including universities, cause conflict with family obligations. This highlights the social, political, gendered and cultural context within which carers work.

While the numbers of women participating in the workforce has increased dramatically, they continue to dominate the caring and service professions e.g. teaching, hospitality and health, where pay and career options are lower (Fenwick, 2004). The role of gender in occupational choice has been studied across several sectors, including education. Three interrelated themes which emerge from the literature are the continued dichotomy between male and female career choices; women's experiences of the conflicts between career and family, and the exploration of alternative definitions of success, career and career path occurring as women and men negotiate these tensions (Smulyan, 2004).

Subject choices remain heavily gendered with female students being over represented in arts, education and nursing (Francis, 2006). There are many factors which contribute to the gender based selection of subjects and careers, including the perceived low status and low pay of traditional feminine occupations, which certainly impacts on male choices in regard to teacher education in Ireland (Drew, 2006). However, female and male career choices are not just influenced by personal preferences. Francis (2006) uses a post-structuralist feminist critique to demonstrate that societal constructions of what is 'appropriate' for one gender or the other, continue to have a powerful effect on career choices. Several feminists have highlighted the gendered, classed and racial nature of the curriculum within which gendered choices are made (Paechter, 2004). Indeed, the institutions through which education is delivered remain male-centred institutions with a fairly rigid curriculum, in spite of the increased number of women participating in third level education (Quinn, 2003). Fisher-Lavell (1998) note that women are sometimes perceived to be less committed to academic work if they give priority to mothering duties, while Stalker and Prentice (1998) argue that academia has developed as a masculine, public sphere that is far removed from the private domain of the home. Gouthro (2005), Stalker (2001) and Edwards (1993) discuss how many women struggle with continuing their education because of unsupportive partners, childcare and domestic responsibilities.

2.3.8. Gender Equality and Education

Discussions about gender inequality in education have recently been more concerned with underachieving boys (Moreau et al., 2007) and the low numbers of males participating in primary teaching programmes (Drew, 2006; Drudy et al., 2002) despite the glass ceiling experienced by many women in education (DES, 2007; David and Woodward, 1998). There is a general assumption in mainstream education, both in England and in Ireland, that as young girls are outperforming boys in second level education, their participation in education is no longer of concern to the equality debate, and attention should instead be redirected towards underachieving boys (Francis, 2006). Epstein et al. (1998) refer to the 'poor boys' discourse which is featuring strongly in current debates on gender and achievement. Despite the concerns about underachieving boys, Fenwick (2004) highlights a significant structural inequality which exists whereby girls achieve higher academic success but lower economic achievement than boys and this, she argues, needs to be investigated urgently.

This view is supported by a recent publication from the Department of Education and Science (2007), *Sé Sí (Him, Her) Gender in Irish Education* where the under-representation of women in positions of seniority in educational institutions is acknowledged. Women account for 83 per cent of all staff members at the primary level, yet only 53 per cent of school principals are women. In higher-education institutions, there has been a significant increase in female academic staff over the last decade. However, as one rises through the academic hierarchy, the proportion of women decreases dramatically i.e. the proportion of men increases with the seniority of the academic position. None of the seven university presidents are women.

2.4. Teacher Education in Ireland and its Institutions: Meso Level Review of Literature

2.4.1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of issues relating to teaching and teacher education in Ireland. The institutions responsible for providing education for primary teachers are

listed, as are the major cultural influences associated with these colleges. This part of the literature review also includes a discussion on the feminisation of teaching in Ireland and on lifelong teacher education. It contains an outline of the review of primary teacher education which was conducted on behalf of the Department of Education and Science in 2002.

2.4.2. Teaching and Teacher Education in Ireland

Traditionally, the teaching career in the Republic of Ireland has enjoyed high social status and regard. Teachers retain the confidence of the public; entry to teacher training remains highly competitive from well-qualified candidates, and teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, is well-regarded (Coolahan, 2002). Teaching is a regulated profession and the points required every year depend on the number of places available in colleges of education and on the number of people applying.

In Ireland, entry to the primary teaching career is predominantly through two modes. These are entry to the three year concurrent B.Ed. course in the colleges of education, which are affiliated to universities, or a graduate entry to a shorter eighteen month course, also located in the colleges of education. Some students, who have previously obtained a primary degree, including a small number of mature students, complete a one-year *Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)* in Primary Teaching. This course is offered by a range of colleges and universities in Great Britain. However, teachers have to pass an Irish examination - *Scrúdu le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge (SCG)* to guarantee their eligibility for permanent employment. The SCG is taken by teachers who qualify outside of the State. It provides certification of attainment in the Irish language which is compulsory for Irish primary teachers. At present, teachers who qualify outside the State can, if their qualifications are acceptable, be given 'provisional recognition' to teach in a primary school for a period of up to five years. However, to achieve full recognition they must pass the SCG Examination within that time.

There are five colleges of education with responsibilities for primary teacher training, each of which is affiliated to a university. The five colleges are Mary Immaculate College,

Limerick, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin, Froebel College, Dublin and the Church of Ireland College, Dublin. These colleges are denominational in character and are privately owned. They are funded by grants from the Department of Education and Science or the Higher Education Authority. The two largest, St Patrick's College and Mary Immaculate College are located in Dublin and Limerick respectively and they account for approximately 76 per cent of students in teacher education programmes (DES, 2002). In the last few years, the Minister of Education and Science has dramatically increased the intake of students to the colleges of education in response to the shortage of teachers which was experienced by primary schools. As a result, these colleges, which were built to cater for relatively small number of students, are now struggling to meet the needs of a much larger cohort of students. Table 2. outlines the number of student teachers in the colleges during the academic year 2004-2005.

Table 2. Total Student Teacher Population including Post Graduates 2004/2005.

College of Education	Students by Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
St Patrick's College	144 (11%)	1162 (89%)	1306
Mary Immaculate College	157 (12%)	1198 (88%)	1355
Coláiste Mhuire Marino	43 (12%)	327 (88%)	370
Froebel College of Education	21 (10%)	193 (90%)	214
Church of Ireland College of Education	2 (2%)	91 (98%)	93
Hibernia College⁴	23 (11%)	186 (89%)	209
Totals	390 (11%)	3157 (89%)	3547

(Source DES, 2004:15)

⁴ Since 2004, Hibernia College, an Irish online third-level college has offered an online postgraduate higher diploma in primary education. This eighteen month course is fully recognised by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Department of Education and Science. The programme is a mix of online content, live tutorials and face-to-face classes in selected locations throughout the country.

The B.Ed. degree for primary teachers is a three year full-time degree programme with the exception of the colleges affiliated to Trinity College, who offer a fourth year for an honours degree. In general, the B.Ed. programme allocates 40 per cent to education, 40 per cent to an academic subject and 20 per cent to teaching practice (DES, 2002). Students are required to study religion as part of the education component. Methodologies in curricular areas of the revised primary curriculum (DES, 1999) form a significant part of the education component (see appendix two). The foundation disciplines, e.g. philosophy, psychology and sociology are also included.

Any discussion on primary teacher education in Ireland must take account of three major cultural influences associated with colleges of education; the importance accorded to the Irish language and culture, the denominational nature and religious ethos of the colleges themselves (Killeavy, 1999) and the feminisation of primary teaching in Ireland (Drudy et al., 2005; Drew 2006).

A high standard in the Irish language is an essential requisite for all student teachers. Traditionally, students were required to demonstrate proficiency in oral Irish through an interview for the colleges of education. Now, the colleges no longer hold interviews for school leavers, but candidates must have at least a grade C in the higher level Leaving Certificate Irish course. Only mature students and postgraduate students are required to take an oral examination in the Irish language to obtain a place on the B.Ed programme. The religious ethos of the college stems from an era when most, if not all members of the teaching staff in the colleges of education, were members of a religious order (Killeavy, 1999). Today, the religious ethos of the colleges of education is still an important factor.

The middle class nature of the teaching profession has also been highlighted in the international literature (Maguire, 1999; Ozga and Lawn, 1981) and this is also the case in Ireland. Entrants to colleges of education in Ireland tend to come from the conservative middle classes and largely from the rural agricultural sector (Clancy, 2001). Indeed colleges of education themselves tend to be conservative both in Ireland (DES, 2002) and

internationally (Buckberger and Byrne, 1995). According to Griffin (1999:2), 'many believe that schools and related institutions, such as colleges of education, for example, are among the most difficult social institutions to alter in any significant and long lasting ways'.

The *Report of the Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education*, (DES, 2002), recommended the extension of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) course from three to four years. The structure and content of the curriculum for student primary teachers which has operated, in the main, since the introduction of the Bachelor of Education degree in 1974 is likely to be subject to re-structuring and modernisation in the light of the 2002 Working Group Report. The Report urges a reduction in the time spent at formal lectures in favour of smaller group work and personal study. In particular, the Report urges significant attention for the requirements of the revised primary school curriculum (DES, 1999). As yet, the government has not decided on the extension of the course to four years. While these reforms have yet to take place, the timing is opportune for a study of this nature to inform the future development of the B.Ed. from the perspective of mature students.

The (DES, 2002) review of primary pre-service education has highlighted some important issues for teacher educators in Ireland, such as the lack of integration within the B.Ed., (even though primary school teachers are expected to plan integrated teaching of the primary curriculum); an over reliance on the 'transmission model' i.e. through the lecture format, (even though staff advocate other approaches to teaching and learning); over crowded programmes, in which the demands on the students are excessive; and the lack of time for student reflection (DES, 2002). These issues have also been raised in other studies. The OECD (1991) review highlighted the over crowded nature of teacher education programmes in Ireland. According to Hall et al. (1999), Irish students perceive a much greater workload than their English counterparts and less freedom in how they learn. English students spend more time in private study.

2.4.3. Gender and the Feminisation of Teaching

Teaching and teacher education are both feminised divisions of labour. Murray and Maguire (2007:288) describe teacher education as ‘a social learning process that takes place in higher education and school settings, and involves the reproduction and regulation of gendered social identities and relations, mediated and contested by the teacher educators, teachers and students engaged in the process of teaching, learning and research’.

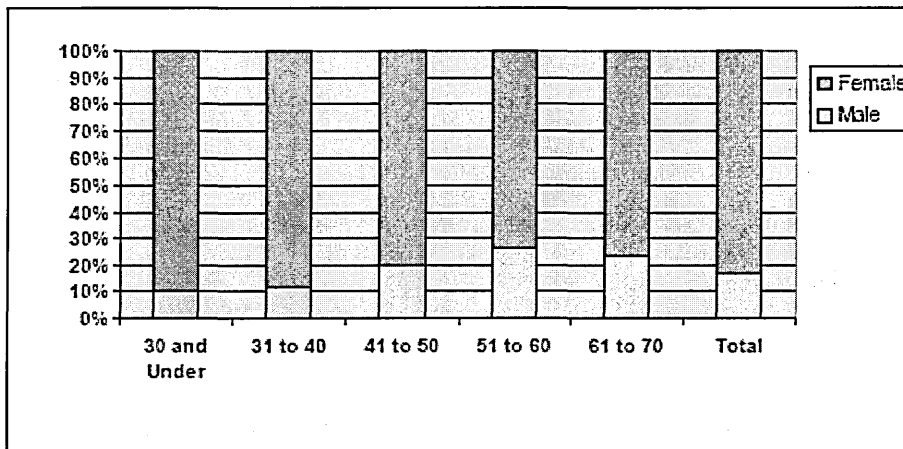
The majority of students on pre-service teacher education courses in Anglophone countries are female, as are the majority of teachers in their schools (Murray and Maguire, 2007). Indeed, teacher education itself now involves a predominantly female labour force, working as academics in the professional development of their predominantly female students (Acker, 1996). Historically, the field of teacher education, which is associated with the more intensive, less prestigious and less rewarded work of preparing teachers (Ducharme and Ducharme, 1996), has been somewhat marginalised within the traditional high status university sector (Furlong, 1996). Therefore, female teacher educators are further marginalised. Some would argue that the historical legacy of teacher education’s marginalisation in the higher education sector has been countered to some extent by the movement of teacher training colleges into university departments or schools of education, or by the accreditation of teacher education courses by the university sector. However, this move into the mainstream academy has not been without its tensions (Burke, 2000; Goodson, 1995). Many teacher educators are now struggling to balance the demands between delivering high quality, intensive teaching required for teacher education programmes with the academic demands of conducting research, so much so that teacher education remains what Maguire (1994) has called ‘the impossible job’.

While the feminisation of the teaching profession is an international trend (Acker, 1989; DES, 2004), it is particularly acute in Ireland (Drudy et al., 2005; Drew, 2006), especially in the areas of primary pre-service education and primary education (Drudy, 2007). The gender imbalance in recruitment to primary education is reflected in a ratio of about nine to one in favour of women (see Table 2.). A study on this issue entitled *Gender Difference*

in Patterns of Entry to the Colleges of Education (Drudy et al., 2002) reveals gendered perceptions of teaching as a career. This study shows that primary teaching is conceived as a woman's job; that significantly more girls are attracted to teaching of all kinds; that many university courses are stereotyped; and that the pool of males with the necessary qualifications for teaching is smaller than the corresponding number of females. Drew's (2006) study follows a survey of over 600 teachers who had entered the profession in the last 10 years. The survey found that the positive attractions of teaching are offset by issues such as length of salary scale and poor advancement opportunities. The teachers believe that other issues putting potential male entrants off include the high standards of Gaeilge (Irish) required and fear of false allegations in their dealings with children. However, the feminisation of the teaching profession has not been accompanied by feminist changes; it has instead brought about a reduction of status for the profession and a regression to traditional gender roles (Connolly, 2007).

In recognition of the feminisation of primary teaching, the Minister for Education and Science established a committee in 2003 to investigate the issue and to prepare a report (DES, 2004). This issue is of such concern to the government, that the Minister for Education and Science recently (January 2006) launched a campaign entitled MATE (Men as Teachers and Educators) to attract more men into primary teaching. The UK government has also adopted policies to increase the number of men into primary teaching. However, there does not appear to be the same concern about the under representation of women in managerial jobs in education (Moreau et al., 2007).

Table 3: Percentage of Male/Female Primary Teachers 2005.



(Source: DES, 2005)

The literature demonstrates the gendered nature of teacher education, teaching and indeed lifelong education itself (Leathwood and Frances, 2006). It is within this context that this study of mature student teachers will be understood and analysed.

2.4.4. Lifelong Teacher Education

Several commentators have made the point that a reliance on initial education is no longer sufficient in order to be able to respond to the level of rapid change in society which is currently being experienced (Edwards et al., 2002). This is particularly the case for teacher education. Lifelong learning can ultimately make a very important contribution to the professional development of teachers and teacher educators, both at pre-service and in-service level. Equally, a coherent teacher education programme can greatly enhance a country's lifelong learning agenda. If this is the case, as Nicholls (2000) argues, then lifelong learning strategies can help promote the creation of a learning community, based on the interactions between educational institutions and their host communities, i.e. involving teachers, students, teacher educators, schools and higher education institutions. The challenge here, however, is to broaden the frameworks of teaching and learning within higher education to incorporate a commitment to lifelong learning.

2.5. The Mature Student: Micro Level Review of Literature

2.5.1. Introduction

This section examines the literature and research on the experience of mature women students within adult and continuing education including: terminology used to describe mature students; motivations for returning to study; factors which affect the student experience, barriers and difficulties experienced by mature students; an overview of international and Irish research studies on mature students and an overview of research on mature student teachers.

2.5.2 Conceptualizing the Mature Adult Learner

While it may appear somewhat obvious, it is important to state clearly that a mature student is an adult learner. While all third level students are adult learners, mature students represent a distinctive category. Mature students are discussed in the literature under the category of 'non-traditional' students. This categorisation brings its own set of opportunities and challenges. The term 'traditional' tends to refer to the school leaver who enters third level, having acquired sufficient credits or points from their second level education. The term 'non-traditional' is subject to different interpretations. Schuetze and Slowey (2002:313) describe the term 'non-traditional' in two ways, i.e. framework of the life cycle stage and framework of equality. In the context of the lifecycle framework, the term non-traditional refers to 'older or adult students with a vocational training and work experience background, or other students with unconventional educational biographies'. In the context of the equality framework, the term refers to 'socially or educationally disadvantaged sections of the population, for example those from working class backgrounds, particular ethnic minority groups, immigrants and, in the past, frequently women' (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002:313).

Webb (1997) also discusses problems with conceptualising the mature student in the literature. According to Webb (1997), the label 'mature' has been used interchangeably with 'non-standard' or 'non-traditional', even though there are large numbers of non-traditional students who are under the mature age entry, while there are a large number of mature students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Both Weil (1989) and

Merrill (1999) have issues with the term 'non-traditional student'. Labelling mature students as non-traditional students, they believe, implies that mature students are different to other students in a negative sense.

Some argue that the term 'mature' itself is misleading as the term 'suggests a level of experience, coping ability, assurance and knowledge of subject area which often bears little relationship to the real condition of the adult student' (Uí Chasaide, 1997). In this scenario, there is a danger that the doubts, fears, support needs and lack of previous experience of an adult learner in a university might be underestimated. Thompson (1997:119) describes the term 'mature' as 'a synonym for non-standard'. She argues that mature students as a category within higher education has not been normalised. Parry (1995:107), on the other hand, indicates mature students have tended to be perceived as a relatively homogenous group of 'returners', i.e. those who missed out on earlier educational experiences.

However, mature students do not constitute one homogenous grouping. According to Fenwick and Tenant (2004:55), 'there is no generic essentialised adult learner'. This is an important point to remember, since not only is each individual learner unique, but he/she has also lived through his/her own unique set of personal, social, family, previous education and work based experiences. This set of lived experiences influences the manner through which they engage with the academy, and will ultimately have an impact on the type of experience they will endure throughout their chosen third level programme.

The mature student is, therefore, a human adult learner involved in some kind of learning endeavour. Learning itself is an intensely complex and multifaceted process. It can be simultaneously a painful, joyful, frustrating, yet rewarding experience. Adult learners are great students. They tend to be highly motivated, extremely determined and single minded as they set about their task. They also bring with them a wealth of life experiences, which potentially can provide a rich source of resources for the adult learner, his/her colleagues, the tutor and indeed the third level institution itself. However, instead of maximising this valuable learning resource, the education system treats it somewhere on a continuum from

tolerance to dismissal. For the tutor/lecturer, the experience of working with adult learners can be threatening, liberating, great fun, or indeed profoundly educational, depending on their own attitudes and self-perceptions.

2.5.3. Motivation to Return to Study

Mature students also differ from each other on the basis of their motivation for attending higher education. OECD (1987) research classifies mature students into four categories according to their motivation: second chance students; updating previously acquired skills and qualifications; work related courses and personal fulfilment.

Osborne et al. (2004) describe six categories of mature students in higher education. These are; *delayed traditional students*; 'late starters' who have undergone a life-transforming event, e.g. redundancy or divorce and require a new start; *single parents*; *careerists*, who are currently in employment and seek a qualification to make progress in their existing careers; *escapees*, who are currently in employment and want a qualification as a way out of dead end jobs; *personal growers*: a small number pursuing education for its own sake.

Some people may have multiple motivations for enrolling in higher education. While several surveys refer to the vocational and economic reasons for participating in higher education, personal reasons are left largely unexplored. Motives of mature students are categorised along gender lines in some research. Existing studies of mature students demonstrate that men are more likely to give instrumental reasons for participating in education, whereas women tend to be more interested in personal development and in education itself (Woodley et al., 1987).

However, this binary approach, which has reinforced dichotomies between the perceived instrumental motivation attributed to males and the perceived self-fulfilment motivations attributed to women (Pascall and Cox, 1993), has been criticised by Britton and Baxter (1999), as such an approach oversimplifies the complexities involved and the constituted nature of self. An example of this complexity is found in Parr's (2000) study where returning to education for a group of mature female students was as much about identity as

about qualifications. Parr (2000:1) describes 'the desire to redefine as least part of their identity, to see themselves in a different way and exert a degree of control over some aspect of their lives'. However, I strongly agree with the statement of West (1996:1), that 'our understanding of student motivation is limited because learners themselves have rarely been encouraged to reflect, in a flexible and longitudinal way, on their reasons for educational participation and learning in the context of past as well as present lives'.

2.5.4 Factors Affecting the Student Experience

The experience of mature students is directly affected by a number of factors, both within the college experience itself (e.g. procedures, facilities and programmes which are in operation in the college) and factors which are external to the college experience (finances, relationships, number of external commitments). Finances, relationships, external commitments and the learning process itself feature prominently in the literature (Inglis and Murphy, 1999; Fleming and Murphy, 1997). The effects of these factors are in turn mediated through class, gender and ethnic background.

Finance is a key issue, which impacts on the lives of mature students (Woodley et al., 1987; Lynch, 1997). According to Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997), one of the main reasons for mature students failing to complete their courses is the greater financial and family pressure they experience. However, the degree of financial difficulty experienced by students is further intensified by class and gender (Lynch and O Riordan, 1998).

Reay (2002) explores the experiences of a number of mature students (through narrative) who failed to make the transition to higher education after an access course. This research identifies 'a shortage of money, lack of time and childcare problems as the most common reasons for leaving courses prematurely' (Reay, 2002:15). As in Beck (1992) and Edwards (1993), gender is an important factor here in that female students are more likely to feel pressures of childcare and home based duties. (Beck, 1992:132) comments as follows:

... while men remain essentially untouched by family events in their biographies, women lead a contradictory double life shaped equally by family and by organisations. For them the family rhythm still applies, and in a majority of cases

the rhythm of education and career already do as well, which results in conflictual crises and continuing incompatible demands.

Family commitments, including caring responsibilities, therefore, represent a significant factor in the literature (Edwards, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993; Redding and Dowling, 1992; Fleming and Murphy, 1997). Edwards (1993) informed by Coser (1974), highlights the dilemma of mature women students struggling to satisfy two 'greedy institutions', i.e. universities and families, which compete for women's time and energy.

University life can also damage relationships. Several studies cite returning to study as a source of conflict between partners. Fleming and Murphy's study (1997) found that relationships and external commitments are significant factors for mature students. Resentment and guilt are generally experienced by women. High levels of marital problems are experienced by married mature students. A significant number of students experience a range of problems and traumas, including the death of a friend, divorce, alcoholism and a range of other life crises. In terms of the general life cycle, these kinds of events are more likely to occur during middle and late adulthood, therefore, they are likely to be more of an issue for mature students than for early school leavers.

2.5.5. Barriers and Difficulties Experienced by Mature Students

While there has been a significant increase in the number of access programmes and a concerted policy effort to increase the number of adult students in our universities, adult students still experience a range of barriers which a) make it difficult to enter the academy and b) make it difficult to fully participate in the academy's programme once the rituals of entry have been completed. The literature presents a 'barriers' explanation to non-participation (Cross, 1981; Woodley et al., 1987; McGivney, 1990).

According to Cross (1981), obstacles/barriers can be categorised into three groupings: situational, dispositional and institutional. Situational barriers may be experienced due to one's situation at any given time, e.g. job pressures, family responsibilities and financial restraint. Transportation may be a problem for those in remote areas or childcare may be an obstacle for young parents. Dispositional barriers are those relating to the personal

outlook of the learner e.g. low self-esteem. Many adult learners lack confidence in their ability to complete the formal demands posed by third level institutions e.g. writing essays, participating in tutorials, conducting practicals, completing assessments and taking examinations. Some adult learners have a deep-seated fear of failure, which they may have inherited from earlier school experiences. These self-perceptions may not only deter people from applying for a place on a course; they may also impact on the experience of the student once in college. Institutional barriers include those practices in the academy, which may exclude or discourage adults from participating in educational activities, e.g. unsuitable timetables and lack of childcare facilities. These barriers have also been highlighted in more recent research (e.g. Bowl, 2003). However, Bowl's (2003:28) work reveals a more complex picture whereby students are also impeded by barriers of 'lack of interest, lack of information and lack of guidance from those who might have been expected to support them'.

Mature students have different needs to younger students, and unfortunately, many colleges are ill-equipped to meet these needs. While students from non-traditional backgrounds are often viewed as 'different' or 'disadvantaged' in some way, these students tend to be further disadvantaged by an institutional culture that places them as 'other' (Read et al. 2003; Tett 2000). Those who are considered as 'others' within the academy and through society's perceptions of higher education often internalise this external social construct.

Once the student has successfully registered for a course; a new set of situational and dispositional barriers become apparent. Multiple and sometimes conflicting demands on personal time represent a significant challenge. Study requires time. The more time which is dedicated to study, the less there is available for other responsibilities e.g. relationships and child care. This re-allocation of time often leads to feelings of personal guilt on the part of the learner and feelings of alienation among family members. While on campus, the literature suggests that mature students feel 'different' and in some cases inferior to the traditional cohort of students. These feelings are exacerbated by a number of factors, e.g. the lack of flexibility in the timetable, the lack of childcare and the predominance of

young school leavers in the university's promotional material. According to Read, Archer, and Leathwood, (2003:265) 'these discourses work to reinforce the culturally prevalent conception that individuals who are no longer of school leaving age have 'left it too late' for university'.

Once in college, mature students experience a range of other problems e.g. writing essays and dealing with reading lists. According to Moss (1988), mature students experience undue anxiety with reading lists and require assistance on reading techniques. Mature students have a tendency to read too much.

Other difficulties relate to communication and lack of clarity around university procedures, including information given before and after assignments. Young (2000) speaks about the importance of giving clear feedback on a regular basis. In his study of access students' responses to feedback, he found that there is a tendency for students with low self-esteem to take feedback personally, rather than as a comment on their work. This is not the case for students with high self-esteem. Bufton's study (2006:104) with working class students highlights the processes of 'double translation' and 'speaking in a second language' whereby ideas from personal experience have to be translated into academic speak and the content of academic texts have to be translated into simpler language.

These studies demonstrate that students experience serious problems with communications procedures and the 'academic speak' of our universities. In other studies, mature students feel their experience is insufficiently acknowledged or valued. According to Johnson and Locke's study (1990:34), mature students wanted their experience to be valued, but found there was 'tension between the practical and academic aspects of [the] course, with students sometimes feeling that lecturers did not incorporate the practical knowledge of mature students into the academic teaching and learning'.

2.5.6. International Research Studies on Mature Students

Several authors have commented about the shortage of research on mature students registered for full-time study in higher education (Walters, 2000; Wilson, 1997).

According to Wilson (1997:347), 'unless we understand how the experience of being a mature student is lived, it is difficult if not impossible to consider how policy and teaching practice for mature students is developed'. Initial research on the participation of adults in higher education was largely quantitative and dealt primarily with part-time adult students (Woodley et al., 1987). In the last two decades, researchers have begun to look at mature students, especially females through a qualitative lens (Parr, 2000; Merrill 1999; Edwards, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993).

Bowl's (2003) study explores the reality of access to higher education from the perspective of a group of people from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds. It draws on the contributions of thirty-two people who became involved with the Birmingham Reachout Project; a central government, community based initiative aimed at increasing mature, working class and ethnic entry to higher education. This research suggests that the experience of non-traditional students remains undervalued by higher level institutions and that the 'widening participation' agenda takes second place to a university's attempt to gain and maintain a prestigious research reputation.

In a study based on narrative interviews with 30 mature students in Warwick University, Merrill (1999) concludes that studying for a degree represented an active decision to take greater control, to break free from gender and class restraint and to transform individual lives. The study is informed by the interaction between structure and agency and the significance of macro and micro levels in shaping the experiences of mature students in an interactionist context. Pascall and Cox (1993) longitudinal study, conducted with forty three women (studying for social sciences of art degrees) in two higher education institutions, highlights the potential of education to offer women an opportunity to change their lives. However, despite knowledge of potential gains from returning to education, fragility and risk were identified as key concepts in the decision making process of mature students (Davies and Williams, 2001).

Edwards (1993) is somewhat critical of previous studies on mature students. She states that these studies tend to focus on the perspective of the institutions rather than on that of

the mature student and they tend to underestimate the experience of the mature student's personal life outside of the institution (i.e. family, friends and relationships). Her study, conducted with thirty-one women from three higher education institutions, focuses on the separateness and connectedness between education and the family.

James (1995) is critical of earlier studies, which have either focused on the 'social species' approach of macro issues such as the socio-economic backgrounds of students, or on the 'learner species' approach of micro issues such as self-esteem. James (1995:464) calls for 'a sociological approach which attempts to keep in view the dynamic and interdependent relationship between structures and practices at both the individual and institutional levels, and possibly beyond as well'. Such an approach, according to James, has yet to be developed.

2.5.7. Irish Research Studies on Mature Students

Lynch (1997) carried out a comprehensive study on mature students in higher education in Ireland. According to a study conducted by Lynch (1997), the majority of mature students (65 per cent) were enrolled in the extra-university sector⁵ and were studying part-time (75 per cent). Also, the majority of mature entrants tended to come from lower-middle class backgrounds. Other reports have examined the experiences of mature students while in college (Martin and O'Neill, 1996; Fleming and Murphy, 1997; Healey, 1997). In their study of full-time mature students in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Fleming and Murphy (1997) found that the vast majority (91 per cent) had a positive experience of university. This reflects research findings from Britain which demonstrate that adult learners were 'overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the benefits of mature study' (Woodley et al., 1987: 104). This positive experience was also present in Inglis and Murphy's study (1999) of mature students in University College Dublin. However, according to this study, students experience high levels of anxiety throughout their university life. While many of their respondents enjoyed the learning and pursuit of

⁵ The extra university sector refers to other third level institutions e.g. the institutes of technology and colleges of education.

knowledge and welcomed the contact with other people in the college, they also felt isolated by the age difference.

2.5.8. Research on Mature Student Teachers

There is limited research available on mature student teachers and even less on mature primary student teachers. Maguire's (1999) work focuses on the narrative of a working class secondary trainee teacher; to highlight the manner in which class works in the process of becoming a teacher.

A study of mature trainee secondary teachers conducted by Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003), demonstrates that students felt that insufficient notice was taken of their responsibilities as parents. No allowance was made when assigning schools for teaching practice, timetables were given out late regardless of parents' needs to make suitable childcare arrangements, the PGCE course ran full-time when the children were on mid-term breaks, again making child care difficult. In this study, many students said they would have appreciated more flexibility e.g. if the PGCE course could have been run part-time over two years instead of full-time for one year.

In George and Maguire's (1998) study of older women ranging from ages of 33- 50 who were preparing to become teachers, the authors found that the women in their study often felt 'patronised and undervalued' (1998:421) whilst in college. They felt their prior experience was ignored. All undergraduates were treated as recent school leavers and they were generally expected to 'listen and learn' rather than participate. They also believed there was a contradiction between the manner in which they were educated and the actual theories of learning which they were studying. Mature women were isolated, marginalised and 'rendered invisible by staff and student alike' (1998:428). Duncan's (1999; 2000) work focuses on a series of interviews with female mature student teachers examining processes of change and adaptation which take place as they learn to become teachers. Her study examines the uneasy blend of struggle, contestation, guilt and success, which became a daily feature of their lives as mothers, wives and full-time student-teachers.

2.6. Identity/Self

The concepts of self and identity are often used interchangeably in the literature on teacher education (Day et al., 2006). In the literature, the self is differentiated from the person. According to Jenkins (2004:28), 'the self is the individual's private experience of himself or herself; the person is what appears publicly in and to the outside world'. Both Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) consider the self to be a process and not a structure. Therefore, individuals are 'acting organisms' rather than passive individuals, as a result of having a self. Because each individual has a self, each individual engages in self-interaction. Through self-interaction, the individual engages in a reflexive process. Blumer (1969:63-64) highlights the proactive nature of individuals as follows:

... the process of self-interaction puts the human being over against his (*sic*) world instead of merely in it, requires him to meet and handle his world through a defining process instead of merely responding to it and forces him to construct his action instead of merely releasing it.

Charon (1989:65) defines the concept of self as 'a social object which the actor acts toward'. The self, as a social object, arises in childhood through interaction and it continues to change as the individual interacts with others in a variety of situations. In the context of this study, the self of the mature students develops through interaction with itself, with other students, staff and with the college environment.

Jenkins (2004:5) defines identity as 'our understanding of who we are and of who other people are'. Castells (1997:6) takes this further when he says 'identity is people's source of meaning and experience'. Jenkins (2004:5) emphatically states that 'identity can *only* be understood as process, as 'being' or 'becoming''. Jenkins also refers to the social and interactional nature of identity and he has developed a concept of *internal-external dialectic of communication*. For Jenkins, the external and internal cohabit as part of the process of identification, a process which involves selfhood/personhood. Forging a sense of identity, as an ongoing process, is also discussed by Bateson (1990: 216), who compares the process to 'catching one's image reflected in a mirror next to a carousel'. However, it is important to note that the processes of selfhood and self-identification are intensely complex and multifaceted. They occur over a lifetime and involve many others

in a range of situations, drawing upon multiple resources (Jenkins, 2004). Part of our identity involves adopting several roles throughout our lifetime.

Castells (1997:7) differentiates between roles and identities. Roles (e.g. student, mother, and friend) are defined by norms structured by institutions whereas 'identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves'. I interpret roles as the names we put on ourselves e.g. a student, a lecturer etc. but these names form part of our identity when they have become internalised or in Castells' (1997:7) words 'identities organise the meaning while roles organise the functions'.

Merrill's study deals with the issue of student identity, particularly in the context of gender. According to this study, 'the women reflected upon the knowledge presented to them, reassigning their self-identity and re-interpreting the world around them' (Merrill (1999:208). Parr's (2000) study of mature female students identified a link between a return to education and a desire by the women to change some aspect of their lives e.g. fulfilment, confidence, independence and a positive self image. These changes are categorised by Parr under the umbrella term of '*identity*'. Transitions in education e.g. returning to formal education as a mature student pose challenges for identity. *Identity in transition*, therefore, features prominently in the literature (Eclestone et al., 2005; Osborn et al., 2006; Jackson and Warin, 2000).

In terms of mature students, the literature also deals with the culture/identity of the institutions, and the clash between this institutional culture and the culture/identity of the mature student. Fleming and Murphy (1997, 1999) use the term 'college knowledge' as another term for university culture, i.e. knowledge which consists of institutional practices; rules and regulations, content of teaching programmes; and how this content is taught, transferred and shared.

Susan Weil's work (1986, 1989) on mature students focuses on learner identity and the dissonance between it and university identity or the learning context of the university. Dealing with this dissonance involves negotiation on the part of the students. This

negotiation, according to Fleming and Murphy (1997), is the most significant part of the overall negotiation procedure (and probably the most stressful) which the students undertake, even more so than the negotiation which takes place around financial issues and family commitments. Fleming and Murphy (1997) argue that mature students experience college as a process of negotiation. This process is essentially a conflict between academic and domestic roles and also between the roles of teacher and learner. This process of negotiation is even more acutely felt by working class students who, 'have to negotiate tensions between maintaining a sense of authenticity and desires to fit in' (Reay, 2002:404). Part of this negotiation process involves 'learning the ropes' and 'playing the undergraduate game', according to Merrill (2001:16). 'Learning to play the game' for mature working class students is also a key theme in Bufton's (2006) work. Learning the rules for playing this game refers to learning how the power dynamics operate, both within the institution itself and between tutors and students.

This kind of negotiation between student identity and college identity can leave the students with their own identity somewhat threatened. Weil (1986, 1989) uses the term 'disjunction' to describe the sense of fragmentation, which occurs when aspects of personal and social identity are threatened in this way. Her research documents the learning experience in forming the 'learner identity' of non-traditional adult students (both male and female) from the perspective of the students. Weil (1986:232) states that:

... there is the disjunction between non-traditional learners' expectations and their actual experiences of higher education. There are also disjunctions between the different values and beliefs adult learners and lecturers bring to their interpretations of what it means to generate and validate knowledge and to inhibit and facilitate learning.

The literature also comments on the interaction between the process of learning and identity development itself. For Wenger (1998), learning is central to human identity. Wenger's work focuses on learning as social participation whereby the individual is an active participant in the practices of social communities and the construction of his/her identity takes place in conjunction with these communities. Lave and Wenger (1991) use the concept of a 'community of practice' to describe the process of creating a shared

identity among a group of individuals. Members in these 'communities of practice' are involved in conducting common tasks through a set of relationships over time, thereby, creating a sense of joint enterprise and identity. This is in contrast with the practice in many educational institutions where learning is constituted as an individual process which happens in isolation (regardless of the circumstances and life histories of the learner) and is based on objective concepts of knowledge passed on from the teacher to the student to be regurgitated in an examination paper.

The role of transition from one context to another in relation to changes in identity and construction of self is a key concept in the literature (Osborn et al., 2006). Various interpretations of 'transition' suggest movements and change, choice, agency and decision making (Eclestone et al., 2005). Transition at any stage of one's life poses challenges. So too do educational transitions, i.e. starting primary school, moving from primary to secondary school, moving from secondary school to college. Throughout all of these transitions, the self is constantly being reconstructed. Jackson and Warin (2000:378) argue that transitional points are particularly rich sites for exploring changes in a person's construction of self. They suggest that 'entry into a new social context entails a reappraisal of self-beliefs and may act as a catalyst for significant changes'. Transition is clearly linked to the notion of self and identity and how it is affected by disruption. Self identity is threatened during disruption and there is a need for reconstruction of identity based on new roles and responsibilities. Transition is not an event, but rather the 'inner reorientation and self-definition' that people go through in order to incorporate change in their life (Bridges, 2004; xii). Transition occurs when a person's current reality is disrupted, causing a forced or chosen change that results in the need to construct a new reality (Selder, 1989). Bridges (2004) and Selder (1989) highlight the importance of a person's need to acknowledge that a prior way of living/being has ended, or that a current reality is under threat, and that change needs to occur before the transition process can begin.

In the context of education, successful transition is seen as essential for educational and social achievement. But not all groups and individuals are successful in managing

transition successfully (Osborn et al., 2006). Jackson and Warin (2000:378) discuss the construction of self as a means by which we cope:

... the term 'coping' conveys the person confronting the threats, anxieties, challenges and excitements of unfamiliar environments. It also conveys the person schematising and managing a new range of experiences and relating new experiences to old ones.

Bateson (1990:214-215) makes the point that transitions in the life cycle are more painful in our society than in traditional societies. She states that

... college students feel under pressure to make the right career choices quickly, to get onto a track and stay on it, but life shifts constantly. When paths disappear in the under bush or are blocked, we face the problem of finding a new path that will seem like a continuation of the old.

According to Jenkins (2004), humans experience life itself as a series of transitions from one identity to another. These transitions are ritualised to some extent and they generally take place in three stages i.e. separation from present identity; followed by a period of transition; and finally incorporation into the new identity.

Walters (2000) developed a framework for understanding mature students' experience of higher education. This developmental framework consists of three concepts: redundancy, recognition and regeneration. *Redundancy* refers to a move away from traditional perspectives and roles. *Recognition* suggests an acknowledgement of a need for change, a need for new direction, a readiness to learn. *Regeneration* deals with the construction of new perspectives and reference points. The framework, according to Walters (2000:268), 'is progressive and integrates our experience, harnessing it in the process of becoming more mature'. This framework is useful in that it plots the various experiences of mature students from 'initial culture shock' to 'adaptation' to 'maturation'. Jenkins (2004) tripartite stages of transition also apply here, i.e. separation, transition and incorporation.

2.7. Conclusion

This literature review has set out to explore policy and research related to the participation of mature students in higher education on three levels: the macro, the meso and the micro.

My study builds upon work completed to date in the related areas of lifelong learning, adult education, teacher education and mature students across the levels of macro, meso and micro policy implications. However, there is a considerable gap in the literature regarding the needs of mature student teachers in Ireland. Therefore, this study seeks to address teacher education and the wider lifelong learning debate on a number of levels in an Irish context. The study also seeks to provide a vehicle through which a dialogue between formal and non-formal approaches to education can be shared in the important policy context of lifelong learning.

Three Chapter: Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for my study of mature students. In this study, I am interested in the experiences of the mature students, as described in dialogue with the students through their narratives. Their narratives were constructed on the basis of three in-depth interviews which were conducted with each individual student. The study focuses on the self of the student as a mature student undertaking a full-time B.Ed. programme; on her identity; and on how her identity has been shaped by herself, the college environment and by the interaction between self and the external environments in which she has been located for the last three years. This qualitative study is built upon a theoretical framework which is informed by critical realism and symbolic interactionism. This chapter will set out my theoretical framework and it will also address some of the contradictions which emerge between the perspectives which I have chosen to inform this study.

3.2. Philosophical Framework

Two key concepts in philosophy, directly relating to research, are ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to conceptions of reality whereas epistemology refers to the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know. In the literature, there are two schools of thought that are at opposite ends of the ontological spectrum, namely positivism and interpretative/social constructionist approaches. Positivists believe in an external, observable reality. The causes of human behaviour are external to the individual and reality is objectively determined. According to its epistemology, positivism gains knowledge by experimental or comparative analysis.

On the other end of the ontological spectrum, interpretative/ social constructionist approaches view knowledge as subjective and derived from meanings, with the researcher being involved in the process of meaning making. Positivism is essentially linked with quantitative methods, while interpretative and social constructionist approaches are linked with qualitative methods.

Having reviewed both the positivist and interpretative/social constructionist approaches, I contend that neither a purely positivist nor interpretative/social constructionist approach can fully answer my research question. This is because neither pure positivism nor interpretative/social constructionists approaches are equipped to deal with the multi-layered framework adopted in this study. My own ontological position is that people construct their own realities and, therefore, multiple realities exist for people who share the same situation. Yet the underlying structures, e.g. educational institutions, which provide the backdrop for these realities, are relatively robust. This research focuses on the micro experiences of mature students, with a view to informing the institutional level (meso) and the national/international policy context (macro context).

3.3. Critical Realism and Critical Theory

Critical realism is an antipositivist movement within the social sciences associated with the works of Bhasker (1991), Layder (1993), Danermark et al. (2002) and Archer (1995). Layder (1993) contends that the bridge between positivist and social constructionist approaches is provided by a realist approach. While critical realists agree with positivists that there is a world of events out there, which is observable and independent of human consciousness, they believe that knowledge about this world is socially constructed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Our perceptions of reality change continually, but the underlying structures constituting that reality are relatively enduring. The aim of realist research, therefore, is to develop a better understanding of these enduring structures and mechanisms.

Critical realism acknowledges the stratified nature of social life. Therefore, critical realists argue for a relational perspective, seeing society as ‘an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform’ (Bhaskar, 1991:76). Consequently, in order to practically explore a social situation, one must examine each level in turn, as well as the interactions between structures identified on different levels (Layder, 1993). Layder (1993) also makes the point that realism seeks to understand the interwoven nature of different levels and dimensions of social reality, or macro and micro

aspects of the social reality. Thus, critical realism offers a robust philosophical justification for my exploration of the experiences of mature students on micro, meso and macro levels. According to Danermark et al. (2002:200), society is made up of feeling, thinking human beings, and their interpretations of the world should be studied. While this study deals with the immediate experiences of mature students (i.e. the micro level), it situates these experiences in the wider context of the broader layers of institutional setting (meso level) and national and international policy instruments (macro level).

The realist approach attempts to address this complexity by offering a layered or stratified model of society/ reality that includes macro and micro aspects. This allows one to better analyse the organic links between them and to see ‘reality’ as a series of layers, each with its own distinctiveness. Layder (1993) offers the following map of reality.

Figure 3.1. Layder’s map of reality.

H I S T O R Y	<i>Research Element</i>	<i>Research Focus</i>
	Context	Macro social forms, e.g. gender, class, national economic situation
	Setting	Immediate environment of social setting, e.g. organisation or institution
	Situated activity	Dynamics of ‘face to face interaction, e.g. participating in a degree programme
	Self	Biographical experience and social involvements, e.g. individual stories of mature students

The first two layers (context and setting) are concerned with structural typologies and the other two (situated activity and self) are action typologies. The last layer (history) is applicable to all the layers collectively, e.g. the histories of self unfold inside the larger historical dimension of setting. The realist approach has two important consequences. It enables social research to address the problem of the division between macro and micro levels of analysis by concentrating attention on the organic links between them; thereby, giving the research a ‘textured or interwoven’ quality (Layder, 1993:8). Secondly, viewing social reality as a series of interdependent layers each with its own distinctive characteristics enables the researcher to be sensitive to the different units and time scales that are involved in social processes and social change (Layder, 1993). These layers

broadly correspond with Murray and Maguire's (2007) framework for analysing teacher education which includes three levels or spaces: Micro, Meso and Macro.

Critical theorists see education as a process rather than a product, as a means rather than an end. While traditional researchers are concerned with describing, understanding and interpreting a phenomena, critical theorists are more concerned with challenging the status of the phenomena through political action. Critical social theory is concerned with issues of power and injustice. It recognises that structures of society collude to maintain the status quo - a status quo which often works against the best interests of the politically disempowered or of those without a voice. One of the driving forces behind this research is to grant a voice to mature students. Critical theory is essentially about social change, egalitarianism and empowerment. While empowerment can be sometimes construed in a nebulous manner, critical theory links issues of power or lack thereof to social injustice and lack of a political voice. According to Kincheloe and Mc Lauren (2005:305) 'research thus becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness'.

Critical theory encourages people to look beyond the socially, politically, culturally, economically constructed world order and to ask political questions such as; who has created this scenario? For what purpose? What groups of people are benefitting? What groups of people are excluded? Critical theory is counter hegemonic in that it questions and challenges the nature of knowledge and the processes of power within education. Critical theory has implications for all aspects of education from pedagogy to curriculum development, from classroom management to teacher education.

3.4. Symbolic Interactionism

The nature of my study has led me to the interpretive theory of symbolic interaction. I am interested in exploring the self and identity of the mature student through the nature of their experiences in college. Equally, I am interested in the manner in which they engaged and interacted with both the college and the course and the manner in which this interaction affected their self and their identity.

Interpretative interactionism is particularly appropriate for this study as it explores the interrelationship between private lives and public responses to personal issues, i.e. it works outward from the biography of the person (Denzin, 2001). Because of its emphasis on the experience of the individual and the meanings of this experience as articulated by the individual, the interpretative approach suggests that programmes should be judged 'by and from the point of view of the persons most directly affected' (Denzin, 2001: 2). In that case, the persons directly affected are mature students, the programme is the B.Ed. and the institution delivering the programme is St. Catherine's College.

According to symbolic interactionism, all communication is symbolic and based upon interaction and meaning. Formulated by Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society in both psychology (Charon, 1989) and sociology (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Denzin, 2001). The symbolic interactionism perspective has evolved largely from the work of Mead, but the actual term '*symbolic interactionism*' was formulated by Blumer, a student and interpretator of Mead. Symbolic interactionism is the process of interaction in the formation of meanings for individuals.

The central thesis of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic arena. Symbols are culturally derived social objects, having shared meanings that are created and maintained through social interaction. Symbols provide the means by which reality is constructed through language and communication. Reality is primarily a social product, and all that is humanly significant - self, mind, society, culture - emerges from, and is dependent on, symbolic interactions for its existence.

Symbolic interactionism is a social constructivist approach to understanding social life, which focuses on how reality is constructed by active and creative actors through their interactions with others. Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction; how they present and construct the self (or "identity"), and how they define situations of co-presence with others. One of the perspective's central ideas is that people act as they do because of how they define the present situation. At the

heart of symbolic interactionism are three principles which govern, and in turn are governed by beliefs about the nature of the self, of meaning and of symbols. The three principles as formulated by Henry Blumer (1962:2) are: firstly, human beings act towards things in their environment including physical objects, other people, social institutions, ideas, principles and daily activities on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; secondly, the meaning of such things arises from the social interaction one has with one's fellow human beings; and thirdly, these meanings are handled through an interpretative process.

Interpretative interactionists are interpreters of problematic lived experiences involving symbolic interaction between two or more people. The focus of interpretative research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings people assign to themselves and their lives (Denzin, 2001). These 'interactional moments' or 'moments of crisis', which leave marks on people's lives, have the potential to create transformational experiences. Sams (1994) and Denzin (2001) use the term 'epiphany', while Woods (1993) refers to 'critical events' and Giddens (1991) talks about 'fateful moments' to describe these instances.

3.5. The Concepts of Self and Identity: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

In the context of symbolic interactionism, the self is firstly an object. Therefore, an individual can act towards the self as he or she acts towards other people. Secondly, the self is social. It arises in interaction and changes or remains stable due to interaction (Charon, 1989). According to Charon (1989:82), 'the person imaginatively gets outside of his or her person and looks back at self as others do. This course of action depends to a high degree on taking the role of others, both significant others and reference groups to see self from their perspective'. Mead (1934), on the other hand, defines self in terms of 'a process in which the individual is continually adjusting himself in advance to the situation in which he belongs, and reacting back on it' (1934:182). The idea of self as process is also supported by Plummer (2000:195), who states 'the self is a process built out of encounters and endowed with shifting meaning'.

The self serves as an object of symbolic interactionism. Each person is able to think, to interpret a situation, to communicate with herself because of the self. In the literature on symbolic interactionism, the art of thinking is portrayed as a key function in communicating with the self. Mead (1934:173) considers the essence of the self to be cognitive, 'it lies in the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking'. According to Charon (1989 :72), 'to think is to speak to one's *self*, to point things out, to reflect, to carry on conversation with that social object called the self, identically the same manner as one speaks to others, except that in most cases, conversation with one's self is silent'. People would not be able to symbolically communicate with others if they were unable to communicate with the self. When one communicates with the self, one essentially defines the situation to hand by conveying information about all objects involved in the situation, including information about the *self in situation*.

While symbolic interactionists acknowledge that the self is a social object shaped through interaction with others, this does not imply that the self is passive and not involved in identity development. Theorists such as Cooley (1964) and Mead (1934) consider the individual to be actively involved in interaction and to be capable of innovating and initiating actions with different groups and different situations. The self has both an individual and a social identity. However, Nias (1984:268) remarks that 'the contexts which determine these social identities change with time, place and role'. This brings us to another concept in symbolic interactionism, the concept of 'multiple selves' which reflects the perception of self in relation to each individual group with which the self interacts. Nias (1984) and Woods (1993), therefore, claim that teachers' 'selves' are both situational and substantial. In this context, Woods (1993) suggests the concept of a 'preferred self'. However, in order to cope with the world, particularly with institutional arrangements, the individual, according to Woods (1993), adopts different guises in different situations as a survival strategy. There are times when these situational selves may be contradictory and difficult to resolve, e.g. the traditional role of mother and the adopted role of female mature student who is also a mother.

Goffman's (1959) approach uses dramaturgy to describe and understand the behaviour of the self. In face to face interactions, the individual puts on a 'front' in her/his performance to others. Goffman (1959) makes an analogy with actors on a stage; individuals stage a performance to produce and manage their interactions to gain respect from others within a social context. In this comparative context, he talks about 'the presentation of self during interaction'.

Charles Cooley's (1964:184) phrase '*looking glass self*' refers to the process of the development of the self. This looking glass self has three components: how we think our behaviour appears to others; how we think others judge our behaviour; and how we feel about their judgements. If we misconstrue our looking glass self, we may develop false images of how others perceive us. This is linked with Merton's (1957) idea of 'self fulfilling prophesy'- a theory which proposes that individuals will react to imagined perceptions of others no matter how realistic or unrealistic they may be. From an educational point of view, a knowledge of self-fulfilling prophesy is useful as a means of understanding interactions between teacher and students.

Each person has a number of ideas about self, referred to as *self-concept* or *self-perception* in the literature. *Self concept*, according to Charon (1989), has two aspects: self-judgement and identity. Thinking about the self involves making judgements about the self. This is sometimes known as self-esteem. *Self-judgement* is strongly related to the judgement of others. Indeed, it is our perception of others' judgement which is the critical ingredient. The manner in which we define the views of others has a direct impact in how we view the self.

Identity is an important part of the self and it features strongly in the symbolic interactionist literature. Identity is constantly changing. It is dynamic and fluid. According to Charon (1989:80), identity is 'who the individual thinks he or she is and who is announced to the world in word and action. It arises in interaction, it is reaffirmed in interaction, and it is changed in interaction. It is what we do.' Jenkins (2004), on the other hand, looks at selfhood as being part of individual identification. Jenkins refers to a model

of identification, which he terms the internal-external dialectic of identification. This is the process 'whereby all identities – individual and collective – are constituted' (Jenkins 2004:18). This model is partly informed by the earlier work of Mead (1934) who argues that the development of the self is an ongoing process of synthesis involving both internal self definition and the external definitions of others. Jenkins argues that while individuals are unique, selfhood itself is socially constructed. Therefore, he believes that identity is simultaneously individual and collective, i.e. 'individual and collective identities are systematically produced, reproduced and implicated in each other' (Jenkins 2004:23). However, in order to understand collective identity, Jenkins considers it important to understand the notion of institutions and the role of organisations. This is a key concept for this study as mature students report on their interactions with an institution of education. Jenkins also refers to power relations in the context of identity formation. According to Jenkins (2004:23),

identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identification is something *over* which struggles take place and *with* which stratagems are advanced – it is means and end in politics – and at stake is the classification of population as well as the classification of individuals.

Both feminists and poststructuralists have suggested that identity is multiple, shifting and contradictory. Individuals have several subject positions from which they engage with the social historical contexts in which they live their lives (Norquay,1990). Furthermore, individuals constantly struggle with varying and often contradictory subject positions, which are constructed around gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexual preference, which intersect in a variety of ways. Going beyond the purely theoretical discussions of multiple and shifting identity, feminist Audre Lorde (1984) demonstrates how her multiple locations as a black woman, a lesbian, a feminist, a college professor and a mother, locate her repeatedly in situations where one part of her is seemingly at odds with another (Lorde, 1984). Critical realism seeks to understand the underlying mechanisms that are influencing and structuring the various actions of the persons involved.

3.6. Identity Construction

Identity construction is affected in different ways according to how the situation is defined, one's perspective of a situation and the emotions involved. How we define the situation is central to how we act. Thomas's (1928) famous dictum: '*If situations are defined as real, they are real in their consequences*', reflects both the importance of meanings and how they are constructed. Symbolic interactionists argue that we all define the world in which we work, study and inhabit; that part of this definition is our own which involves conscious choices (Charon, 1989). The definition of the situation emphasises that people act in situations on the basis of how these are defined. Definitions, even when they clash with "objective" reality, have real consequences for people's actions and events. The process of defining a situation involves the relevant identities and attributes of those involved in an interaction, e.g. if a teacher defines a pupil as a slow learner, he/she will treat the learner accordingly. The pupil will thus internalise messages of low expectations for the teacher and act accordingly, thereby resulting in a self-fulfilling prophesy (Merton, 1957:144). Defining a situation is not a static process. An initial definition, based on past experiences or cultural expectations, may be revised in the course of interaction. Much of the negotiation in social situations entails an attempt to present the self in a favourable light or to defend a valued identity.

Symbolic interactionists describe perspectives as a set of symbols. Perspectives are considered to be dynamic, constantly changing and are transformed through interaction. Therefore, perspectives are intensely complex in line with symbolic interactionist thinking. Woods (1993:7) defines perspective as:

... the framework through which people make sense of the world. People do not see one objective reality with a universal mental template. Rather, their view of reality is through a screen, or an interpretational code which they employ to understand the world.

According to Charon (1989:6), 'perspectives are a complex matter. Perspectives are not perceptions but are guides to our perceptions, they influence what we see and how we interpret what we see. They are our eyeglasses we put on to see'.

Over the last few years, symbolic interactionists have become interested in the study of emotions, which according to Charon (1989), have been neglected for a long time. For Charon (1989:132), 'emotions are *social objects* within our stream of action – we label them, define them, control them, direct them, use them, and perhaps alter them in situations'. Essentially, emotions are a very important part of human actions. Emotions do not present themselves automatically; they emerge as a result of interaction with others (Plummer, 2000). We feel as human beings and this is important. As humans we can decide to express, repress and/or manage our emotions. Nevertheless, they cannot be ignored. Symbolic interactionists recognise that emotions are part of what humans use in different situations.

Denzin (2001) takes this one step further as he argues that emotional understanding is a fundamental principle of interpretative research. It is part of the lives of those being studied and it forms part of the interaction between researcher and those involved in the research process. Emotions play a key role in the construction of identity (Zembylas, 2003). However, Day et al., (2006) argue that there has been insufficient consideration given to the role of emotional factors in the discussion of teacher identity.

Emotions and identity are closely linked (Zembylas, 2003). Emotions provide meaning to our experiences and it is, therefore, impossible to discuss identity construction without considering the meaning of our experiences. Symbolic interactionists remind us that emotions and their communication through symbolic expressions, e.g. oral and body language are shaped in dialogic interaction with others and with a variety of other emotions. For Bakhtin et al. (1981), the notion of dialogicality highlights the point that one's identity is linked to the recognition of others. Therefore, if people feel they are being perceived negatively, this will impact negatively on their self image.

Recent educational research has emphasised the role of emotions in helping human beings to survive and adapt, to motivate their learning and to communicate with others. According to Zembylas (2003:216), 'there seems to be a renewed interest in the emotions of teaching, the emotional politics of teacher development and educational reform, and the

implications for teacher development'. However, Boler (1999) argues that emotions have been disciplined, suppressed and ignored at all levels of education. Zemblyas (2003) believes that emotions are socially constructed rather than simply located in the individual. In this scenario, the emotions that student teachers experience and express are not matters of personal dispositions but are constructed in social relationships and value systems from family, culture and educational experiences.

3.7. Addressing Some Inherent Tensions and Contradictions

Qualitative research is 'defined primarily by a series of essential tensions, contradictions and hesitations' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: xi). This study is certainly characterised by a number of theoretical and practical tensions on a number of levels. In the first instance, there is a tension between the micro, meso and macro levels which the study attempts to address. While the research is based on the micro individual experiences of six mature students, it is attempting to inform and change policy at meso and macro levels. The study moves from the micro to the macro context and *vice versa*. However, the interactionist nature of symbolic interactionism, in terms of the interaction between self and society, appears to me to be ideally placed within the micro/macro implications of this study. Plummer (2000:207) calls for the end of the micro-macro split. He acknowledges that while the self and its concern with the other is a key interactive unit in its own right, 'it has to be woven into a dense web of progressively larger scale interactive layers of encounters, roles, groups, organizations, social worlds, settlements, societies and civilizations'. Concern with bridging the micro-macro split has come to the fore in contemporary writings of interactionists (Maines, 1982). Maines (1982:10) suggests the term 'mesostructure' – i.e. how societal and institutional forces mesh with human activity as a means of connecting the micro and the macro. This notion of a mesostructure reflects a sense of social organisation, whereby the micro and macro are connected. This is also a key concern for critical realists who highlight the interdependency between the micro world of everyday action and the macro world of structures (Layder, 1993).

In the second instance, I am drawing from two traditions which are seemingly at odds with each other, namely the individualistic nature of symbolic interactionism and the macro

structuralist nature of critical theory. Symbolic interactionists focus on the subjective aspects of social life rather than on the objective macro-structural aspects of social systems (Charon, 1989). In fact, symbolic interactionist theory has been criticised because of its alleged inability to deal with social structure. However, Plummer (2000) rejects the critique that symbolic interactionism is an overly subjective micro theory, arguing that interactionist work has the capacity to anchor issues in a historical context and to deal with networks of power.

In the third instance, there are tensions between the biographical approach and thematic approach which I have adopted in the analysis of the data. In order to resolve this tension, I refer to the work of Bruner (1985). He argues that there are two equally valid ways of knowing *paradigmatic cognition* and *narrative cognition*. Paradigmatic cognition is essentially about sorting different experiences into categories and themes. Narrative cognition, on the other hand, according to Polkinghorne (1995:11), 'gives us explanatory knowledge of why a person acted as he or she did: it makes another's action as well as our own understandable'. In this thesis, I combine elements of both paradigmatic cognition (chapter five) and narrative cognition (chapter six) in an effort to enhance validity and to draw upon the best of both approaches. I am also interested in the transformative potential of story telling (Stroobants, 2005). Therefore, I believe that narrative research is not just about reporting the story; it involves generating an understanding of emergent themes and reflecting on the implications of these themes in a collaborative process involving the researcher and the interviewee. The themes which are discussed in chapter five emerge from the data in line with the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Despite important ontological and epistemological differences, critical realists who employ qualitative research methods share several assumptions with symbolic interactionists. This qualitative study on mature students is informed by both symbolic interactionism and critical realism, because I believe they complement each other in terms of the micro-meso-macro structure I have adopted.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter outlines my theoretical framework, which is informed by symbolic interactionism and critical realism. I have also addressed key themes of self/identity and identity construction which are central to this study. The chapter also addresses some of the contradictions which emerge between these perspectives. The next chapter deals with methodological issues.

Chapter 4: Methodological Assumptions and Methods

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I deal with methodological assumptions and methods. Methodology, like epistemology, is also concerned with how we come to know, but it is much more practical in nature. Methodology is focused on the specific ways, i.e. methods that we use to try to understand aspects of our world. This chapter outlines the methods of narrative and interviewing which were used in my research study. The process of generating, collecting and analysing the data is set out in detail. I locate myself in the study by referring to my own biography. The themes which emerged from the data and from the literature on symbolic interactionism are also included.

4.2. Qualitative Research: Narrative Inquiry and the Biographical Tradition

My inquiry into the experiences of mature student teachers is qualitative in nature. The literature on qualitative research has grown exponentially in recent years. A classic example of the variety of perspectives informing qualitative research is set out in Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3), qualitative researchers 'study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them'.

Creswell (1998) describes five traditions of qualitative inquiry; namely biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies. Creswell demonstrates the important relationship between tradition and research design. I have chosen to work with the biographical tradition. Denzin (1989:69) describes the biographical approach as the 'studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning point moments in an individual's life'. Denzin (1989) also has a particular approach to biographical study known as 'interpretative biography'. According to Denzin (1989:82), 'we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in story telling practices'. From a feminist, critical, emancipatory perspective, biography has an appeal for those who feel marginalised or silenced by decision makers.

People are essentially story-tellers. The art of story telling is a particularly strong traditional part of Irish culture. Telling stories is a fundamental human activity. Therefore, it is not surprising that narrative and story telling have emerged as popular forms of qualitative research (Gudmundsdottir, 1997). The use of narrative in research has grown significantly in the last two decades (Carter, 1993; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998; Chase, 2005).

Creswell (2003:15) describes narrative research, as

a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then re told or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. In the end the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative.

However, different authors highlight different aspects and different understandings of narrative. This has caused some ambiguity and confusion according to Polkinghorne (1995). He differentiates narrative as prosaic discourse and narrative as story. Narrative as prosaic discourse is essentially one form of data, e.g. that which is generated from some interviews and observation notes. Narrative as story is a particular type of discourse. According to Polkinghorne (1995:7):

a story is a special type of discourse production. In a story, events and actions are drawn together into an organised whole by means of a plot. A plot is a type of conceptual scheme by which contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed.

Other authors also focus on narrative as story. Seidman (1998:1) describes story as 'a way of knowing' and as a 'meaning making process'. Story telling is an elementary form of human communication. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000:58), 'by telling, people recall what has happened, put experience into sequence, find possible explanations for it and play with the chain of events that shapes individual and social lives'. One of the primary arguments in support of narrative research is that many of the assumptions and experiences which have shaped an individual's life and a society's life are difficult to access in any other way (Wengraf, 2001).

4.3. Narrative and the Construction of Self/Identity

Since narrative has emerged as a significant force within educational research, the literature suggests that selves and stories are linked and that stories form the cornerstone of our identity. Andrews et al. (2000:77-78) makes this point coherently as follows:

Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experience....they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves ...our stories are a cornerstone of our identity.

This suggests a symbiotic, interconnected relationship between the story and story-teller; whereby, the story helps the story-teller to make meaning of their experiences. The use of narrative research is hence associated with the construction of identity and the exploration of self (Kehily, 1995). Feminist writers and researchers have explored the use of narrative and self-narration as a way of recording and validating the experiences of women (Bateson, 1990). Narrative can, therefore, be seen as an important activity in the process of identity construction and as a way of exploring how versions and reconstructions of the past shape and construct the present.

Goodson (1997:113) argues that stories exist within history and that each story is located in time and space. Therefore, 'stories should be narrated and located'. This reference to location implies a move to 'the wider contextualised collaborative mode'. I am conscious of Goodson's idea of locating the story. Therefore, my framework of linking the micro experiences of mature students to the meso and macro levels of institutions and national policy addresses the requirements of locating the individual story within a social, cultural and political frame.

4.4. Data Gathering Methods

I have chosen the interview as my research method, due to the exploratory and open-ended nature of this research. According to Patton (2002:341), 'qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit'. The narrative interview according to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000:59), 'envisages a setting that encourages and stimulates an interviewee.. to tell a story about some significant event in their life and social contexta technique [which] derives its label from the latin word *narrare*, to report, to tell a story.' Seidman (1998) argues that the

essence of in-depth interviewing is understanding the experience of other people and the manner in which they make sense of that experience. Kvale (1996:42) refers to the qualitative interview as 'a construction site of knowledge'.

The interview is an interaction between the researcher and the researched, essentially a process of symbolic interactionism. Through research, the researcher is acting upon and constructing the world. As I interviewed the students, I became aware of the process of generating knowledge which was taking place, both for the students and myself, as we grappled to explore and understand the emerging issues. I adopted an approach articulated by Shuman (1982) (cited in Seidman 1998:11), namely the three interview series.

Interview 1. Focused life history;

Interview 2. Details of experience; and

Interview 3. Reflection on the meaning.

4.4.1. The Interviews

Three separate interviews took place with each student. Each interview was timetabled in consultation with the students and arrangements were made to re-schedule, if the students were not able to attend for any unforeseen reason.

The interviews with the six female mature students took place in my office in the college in the period from May - June 2005. This study specifically focuses on the experiences of mature students who are in their final year of study. I have chosen to work with final year students for a number of reasons:

- At this stage, they have experienced three years in college; therefore, they have definite views about life as a mature student. Very often first year students are trying to acclimatise to a number of different factors simultaneously; therefore, their experience as mature students may be confused with other aspects of their social and emotional life.

- Third year students have experienced the full range of options which the college has to offer, in terms of curriculum, extra curricular activities, friendships with peers and relationships with members of staff.

- Third year students, are in my experience, more self assured. In several cases, they enjoy a more relaxed relationship with members of staff and they are clearer about their own views with regard to course content, teaching approaches within the college, and the nature of their own experiences in college.

The first interview focused on the life of the participant up to the point when she became a mature student. The interviewees were asked to tell their story; to reconstruct experiences at home, in school, in previous work experiences, with family, friends and colleagues. The idea of this initial interview was to work with the participant to develop a context which informed current experiences in college.

The purpose of the second interview was to establish clear details and stories about current experiences in college. The interviewees had opportunities to describe experiences in the context of their life stories described in the first interview. During the third interview, the participants were asked to reflect on the nature of their experiences. They had an opportunity to do this by looking at their current experiences in detail, within the context in which they occurred.

The process was based on a very definite structure whereby each interview laid the foundation for the next. According to Seidman (1998:13), 'in the process of conducting the three interviews, the interviewer must maintain a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the participants to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work'. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and the third interview for each of the participants was somewhat shorter. This was due to the extensive nature of the first two interviews. It was also due to timing as the students were preparing for their final examinations and they had other matters on their minds. Each interview took place on a weekly basis; thereby, allowing time for each participant to

reflect on each interview without leaving so much time as to allow the participant to disconnect from the process.

Seidman (1998) argues that the three interview structure incorporates measures which enhance validity. Firstly, the participants' comments are set in context. Secondly, it proposes a time frame whereby the three interviews take place within a three week period, which allows the researcher to ensure consistency between one interview and the next. Thirdly, by interviewing a number of participants, it is possible to cross check their experiences. Fourthly, by bringing the participants along a journey, whereby they build a context, describe their experience and make sense of that experience, then the process has an inbuilt validity monitor. I believe this inquiry is valid because of the three interview structure and this is the primary reason why I have chosen this approach. My interview schedule is set out in appendix five.

4.5. Piloting

I piloted the three interview approach with a second year mature student. During the piloting stage, I discovered that the conversation was not sufficiently audible so I invested in a high quality recorder with microphone attached, which made a significant difference. This turned out to be an invaluable lesson learned from piloting. As the data is so valuable, the reliability of the study would have been seriously compromised if I was unable to hear the tapes properly.

4.6. Selection of Students

There were 396 final year B.Ed students in the 2004-2005 group. Among these were thirty four mature students, two of whom were male. After one of the lectures given by another lecturer, I asked to speak to the mature students as a group, whereby I explained the nature of my work. All were asked to attend a meeting for more information. This meeting took place in April 2004; during the day, when no lectures were scheduled for the students and was attended by twenty students. Thus, the sample of students from whom the interviewees were chosen was a self selecting group. I outlined my research project and explained that by volunteering the students would have to be available for three one hour

interviews over a three week period. The students were invited to volunteer to participate in this study by completing a form (see appendix three). Eight students volunteered and I selected six names from a box in their presence. Two names were maintained as reserves. Due to the intensive and prolonged nature of the participation required, as well as the lack of incentives or rewards, it was entirely reasonable that such a limited sample would emerge.

4.7. Rationale for the Number of Students

Seidman (1998) poses two criteria for deciding on the number of participants to interview: *sufficiency and saturation*. Firstly, are there sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants? Secondly, are there too many participants leading to a potential saturation of information, whereby the researcher is not learning anything new? I have taken Seidman's criteria on board to ensure I have engaged with a broad range of mature students' experiences. However, due to the qualitative and in-depth nature of this research, I believe that the number of participants is less important than the quality of the data. This is in line with Patton's (2002:7) view that 'the quality of the insights generated is what matters, not the number of insights'.

I have also drawn upon the 'small is beautiful' logic of narrative enquiry:

Since the aim is to understand contexts or narratives, then the study can only get so big before the context becomes invalid or meaningless. So generally in qualitative research, small is beautiful (Sanders and Liptrot,1994:26).

4.8. Working with the Data

Kvale (1996:160) refers to the act of transcription as 'an interpretative process'. When I re-read the final transcripts while I listened to the tapes, I was conscious of the difference between oral and written language. The actual scripts themselves were devoid of the colour and the personality of the interviewees. In some instances, the grammar and syntax appeared quite poor, even though the interviews themselves were conducted by highly articulate, intelligent participants.

Once all of the interviews were transcribed, I worked exclusively on each participant's set of three interviews. I re-read the texts; then I re – read them while listening to the tape recording in an effort to remain grounded in the data and to remain true to each participant's story. I removed any reference to the interviewee's identity from each transcript. While working on each individual text, I tried to extract the narrative and understand the data holistically in the context of each individual story-teller.

The data has been presented as it was transcribed from the tapes. However, some editorial decisions were taken in the case of Cathy's story in chapter six. In order to construct her narrative, I had to decide which pieces to include and which pieces to exclude. Some repetitious speech was removed and grammatical mistakes were corrected in order to facilitate the logical flow of the story. Other editorial decisions were taken for ethical reasons e.g. all references to identifiable members of staff were removed.

4.9. Data Analysis Procedures

Much of the literature on qualitative research deals primarily with techniques for gathering data rather than data analysis. Polkinghorne (1995) proposes two different types of narrative inquiry based on the two different ways of knowing: *paradigmatic cognition* and *narrative cognition* (Bruner, 1995), i.e. analysis of narratives which employs paradigmatic reasoning, and narrative analysis which employs narrative reasoning. While both share the general principles of qualitative research e.g. working with natural language, they have significant differences. The paradigmatic type seeks to identify themes from stories whereas the narrative type generates stories from the data. According to Polkinghorne (1995:15) 'the process of narrative analysis is actually a synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its constituent parts'. Whilst the paradigmatic type has a long, established tradition in social science, the narrative type is more recent and poses a more radical challenge to accepted forms or inquiry (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). In this study, I have adopted both analysis of narratives based on paradigmatic cognition and narrative analysis based on narrative cognition. Analysis of narrative was used whereby I identified themes from the data as presented in chapter five. Narrative analysis was also used whereby the story of one of the participants was the outcome of the analysis as presented in chapter six.

As the categories and themes were not predetermined, they emerged from the process of data analysis very much in line with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) ideas of grounded theory. This defines grounded theory as 'theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process' (Strauss and Corbin 1998:12). While I did not have a preconceived theory and I endeavoured to remain open minded throughout the study, I had some preconceptions about the experiences of mature students from my own previous interactions with mature students in the college.

The analysis of the data took place in three distinct stages. Paradigmatic analysis of data took place during the first two stages as I endeavoured to locate common categories and themes and narrative analysis took place during the third stage. The first stage, the inductive phase was conducted through the use of Nvivo, an example of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The second stage, the deductive phase took place through re-reading the entire transcripts, coding manually and cross-checking with codes which emerged through the Nvivo process. The process of formulating themes was informed by symbolic interactionism and by protracted discussions with my supervisors. The third stage involved the construction of a story through narrative analysis.

Stage one: Use of Nvivo as a Software Tool for Analysis

The use of Nvivo was useful in that it assisted with the enormous task of managing and storing the data in a manner which accommodated easy retrieval of the material as and when it was required. The programme essentially assisted me to re-structure the data for further analysis. The interpretation of the data was, however, my responsibility as computers can only do so much. According to Gibbs (2002:57) 'coding is the process of identifying and recording one or more discrete passages of text .. that in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea'. I carried out a horizontal analysis (Figure 4.1) of all 18 interviews. Through this inductive stage, I carried out an open coding exercise whereby I went through the data, extracted each unit which made sense (a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph) and I used a phrase or a word in the coding stripe on the side of the page to describe this unit. The Nvivo software uses the term node; however, I will use the term code. Then I carried out a vertical analysis (Figure 4.2) going back over

the codes for each individual, thus respecting the totality of the story from each individual participant. I also referred back to transcripts and the tapes themselves to capture the emotional element which accompanied the text.

Figure 4.1. Horizontal analysis

	Amy	Cathy	Susan	Bernie	Laura	Rachel
1st interview	←					→
2 nd interview	←					→
3 rd interview	←					→

Figure 4.2. Vertical analysis.

	Amy	Cathy	Susan	Bernie	Laura	Rachel
1st interview						
2 nd interview	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
3 rd interview	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

The next step in the process was more challenging as I grouped the open codes into categories and sub categories in terms of general areas and ideas which were beginning to emerge. This was the stage where I as the researcher was actively involved, making decisions about potential theoretical ‘homes’ for each code. The qualitative data was used inductively to identify themes, which were in some cases reframed in interaction with the theoretical literature.

Figure 4.3. List of categories which emerged from study.

Categories from Interview 1	Categories from Interview 2	Categories from Interview 3.
Personality traits Personal circumstances Previous work experiences Previous educational experience Previous life experience Travel Initial career decisions Desire to be a teacher Previous teaching experience Efforts to obtain place on B.Ed. Emotions	The B.Ed. course Administrative staff Academic staff Services Fellow students Social scene Lack of flexibility Assessment Teaching practice Education subjects Arts subjects Pedagogical options Alternative education experience Irish Workload Perspective about teaching and learning Emotions and feelings	Support from institution Childcare Study skills Family support Fellow mature students Finance Motivation to keep going Recommendations Critical turning points Stumbling blocks Thoughts about the future General impressions Social life The college Facilities Reactions to being interviewed Identity Roles Metaphors Sense of powerlessness On being a mature student

Stage Two: The Deductive Stage

In the second stage of the analysis, the deductive stage, I re-read the transcripts again. Throughout this phase of deep reading, I manually documented categories and cross-checked with the list of categories which emerged from the coding process through Nvivo. I used this opportunity of reading through all of the data to challenge and verify my understandings, and I also evaluated the overall process in terms of usefulness with reference to the original research question. I searched for alternative explanations and built a case for the emergent theme, through the use of memos and notes. This was an attempt to analyse the data in its totality or in a holistic fashion in line with Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approaches. Finally, the process of writing itself illuminated the thought processes, the logical processes of analysis and became a central part of the

interpretive process itself. The following is an example of moving from raw data to theme:

Figure 4.4. From raw data to theme.

Raw data	I mean obviously coming in here was a big, big kind of question mark 'God, am I able for it?'
Open coding	Initial reaction to becoming a full-time mature student
Sub category	Self-doubt
Category	Emotions and feelings
Sub theme	Stepping into a new identity
Theme	Self in transition

The following three themes were generated as a result of this process of data analysis:

Figure 4.5. List of themes and sub themes.

Theme 1. Presentation of Self	Theme 2. Self in transition	Theme 3. Redemption of Self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and aspirations • Significant life events • Previous educational experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepping into a new identity • Interactions with the college • Interactions with the B.Ed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging identity • An emotional journey • Life as a mature student: some reflections

Stage three: Construction of one participant's story.

The construction of one participant's story allowed me to build upon the analysis which had taken place during stage one and stage two and it enabled me to engage with the data on a deeper level. The result of a narrative analysis, according to Polkinghorne (1995), is an explanation which is retrospective whereby past events are linked together to explain the final outcome. In constructing the final story, I brought order and meaningfulness to the data in a manner which complemented the analysis in chapter five. I decided to work with Cathy's data because Cathy was the person who wrote to me and asked to become part of this study before I asked for volunteers. She had a strong desire to tell her story and therefore I decided to work with her data for chapter six. However, because the data from all of the participants was so rich, I could have equally selected any of the remaining five participants.

The themes and categories which emerged from the data are presented in chapter five. Cathy's story is presented in chapter six while chapter seven provides a meta analysis of the data in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature review.

4.10. Positionality and Personal Biography

In qualitative research, the researcher herself is the primary instrument (Patton, 2002:141). Feminist research in particular, highlights the personal history of the researcher which subjectively influences and becomes part of the research process (Merrill, 1999). Therefore, I believe it is important to describe my own position in relation to this research study. Simultaneously I am a woman, a wife, a friend, a daughter, a sister, a lecturer, a teacher, a mature student and since I have started this course, I have become a mother. I am currently working as a lecturer in a college of education in Ireland. In 1986, I spent a summer in Kenya where I worked as primary teacher. This constituted a 'critical event' (Woods, 1993) in my life. From that time, I became very interested in different cultures, different perspectives, and different kinds of education. I have virtually been a mature student since I left college with my primary degree, completing courses in diverse areas ranging from public relations to intercultural education, to teacher education to adult education.

In the context of this research, I am a researcher/lecturer working in the institution being studied; therefore, I am somewhat of 'an insider researcher' (Merrill, 1999). As I have worked in this institution for the past six years, I have developed my own ideas and perspectives about the institution, the staff, the students and about the programmes which are delivered. Therefore, I am not approaching this study with a blank sheet. However, by acknowledging this perspective, I am also informing the process about the particular lens which I bring to the research. I am a lecturer in education, with many years of experience in education; therefore, I bring an in-depth knowledge of education to this process, unlike a researcher who might come from an engineering or a medical background.

My own role as researcher is also part of the context for findings. As a researcher, I have designed the research approach, taken field notes, asked interview questions and interpreted responses. Self awareness and ongoing reflexivity is therefore an important

asset to the research project. My own background, my previous experiences, my own life story, my gender, class and culture has collectively coloured the lens through which I view the experiences of the participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). By explicitly positioning myself in the research process and openly acknowledging how my 'interpretation flows from (my) own personal, cultural and historic experiences' (Creswell, 2003:8), my influence on the research process is clarified. I believe that my own personal experience has assisted me in developing empathetic relationships with the participants and has encouraged me to challenge and vigorously test my findings to ensure trustworthiness. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, I am bringing a gendered, historical self to this process (Denzin, 2001).

4.11. Ethical and Political Considerations

Issues of power are central in every research study including narrative studies. In effect, stories can collude with 'the powerful' in society to maintain the position of 'the powerless' in terms of how stories are interpreted. This 'representational crisis' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) is in danger of further marginalising those who share their stories. According to Goodson (1997:114) 'narration ...can both reinforce domination or re-write domination'. The mature students in this study freely volunteered to participate in this process. They welcomed the opportunity to voice their stories and to discuss their burning issues. So, my hope would be that through this research process, the students' stories will become emancipatory stories (Mc Ewan, 1997).

Pring (2000: 146) comments on ethical issues as follows: 'there are duties of respect to those who are being researched, often people in positions of vulnerability'. This research is characterised by the utmost level of respect for all participants involved or implicated throughout the research process itself. A right to privacy was guaranteed at all times. While I acknowledge there are issues of power in the lecturer/student relationship, I endeavoured to ensure that this did not interfere with the validity and trustworthiness of the research process. As a lecturer, I was not involved in grading any of the interviewees' final projects or teaching practice assignments. The students were fully aware of this, as I was not scheduled as a lecturer for any of their courses.

Participants were requested to donate some of their personal time to participate in this study; this requirement was voluntary in nature. Participants by virtue of their identity as students may be vulnerable and, therefore, every possible strategy for protecting their identity has been taken, including the use of pseudonyms. Before agreeing to participate, I invited all mature students to a meeting whereby I presented them with an overview of my study including aims, approaches and the potential for contributing to policy on both local, i.e. the college and national levels. I endeavoured to explain my role as a researcher as opposed to a lecturer and I invited volunteers to indicate their interest. My findings have been recorded and reported as truthfully as possible. All mature students who participated had an opportunity to share their experiences in an open, safe and non-threatening environment. The consent form (appendix four) was used as suggested by Creswell (2003), which included the purpose, procedures and benefits of study, a guarantee to participate voluntarily or to withdraw, a guarantee to transparency and clarity throughout every stage of the research process, and finally the signatures of both the researcher and the participants.

However, I would like to acknowledge that I am deeply conscious of the unequal relationship which exists between myself and the students. On the one hand, I am a lecturer, a permanent member of staff holding what they could perceive as a powerful position in the college. The students, on the other hand, are in a more vulnerable position. They are in the process of completing final examinations whereby lecturers are involved in assessing their performance. The interviews themselves were also unequal as I did not tell my story. I did, however, share aspects of my story as we established a very good relationship and I felt my own emotions changing as I reacted to the students on a personal level. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the participants, all names and places are false. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used and identifying information, e.g. place names are not used in the case of individual quotations and biographical information. References to the identity of staff members have been omitted. The college where the students were registered has also been assigned a fictitious name, i.e. St. Catherine's College.

4.12. Conclusion

In this chapter, I outline the methods which were used for this research study, namely narrative interviews. The process of generating, collecting and analysing the data was also described. These methods were underpinned by the theoretical framework set out in chapter three. The themes which emerged from the process are also listed. This research is naturalistic and inductive. The research design evolved as the fieldwork progressed. The data and its analysis is set out in the following two chapters through the three themes in chapter five and Cathy's story in chapter six.

Chapter 5. Data: Overview of Themes and Their Analysis

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a trinity of themes which explore three different dimensions of identity as experienced by the mature students in this study. I have described these as: Presentation of Self, Self in Transition and Redemption of Self. Each theme is inherently linked with the other two themes and the three themes collectively provide a clearer insight into the concept of identity for the mature students.

The data for this study was collected through three in-depth interviews, with each of six mature student teachers⁶. These students shared their stories based on their experiences, participating as full-time students on a three year B.Ed. programme in a college of education in Ireland. The six mature students ranged in ages from twenty six to thirty seven years of age. Each student had volunteered to be interviewed and enthusiastically participated in the process. I have included lengthy quotes in the interest of granting the mature students an authentic voice in this research. The analysis of data presented in this chapter is informed by analysis of narratives, and in chapter six by narrative analysis through the construction of a story (Polkinghorne, 1995).

5.2. Context of Analysis

The research investigates the policy of widening participation from the perspective of mature students, a perspective which is often overlooked (Bowl, 2003) in favour of the policy maker or of the educational institution. This research stems from an interest in social justice in education. This analysis, which adopts a symbolic interactionist approach informed by critical realism, aims to understand the experiences of mature students from their view points as articulated through their personal narratives. The research also actively creates a body of 'useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996), through the women's stories and the analysis of these stories carried out by myself, the researcher, who is also a female mature student. Feminist research not only aims to include the perspective of

⁶ To protect the identity of each student, the names of all the participants and the institution in which they were registered are pseudonyms.

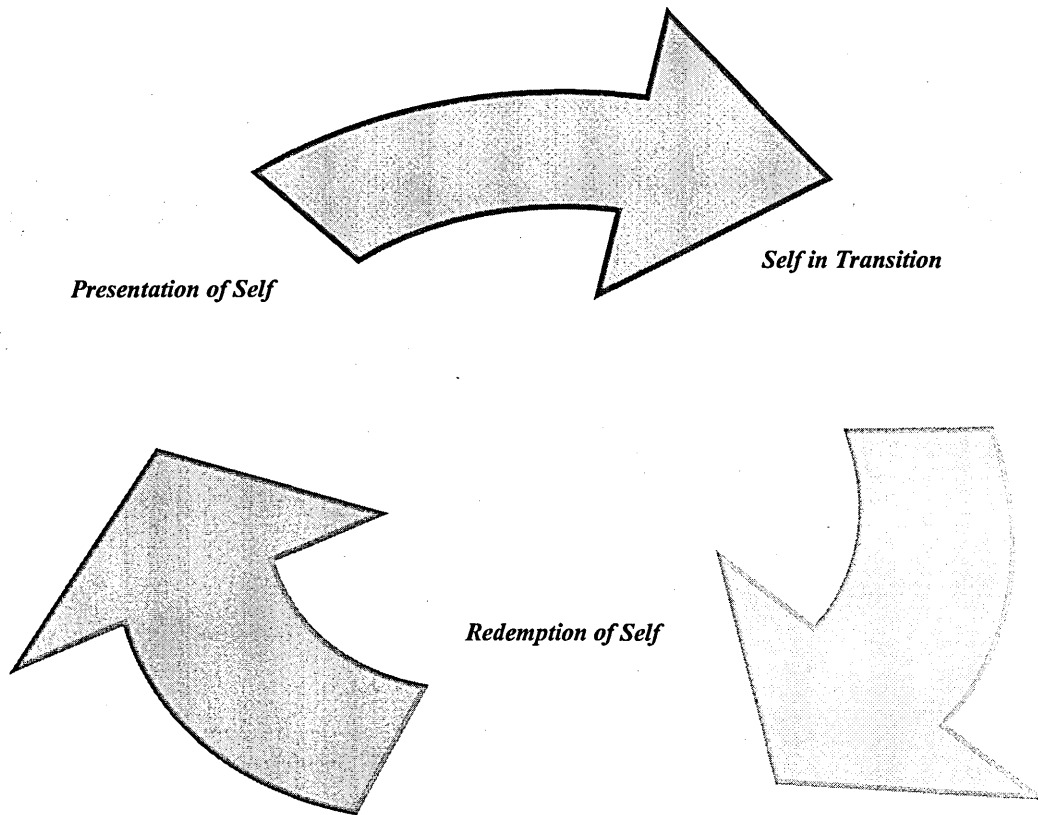
women, but also endeavours to produce useful knowledge which women can use to create change.

Three interrelated and interconnected themes were generated from the data: Presentation of Self, Self in Transition and Redemption of Self. These themes are divided into three sub themes and are presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. List of themes

Theme 1. Presentation of Self	Theme 2. Self in transition	Theme 3. Redemption of Self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and aspirations • Significant life events • Previous educational experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepping into a new identity • Interactions with the college • Interactions with the B.Ed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging identity • An emotional journey • Life as a mature student: some reflections

Figure 5.2. Construction of identity for mature female student teachers: an interactive process



5.3. Presentation of Self (Theme 1.)

Themes of self and identity are prevalent in this research. The self of the mature student is the starting point for all interaction, both with the individual and with others. Charon (1989:82) argues that ‘the analysis of self as we interact with others is central to understanding social situations’. The self is present in all interactions and the interaction with self is a key aspect of how situations are perceived and defined. The self is very important in terms of self communication, self-concept, self-esteem and identity. These mature students presented the self when they enrolled on the course. Goffman (1959) talks about presenting the self in terms of a performance as follows:

a social role will involve one or more parts and... each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons (Goffman, 1959:16).

Goffman's metaphor of a performance is useful in analysing the experiences of these mature students. As each student presented the self for their three year 'performance', they brought with them a metaphorical bag full of their personalities, their attitudes, their identities and their past experiences. This baggage was always in use as the self interacted with each individual and with others, in making the decision to become student teachers and in completing the three year programme. The literature refers to multiple selves and multiple identities (Jenkins, 2004; Nias, 1998; Woods, 1993). There is evidence of this in the data and it was the negotiation between multiple selves which heightened emotions and had an impact on the overall experience of the course for the students.

5.3.1. Goals and Aspirations

For all of these students, their motivation for returning to college and undertaking a full-time degree programme was very much associated with their desire to become a teacher and this motivation was a driving force which sustained them throughout their time in college. Susan describes the course as 'a means to an end'. This desire to be a teacher was a fundamental part of the students' identity and they made serious adaptations to their life to fulfil this aspect of their identity. For Susan, it was like 'an obsession'. Susan always wanted to be a teacher. She began an arts degree after school but withdrew after one year and started travelling. Even at this stage, she knew she was going to try and return to college as a mature student. She recalls a conversation with her father after she announced that she was going to travel:

Susan: I said to my father 'I mean I've always wanted to teach, you know, I've had it in my head. I'm going to go back in a few years time. You can do that as a mature student ... when you're twenty-three' – I had already looked this up....'I really want to travel, I really want to look after kids so that'll improve my experience and I'll gain languages, you know'.

Bernie wanted to be a teacher since she was 'knee high'. She realised the importance of having a degree and she appreciated the flexibility of teaching as a career. Not only were

these mature students highly motivated, but they equipped themselves in every possible way to ensure they would get one of those valuable places on a teacher education programme. Amy prepared to repeat a Leaving Certificate Examination by attending a Post Leaving Certificate course one evening a week:

Amy: It was strange because I used to come out, I used to clock off work at five and the class was on at a quarter past five and I used to go up in my suit and everyone else was there in their school uniform. I felt like, Oh my God, here's me the old dot inside, but I just went in there, sat down, did my work and walked out again.

Amy felt she stood out because of her age and her clothes. By referring to herself as 'the old dot', Amy demonstrates how she perceived herself to stick out amongst this group of younger students. The reference to clothes symbolises different identities; the identity of the secondary school student and the identity of the employee.

Susan volunteered to work in a primary school to obtain experience. Cathy always wanted to get a place on a teacher education programme either for primary or P.E. teaching, but her points acquired for her Leaving Certificate were insufficient. Laura spent some time in the Gaeltacht to improve her oral Irish in preparation for her interview. Rachel knew she did not have sufficient points so she repeated two Leaving Certificate subjects, biology and social and scientific. She only needed an honour in one subject but she repeated two subjects, 'just in case'. She also completed an Access Course which was offered by the college and she was the first B.Ed. student who came through the college's access route. Rachel's motivation to return to college arose strongly from her personal circumstances. After being financially dependent on her husband she reviewed her options when they separated.

Rachel: It was always at the back of my mind that I would like to do it but I never actually thought that I would be capable of getting in and actually being able to do the course. I decided when I separated from my husband, I was doing night courses here and there, doing little things, just more leisure courses than anything and, I decided that I'd give it a shot. And I repeated two subjects in my Leaving Cert, Biology and, Social & Scientific. And I applied for a Foundation Course ... I applied for that and thankfully I got it. So I decided I'd take it step by step and do

my application form and go in for my interviews and, the rest is history as they say.

The decision to return to college to this particular degree programme was largely dictated by the motivation to become a primary school teacher. For Rachel, this was also linked to the motivation of financial independence, since she is the sole carer for her two children.

5.3.2. Significant Life Events

Every student comes to college from within the canvas of their own unique family background, individual personalities and life circumstances. This canvas plays a significant role in how college is experienced either consciously or sub-consciously. For symbolic interactionists, this canvas impacts on the manner in which a person interacts with the self, with others and with society.

Before Cathy started the course, she successfully dealt with problems of alcoholism with the help of intensive rehabilitation. Her family had also been affected by alcoholism on different levels. She was diagnosed with depression when she was seventeen and remains on medication for this condition. As a result of the cumulative circumstances in Cathy's life prior to her time in college, I would suggest her identity was somewhat fragile when she registered as a mature student. Her personal circumstances had a clear impact on how she experienced the course. She found the course very challenging and she considered withdrawing on several occasions.

Bernie grew up with her mother and her grandmother and she never knew her father. He is Irish but is now living abroad. For many years, she felt there was part of her identity missing. When she was 21, she travelled overseas and met with her father who was by then married with two daughters. She describes the situation here:

Bernie: It was just an inner thing that I always wanted to do. Then he ended up living overseas so that's where he is now. So that was very difficult family-wise because my mother and myself went through a very difficult phase where there were a lot of changes happening and I was trying to get to know him without hurting her. It was a difficult time. It's settled now, only now like. They live there. They're happy. But there's very little contact. I think because there was twenty-one years, it was too big of a gap to ever build up a relationship, a proper

relationship and because he's abroad as well and I'm here, it doesn't help, you know. Maybe when I get working and I'll have time in the summer I could go over or he'll come over here. I'd like to see our relationship being built up eventually.

She describes here what it was like when she met her father for the first time:

Bernie: Weird [laughing], totally weird. There was the sense of knowing him....There was a sense of knowing him and a recognition, without ever having spoken to him. I didn't know he was married, I didn't know about his life, I didn't know he had a sister in Ireland that I now am actually very close to, you know. I get on great with her, she's my aunt, a new aunt, you know, a new family. She has kids my age that I never knew about. There were so many secrets there that I could have been told about but wasn't so there's a whole sense of discovering things. But it made me. I suddenly became me, you know. I just, I knew me all of a sudden. My identify was complete. It was like a whole new me emerged.

There was a huge part of Bernie's identity submerged for years because she didn't know anything about her father. While she coped with not knowing, her sense of self-actualisation was evident when she said 'my identify was complete. It was like a whole new me emerged'. This also demonstrates how identity construction takes place on different levels i.e. personally and professionally; sometimes concurrently, sometimes consecutively.

For Cathy, giving up drink and for Bernie, meeting her father were clearly two 'interactional moments' (Denzin, 2001) or 'epiphanies' (Sams, 1994) or 'fateful moments' (Giddens, 1991). These 'fateful moments' are deeply ingrained in identity for both students as they have influenced the manner in which the students have interacted with self and the manner in which they continue to interact with self. Though 'critical events' of this nature happen rarely, they are central in terms of the women's sense of self. These 'fateful moments' demonstrate a close link between the self and the personal story we tell (Denzin, 2001:60).

For mature students, life circumstances tend to be more pronounced. As mature students tend to be older, they have more life experiences as they are going through a later stage of their life development path. In some instances, this will mean more responsibility including relationships and children. Two of the interviewees have children. Amy has a

baby girl. Rachel has two little girls aged six and four. So there is a constant requirement to juggle family and course commitments. The concept of free time is a luxury for the interviewees as Amy describes here:

Amy: This year now is a lot tougher in the sense that, I feel my free time when I have it I have to do something, I can't kind of say 'Oh look, I'll come back to it in two hours' because those two hours I have to come back and be a mother to my little girl, you know. So that way my free time has to be used when I get it.

For many mature students, they struggle with the pull between home and college life (Edwards 1993). This creates a sense of conflict which is highlighted here by Laura:

Laura: It's harder in many ways because you have another life at home and I'm not saying the younger students don't have a life but for them getting away from school and getting away from your parents is a great thing. Whereas I think when you're a mature student you've a different attitude and you kind of want to go back home and you want to start other things. I found that difficult over the three years.

Laura's reference here to a 'different attitude' is a fundamental aspect of this research. Mature students have different attitudes to school leavers because generally they have more commitments and tend to be more immersed in their home lives than school leavers. All of the interviewees experienced the pull between their college and home lives. Feelings of guilt were expressed, as partners and family members were called upon for support. Not having enough time for family members, partners, friends and children also caused stress and guilt. This interplay between home lives and college was a constant feature in the lives of the interviewees.

Susan had responsibilities at home.

Susan: My grandmother was very sick for a while and that was a bit of pressure, you know. She has Alzheimer's. She's now in a home which eases the pressure but just for a while there it was tough, because you're tired and you're going home and your mother is stressed and she needs a break and you need a break when you come home, you know, and you're killing each other.

This supports the work of Edwards (1993) which states that female students are aware of the discrepancies between their own daily-lived experiences in the home place and the

world of the university. They often feel caught between two opposing, equally demanding institutions, where the work in one place is often not valued in the other. As a consequence, many women must not only work exceptionally hard to prove they are meeting the demands of each institution, but they must also do it in a way that hides the work, so as not to draw attention to the time and energy expended upon it. In Susan's case the conflicting demands of home and college increased the tension in her home life.

Bernie notes here, that this is not the same for younger students as the college is their life:

Bernie: We all have our lives outside of college. Whereas you look at the younger ones and it's just, that's their life, its college, you know. And they haven't really built up their own lives outside of it yet, whereas we have, so we're bringing different dynamics to it. When we go out and socialise we're meeting partners and children.

Bernie was very conscious of the difference between school leavers and mature students. The reference here to younger students, who 'haven't really built up their own lives', outside of college, refers to the process of identity formation. Mature students have made more progress in the formation of their identity due to their age and the life experiences. The reference to 'bringing different dynamics' is also very interesting. This notion has been well documented in the literature of adult education (Knowles, 1990; Jarvis, 2004).

Many of the mature students make considerable personal sacrifices to undertake the course. Laura has been in a relationship for the last six years and she decided to delay marriage until the course is complete. This is a clear example of putting part of her identity on hold. This has implications not only for Laura, but also for her partner.

Laura: The last two years a lot of my friends got married and had kids and I just can't wait for it....And I was the one who put the foot down and I said that if I was doing this I was doing it and we would wait until this [course] is finished. But the last two years, this year in particular I found it very difficult. Because he bought a house at the same time that I got this course, everything was just going on at the same time, the wrong time. I stopped earning, we got the house and even though he bought the house it's just we were like 'Oh God'. Two paths were kind of dividing up and I'm saying 'Am I really doing the right thing?'

Laura's reference here to 'two paths were kind of dividing' captures the essence of divided loyalties between competing identities. Laura clearly wanted to do the course and she also wanted to live her life as a married woman, but she decided that one identity would have to be compromised in order to facilitate her identity as a student and her future identity as a primary teacher. Living with this decision is not easy and Laura clearly wondered at times if she had made the correct decision. Amy, on the other hand, consciously decided to take on multiple identities whilst in college so she faced a different set of challenges. For Amy, her personal circumstances changed during her time in college as she got married and later had a baby girl.

Amy: I got married a year later while I was here. That concreted me, I was now part of somebody even though I always was, but it was just, it was complete. And, you know, you're on a high.... But, a year later I became a mother. So that would have been the biggest change in the sense that my free time was more limited. I mean my husband was very supportive to me any time I wanted to go to the library, if I needed to cram, he was there, even like when the girls came up my house, we made my house the study-house.. he'd always have biscuits and he'd have the tea and he'd always have things for us, you know.

When Amy got married, her identity changed in a very positive way. As she states 'she was complete'. Her identity as a wife is very explicit in her statement 'I was now part of somebody'. The security she gained from her identity outside of college also facilitated her identity as a student. She was 'on a high' in her own terms, she felt very positive about her life and this certainly helped her as a student. Her supportive husband also enhanced her student experience. This suggests the more support a mature student receives from family networks, the more enhanced the student experience will be.

During the interviews, the personalities of the interviewees clearly illuminated themselves. The diversity of personalities among mature students is noted here by Bernie.

Bernie:.. in our little group of mature students, we're a very diverse group. I don't think any one of us has the same personality – I know nobody has the same personality...we're all still very individual. We all have our lives outside of college.

Bernie's reference here to 'our lives outside of college' refers to the multiple identities which exist for the students and which are highlighted in this study. Each mature student brings their personality and personality traits to a particular course. When a lecturer or tutor meets a group of fifty students together, the richness of this collective asset cannot be realised or appreciated. From my own perspective, I had lectured to this group of mature students in previous years, but this was the first time I had an opportunity to enjoy their personalities at close quarters.

The past plays a role in our every day lives because we use it in our definition of the present. According to Charon 1989:128), 'the past is rich for us, and it provides us with the tools to define the present'. Previous identities and self-concepts from the students' past were remembered by the participants, e.g. Laura has very strong memories of feeling like 'an outsider' in school.

Laura: I would have gone home and my parents would have had a strong work ethos and, that's the way we were it didn't bother me. I was delighted. But I always would have felt a Goody-Two-Shoes and I always felt an outsider, even though I always got on with everybody. ... I remember they made me Class Captain. So I don't know why because I always felt as if I was an outsider person and very nerdy. Like my skirt would have been below the knees, it wouldn't have been up around my ass so to speak.

While Laura identified herself as an outsider, she was genuinely surprised when she was elected Class Captain. This is an example of disjunction (Weil, 1986) between her private self-concept and public perceptions. According to the internal-external dialectic (Jenkins 2004), these two issues resolve themselves through the process of identification. In Laura's case her self-esteem improved as a result of this experience. However, having worked through these life experiences previously, the students are faced with a new set of challenges to their identity, once they enter an educational institution as a mature student. I will deal with this aspect in more detail under *self in transition* (Theme 2).

Mature students bring with them a wealth of experience from previous employment, education and life experiences. However, this experience is frequently undervalued and in many cases silenced by the institution (Preece, 1999; Bowl, 2003). This was also borne

out in this study where the mature students had to park their experiences and get on with the task in hand. In fact, as the course progressed, the students became so busy with the day to day requirements of assessments, teaching practice, lecturers and tutorials that they practically had no time to reflect on their current experience, and even less time to dwell on their previous experiences. There is no evidence to suggest that this rich and varied experience from their earlier years was recognised in either a formal or informal capacity by the college.

This represented a missed opportunity both for the college and the students themselves. Rather than being used as a basis for the formation of knowledge and understanding and in particular as a means of informing their own concepts of teaching and learning, which is a fundamental part of the teacher education programme, the students struggled to keep up with the demands of the programme. While reflective practice is on the B.Ed. Programme, the reality is that there is no time for the students to reflect (DES, 2002).

5.3.3. Previous Educational Experiences

All of the interviewees are intelligent and academically successful since they have demonstrated a minimum standard of qualifications to obtain a place on the B.Ed. programme. All of the students have previous experiences of primary and secondary education. Amy loved primary school. Susan also had positive memories of her time in both primary and secondary school. She was a high achiever in school and won two scholarships in secondary school, one for the Gaeltacht and one for Euro languages. Some of the students had very negative experiences of education before they started the B.Ed. degree. For example, Laura, Cathy and Susan had the shared experience of starting a previous third level course but withdrawing before completion. Susan had begun an arts degree and she describes the experience as 'a black cloud'. While this left a negative flavour for them in terms of education, it also acted as a motivating factor to complete the B.Ed., as they were determined not to experience the same sense of failure again.

Other students such as Amy, Bernie and Rachel successfully completed third-level courses previously. Some of the course content from these courses, is directly applicable to

primary teaching. Bernie has a certificate in heritage studies. Laura studied German as part of her arts degree. Susan also has German and some Italian. Many primary schools are trying to recruit teachers with European languages. Amy had completed her auctioneering examinations. Cathy had completed one year of a health and leisure course. Susan did a course in child care and Laura has a business studies diploma. Rachel completed a diploma in European business. These previous educational experiences underline the accomplished nature of mature students and the potential they have to bring to the course and to their future careers as primary teachers.

Some previous experiences have left an enduring mark on the students. I refer to Laura's story as an example. Laura had a very negative experience during her arts degree. She registered for an arts degree but this was the sixth option on her Central Applications Office (CAO) application. She was not eligible for any teaching course (her first five options) due to insufficient points. In her own words, she 'hated' the arts degree. At the end of second year, she unsuccessfully appealed results for one grade and describes the experience as follows:

Laura: I was very bitter about it at the time because a friend and myself we had, both failed an examinationand we got the same grade and the professor of the department had written reports saying that we haven't attended classes and it was taken to the Appeals Court and I had other professors backing me but they let her [my friend] in, and they let her through and I didn't get through, even though we had the exact same percentage.... It got very messy and I just kind of found it too hard in the end, I just let it go.....I was very bitter about the place and I had a big problem with it and it took me a long time to get over it and then it kind of took me a long time to even think about education again.

Laura's previous identity as a student therefore had negative connotations for her. This had to be reconciled with her newly established identity as student teacher. However, before she started the B.Ed. she returned to college to study for a qualification in business studies by night. This turned out to be a far more positive experience. For Laura, it went some way towards restoring her faith in the education system and, therefore, assisted her in her transition to becoming a full-time student for three years.

Each of the interviewees has accumulated a considerable amount of skills and experience to date. Amy has a range of office and communications skills. Susan has extensive childminding skills. Cathy has a range of sports and coaching skills. Many of these skills are transferable to teaching and can potentially enrich the student's capacity to teach. Bernie, who completed a two year heritage course and has worked in several part-time jobs, describes her set of skills as 'people skills' which are particularly useful when one has to deal with children, parents and other teachers in a school context. Yet, there is no mechanism for recognising and accrediting these skills and previous experiences (Murphy 2003). In other words, the mature students were treated identically to the younger school leavers.

5.4 Self in Transition (Theme 2.)

Transition between settings e.g. return to college for mature students, has the potential to challenge established identities and force re-adjustment. This presents both opportunities and challenges. The students in this study made initial career choices after their Leaving Certificate Examination. All of the students received insufficient points for primary school teaching, even though this was their first choice, so they tried a number of different options. Yet, there was always something missing for each of the students. In order to fulfil earlier ambitions, each student took a momentous decision to return to college as a mature student. Bateson's reference (1990) to finding a new path represents the choice taken by this group of students. As they travelled this uncharted territory, their journeys as shared through their narratives, demonstrate much of the creativity and courage described by Bateson (1990). Their journeys as mature student teachers were nevertheless problematic and challenging on many different levels, particularly for the self in transition.

5.4.1. Stepping into a New Identity

When the students registered for the B.Ed., they adopted the identity of a mature student in St. Catherine's College. The role of institutions in identity formation has been noted in the literature. According to Jenkins (2004:23), 'organisations bestow 'specific individual identities upon their incumbents'. Two of the initial processes which are used are

recruitment and initiation (Jenkins, 2004). Some of the students formed their first impressions when they were called in for their interview. For Amy, who admits she did feel nervous, the interview itself was overwhelmingly positive:

Amy: It was just so warm, it was so welcoming. There was no pressure on me, I didn't feel intimidated, I didn't feel I was being analysed. I thought it was very, very nice.

All of the mature students successfully completed oral English and Irish interviews. These were described as 'intense' by Susan. The initiation process continued on their first day in college. The actual act of physically returning to college on day one was a significant challenge for the students as Bernie describes here.

Bernie: It was very scary coming in on day one.. just the sense of not knowing, what I was up against I suppose and not knowing anybody.... all that feeling of dread – did I make the right choice? – because, when you go from secondary school straight from college it's automatic, you know, but this was actually something I decided to do that I was going to go back and do this.

Bernie makes an interesting point here. She perceives that the transition to third level college for school leavers is somewhat automatic, whereas for mature students it is the result of a conscious decision. This is another example of symbolic interactionism whereby the mature students, in interacting with self and with other factors, make a decision to return to college, whereas there is less of a decision involved for school leavers in that it is taken for granted that many school leavers will progress to college.

While the first exposure to the college was somewhat daunting, the students found it easier as soon as they started to meet other mature students or other people who were 'in the same boat as me'. Some of the students used metaphors to describe their experiences whilst in college. Amy compares her time in college to climbing a mountain as follows:

Amy: It was like climbing a mountain in the sense that, you go out and you're all enthusiastic about starting and you can't wait to get going and you know you're energetic and the top doesn't look that high, you think 'God from here it isn't that high'. And that's what First Year to me was like because I came in initially full of buzz and we met a lovely bunch of people and college wasn't that hard, it was very doable [sic], it was intense but it was very doable [sic]. Then second year would

have come with a knock. I mean it was half way up and I suppose that's when I would have been 'Oh ...' - not that I would have ever quitted, I knew I was here to stay, but just it would have been testing for me...I suppose then again coming down my final year, home TP was very enjoyable. It was tough going..., but it was enjoyable. And now here we are ..the final straw and where the three years have gone I don't know.

This represents many of the stages of transition that the students experienced, beginning with the initial feelings of anticipation and anxiety, to the realisation that the course was more demanding than was initially anticipated to the final stages of feeling relieved and satisfied that the course was almost completed, while the next challenge of finding a job and living as a teacher lies ahead. While all of the students experienced a transition in identity during their time in college, moving from their former roles to their newly acquired student roles, some of the students were also experiencing a transition in identity in terms of their personal lives. Amy became a wife and a mother while she was studying. As a result, her time was more limited. However, she said she was 'on a high' because there were so many positive things happening in her private life and this sustained her throughout her student life.

For students such as Laura, there is evidence of a clash between new and old identities. There are pressures on previous friendships as her non-college friends cannot identify with her current experiences.

Laura: Well you know everyone has gone on with their work and their life and that's fine and you come home and all that you're talking about is college and this assignment and that assignment and this thing and it's very hard to relate to them. They don't understand a lot of it. They're sympathetic towards it but it's trying to understand it. And I'd often find now I'd pick up the phone to one of the girls in college instead and you'd just be ranting and raving ...And that is strange because it is a total life change and everything does orientate around it, for the three years, very much so. So that was strange, you know. Just losing contact with reality I suppose in many ways ...

The issue of multiple identities was also evident from Bernie's interview as she acknowledged the difficult nature of 'balancing work life and college life'. For Bernie, 'balancing work life and college life' was particularly challenging for the first two years as she had to work part-time to fund her fees and living expenses in college. This placed

inordinate pressure on her identity as 'student'. She describes her experience of college life here:

Bernie: It's just too pressurised for me. There was just too much work, and maybe that's because of my own life at the time, you know, that I had to balance a part-time job and college. But I just never stopped. If there was stuff to be done, it had to be done. There's no leeway given because I have a part-time job, you know. I can't go up to a lecturer and say 'Look, I'm sorry but I didn't get it done because I was working'. There's no flexibility in this college at all. Like I said to you before I had to work and, and go to college and there was no flexibility there when it was time to hand in stuff. No lecturer would kind of take on board that you had a, a job for twenty hours of the week, that you know you literally didn't get the time to do something. The fact that St.Catherine's does not see a life outside of this college, I never expected that. I really thought there'd be just that little bit more flexibility.

Again, there is evidence here of 'greedy institutions' (Edwards, 1993). Bernie felt that the college did not acknowledge the other identities of mature students, in her case her identity as a part-time worker; an identity she had to maintain in order for her to continue her identity as a student. She believed there was no recognition that students might have a life; and therefore, another identity outside of college.

5.4.2. Interacting with the College

The interviewees were mixed in terms of their perspectives of the institution. Those such as Amy and Rachel were very positive about their experience. Laura and Susan were relatively positive but nevertheless had some criticisms, whereas Cathy and Bernie were highly critical.

The student friendly aspect of the college was stressed by some of the students as follows:

Rachel: I didn't actually think the college could be as student-friendly as it actually is, you know. And maybe that's the whole fact that this is a smaller college than the big universities, you know. And overall the majority of the lecturers would have been quite approachable.

The friendly nature of the college was further highlighted by Laura and Amy who described the college as 'very personal'. Amy commented that lecturers would generally salute students on the corridors. However, Bernie and Cathy did not find the college

particularly friendly. Cathy admitted that she still did not know half of the people in her group.

Susan however encountered a lack of flexibility on the part of the institution when she was not facilitated to repeat her teaching practice within the academic year so that she could graduate with her cohort, and she was clearly disappointed about this. The lack of flexibility was also noted in the context of the timetable by Cathy and Bernie.

Bernie: It's scattered. There are big gaps everywhere. If you're not living near the college it's a pain in the backside because if you can't get a seat in the library, what are you going to do for three hours? I mean I had a gap of four hours in the day on a Monday. We had like nine, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock lectures, nothing again until four o'clock that evening and it was just 'oh God like' especially at the beginning of the semester when you don't have any projects to do, you've no essays due in yet and for the first three weeks it was awful like, hanging around the college. Because there's nothing here to do.

The college's lack of facilities was highlighted on several counts. The students described poor canteen facilities, inadequate computer and printer facilities and a lack of childcare facilities.

Bernie: If you're not studying, that's another thing about the college, there's no tennis court or basketball court for you to relax for a couple of hours. You know, the gym is always in use, there's always something going on. You can go upstairs and play table tennis for twenty minutes and then you have to go if somebody else comes in. And if there's nobody in the office you can't get the ball,...there's nothing to do, short of going into town or study.

There is a greater likelihood that mature students will require some support with childcare. Laura also commented on the lack of childcare facilities for mature students even though this did not affect her directly.

Laura: If there was some sort of a crèche I think that would be huge, I really do. I see it with the girls, Rachel now for example. Rachel drives up here with the kids to drop in essays and things like that and she's dragging the kids around the place. There's no-one to look after them. Either one of us has to look after them or else she drags them up to the offices. But there are so many times she hasn't been able to come up if she just can't get someone, or if her parents are away and I think

that's crazy. There should be some sort of facility so that you can leave the kids there, even if it's just for an hour or two. There should be a room or some place and even if a person was employed to mind children, someone who just took one of the rooms in a private capacity, because it's not easy on the girls.

Cathy was critical of the physical nature of the building itself, but more specifically with the lack of sports facilities. Poor facilities also represent an issue for younger students but it can be argued that lack of facilities is more acutely experienced by mature students as they have less time to queue for photocopying machines. The somewhat oppressive nature of the building itself was also noted by students:

Susan: I suppose the structure of the building doesn't really help, does it? It's really kind of convent like, you know with old-fashioned rooms.

For those who may have had previous negative experiences as a result of their formal education, returning to a building which appears somewhat oppressive is not helpful. Colleges of education have been campaigning for better facilities for some time and hopefully this will be addressed through the recent agreement with the Department of Education and Science to build more buildings. However, the environment in which the students study does affect how the students perceive themselves, their course and the nature of their own learning.

5.4.3. Interacting with the B.Ed.

The course itself was viewed as a highly significant 'moment' or 'epiphany' (Sams, 1994; Denzin, 2001) in the lives of the mature students. While the course was intensive, extremely challenging and sometimes painful at times, it was, nevertheless, considered a necessary process to be endured. The course was characterised by a series of high points and low points for all the students. Self-esteem and confidence fluctuated for the students as they perceived the self through different occasions of perceived success and failure. All of the students viewed the course as a means to an end, the end being a qualification to become a primary school teacher and the prospect of a permanent job. Therefore, the stage of 'adaptation' or 'recognition' was clear in that they decided they would do whatever they had to do to survive. For example, Cathy and Susan consciously decided not to rock the boat in case their long term goal of success could be jeopardised.

Teaching practice, which is the compulsory practical element of the course, was a burning issue for all the interviewees. Many interviewees experienced high levels of stress as a result of teaching practice. Bernie who referred to teaching practice as 'stressful, the most stressful thing I think I've ever gone through' spoke strongly about the pressure induced by teaching practice in general and supervisors in particular.

Bernie: I just thought it would never end, I really did. But it was good, I had a good class. I had Second Class and they were great and they had a great class teacher, great support from her. But only for her I swear to God I don't think I would have got through it because it's just the sense of not knowing when the door is going to open and when they're going to come in and, you know, I know it's different in the real world but it was just, that feeling of being watched all the time for five solid weeks, it's a very long time to be watched. Two weeks I got through no problem in the other teaching practices but, just the five weeks was, I thought, Oh God, I really thought it would never end. But I'm glad it's over.

The interviewees were also quite vocal about the role of supervisors. Cathy thought the supervision system was an 'absolute disgrace'. Being a mature student was considered a disadvantage by Cathy as she perceived that supervisors had higher expectations of mature students when it came to teaching practice. Amy felt that supervisors did not appreciate or realise the amount of work which was invested in teaching practice.

Amy: And I think, you know, you're up late at night, you're up early, I was an early morning bird...I can't stay up late at night, I used to get up early in the morning and I used to be there at four and five o'clock in the morning trying to get stuff done and no-one sees that side of it, you know. You come in and they'd say 'Well look, you haven't this part covered now, you didn't do this right'. The majority of supervisors are very good, they are supportive but if you could go into a house some night before. You would see all the preparation that goes on, you know. It is hard going.

Susan believed there was a lot of inconsistency between supervisors as follows:

Susan: I think that, a lot of supervisors – well I won't say a lot, sorry – a few supervisors, they seem to have this bad reputation and, I think it's more than coincidental, you know. I mean maybe a lot of it is generated from the students' pressure, you know and prior talk as to their experiences but there are certain supervisors who do have a bad reputation, you know and our hearts are in our mouths when we're thinking who will we have. I think it's unfair, you know. A lot of it is a gamble as to who you'll get.....You know, I think that's unfair,

inconsistent. It's unfair, I think when somebody really loves what they're doing and really puts their heart and soul into it.

For one of her teaching practices, Cathy perceived one supervisor in so much of a negative manner that she cried when she realised this was to be her supervisor. This brought up feelings of vulnerability, fear and self-doubt. She had major concerns about the system through which teaching practice supervision was organised and the way teaching practice was assessed. Most of the students perceived a sense of unfairness about the system, especially in relation to supervisors. At one point Cathy stated that supervisors 'are there to cut your throats'. While this is an extreme comment, it does demonstrate the depth of feeling on how the conduct of teaching practice was experienced by Cathy. Students felt that supervisors did not appreciate the amount of time and effort which they invested in teaching practice as is evident in Amy's comments above. There was also a perception that the personality and preferences of the supervisor tended to influence the grade, e.g. if a supervisor was personally committed to planning as opposed to teaching then strengths or weaknesses in planning would strongly influence the grade. Issues of power were also raised in the context of the supervisor setting a grade which many considered was beyond the appeal system. These feelings could equally apply to younger students; but, I would argue that they are more acutely felt by mature students. Mature students, who have made such an effort to get onto the programme, clearly did not anticipate this kind of pressure. Again it is another example of Goffman's (1959) 'mortification of the self'.

The interviewees highlighted the intensive nature of the course in many different ways. The oppressive nature of the workload was clearly highlighted. Bernie described the workload as 'unreal'. She felt 'that there were things being thrown at me left, right and centre'. Amy commented that in addition to all of the practical requirements associated with teaching practice, there was an inordinate amount of work required in relation to the academic subjects:

Amy: I took French along with Irish. You've novels to read, you've projects in, and you've essays in on top of all your education subjects. I just think the workload is huge, it really, really is.

The students were also critical about the amount and nature of assessment.

Susan: It just seems to be regurgitating information and facts. You just cram it all, you learn it off for the examination, you spit it out and then that's about it, you forget it all after a day or two.

A perceived lack of co-ordination was also noted by some of the students and Bernie commented on her perceived haphazard nature of the course as follows:

Bernie: Yeah. It seems higgledy-piggledy at times, really higgledy-piggledy, that there's no continuity there, you know. In first year we were doing middle classes and then all of a sudden you're down to infants, but at the same time we were studying for fifth and sixth class. In second year they cross over and that can be confusing.

Issues of poor co-ordination and lack of continuity in terms of the course structure affects both mature students and school leavers, however I believe that because mature students have invested so much personally, financially and emotionally in the course, then any perceived imperfections will have a greater impact on them. All of the mature students struggled to varying degrees to cope with the demands of the course. Some of the students found the course so challenging that they seriously considered withdrawing. Bernie admits that she did 'lose faith in herself'. Bernie's financial situation exacerbated her feelings of self-doubt even more as the course was costing her both personally and financially and she seriously considered 'cutting her losses' half way through the programme. Bernie's mother was influential in persuading her to stay with the course.

Bernie: My mother said 'Get back up, off your arse and do it. It's something you've always wanted to do and if you throw it away now you'll regret it for the rest of your life'. And, she was right. Mothers always are, you know.

Motivation to persist was provided by family, close friends and the group of mature students, by the desire to become a primary school teacher, by partners and by previous

negative experiences of having left other courses. Interestingly nobody referred to the course, the college or to staff in terms of motivating them to stay.

5.5. Theme 3. Redemption of Self

During the final interviews with the students there is evidence of the students emerging with a stronger sense of self. All of the students, including Cathy are displaying greater self esteem and confidence. I have used the term 'redemption of self' here very deliberately as I believe it captures the personal transformation and personal responsibility demonstrated by the students as they complete one phase in their lives and as they anticipate the next stage.

5.5.1. Emerging Identity

From a symbolic interactionist point of view, as humans we do not respond to the world as it exists but to a reality which we define. Charon (1989:126) states 'our realities are our definitions of situations', e.g. if I define shopping as boring or enjoyable then I will act towards shopping in that manner. In this study, there is evidence that the students were beginning to define themselves as teachers as they completed their B.Ed. programme. They knew that they would be teaching in their own classrooms in a matter of months. This highlights the importance of the future in the individual's definition of the situation (Charon, 1989). At the end of the programme, there is evidence that an identity as a teacher was beginning to emerge as demonstrated here:

Bernie: And I have become more knowledgeable, book-wise, learning-wise and I guess I'm a teacher now. They do make a teacher of you, you know, but in their way. Again the rigidity comes in. It's like the St. Catherine's teacher. I'd say I'll change when I go out teaching. I don't see myself following that way but, it's a good basis, definitely. I can't take that away from it. What I've learned here and what I'll probably take from it when I put it into my career will be, you know, the majority of it will be St. Catherine's what I learned here but, I think an awful lot more things are going to come into it because St. Catherine's is just so focused on, I suppose the academic side of things rather than the fun element again, you know, that you need to bring to teaching. You need to bring that to kids, that you can be fun as well as being the strict teacher.

Bernie clearly feels there is a particular type of teacher identity created and validated by this college. She believes she will have more freedom to develop her own identity as teacher when she leaves the college, especially in relation to bringing a fun element into her teaching. Again, this resonates with Goffman's (1959) ideas of the institutionalisation of inmates, where the only perspective promoted is that of the institution.

For Susan, experiences of low self-esteem arising from previous educational failures, actually acted as a motivating factor for her personally. She was determined to complete the course whatever the cost to herself. In her terms the end goal was worth it. However, she did find that her self-esteem was nevertheless challenged during the course, especially during teaching practice as she describes here:

Susan: I mean I can take constructive criticism of somebody pointing out where you went wrong, how you can improve, but I just don't take somebody coming in and flicking through your folder and giving out to you over paperwork and completely stripping you, you know, of your self esteem when you're doing your best.

Again, in Susan's own words 'stripping you of your self esteem' resonates strongly with Goffman's (195) mortification of self. Bernie on the other hand believed that the whole experience made her more confident as she describes here:

Bernie: I think I was confident coming in here but I've, gained more confidence I think from the course; I'm definitely more knowledgeable that's for sure. Even if you didn't want to be you, you learn something here, you know [laughing]...Getting up in front of the class ...and taking criticism. I think that does build your confidence. It can shatter your confidence as well, it can go either way. But I'm old enough to realise, you take it on board and you just go with it. I mean some of the younger ones their confidence, could be shattered by a supervisor on TP and I think you have to choose your words very carefully when you're talking to somebody because you're dealing with their career here and their confidence.

Bernie believes here that being older is an advantage in terms of taking feedback from supervisors. On the other hand, Cathy believed that her confidence was shattered by supervisors as she describes her experience in chapter six. However, as Cathy is finishing

the course she is personally delighted with herself; that she stayed with the course, that she will have a degree after three years and that she will be qualified to teach.

Now that the course is almost finished; Bernie, Rachel, Laura and Amy describe the experience retrospectively in terms of a personal sense of achievement.

Rachel: I just feel that I could face any challenge now. I think its maybe to do with the fact that on teaching practice you're standing up there in front of the class and you've your supervisors and initially it's daunting and the whole thing but you just get over it and you come from that. And, now I wouldn't be the best person in the world to speak in tutorials or anything like that but I've done it – on a minor basis mind you but, it wouldn't pose as much of a problem to me now as it would have done initially ...Personally it's been just a personal achievement for my, for my own self, for my own self-esteem and self-confidence.

Here, Rachel has moved from a position where she was very nervous about her first teaching practice, where she is now reasonably comfortable with herself participating in tutorials. Amy also reflects on the experience as an achievement.

Amy: And I suppose that was a huge achievement then, knowing that I'd got in here, knowing afterwards the amount of people that are applying now even to get in and can't, or have tried two or three times maybe and still can't get in, you know. ...I'm not a very high achiever, you know, a benefit for me is that I've got this far... that is huge for me, that I have actually done my duty for, for education, my, my career .. I'm complete and I'm thrilled I've come back.

Again there is a reference here to identity construction when Amy says 'I'm complete'. It's almost as if she has found the last piece of the jigsaw. However, she would not like to repeat the experience as she says 'I am delighted to have it done. I wouldn't like to face it again now'. This sense of personal achievement is also reiterated by Bernie.

Bernie: the sense of achievement that I've done this, definitely - that'll be a big high. The day I get my degree into my hand I'll be delighted altogether.

While self-esteem may have been challenged during the course in some instances, there is evidence of a stronger self emerging after the process. Laura says she has grown in confidence as a result of her experience. The students seem to get a great sense of achievement not from having participated in the course but from having completed it.

From their perspective it was a little like an obstacle course and they have successfully negotiated all of the obstacles. There is evidence of growth in both a personal and a professional sense. Laura who has led a very sheltered life, who described herself as a very 'dependent person', now views the experience as a chance for her 'to grow up and to actually do something for myself by myself'. She now believes she has a better relationship with her parents as they don't perceive her as a little girl anymore. Equally, I believe she doesn't perceive herself as a little girl any more. There is evidence here of Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation.

Each student's self and her own self-judgement can directly affect the quality of a student's experience in college. Amy's self is very grounded and self assured. She has a very supportive husband and family who have helped out with childcare, finances and personal motivation. She is very focused and she is clear about her reasons for doing the course. Her personal disposition comes through several times throughout the three interviews. She speaks positively about the overall experience, about the staff, about the course and about her fellow students. While she has some criticisms of the course itself, overall she is quite positive about her experience of being a mature student and she is very affirmative about what she has gained from the course itself as she states here:

Amy: I must say overall I've loved it here. I've learned a huge amount. I think on leaving here, if I could just keep a quarter of the knowledge, I've been taught I would be delighted. There's so much information, even in this term on Psychology and Sociology and Philosophy – there's so many fantastic ideas there, but sure I know, you go into a classroom, they'll probably go out the window. But I have definitely gained a lot of knowledge from the course.

Clearly, Amy enjoyed her experience and benefited tremendously from the course. She is a proactive person with initiative and this was displayed during her time in college e.g. when she organised for a group of the mature students to stay together in the same accommodation whilst in Irish college. As a result of this simple intervention her cohort of students and herself had a much more positive experience in Irish college. There is evidence here of a stronger sense of self emerging, a more confident self which will be able to cope with future challenges. As the students are now finally within grasp of

achieving their ultimate goal of becoming primary teachers, they are more self assured and confident.

From Cathy's perspective, the B.Ed. course in general and her experience of teaching practice in particular has dented her confidence somewhat. In her own words, 'I was definitely more confident in First Year than I was in Third Year'. However, by the time of her final interview with me she was far more relaxed and philosophical about the experience and she admitted that her confidence was on the way up again. She even admitted that she would consider further study in St. Catherine's, but not in a full time capacity.

5.5.2. An Emotional Journey

Symbolic interactionists consider emotions to be part of the complete package adopted by humans in interaction. Emotions are intrinsically involved in the process of defining and redefining each situation. The participants in this study experienced a continuum of emotions throughout their time in college, ranging from the initial sense of delight, having discovered they had a place on the programme, to feelings of self doubt when they wondered if they would be able for the course, to feelings of stress and depression as they struggled with the various demands and to final feelings of achievement and anticipation about the next stage of their life journey. This supports Duncan's (1999:23) findings of an 'emotional roller coaster' experienced by mature student teachers in her study.

All of the students were delighted when they heard they were accepted on the course. Amy talks about the day she received the good news: 'I got a letter in the post saying I was accepted into St. Catherine's, so I was thrilled'. Susan remembers the feeling of sheer joy when she discovered she had a place in college. 'I think I was just so happy to get back, I didn't care if I had to go to the moon you know as long as I got what I wanted'. Bernie said she was 'thrilled and over the moon'. But then reality set in as she realised her life was about to change. She was giving up a secure job and a good income. The imminent risk of what she was about to do became immediately apparent. Laura describes initial feelings of delight following by some self-doubt as follows:

Laura: Everybody who knows me has known that this is everything. So when I got this it was just out of the world. I think my mother was afraid to actually tell anyone for a while, it was as if it wasn't real, you know. And when I got up myself I was kind of 'Oh God, I'm actually after getting it now, I have to think will I go for it. But no, this would have been everything really. And they [my parents] knew that and that's why I think for three years, even though they've been a difficult three years ... but, they [my parents] don't care what happens, what it costs, nothing, just get it, you know.

Once the participants got used to the idea that their lives would never be the same again, as they were about to embark on a three year programme, they experienced feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. They began to question their own ability; whether they would be 'academically able' for the course and whether this was the correct career choice for them. All of the students vividly remembered their first day in college and their initial mixed feelings which included anticipation, fear and anxiety. Amy said she 'felt like a child starting school again'. Her initial feeling was that she hated the place but she soon felt better as she began to make friends with other mature students. Some of the regular requirements of a degree programme caused considerable anxiety, e.g. essay writing:

Bernie: God the first essay I wrote for Sociology I'll never forget it. I nearly cried over it because I was so worried about whether I was doing it right or not. And there wasn't anybody to go to and ask because if you asked the lecturer he or she would just give you the same guidelines as they'd given you in class so there was no extra support.

Amy experienced a 'sense of alienation' when new components of the course were introduced with no explanation with regard to their nature and to their relevance to teaching.

The course was directly experienced by the interviewees as human beings with the full range of emotions and personal reactions which any human educational endeavour involves. Several different emotions were quoted by the students especially during times when they were severely tempted to quit. Cathy hated the place and the course at different times and would not have been able to continue without the support of her friend. For mature students who lived as responsible adults before they started the course, it was somewhat difficult for them to adapt to the procedures employed by staff in the college.

Bernie and Cathy for example discussed their frustration as they felt they were treated like children. Bernie felt she was not treated like an adult in charge of her own learning.

Bernie: It's like being back in school. Its all rules and regulations. You feel like you're back in primary school sometimes. It's just the amount of work that you're given to do, the deadlines that you're given. In my previous course, they were so much more flexible. If I didn't get something done I could go to my lecturer and say 'I didn't get this done because of work commitments but they were more flexible. They were just like 'Grand, hand it in tomorrow or next week'. Here it's like 'Oh my God! What do you mean you didn't get it done? You know, you were given enough time. You were told about this ten weeks ago'. There's just no flexibility here.

Susan describes her frustration with a role being taken for most lectures, whereby the students have to sign a sheet to indicate their attendance:

Susan: I think the signing in as well; we were all kind of giving out about that. That was probably just pure frustration for classes, you know. It was kind of like 'If you want to go to a class, you know, why do we have to sign in – just go?'

These kinds of procedures disable the students to some degree and they also operate according to Goffman (1959) to bring about a 'mortification of the self'.

For others, teaching practice was the area where heightened levels of powerlessness were evident. For Susan, all power lay with the institution and according to her perspective there was general consensus emanating from those representing the institution which stated 'the reins are in our hands until you get out of here'. Cathy was disappointed with one of her teaching practice grades. She decided not to appeal her result because in her own words 'there's no point in doing anything like that because you're just not listened to'. In her opinion appealing a grade was a complete waste of time, effort and money.

Teaching practice and its assessment was a considerable source of stress for all of the students.

Susan: One supervisor came into the school and we were just like nervous wrecks, it was terrible. He went in, he didn't come in to our class. He went into two classes, you know. Two of the girls were crying. One of the lads said 'Are you okay?' 'Don't ask!' I think we were like nervous wrecks then for the remainder of the week thinking 'Are we going to get a visit from him?' you know. That was what actually contributed to the stress.

Cathy's interview conveyed a great deal of feeling. The assigning of a new identity induced strong, traumatic feelings: anger, feelings of injustice, determination, and great courage. While she was disempowered by the process, there is evidence of her generating an identity that provided her with a measure of self worth and dignity. While, Cathy is very happy to be at the end of the course she states: 'if I had known what I would have gone through, I would never have done it'. However there were also positive emotions for Cathy. She enjoyed the practical aspects of the course, including the work with children. As Cathy spoke about her experience in Africa her face lit up and it is clear that this was a formidable experience for her personally and professionally and it could be argued that to some degree it partly compensated for earlier negative experiences in the college. She is very grateful to those who afforded her the opportunity to travel to Africa and she clearly benefited in terms of her own personal development, self-esteem and confidence.

The other personal highlight for Cathy is the friendships she made during her time in college. Her friends became a significant reference group which influenced how her self coped with the entire college experience.

5.5.3 On Being a Mature Student: Some Reflections

According to symbolic interactionists, 'individuals are goal directed' (Charon 1989:130). These students were very clear about their goal to become a primary teacher and the way to achieve this goal was to enrol as a mature student for three years. For this period, they adopted the identity of a mature student. During the interviews for this research the students had an opportunity to reflect on their perspective of being a mature student. Grouping the mature students together was a factor in the process of their own self identity as mature students. They referred to themselves as 'the matures' or as 'mature students' and they considered themselves to be apart from and different to the other younger students in their year.

Laura:It was very good, the one good thing I have to say about the college that they did for the mature students and it was probably the only thing they did for us in one way was they put us all together.

Bernie felt she had more in common with other mature students than she would have with eighteen year old students straight out of school. In general, these women embraced their identity as mature students, partly because it represented their avenue of entry onto the programme and partly because it was a means to an end - a means to becoming a primary school teacher. Being part of the recognisable group of mature students was also consciously adopted as a means of making sense of their new social order in college. This concurs with Merrill's (1999:203) study where mature students formed 'sub cultural groups by modes of study, gender and age, and claimed their social and territorial space within the university'. There is also evidence of mature students in this study claiming their territorial space as Amy comments here:

Amy: we used to have one big huge table in the canteen, that's where we used to sit. That was our corner and we used to all congregate there for chats.

In some instances the students felt that being a mature student was actually an advantage and that they would not have been able to cope with such a demanding course as a school leaver. As Amy comments: 'I think there was an advantage being that bit older coming in'. For Laura, because she is older she was not intimidated by lecturers and she was not afraid to ask for their assistance when required. Cathy believed that the course is so tough; she would not have lasted for two weeks if she started the B.Ed. as a young school leaver. Susan felt there was greater cohesion and co-operation between the mature students compared to the school leavers. She felt the school leavers were far more competitive, whereas the mature students were more willing to help each other out. According to Bernie, mature students take their study more seriously, 'for younger students this is their life, whereas for mature students it is only part of their lives'.

While all of the students commented on the firm friendships they made with other mature students, Bernie felt she missed out on this somewhat because she had to take on part-time

jobs to support herself. Overall a lack of support for mature students by the college was noted. Cathy comments that 'mature students are ignored in a lot of instances'.

This feeling is reiterated by Laura:

Laura: the college didn't really approach us at all as mature students and say 'Oh, do you need help with this, or advice with this?' So it was kind of, you know, we just figured it out ourselves and had to pull through.

The mature students also endure severe financial restraints due to their loss of income for the duration of the three years. Individual circumstances and varying degrees of financial pressure affect students differently. Amy did not have to pay fees and she was supported by her husband, whereas Susan had to pay fees for two years and she therefore had to take out a student loan. For Susan, finance was an issue as she describes it as 'a continual worry'. When Susan was finally successful in obtaining a place on the programme, her delight was somewhat diffused when she discovered she would have to pay fees for the first two years as she had been previously registered on a third level course. If she had waited for one more year she would not have to pay fees as there is a stipulation that students are not eligible to pay fees, if a period of five years has elapsed between courses. However, she was so desperate to start the course that she could not contemplate deferring.

This financial pressure is further compounded by the college due to the costs of course related expenses such as photocopying and teaching practice expenses. Cathy incurred high expenses with teaching practice, as she spent a significant amount of money on teaching resources to assist her in the classroom. In several instances the financial burden is more acutely experienced by mature students. Bernie believed that mature students take their studies more seriously than school leavers because of the sacrifices they have made including the financial pressures which are being endured.

Bernie: That's a big difference because, because it's my choice, because there's so much money involved in it, because I made sacrifices to do this. Definitely I take it more seriously. I feel more pressure on myself to do well because again after all the burdens of finance I feel I have to make this worthwhile.

Financial pressures were particularly acute for Bernie, who also had to pay fees for the first two years because she had completed a two year higher level course previously. During her time as a student teacher she had to work part time to sustain herself. She worked in local shops as a shop assistant on Thursday and Friday evenings and all day Saturday and Sunday. She believed that this affected the nature of her experience whilst in college, as she did not have sufficient time for all aspects of student life, and she had no time for any extra-curricular activities or for a social life whilst in college. Because of her financial situation, Bernie was also 'time poor' (Edwards 1993) spreading herself between the demands of study and work. This concurs with other studies where finance or lack thereof has been identified as a key issue for mature students (Woodley et al., 1987; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1997).

Other students such as Susan and Laura also stressed the pressurised, unsupported experiences of mature students. According to Susan, 'we were kind of left to paddle our own canoe really'. Laura believes that the B.Ed. should come with a warning sign for mature students before they commit themselves to the course.

Laura: I mean, with regard to mature students I just feel they should be warned about the pressure that is coming up and it should be taken into consideration for them, you know, that they are travelling up and down and that there are other pressures outside their course, you know, with families and things... I'm just saying for a lot of mature students that they're starting families and they've young kids and I think that should be remembered. And ...even if somebody asked them once or twice a year 'Look, how are you dealing with the deadlines?' or something, just to check in with them that might be an idea. Like no-one did for us.

Some of the interviewees used a metaphor to describe their experiences as mature students. Susan compared her experience to Irish weather as follows 'unpredictable that's what I'd say. Rainy days, a bit of sunshine now and again, but I suppose an optimistic outlook overall'. Laura described her experience in terms of a chapter in a book or 'another chapter of my life'. Cathy used the metaphor of white water rafting whereas Rachel referred to Plato's myth of the cave:

Rachel: The myth of the cave was, where Plato believed that there were these prisoners inside in the cave and they could just see shadows. They were chained and couldn't move their heads and they saw shadows. Behind them was a wall and a fire and in between the wall and the fire were these people passing. But the prisoners thought the shadows on the wall were actual reality. One of them escaped and, broke out and he was blinded by the sun but then eventually he saw the trees and, you know, the grass and so forth and he realised that that was reality. So Plato believed that by following the philosophers that we'd come to see the real world.

This is an interesting metaphor on a number of different levels. There is a strong correlation to captivity with references to prisoners, a sense of powerlessness and restriction. Different perspectives of reality are also included in line with symbolic interactionist thinking, with the final realisation that the real world with trees and grass lies beyond the cave.

These metaphors are very useful in that they highlight the experience of the mature student on a number of different levels. The challenging, difficult, confused nature of the course is stressed. The element of a journey is included. The positive and negative aspects are referred to, but overall a worthwhile rewarding experience is highlighted.

By telling their stories, this research provided an opportunity for the students to reflect on their experience and on their own identity. They clearly welcomed the opportunity to do so, but they also found the experience uniquely therapeutic. According to Denzin 2001:60), 'the stories we tell help us to wrestle with the chaos in the worlds around us, help us make sense of our lives when things go wrong'. The interviewees welcomed the opportunity to voice their opinions and to be heard. As Rachel reported it was the first time that a lecturer formally expressed an interest in their experience as mature students.

Rachel: I just think that over the three years this has been the first time that anyone has kind of mentioned mature students as such ...

For Cathy, there was a visible sense of relief in telling her story even though it raised a lot of anger for her. For Amy, the interview process for this research study was a very positive experience as was her time in college.

Amy: I must say I came out feeling lovely. I just really came out elated in the sense that reminiscing on what I did prior to coming in here; memories that I had forgotten about ...Lots came back to me that I hadn't even planned to say, but just came as I was telling a story. I think it was lovely to kind of reminisce on those things. It was very positive because I felt that I had seen where I had come from to this stage, which I wouldn't have reflected on up until now really. I always kind of just realise 'Well I'm here now' and that's it. Whereas saying it out loud, I think hearing it was nice just to hear my own stages.

Again, Amy's reference here to 'saying it out loud' is very much in line with the therapeutic nature of story telling (Denzin, 2001). Once the mature students were given a voice they made several valuable suggestions. The interviewees had a lot of ideas about improving the course. These ideas have informed recommendations in chapter eight.

Although the students found the course challenging and in some instances oppressive in nature, they demonstrated great determination to complete the programme in spite of their perception of the obstacles experienced. This ability to focus on the task and to solve problems which they encountered is directly related to the quality of the self.

According to Charon (1989:81):

the quality of the self relates to the human's ability to solve problems. We can relate to problems we encounter through directing and redirecting our self. We work towards goals through directing and redirecting our self.....It is through this self-direction and self- control that the active human being begins to be a reality.

Each of these students successfully completed the course and passed their final examination, thereby achieving their goals of acquiring a qualification which would enable them to become primary teachers. In spite of the difficulties and obstacles, the time spent away from family and friends, they directed the self to cope with all of the challenges posed by the course. They demonstrated incredible determination by not withdrawing from the course and hopefully they are reaping the benefits now in their individual teaching careers.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented data from the study under three themes: Presentation of Self, Self in Transition and Redemption of Self. These themes are interrelated and should not be considered in isolation (see figures 5.1. and 5.2.). The interrelated nature of the themes is also pertinent in the context of the interactive nature of symbolic interactionism (Charon 1989).

As the mature students told their life history to date, different life experiences were mediated by the interviewee's personality, sense of self and self-esteem. The student's personality, personal outlook and personal well-being affected the way the student experienced the course. For instance, Cathy, who suffered from depression, and from different illnesses, missed a lot of college time and found the course extremely challenging. Some students clearly needed more support from the college than others. Susan and Amy were quite philosophical in their outlook and this helped them tremendously throughout their college life. Amy, Susan and Rachel had good coping strategies. The experience of the course also went on to impact on each student's concept of self and identity.

The interviews demonstrated that each of the students has a strong sense of self. There is also evidence of multiple identities, especially when they incorporated the identity of mature student. However, the student did not abandon other identities such as mother, partner and friend. But the process of juggling these sometimes competing identities posed a number of challenges. Each of the students brought multiple selves to the course. Once they started the course they struggled as they adopted a new identity as mature student teachers. Juggling demands between competing identities was problematic on several levels. The desire to become a primary teacher was a strong part of their identity and they demonstrated tremendous determination and resolve as they journeyed towards this end goal. For the mature students, the course was very much a means to an end. The students struggled with 'self in transition' to varying degrees of difficulty, depending on the individual circumstances of the student. Several difficult examples were noted which resonated with Goffman's 'mortification of self'. This I would argue could be alleviated

somewhat if a more 'adult friendly approach' could be adopted by the college. Each student was delighted to have made it to the end of the course. There was evidence of a 'redemption of self' for the students as they expressed delight to be finished and they displayed great pride in their own achievement. The analysis of data continues in the next chapter through the construction of Cathy's story by means of narrative analysis (Polkinghorne 1995).

Chapter 6: Cathy's Story

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the data and analysis under three themes: *Presentation of Self*, *Self in Transition* and *Redemption of Self*, based on Bruner (1985) and Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic modes of analysis. In this chapter, I am using narrative analysis, the outcome of which is the production of a story. I am adopting Polkinghorne's (1995:15) interpretation of narrative analysis, i.e. 'the configuration of data into a coherent whole'. I have chosen to construct one narrative in its entirety to allow the data to be considered both on a deeper level and in a more holistic fashion. This chapter, which presents Cathy's story,⁷ complements and builds upon the analysis which has taken place in chapter five. I have chosen Cathy's story for two reasons. Cathy approached me and offered to be involved in the study before I asked for volunteers, as she was very anxious to tell her story. Also, Cathy's story is a particularly strong illustration of the three themes which were generated by the analysis. This chapter also includes my own analysis of Cathy's story. By providing my own analytical commentary, I am locating the story (Goodson. 1997) in the broader meso and macro context, a process which is continued in chapter seven.

I wish to acknowledge my own role as the researcher in the construction of this story. Cathy's story is a construction which conveys her sense of her own experience. Firstly, the data from which the story emerged is a dialogical production resulting from the interaction between myself, the researcher, and Cathy. Secondly, I constructed the story based on the data presented during the three interviews. In the construction of the story, I made decisions about which sections to include and exclude and decisions in relation to grammatical conventions. The story is, therefore, not a neutral representation of the research finding because of my analytical and editorial decisions. These decisions were also influenced by ethical concerns, whereby I excluded any references to identifiable staff members and the names of geographical places. However, I have endeavoured to ensure

⁷ To protect the identity of each student, the names of all the participants and the institution in which they were registered are pseudonyms.

that the story has not become diluted by my editorial decisions and therefore the story is told primarily in Cathy's own words.

This study highlights some of the major intellectual tensions which exist in educational research with regard to narrative approaches. Carter (1997:11) highlights the political context of story in terms of gender, power, ownership and voice. McEwan (1997) associates emancipatory narratives with the power of meaning making. Issues of power are also present in methodological and epistemological aspects of narrative research. Narrative researchers also face a strong challenge by epistemologists in relation to truth and issues of trustworthiness. However, I contend that issues of truth are not peculiar to narrative research, but are in fact present for all research communities. While I am aware that narrative analysis poses 'a more radical challenge to accepted form of inquiry' (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997:76), nevertheless, I believe that narrative researchers no longer need to argue for the legitimacy of their methods, but instead need to demonstrate standards of rigor which are essential for all research projects. My approach to data analysis has been outlined in chapter four.

This research has been informed by and evolves from a feminist, critical, emancipatory perspective. Therefore it is not my intention that this research colludes with the powerful to further marginalise or silence the women who participated in this research, or in Carter's (1993) words, to 'substitute one paradigmatic domination for another without challenging domination itself'. However, my primary motivation in presenting Cathy's story is to grant Cathy a platform to present her experience in her own words.

6.2. Cathy's Story

My name is Cathy. I am twenty seven years old. I have one brother and three sisters and I am the second youngest in the family. This story focuses on my educational journey to date, particularly on my current experience as a mature student completing my B. Ed. degree programme in St. Catherine's College. The B.Ed. was something that I wanted to do since I was in secondary school. It was the first choice on my CAO form, but as I didn't

get enough points to do it, I forgot about it for a while. I ended up taking jobs in which I had absolutely no interest and as a result I felt that I had no purpose in life. I wasn't even aware of there being a possibility to get in as a mature student, until I rang up the college and asked for a prospectus.

My experience of education to date has been mixed. As far as I can remember, my first couple of years in primary school were very unsettled. I remember crying going in to school and I remember my mother carrying me to the door and the headmaster carrying me into the classroom. I have no idea why, but that's the way it was. One thing I hated about primary school was that the boys always got more than the girls, as in they always got to go out playing hurling or football and we had to do knitting. I wanted to be out doing sports but we never got any opportunity to do PE or games. I was always very interested in sports since I was small - hockey, camogie, tennis, every kind of sport really. I loved secondary school because I was involved in everything. Sportswise, I was on every team there. I had loads of friends and I got on very well with most of the teachers. I hated the thought of leaving secondary school. I absolutely loved it.

After secondary school, and after some part-time jobs, I enrolled for a two year health and leisure course in my local Institute of Technology. The health and leisure course was great in the sense that I love sport. I was on the college soccer team and we won two All-Ireland medals and I loved that aspect of it. But I didn't like aerobics and gym instruction. I hated these so much because I was so self-conscious and I felt as if I was on show. I didn't like that at all, I hated it. I found that really hard because I felt I had to have a perfect body. I think that had a lot to do with me dropping out of the course. On the other hand, I did make good friends there, I had good fun and there were lots of good times there as well. I got into coaching and I got a qualification in life saving. Then I took the decision to leave the course which was a difficult decision really. I remember at the time my uncle who I was really close to, died and it kind of hit me hard but I never cried over his death. I felt as if everything was kind of getting on top of me I suppose. One day I just woke up, packed my bags and went home and that was it, you know. I just said 'I'm going'. I didn't regret my decision to be honest.

I always seem to do really well in subjects when I get on well with a teacher. If I am relaxed and have a bit of fun with the teacher, I always do fairly well and I work hard for the teacher. But if there is a teacher I don't like, if a teacher is very domineering or if I ever feel belittled, which I did in the past, then I do everything possible to avoid having anything to do with that teacher. I suppose different people influence me in different ways. I love when somebody gets you involved in a discussion or is interested in what you have to say about something and not somebody that just kind of stands up at the top of the room and kind of mumbles away for an hour and you're bored out of your brain. I like to be asked my opinion and I like to get involved in whatever is being taught, that's the kind of teacher I'd like to be myself. I love somebody that has a really good sense of humour. So I think it's a lot to do with personality. I don't like people who think they are better than you are and who think they know everything. I personally learn best in an environment where I feel safe and have a good relationship with the teacher or lecturer and where I feel free to express my own opinion. That's really what gets me interested. I have absolutely no interest in something where I felt restricted or not free to express myself. So that's definitely the way I learn best. I learn a lot from people with whom I am close to and whom I admire and respect. So I'd love to see mature students more involved with lecturers or getting closer to lecturers because I think that you learn more from people when you are friendly with them. A lot of us like are nearly the same age as some of the lecturers here, which is kind of strange when you think about it.

Before I came here I had developed a range of skills which hopefully will be useful to me as a teacher. I have improved my communication skills. I've done a lot of coaching in different sports on a voluntary basis. That has benefited me more than anything else and it was really through my coaching work that I realised that I love working with children. I developed great organisational skills through my work with the scouts. I loved being a scouts leader. Nearly every few weeks I'd be organising either a day trip or a weekend away or a camping trip. That involved all kinds of tasks e.g. booking buses and booking accommodation and trying to get all your equipment sorted. It also involved teaching skills as I used to manage the games side of things. It's a huge responsibility to bring away thirty kids on a camping trip. On overnight trips, I could never relax as I was

always concerned about the welfare of the children especially if we were near the sea. I was in the Scouts myself for two years and I was a leader for five years.

I think sport is a really positive thing, especially when I look back at myself in primary school where sport played no part for girls. I'm actually resentful about that. I think it's so important for children in every aspect and particularly for self-esteem reasons because I think when you're doing sport or find, find something that you can do or that you're good at, that it really makes you feel good about yourself. It's even more important these days with all of the media coverage on childhood obesity.

I started drinking when I was in school. I don't know why really. I think I suffered from depression when I was in Leaving Cert. I remember bringing drink to school in a Tipperary water bottle. And things started going downhill from there. I wasn't able to do as well at sport. I wasn't able to keep up my grades and everything kind of slipped from under me. I lost a lot of my friends at that time. I was on medication for depression when I was seventeen. I felt like I was being labelled. I never told anyone except my friend from Scouts. I was a Scouts leader for years and we used to go away on weekends. I was very friendly with one of the Scouts leaders and I used to talk to her about everything. She brought me to the doctor. I never actually told them at home what was going on. I thought the medication helped for awhile but, it wasn't until I got off the drink that my moods evened out a bit. I still take medication to this day. I am off the drink now for four and a half years. Giving up the drink has been the most significant turning point in my life. Since that time I've had some of the happiest times of my life and I've also had really bad times. It's like not having a crutch or an anaesthetic to take away all the feelings so I have to face things now which is much better. I am able to face things now, which is more important. So that was a huge turning point. I would never have come back to college because I'd never have been able to hold down a job, I started drinking when I was fifteen and I gave it up when I was twenty-three with the help of a three month intensive rehabilitation programme. Drink has always been a factor in my family life. My brother is a recovering alcoholic and my mother still drinks.

The B.Ed programme itself is tough. It's really tough. I know if I had come into this when I was seventeen that I wouldn't have lasted two weeks. There's an awful lot of work involved in it. It probably should be a four-year course. I have to be honest and say that I still don't feel one hundred per cent ready to go out and teach after the three years here. I found it very hard but there were lots of good things about it too though. Some of the lectures that we had were very interesting and were very relevant and I did learn an awful lot here. I found First Year very tough in the sense that college life is about your social life and about drinking and I found it very hard that everyone seemed to be going out drinking every night and I was in an environment that I wasn't used to. As I was off the drink I didn't know whether to tell the other students about my situation. So I found that hard initially and then I eventually did tell a few of the other mature students my story. So things were much better then. In terms of the college itself, I felt there was an awful lot of work involved and I found the long days quite tiring. I hated micro-teaching because, I hated anything which involved looking back at myself in a video. I found that hard. For my first teaching practice, I found it really hard being in a classroom situation for the first time and not knowing what I was expected to do. Even though I got on well with my supervisor in First Year and I felt that I was encouraged a lot, I found Second Year in general to be tough and most of the time I thought about dropping out of the course. I was quite sick in Second Year and I had to go to hospital for awhile so I missed a substantial part of the course. That kind of knocked me back an awful lot. And then when I was back in college I just couldn't handle the pressure due to the insane workload.

Then we had our infant teaching practice. I hated it. I thought that would be the one that I'd love and I was kind of looking forward to it but when I went in to the classroom it wasn't what I expected at all. I couldn't stand my supervisor for a start and when I saw the person's name on the board I just cried. By the middle of the second week of my junior teaching practice, I was up the walls literally and I think I cried for most of the second week because I couldn't stick it. So I think it was around that time that I started to question whether this was really what I wanted to do or not or whether I was really cut out to be a teacher at all. So I was glad when it was over to be honest and afterwards myself and my boyfriend went to Spain for a week to try and recover from it. But the next

semester was very tough. And I felt a lot of stuff that we did really had nothing to do with the classroom situation or didn't have much to do with the course in general. Because I was sick again I wasn't able to do my exams so I did the repeats in September.

I think a mixture of things stopped me from dropping out. The fact that I had dropped out from a previous course, the fact that I wanted to finish this course so badly and of course my friends kept me going, especially the other mature students. I discussed dropping out with a few different people and they urged me to continue, even if it was just to gain the qualification and I was never to teach. So I tried to take it one week at a time.

I quite enjoyed my senior teaching practice. I felt I got on well, and, and when I got my grade I realised that I didn't do as well as I had thought. I was absolutely disgusted with my grade. I found home based teaching practice the most stressful thing that I've ever gone through. I really found it stressful. I did get on well with my supervisor I have to say. However I found it very tiring because I had been sick so much. I felt I was fit to collapse after two weeks. I was absolutely exhausted. I was advised to take time off and, I didn't want to, because I didn't want to have to repeat anything and I think it went against me in the end. I was so tired that I wasn't able for it to be honest and I ended up crashing the car in the middle of it. I had to take three days off as a result. When that teaching practice was over I was never so happy in my whole life.

In terms of the three year B.Ed. programme, if I had known what was involved and what I would have to go through, I would never have done it. But at the same time I'm delighted that I got a chance to do it and I know that in the long run I will have a career out of it. I know that when I am in the classroom that I love teaching and I love the kids. However, a lot of my confidence has been knocked out of me through my experience of teaching practice. I was definitely more confident in First Year than I am now in Third Year. I felt that my confidence was knocked an awful lot and that it made me question whether I was a crap teacher or whether I should be doing something else. Even though I got a fairly good grade in my infant teaching practice. I got Bs in all of them but in First Year I got a B1 and I went down a grade for each teaching practice after that. I knew that I had come

on leaps and bounds in my teaching style, but it isn't reflected in your grade at the end of the day.

I think the whole teaching practice system is a joke. There is no financial provision for us to buy basic resources for our teaching. The amount of personal money we have to spend is unbelievable. On my infant teaching practice alone I spent about €1,000. I spent it on lots of things eg. puppets, teddy bears and art material. I remember I was doing Breithlá (Birthday) I bought lots of things to wrap up for presents for the children. Altogether I would say I spent €2,000 of my own money on my teaching practice over the three years.

Supervision of teaching practice is, I believe, an absolute disgrace. It has nothing to do with your teaching, it's about the supervisor that you get. I think every supervisor looks for different things. A lot of the supervisors have a higher expectation from mature students than they do from the others. I even felt looked down on actually, to be honest. I felt that I had to work much harder than my partner, and as a result I believed that I did way better than him. However, when the results came out he got a much higher grade than I did. So that shattered me to be honest, it really shattered me. It is time to change supervision practices here. If you ask any of the students here, the supervisors are there to cut your throats and that's it. And that's not the way it should be like. I have seen students here in a terrible state because of teaching practice with no support available for them. The supervisors do write assessment sheets and final reports but after we receive our grade there is no explanation given to us for the rationale behind the grade. After my home based teaching practice, I made it my business to go to my supervisor whom I got on really well with, to discuss my grade and that went very well. I was delighted I did it. At the time, I was feeling bad about everything and when I went to her and I sat down with her for about an hour and spoke to her and I came out I felt great.

There should be an opportunity for every student to discuss his/her grades with each supervisor. Even the process of communicating the grades is disgraceful. Every grade is displayed on a notice board beside our student numbers. As the crowds of students gather around to find their grades some are left in floods of tears in public. It is so impersonal

and totally unfair. As for the appeals system, you can forget about an appeal. I mean if you want to appeal you pay €50, but a grade in the history of St. Catherine's has never been changed in an appeal. I did investigate the possibility of appealing one of my grades, but I genuinely believed it was a pointless exercise.

I felt this term was really all over the place in that there was no structure to it at all. We're doing subjects that have very little significance to what we're doing as teachers. The timetable also causes problems for us. We're in until six o'clock every single evening. Most of us are off on Friday which is great, but the timetable is not good for commuting students. Most of the mature students have to commute from all over the country to be here for a nine o'clock start in the morning. We might have four hours off after that and then you're in college until six o'clock. It takes me an hour and a half to drive home. I did stay over for the first two years but now I commute. I decided that this term that I'd just drive up and down rather than pay for accommodation. But a lot of the other mature students have done it for the last three years. They've driven every day. So I think there's no flexibility with regard to the timetable. It wouldn't be quite so bad if the facilities were better. These days every college has fantastic sports facilities, but not this college, there's absolutely nothing here. It's a nightmare to get a computer or a photocopying machine because of the queues. One could be queuing for two hours to photocopy one page. Even the rooms that we're in for lectures are so small and so old-fashioned. They're not like lecture halls you would see on television. Even the structure and design of the building itself looks more like a secondary school than a third level college. The social life in this place is not like other colleges. But I think that doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing. I just think that the workload is so big that people just haven't got time to go out and party, like they do in other colleges especially the B.Ed. students. But there wasn't much happening here in terms of student societies. To be honest if I was to stand up in front of a group of four hundred students that were starting St. Catherine's next year I would tell them to turn around.

It was brilliant to have all of the mature students in the same group even though we spent a lot of time moaning. We still managed to have great fun together. I've made absolutely

brilliant friends. The support among the group of mature students is fantastic. If anyone ever has a problem with an assignment, or with a missed lecture, there's always somebody there that will explain it to you, or sit down with you. We're always on the phone to each other at weekends to check up on progress with assignments which is great. However, there's nobody from the college there for us in an official capacity. There's nobody there that we can talk to, even if you're just having a bad day and you just want to talk to somebody or you just want to get something off your chest there's nowhere to go. Nobody ever put themselves out of their way to get to know us. And I think there really should be a lecturer that's kind of a facilitator for mature students in the B. Ed. because I think we probably work harder than any of the other students. And yet we're ignored in a lot of instances. It would be useful for us to have someone there for us. I believe that because we are mature students we are more likely to have issues than the younger students. There are going to be days when we find it difficult to cope. People just don't realise how much of a sacrifice we've made to come back and do this and how hard it can be on us at times. This is especially true for mature students with children. And a lot of the time too I feel that we can be looked down on in a sense that we're mature students, we didn't make it first time round so we somehow lack the intelligence.

There was never an opportunity for me to discuss my previous life experiences in class. Nobody has ever asked me what I've ever done before I came here. I know that I'm very outspoken. I tend to speak my mind an awful lot and I don't think that's a good thing here. The only way you get on in St. Catherine's is to keep your mouth shut, your head down and don't challenge the system. Some lecturers did make an effort with us and they made us feel that we brought something extra to classes, but those lecturers were in the minority. I think we've a lot of life experience to take with us into the classroom. Teaching wouldn't be our first job. We've had an awful lot of previous experiences with children plus the fact that we've given up an awful lot to come back and do this course.

The best experience for me during my three years here has to be my trip to Africa. I spent three weeks in Zambia where I visited some primary schools, an orphanage and some health centres. That's the most positive thing I've done I think and the most positive thing

that has come out of the whole course to be honest. It was fantastic. It was really fantastic. I can't even describe it. I loved every single thing about it. The kids just broke my heart, to be honest, and we had great fun as a group. At the same time, I was happy to go home because I cried nearly every day over there with the things I saw. I just wanted to bring all of the children home with me so that they could have a better life. I found the poverty hard but it was definitely the best thing that I've ever done. I did some fundraising before I went and I really felt that I might have made some kind of a difference to somebody there and that was good. It was definitely the most positive thing that I'll be taking out of St. Catherine's.

I'm nervous about getting a job but, I can't wait to start teaching because I know that I'll have my own class and that I'll have my own style and that at the end of the day there won't be somebody coming in trying to knock my confidence. While it is a bit daunting to think that I will be teaching in September, I just can't wait to get into the classroom and see how my own style works say in a real class situation. I've gotten a lot of ideas and I am really looking forward to seeing how they'd work in a real classroom situation. I'd love to see myself as being different to the teachers that taught me. I hope I will always be approachable and that the children will see me as a significant adult in their lives. That would be a reward for me. I am nervous and I wonder if I will be able to handle it. I'd love to do a Masters to be honest but, whether I do or not, I don't know. I need a break for a couple of years anyway.

In general the course was an awful lot tougher than I thought it would be. I suppose I expected that the course was something that I'd come here to do during the week and I'd be at home at weekends and I'd be able to leave it all behind me. I thought the course wouldn't interfere with the rest of my life but how wrong I was. The course literally took over my life for the three years. It was impossible to leave it behind in college. I thought the whole thing would make me kind of grow as a person as well like, in confidence. While I am not as confident as I would like to be and my confidence was certainly challenged here, I do think I am an awful lot better than I was when I came here, I know that. Maybe, I am more confident than I think. It was tough financially but I did get a

grant and I didn't have to pay fees, which was great. I got the Back to Education Allowance. You actually have to be on the dole for six months before you come back to college to be eligible for that allowance. So I purposely did sign on the dole for six months because I wouldn't have been able to afford to come back. I wouldn't have been able to go through college otherwise, so that's what I did. Now I did struggle obviously, but I was never in a bad way. I took out two loans which I will have to pay back now.

I suppose for me the course could be compared to some kind of white water rafting, definitely a journey that was full of ups and downs. I just didn't know what was going to happen from one minute to the next or if I was going to survive at all or would I be better off pulling out altogether. But then when I came to the end of it it's like an adrenaline rush 'I did it'. Now as I have come to the end of my course this is a good time to reflect on my achievements. I've gained a degree which I didn't have before I came here and a future career which is what I always wanted. That's the most important thing. I've gained great friends and, I've gained things personally, like growing in confidence and growing as a person and seeing a part of the world that I'd never dreamed of going to before. I have gained much but in the three years I've lost out financially which was the biggest struggle. My relationship has also been affected, because I have had very little time to spend with my boyfriend and when I was with him, all I thought about was the work I was supposed to be doing. However, I am still with my boyfriend and we have just bought a house together. I can't say I've lost out any other way because I was in jobs that I hated. I think I did learn an awful lot that, even though I probably think that a lot of it didn't have much to do with teaching. But at the same time I enjoyed learning all the things that apply to the classroom. So, I suppose behind all the blood, sweat and tears I've still gained from the course and I would like to study again. I'd like to do Child Psychology. For the last two years I suppose it's been on my mind. I am also interested in counselling or psycho-therapy of some sort, something like that. I wouldn't do it full-time. I'd probably be looking for something with less academic work and possibly more practical work. I would also be interested in less intensive, flexible, modular courses. I would never go back again fulltime. I'll see how I feel in a couple of years time. If I ever study for a Masters, I think I probably would come back to St. Catherine's.

At this stage of the course I am feeling very positive. If I don't think about the bad times I'm delighted I did the course. I am thrilled I did it and thrilled I got through it because there were times when I was going to walk away. Now that it's over I'd never go through it again. I'd never go through it again. I valued this opportunity to tell my story. It was great to get it off my chest with someone who actually listened. I think telling the story raised a lot of anger for me. I knew it would as I have been feeling agitated about the course for some time, but I genuinely feel a lot better now.

6.3. Analysis of Cathy's Story.

The transition to college was particularly difficult for Cathy and it is to her credit that she completed the course. Her experience highlights the difficulties posed by transitions in education, the nature of problems which are experienced by certain students and the importance of understanding how educational encounters are experienced by individual students. While Cathy was in college she struggled with the whole experience in general and with her own self in transition in particular. Firstly, she found herself in an environment where student life was very much associated with a drinking culture. This posed enormous challenges for her in terms of her previous identity as a person with alcohol dependency problems. College life in Ireland is generally organised around the needs and identities of school leavers and is strongly identified with a drinking and social culture. Companies which market alcohol are accepted on campus and in some instances sponsor student activities. Most universities and colleges in Ireland organise an annual Rag Week and this is characterised by over indulgence in alcohol. This kind of a college culture was therefore uncomfortable for Cathy's self and her coping strategy (Jackson and Warin, 2000) was to tell a small group of trusted friends that she had previous problems with alcohol. Once she was surrounded with a group of peers who were aware of her situation, she found it easier to survive.

Cathy found the course itself very demanding, very tiring and very stressful. This was further exacerbated due to personal illness which she experienced during the course. She found the course so difficult that she 'had a lot of thoughts of dropping out in second year'. Cathy made a definite decision to remain enrolled on the B.Ed. Her choice of action

was to complete the course. Charon (1989) states that the cause of action is definition and that definition is not easy to understand. When one enters a new scenario one figures out how one should act given the circumstances which are present. In terms of Cathy's interaction with self, she was influenced by significant reference groups. In this instance it was her friends and this informed her decision to remain enrolled. In spite of her initial 'fragile' identity, her self has emerged in a much stronger light. This is demonstrated through her successful completion of the course, her knowledge that she will become a primary school teacher and her determination to tell her own story. Her experience highlights the difficulties posed by transitions in education, the nature of problems which are experienced by certain students and the importance of understanding how educational encounters are experienced by individual students. In spite of her experiences, Cathy states that she would be willing to return to St. Catherine's for further study. While this may appear difficult to understand, it is nevertheless a very good example of symbolic interactionism where the situation is always changing. This is highlighted by Charon (1989:126) who states 'the actor is engaged in an ongoing stream of action, defining the situation one way at one point, another way later on'.

Cathy enjoyed the practical aspects of the course, including the work with children in schools, although the experience of being assessed in teaching practice raised many issues for her which I will deal with under self esteem. There were two issues in particular which brought her great joy during the course. The friendships she made and an opportunity to teach in Africa. As Cathy spoke about her experience in Africa her face lit up. It is clear that this was a formidable experience for her personally and professionally and it could be argued that to some degree it partly compensated for earlier negative experiences in the college. She is very grateful to those who afforded her the opportunity to travel to Africa and she clearly benefited in terms of her own personal development, self-esteem and confidence. The other personal highlight for Cathy is the friendships she made during her time in college. This group of friends, including her best friend Barbara, became a significant reference group which influenced how her self interacted with and coped with the entire college experience.

Cathy experienced a clash between the identities of the college and the student (Fleming and Murphy, 1997). To progress through the course Cathy decided not to speak her mind. For example, she decided not to appeal one of her grades even though she was very disappointed with the result. This highlights Cathy's 'preferred self' (Woods, 1993), i.e. her outspoken self, and her decision to adopt a different guise or a 'situationist self' (Nias, 1989) as a coping strategy, and as a way of getting through the programme causing the least harm to herself (Woods, 1993). However, there is evidence of Cathy resorting to her 'preferred self' when she took the decision to tell her story.

Cathy remarked that no-one in the college (with the exception of one lecturer) had ever asked her about her previous experience. The first time she referred to her own experience was in an essay, whereby she applied for a place on the college's teaching programme in Africa and was later successful in acquiring one of these placements. Goffman's (1959) reference to 'mortification of self' is relevant here. This lack of recognition of previous experiences in a formal way is akin to stripping the students of their identities. This is an example of the institution manipulating the individual's world so that the individual comes to redefine the self (Goffman, 1959).

For Cathy, her identity was somewhat fragile coming into college. The transition to college, to life as a full-time student was challenging on several levels. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective is a method that uses the theatrical metaphor of the stage, actors, and audiences to observe and analyze the intricacies of social interaction. From the dramaturgical perspective, the self is made up of the various parts that people play, and a key goal of social actors is to present their various selves in ways that create and sustain particular impressions, especially favourable ones. This includes protecting the integrity of performances. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is useful for examining Cathy's private self and her public self during teaching practice. When her public role was criticised as it was through teaching practice assessment, this was seen as a direct attack on her private self. This had further implications for her self-image and self-esteem.

While Cathy is very talented in several aspects of sports, her experience in aerobics and gym instruction raised issues for her in terms of her own self-image. Similar issues were raised as a student teacher when she had to watch herself teach during micro-teaching. Cooley's ideas are relevant here. Charles Cooley's (1964) idea of the looking glass self, is based on the reflexive self-consciousness of our experience, how we continually monitor our self from the point of view of others. In both of these examples, Cathy found that the projection of her image in public was problematic for her personally. She perceived that other people were expecting a perfect body in the case of aerobics and a perfect performance in the case of micro-teaching. She reflected on her self from the point of view of others, a point of view which she considered to be negative, therefore she reflected on herself in a negative light and this had serious implications for her in terms of her self-esteem and her self-image. She was left in a far more vulnerable position as a result. Goffman's (1959) 'mortification of self' is relevant here.

Cathy clearly experienced a sense of powerlessness during her time in college. She defined several situations as a conflict between the powerful and the powerless. This was internalised and she began to feel powerless, as was demonstrated in her attitude to appealing a grade. Her participation in this research study was an indication of her taking some power into her own hands to tell her story. Where power or status disparities exist, the dominant interactionist's definition of the situation likely prevails. As Fleming and Murphy (1997) argue in a conflict between 'college knowledge' and the student's 'experiential knowledge', the college wins. Feelings of inferiority perpetuate feelings of powerlessness. Cathy's story demonstrates how she defined her experience in college, how she felt inferior and how she acted accordingly. It can be argued that the identity of mature student teachers is constructed largely as a result of a continuous dialogue with fellow students, lecturers, college authorities and the self. If student teachers are treated as inferior they may adopt an inferior image of themselves as one's identity is linked to the recognition of others. This is in line with the idea of dialogicality (Bakhtin et al., 1981), and the concept of a self-fulfilling prophesy (Merton, 1957). Cathy perceived that she was treated in an inferior way by some lecturers and she internalised feelings of inferiority as a

result. She states 'Yeah. I even felt looked down on actually, to be honest'. This was in reference to her experience on one teaching practice.

As Cathy is finishing the course she is personally delighted with herself, delighted that she stayed with the course, delighted that she will have a degree after three years and delighted that she will be qualified to teach. Cathy's interview conveyed a great deal of feeling. The assigning of a new identity induced strongly traumatic negative feelings: anger, feelings of injustice, determination and resolve, and great courage. While she was disempowered by the process there is evidence of her generating an identity that provided her with a measure of self worth and dignity. While Cathy is very happy to be at the end of the course she states: 'if I had of known what I would have gone through, I would never have done it'. Overall in terms of emotional impact, anger, frustration and a sense of powerlessness are the primary emotions. Her participation in this research study was an indication of her taking some power into her own hands to tell her story. The B.Ed. represented a series of demands for Cathy for which I would argue she was largely unprepared. This is an issue for policy makers, for educational institutions and for students themselves. Cathy's story has implications for teacher education which I will address in chapter eight.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the story of one the participants, Cathy. This story is based on the data which emerged during three interviews with Cathy. I constructed this story using exact data segments from the interviews. In line with narrative cognition (Polkinghorne, 1995) the construction of this story involved a synthesizing of the data in the format of story. I am cognisant of the question posed by Carter (1993:11), 'have we authored our work in such a way that lives have changed for the better?' My motivation for conducting this study is to ultimately improve the experiences of mature students, such as Cathy, through informing policy in teacher education. This chapter also incorporates my analysis of Cathy's story. The next chapter presents a meta analysis of the three themes which emerged from this study.

Chapter Seven: A Meta-Analysis of the Data in Relation to the Theoretical Framework.

7.1. Introduction

In stating my ontological position that people construct their own realities, I have referred in chapter three to the enduring nature of structures which frame our construction of reality. This robust nature of structures is a key point in critical realism. Layder (1993) makes the point that realism seeks to understand the interwoven nature of different levels and dimensions of social reality, or macro and micro aspects of the social reality. Therefore, the philosophy of critical realism underpins this research through adopting Murray and Maguire's (2007) framework for studying teaching education. This philosophy also facilitates the micro experiences of mature students to be understood in a broader context and to inform that broader context. In this chapter I present a meta – analysis of the key themes in relation to the theoretical structure outlined in chapter three, the literature review presented in chapter two and Murray and Maguire's framework (2007:289) which informs the research design.

7.2. Overview of Findings

Researchers who have investigated the status and experience of female mature students in higher education argue that in spite of some improvements in regard to access and accommodation issues, the reality of higher education for many women is still incongruent with the reality of their lives (Gouthro, 2005; Bowl, 2003; Edwards, 1993). My research focuses specifically on mature student primary teachers and supports the findings of these earlier studies. This study, however, sets out to address a gap in the literature in relation to Irish mature student teachers. Specifically the study addresses criticisms of earlier studies of mature students voiced by James (1995), indicating that such studies deal with macro issues or micro issues in isolation, without reference to a more comprehensive context. This study attempts to address macro, meso and micro issues affecting the experience of mature students simultaneously. So what does this study highlight from an interactionist perspective?

I have demonstrated the cyclical nature of identity construction through the three themes which emerged from this study: *Presentation of Self, Self in Transition and Redemption of Self* (Figure 6.1.). This development of self operates in an interactive manner in line with symbolic interactionist thinking. My study demonstrates that identity construction does not have a beginning and an end. Rather it is an ongoing lifelong process. Changes in the self and identity for each mature student featured as the catalyst for enrolling on the B.Ed. programme. These changes in identity happened over a prolonged period of time. For example, Susan decided she was going to travel and apply for the course when she was 23. Bernie wanted to be a teacher since she was a child. Cathy was not in a position to apply previously because of her own personal circumstances. Each of these students wanted to become a primary teacher and the only route available to them was to become mature students. The B.Ed. degree is a recognised qualification for primary teachers and in a sound economic environment; it represents an excellent chance of acquiring a permanent teaching position. Earlier life experiences with children and missed opportunities due to insufficient points after the Leaving Certificate Examination have clarified the resolve of these students, i.e. they want to be teachers. This study supports Parr (2000), where returning to education is as much about identity as qualification, but in the context of this study it is identity as a primary teacher.

This study has highlighted the instrumental reasons for mature student teachers undertaking further studies. They adopted the identity of a mature student in the long term interests of becoming a primary school teacher. This, however contradicts the findings of other studies (Reay, 2003; Reay et al., 2002), which claim that women frequently refer to the process of the higher education programmes, being more important to them than the final outcome. The reasons for this contradiction, I would suggest, lie in the initial motivation for students deciding to apply for a B.Ed. programme. The final outcome in terms of a B.Ed. degree was considered more important than the process of undertaking the three year degree programme. However, in order to gain control of their lives in the long term they had to lose control in the short term. This study demonstrates that the self of the mature student was rendered powerless to different degrees for each of the mature

students. Their own identity was forced to the background through an institutional process of 'mortification of the self' (Goffman, 1969) as they adapted a new identity as *student teacher* for three years.

The study highlights a number of contradictions which exist between policies and practices at micro, meso and macro levels in teacher education from the perspective of the mature student. The recommendations of the DES (2002) review of teacher education which incorporates some of the language of lifelong learning, have yet to be incorporated in teacher education programmes, and there are no immediate plans to do so in the near future. While it is acknowledged that 'mature students add to the richness of the population' (DES, 2002:66) in colleges of education, the review of teacher education (DES, 2002) makes no recommendations in relation to the specific needs and circumstances of mature students. The report simply acknowledges that 'they experience more difficulties in their studies' (DES, 2002: 66) than school leavers. This lack of concern for the welfare of mature students is in direct contradiction with government policy, which is attempting to increase the participation of mature students in Irish universities. Contradictions in policy such as this, may well be explained in the access/accessibility dichotomy in Irish educational policy.

The distinction between access and accessibility (Wright, 1989; Inglis and Murphy, 1999) is useful in terms of bridging the gap between macro policy and micro practices. While colleges of education, encouraged by national policy, have made some progress in terms of access for mature students to the B.Ed. programme, it is evident from this study that more work needs to be done in relation to accessibility. Radical approaches to accessibility include transformation of the college itself as recommended by Inglis and Murphy (1999). While this is certainly desirable in the long term, even modest changes to address issues of accessibility for mature students in the short term would make a considerable difference to the quality of their student lives. At the moment, the same degree programme is offered to early school leavers and mature students. While some individual lecturers recognise the unique previous experiences of mature students, in

general there is no differential treatment provided for mature students once they gain access to the course. The students in this study clearly struggled with the demands of the programme, found the workload oppressive and had occasion to question the relevance of certain components. These issues have been raised in a general manner in relation to the general student teacher population in the DES (2002) review of primary teacher education. However, I would argue that problems with the B.Ed. are more adversely experienced by mature students, because of the complex nature of their own identity and the range of demands they face outside of college life.

A contradiction between learner centred and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning as advocated in education practice in general and in the primary curriculum in particular (DES, 1999) and the actual practices which the mature students experienced is also evident. While each mature student was positive about aspects of the programme, a range of criticisms were articulated in relation to an overloaded curriculum, lack of feedback and lack of time to reflect. The study also highlights a mismatch between the macro policies of commitment to lifelong learning and adult education and the micro approaches as experienced by the mature students in this study. Specifically, the study demonstrates a contradiction between approaches employed by formal third level institutions and those advocated by adult non formal education, in the area of teacher education. The evidence of 'mortification of self' (Goffman,1959) which is incongruent with the philosophy of adult education, highlights the continuing tension which exists between formal and non-formal approaches to education (Cross 1981), particularly in relation to teacher education programmes in Ireland. These approaches to teaching and learning have implications for all adult learners including mature students.

7.3. Discussion of Findings: The Self of the Mature Student

7.3.1. Presentation of Self

Education has been noted as a 'key site for the construction of identity' (Britton and Baxter, 1999:179) for the mature student. This study supports this statement as the

students acquired an enhanced identity and a stronger sense of self as a result of their experiences. This, however, did not occur in an emotional vacuum. Mature students enter higher education with a readily constructed identity based on their previous life experiences and family roles. This study demonstrated how the students' own identity was in conflict with their new student identity to varying degrees depending on the individual circumstances of each student. Constructing identities is not just about taking on new identities. It is also about the retention of existing identities. As with existing research on mature female students (Edwards, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993; Merrill, 1999), 'balancing' and 'juggling' have emerged as central themes of this research, thus addressing the juggling of multiple identities and fragmented lives often present in modern life. Amy dealt with her multiple identities of a mother, wife and student simultaneously, whereas Laura consciously decided to put that part of her identity which was associated with her relationship on hold, so she could put all of her energies into her identity as a mature student. Each woman perceived the self as an accomplished adult entering this programme. Their stories concur with Lorde (1984) whereby their multiple locations as student, wife, partner, mother, and employee located them in situations where one part of each student was at odds with another. Symbolic interactionism demonstrates how identities are constructed by self and by others, and this is important for our understanding of barriers to learning, motivations for learning and the support needs of adult learners. Identities are not fixed entities. They are fragmented, contradictory and change over time (Bateson, 1990), and this was certainly the case for this group of mature students.

While mature students may differ from each other on the basis of their motivation for attending higher education (OECD, 1987), in this study motivation to become a primary teacher was the one factor in common between the six students interviewed. The decision to return to formal education was not taken lightly by these students, as it required a complete re-orientation of their lives. Davies and Williams (2001), refer to the fragile identity of mature students. However, this study demonstrates a very strong identity encompassing strong motivation, based on the desire to become a teacher and determination to play the rules of the game in the interest of achieving a successful outcome. While there is some evidence of 'fragile identity' in this study, e.g. Cathy's

experience as discussed in chapter six, there is nevertheless evidence of strong determined women who have proactively adopted their new identities as student teachers in the interest of the long term goal to obtain a B.Ed. degree and a new identity as a primary school teacher.

7.3.2. Self in Transition

Returning to education involves a major transition in the lives of students. Part of this process involves dislocation, disorientation and disruption to an individual's life and the need to find new ways of living and being in the new situation which incorporates these changes. Thus, transitional phases require an individual to adopt coping strategies as they confront the 'threats, anxieties, challenges and excitements of unfamiliar environments' (Jackson and Warin, 2000:378). It is therefore very important for educational professionals, including lecturers, to have an understanding of the transitional process in order to assist people to progress through it.

As the students described their experience in college, elements of a journey were certainly present as they moved from 'culture shock' to 'adaptation' to 'maturation'. This is very much in line with the developmental framework proposed by Walters (2000) which consists of three concepts: redundancy, recognition and regeneration. The tripartite stages of transition (Jenkins, 2004) also apply here, i.e. separation, transition and incorporation. Being a mature student teacher was 'a total life change' for Laura and she talked about it in terms of 'losing contact with reality'. As the interviews took place at the end of the programme, the collective sense of relief was palpable and the mature students had certainly reached the 'maturation' stage. However, the course was extremely challenging and their ability to cope varied at different stages. Undoubtedly some students - Amy Susan, Laura and Rachel coped better than others. Some students clearly needed more support such as Cathy and Bernie.

For all of the participants the return to college was anticipated with anxiety and the actual experience itself was something of an initial shock to varying degrees for each of the mature students. While the students were clearly ecstatic to gain a place on the programme

this sense of excitement wore off when reality set in. Amy felt 'like a child starting school again'. Weil (1986:226) describes higher education entry as 'an assault on the identity' of some non-traditional students. This was certainly the case for some of the students in this study. Bourgeois and colleagues (1999) describe a situation where students have to present the self within the new social situation of the college or the university. However, they also indicate that it is the student who is deemed different by virtue of her age, class or ethnicity and it is the student who is expected to adapt to the new environment and not *vice versa*. This has also been referred to in the literature as a clash between the identities of the college and the student (Fleming and Murphy, 1997). All of the students experienced this clash to varying degrees, but Cathy was most adamant about her experience of a clash as she describes in chapter six.

7.3.2.1. Goffman's 'Mortification of Self' and 'Dramaturgical Perspective'.

There have been several references in this study which resonate with Goffman's mortification of self. Susan talked about 'stripping you of your self esteem'. Teaching practice clearly caused mortification in a variety of ways. Some of the students found the process of having to sign in at lectures demeaning and frustrating. Examples of mortification and humiliation are evident in the study with reference to other mature students being reduced to tears. The college's lack of recognition of the students' previous experiences is another example of Goffman's 'mortification of self. While the previous educational experience of the mature students is incredibly rich and valuable it does not seem to be acknowledged or valued in any concrete manner. The interviewees noted that, to date, no-one in the college had ever expressed any interest in their previous experience. It certainly is not valued in any formal way through prior accreditation (Murphy, 2003).

The identity of mature student was bestowed on these students by the college in giving them a place on the programme and it was accepted by the students when they agreed to enrol for three years. Once each student accepted their place, they became part of the student population. Collective identification is associated with similarity and difference, i.e. what members of a group have in common and what differentiates them from non-members (Jenkins, 2004). Each mature student was part of the larger student cohort and

also part of a smaller mature student cohort. Bernie's experience of collective identity as described here resonates with a stripping or a loss of personal identity:

Bernie: it's not individual. You really are in a big gang of people so there's no individuality. A lot of it is left to you, you know...It's like you're this big part, you're nothing, you're nobody to a lecturer, you're not even a face 'because they don't remember you because there's so many of us, you know. It's not personable.

Further references to identity loss are also evident in the correlations between Goffman's ideas on inmates and the students' experiences. The students in general found the college to be very regimented, with daily activities tightly scheduled. Their experience signified that activities were decided by those from the top, i.e. lecturers and supervisors. The students also found that no accommodation was made for the unique circumstances of individual students. In Cathy's words 'we're just treated really like kids a lot of the time'. This notion of being treated like children featured strongly in other interviews. Rachel describes how she felt 'like a child' when she was awarded an incorrect grade by mistake. Susan found the practice of having to 'sign in' for lectures intensely frustrating. Bernie experienced a lack of flexibility which also corresponds with Goffman's notion of 'inmates'.

Mature students experienced challenges to the self as they struggled to meet academic requirements. Susan believed that during the course the students lost sight of the overall purpose of the course due to the sheer demands placed on them. She found the workload especially demanding during teaching practice. She describes the experience as follows:

Susan: We're up until all hours making charts and stuff, you know. You're just worn-out, you're kind of on autopilot...You're really tired. You're practically burnt out, you know, which is a great shame because there are people coming into the course with so many ideas and so much enthusiasm and then by the end of it you're just ready to burst into tears. You're like 'Thank God it's over'. I know there's an amount, every course has a certain amount of pressure and hard work attached to it but I think if you're missing what you initially wanted in the first place, it's a shame, you know. It's like you're churning out teachers on a line.

This reference to 'churning out teachers on a line' demonstrates how the process of the course has become mechanical with a focus on the end product, which is the production of teachers, and not on the process of educating teachers.

7.3.3. Redemption of Self

The word redemption signifies salvation and emancipation. The mature students have themselves carved a new beginning for themselves. In this context, redemption is paralleled to self actualisation. During the final interviews, there is evidence of the students finding themselves and in finding themselves they become redeemed. Through the redemption of self, the students find and expose their newly constructed self identity. There is evidence that the students are beginning to identify themselves as primary teachers. The act of telling their stories clearly has a profound impact on the students. As Denzin (2001:60) states, 'the narrated self, which is who I am, is a map; it gives me something to hang on to, a way to get from point A to point B in my daily life'. Through telling their stories, the students realised how much they had benefited personally from their student experience in spite of the difficulties involved. There is evidence of the differences between multiple selves being resolved through the articulation of a newly constructed identity.

Giddens (1990) argues that self identity is a modern project whereby individuals can construct a narrative, in which they can both understand themselves and acquire some element of control over their lives and futures. At the end of the course the students are beginning to see themselves as primary teachers. Again, there is a sense of trepidation, as they are preparing to leave behind their old identities as mature students. There is also a sense of anticipation as they are about to shed the known identity of mature student teacher in order to adopt a new unknown identity as primary teacher. By deciding to take the route to become primary school teachers, these students are attempting to gain control over their lives in the long term. Becoming a teacher meets their professional needs, financial needs and self-esteem requirements. They considered the price to be paid, such as putting part of their identity on hold for three years, a price that was worth paying in the long term. While examples of powerlessness are evident in this study, there is also

evidence of the students demonstrating personal power through their redemption of self. This was particularly evident through their body language during their final interview. They clearly felt they had won the final prize and they were delighted with themselves.

The course raised a number of strong emotions for the students and the literature demonstrates that emotions are linked with identity formation (Zembylas, 2003). Emotions are 'located' in educational histories (of institutions and individuals) in visible or invisible ways (Boler, 1999). Therefore it is important for student teachers to be aware of how their emotions enable them to think or act differently. Day et al., (2006) argue that there has been insufficient consideration given to the role of emotional factors in the discussion of teacher identity. I would argue that this is also the case in the study of the identity of student teachers. Zembylas (2003) takes this one step further and argues that the role of emotions in the identity of student teacher and teachers should be included in the programme of pre-service and in-service education. Therefore there are inherent issues for programme planners in relation to how emotions should become part of the education process.

Perspectives are an essential part of the interaction process (Charon, 1989). This study highlights the perspectives of mature student teachers about the self, the college, the course and about their experience of being a mature student. Mezirow's (1991) transformation theory is evident here, as the students demonstrated evidence of transformative learning through the redemption of self.

7.4. Discussion of Findings: Meso level

Maines (1982) notion of a mesostructure connects the micro with the macro. In this scenario the college and educational institutions can be considered 'mesostructures' with the potential for maximising learning for their students by recognising and challenging some of the macro issues at stake especially in relation to gender and power. However, in dealing with the meso level it is important to acknowledge the conservative nature of teacher education (DES, 2002; Buckberger and Byrne, 1995), the relatively low status of

teacher education within higher education and national education policy (Furlong, 1996), and the feminised nature of teacher education in Ireland (Drudy et al., 2005; Drew, 2006). Nonetheless, primary teacher education institutions are charged with the preparation of student teachers as professional practitioners, in spite of the complex and challenging environment in which they are located.

The clash between the culture/identity of the institution and the mature student has been noted earlier in the literature review (Susan Weil, 1986, 1989; Fleming and Murphy, 1997). This is even more pronounced for female mature students (Fisher-Lavell, 1998; Stalker and Prentice, 1998). The students in this study clearly did not feel they were at the core of the college's agenda. While some students were more positive than others, the course was characterised by an oppressive workload and significant amounts of stress. Each student coped in their own way, but it was clear that they decided they would 'put up' with the course in order to survive.

Identity is not just an individualised process. It also occurs as a result of interaction with larger social and cultural institutions. According to Jenkins (2004:134) 'institutions - much like identities, in fact - are as much emergent products of what people do, as they are constitutive of what people do. They don't 'exist' in any sense 'above the action'. From a symbolic interactionist perspective the identity of any institution is not a fixed commodity. It emerges as a result of its interactions with various stakeholders.

My study supports the findings of George and Maguire's (1998) study which found all graduates were treated as recent school leavers. In my study, the mature students stated that no one from the college ever acknowledged their unique status as mature students other than putting them together in the same group. Few members of staff ever enquired about the nature of their experience in college, or recognised their previous experience until I informed them about my research. This lack of dialogue with mature students clearly highlights their sense of powerlessness and the institution's attitude towards mature students. At the same time learner-centered education (DES, 1999) is quoted as an educational principle which the students should practise as teachers.

During the course of this study, the students admitted that other than the interviews for this research and to a more limited degree in their initial interviews when applying for a place on the B.Ed. programme, there was never any opportunity for them to discuss or share their prior experiences. Some students found it refreshing to think back over life events during the process of telling their stories for this research. However, this highlights a serious lacuna on the part of the institution. There are two elements to consider when addressing the prior experience of the mature student. Firstly, it is important to include this experience into the ongoing educational development of the student. Secondly, and more importantly it is essential to value this experience in a formalised, transparent accredited manner. It is this life experience which differentiates mature students from school leavers, yet the two groups are treated on the most part in an identical manner.

Hyland and Merrill (2003) have noted how life in college tends to be experienced within small communities, rather than the community of a college as a whole. The mature students were grouped together which re-enforced their own internalised identities as mature students. They worked well together, supported each other, formed friendships and developed a shared identity as the 'matures'. They viewed themselves as different to other elements of the college population including the school leavers and the college lecturers, even though, as one student commented, many of the lecturers were similar in age to the mature students. Meeting other mature students with similar issues in terms of resolving identity issues certainly provided invaluable support. This was identified as a strong coping strategy for the students. In many ways the group of mature students demonstrated several characteristics of Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'community of practice': - a term used to describe the process of creating a shared identity among a group of individuals. The term 'community of practice' refers to the process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in some subject or problem, work together over an extended period to share ideas and find solutions. It refers as well to the stable group that is formed from such regular interactions. While this group operated as a 'community of practice' on an informal basis, there is no evidence to suggest that this 'community of practice' operated on a formal basis in a manner which was supported and recognised by the college.

This study also raises fundamental questions in relation to the function of colleges of education in an era of lifelong learning. Are colleges of education simply required to transmit knowledge and to mould teachers in an unquestioning fashion or are they expected to work with students, in creating new lifelong learning models of teacher education? It is important for colleges of education to clearly articulate their vision of teacher education (Deegan, 2008; Deegan, 2008a). Studies of this kind will provide opportunities for colleges of education to learn from the experiences of mature students. There is a clear need for colleges of education to redefine issues of access and accessibility, not just in administrative terms, but as core issues which relate to the identity of the colleges themselves and their understanding of teaching and learning. It essentially requires a reconstruction of the very understanding of knowledge and learning (Fleming and Murphy, 1999) or in the words of the DES (2002:3) review 'a complete reconceptualization of teacher education and a restructuring of programmes'.

7.5. Discussion of Findings: Macro Level

The literature on adult education highlights the diversity of adult learners (Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1990; Tight, 1996). Their unique nature is characterised by social differences based on gender, social class, religion, family backgrounds (to mention but a few). Each adult learner including mature adult learners have different needs, priorities and learning styles. However, learners are also different from each other because of their own individual perspective, both about the self and about their environment. All of the students brought different perspectives about the self to the college. From a symbolic interactionist point of view, this influenced the nature of the interaction they had with other students, with the course and with staff in the college. Trying to understand this perspective allows one to partly understand why some students had a more positive experience of the course and the college than others. The philosophy of adult education recognises the unique make up of each individual and incorporates previous experiences into the learning scenario in the interest of maximising the learning potential for the adult learner (Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1980, 1990, Brookfield, 1985). However, there is very little to suggest that the B.Ed programme incorporated the philosophy of adult education. This is highlighted in all of the stories but perhaps to a greater degree in Cathy's story in chapter six.

This study showed that students experienced a sense of powerlessness. They were clearly never invited to participate in any decisions which affected their lives. However, this sense of powerlessness may not lie solely with the students. I would argue that it is perpetuated throughout the education system in general and teacher education in particular. There is also an argument that there is a lack of participation in policy making by groups directly affected. Professional or expert opinion is often more valued than that of those who are affected by the policy (Greenbank, 2006). Powerlessness is therefore perpetuated within the education system affecting individual students, tutors, managers and indeed, education institutions themselves. This is particularly pertinent in the current climate of neo-liberalism and marketisation which can be seen in the restructuring of university departments and calls for quality assurance. Governments tend to shy away from implementing policies that are more radical (Greenbank, 2006).

In deciding to return to study it can be argued that these women unwittingly entered a world where 'knowledge' and 'truth' are largely defined by white males (Leathwood and Francis, 2006). My conceptual understanding of gender is that concepts of masculine and feminine are constructed through relations of power. These relations of power do not simply exist 'out there'. They are in effect internalised and enacted through the words and actions of individuals and institutions (Archer, 2006). The gendered nature of education in general and teacher education in particular which was addressed in the literature review has implications for mature students. A sense of powerlessness was strongly identified in this study and this clearly has a gender dimension. All of the participants are women, studying in a gendered course (Francis, 2006), preparing for a gendered profession (Murray and Maguire, 2006). Interestingly issues of gender were not articulated widely by the women themselves with the exception of Cathy and Bernie as follows;

Cathy: ... the one thing I hated about primary school was I felt that the boys always got more than the girls, as in they always got to go out playing hurling or football and we had to do knitting and so on and all that kind of stuff and I hated that like. And I wanted to be out doing sports or whatever but we never got any opportunity to do, do PE or anything like that so that was the one thing I didn't like about it.

Bernie: I've always had it in the back of my head to start up a programme for literacy for teenage girls in a disadvantaged area and just more specific education aimed at them rather than what they're getting from the system, because most of them don't even go to school after twelve anyway – if they even get to that, that age. Just to make them more aware of themselves and because there's a total different, expectation of girls in those areas, you know, and I would focus it on female education rather than male, eh, but there's work to be done on both of them. But, yeah something like that, something worthwhile that will make a difference in their lives, you know. I mean I've worked with people, I've worked with a group of, teenage girls before and they were about fourteen at the time. They'd all be about eighteen now and out of six of them...four of them ended up pregnant and unmarried but there were two that didn't and that's where the difference starts. If you can just do it ...

Gender identity and carer identity were largely invisible in this study. Gender as an aspect of identity was only very occasionally explicitly adverted to: something that may reflect either its perceived unimportance or its invisible nature. Rachel is a mother of two young children, but the demands of the course ensured that her identity as mature student took priority. Her determination to complete the programme did not allow her the time or space to assert her own identity as a mother and a carer. Laura referred to her mature class mates as 'the girls'. A lack of explicit gender awareness has been documented in other studies (O'Connor, 2006; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Schools have been shown to be involved in the reproduction of gendered subjectivities despite their claims to being gender neutral (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). I would argue that the same is also true for colleges of education. There was no explicit recognition by the women in this study that gender might affect their life choices. While the students essentially knew that it is difficult to combine work and family, they did not ascribe this difficulty to gender in any way.

This invisibility of gender and carer identity which was evident on a micro level in terms of the failure of the students to acknowledge their gendered selves is also replicated on a meso level in terms of a gendered institution and a gendered profession. Acknowledgement of a gender dimension in education from a personal perspective is important for student teachers as they grapple with the complex layers of the gendered education system in which they will be participating. O'Brien (2007) comments that while mothers care for their children without expectation of recognition or reward, there is a

danger to their own well being. In terms of traditional gender ideology, the work and identity of the carer have been rendered invisible and not counted as productive, although this work is crucial for a healthy society. Considering the centrality of caring to our society (Lynch, 2007; O' Brien, 2007) it is imperative that one's carer identity is valued and highlighted. Equally, one's gender identity needs to be validated by the self, by the institution, by the teaching profession and by society. Schools and colleges of education can reinforce perceived cultural norms such as traditional gender ideology and the moral imperative to care (O' Brien, 2007), which can in turn perpetuate gender inequality. In the context of the feminisation of teaching there is a need for teachers themselves to be well informed about the gendered nature of education in general and teacher education in particular. Feminists note how it is important to make power issues that affect women explicit, rather than implicit (Stalker, 2001; Gouthro, 2005). This remains an important challenge for teacher education in Ireland.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to focus in detail on class, it is interesting to note that the students who faced the most difficulties with the course were from working class and lower middle class backgrounds (see social background of interviewees in appendix one). Cathy, Susan and Bernie found their time in college far more challenging than Amy, Rachel and Laura. Issues around gender are further exacerbated through class, and it is important for educational institutions to recognise this and to plan accordingly, in the interest of providing the best services for their students.

My study is based on a framework for analysing teacher education adopted from Murray and Maguire (2007:289) which states that critical enquiry cannot take place without inter-related analysis of micro, meso and macro levels. Therefore, shallow changes which take place on one level alone, i.e. micro, meso or macro are insufficient. In order to cater for the needs of mature students in the context of the lifelong learning agenda, there is a need to adopt systematic root and branch changes across all three levels. It is important for education practitioners to be aware of what is happening for the student in terms of identity construction on micro, meso and macro levels. One example of this kind of analysis is in the categorization of barriers experienced by mature students.

According to Cross (1981), obstacles/barriers experienced by mature students can be categorized into three groupings: situational, dispositional and institutional. However, after discussing and analyzing the barriers described through the stories of mature students, I propose that barriers can more usefully be categorized on three interrelated levels: micro, meso and macro levels. Micro-level barriers include those which are experienced because of individual circumstances, e.g. low self-esteem. Meso-level barriers include those which are caused either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously by the institution itself, e.g. rules and regulations, timetables and assessment procedures. Macro-level barriers are those caused by the socio-political economic context in which the degree programme takes place, e.g. the gendered nature of education and fears about 'dumbing down' or diluting the education experience. The challenge for policy makers, practitioners and educators is to understand and challenge these barriers collectively. Remedies which are devised to address barriers on an individual level are insufficient, e.g. provision of study skills support, funding for access courses. A holistic approach to overcoming barriers on an inter-level approach is required.

7.6. Conclusion

The story told over the three interviews reconstructed the journeys of the mature students during their time in college. They began that journey by presenting the self. The self endured several challenges during the course and emerged in redemption at the end of the journey. Identity construction is essentially a lifelong process. This study demonstrates the cyclical process of identity construction, which took place for six mature student teachers as they interacted with the self, with their peers, with the B.Ed. programme and with the college. This meta analysis demonstrates the significant impact the experience of being a mature student had on the interviewees. The goal for the self of the mature student was to complete the three year degree programme, to obtain a B. Ed. degree with a view to becoming a primary school teacher. While the course was extremely challenging to self and to identity, each student remained focused on the final prize and this sustained them to the end. They were willing to compromise their own identity in the knowledge that they would obtain a new identity as a primary school teacher. However, there were examples of

the self enduring mortification and humiliation (Goffman, 1959). The next chapter introduces a set of recommendations which have arisen from this study.

Chapter 8: Lifelong Learning and Mature Student Teachers, Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1. Introduction

Commitment to encouraging increased participation by mature students in higher education is firmly established on the policy agenda both nationally and internationally. The OECD (2004:8) review of higher education in Ireland highlights the importance of 'giving a high priority to lifelong learning, widening participation and the encouragement of mature students'. This chapter presents some concluding thoughts by placing the micro experiences of mature students, in the larger frame of lifelong learning and teacher education. A set of long term and short term recommendations for colleges of education, which have arisen from this study, is presented within the context of lifelong learning. While these recommendations have been specifically constructed for mature students, some recommendations are also applicable for the entire third level student population.

8.2. Conclusions: From the Macro Context to the Micro Experience

The complex and multifaceted nature of lifelong learning has been discussed by several commentators. (Field, 2006; Jarvis, 2004; Nicholls, 2000:370). The research explores the everyday reality of widening participation and lifelong learning for mature students, some of whom enter university with family, work and caring commitments. I agree with writers such as Greenbank (2006) who have characterised policy formulation on 'widening participation' and lifelong learning as 'rather ad hoc, piecemeal and muddled' (Greenbank, 2006:161). In Ireland, on the one hand, ambitious government targets have been set to increase the participation of mature students, while on the other hand the government has adopted a policy of free fees (excluding registration fees) for full-time students, but not for part-time students. This ignores the lived realities of mature students with family, financial and work commitments, but who are not in a position to return to full-time study. Those who do return to full-time study, as this research demonstrates, do so at a significant cost both to themselves and their families. This study highlighted the personal, financial and social costs experienced by all of the students. For example, Laura

made a conscious decision to put marriage on hold until she finished the course. She identified this as a tremendous personal cost. All of the students are in financial debt, with the exception of Amy, who was supported by her husband. Some of the students experienced a deeper, emotional cost as a result of the course such as Cathy.

The recent advent of a new on-line qualification for post graduate students recognised by the Department of Education and Science caused shock with the education community in Ireland. However, the course is meeting a real need for mature post-graduate students in a flexible manner. In this context all providers of higher education need to be proactive. To put it in stronger terms the time for complacency is over. If universities do not take serious steps to meet the needs of mature students, these students will vote with their feet and private colleges will only be too happy to meet their needs. In the context of a changing environment for teacher education, it is now time to 'explore the relationship between teaching, learning, research, professional development and the notion of lifelong learning' (Nicholls, 2000:376).

There is clearly a need to restructure higher education in the context of an ever-changing society and in the event of a more diverse student population (Frost and Taylor, 2001; Kokosalakis, 2000; Duke, 1992; Tight, 1993). However, the challenges facing teacher education, within the broader canvas of higher education and the lifelong learning agenda are even more acute in light of the conservative nature of teacher education (DES, 2002; Buckberger and Byrne, 1995).

In the context of teacher learning and development, Day (1999:2) states that 'one of the main tasks of all teachers is to inculcate in their students a disposition towards lifelong learning'. This cannot happen if teachers have not developed a disposition to lifelong learning themselves through pre-service and in service teacher education. Therefore the reconceptualisation of teacher education in Ireland which has been called for by various commentators (Deegan 2008; DES, 2002) should incorporate a lifelong learning agenda and vision. Closer links between the philosophy of teacher education and lifelong learning would assist teacher education in terms of bridging a number of gaps: between in service

and pre service teacher education; between colleges of education and schools; between teacher educators and teachers. Such cross collaboration of ideas would also assist in the creation of 'communities of teacher learners' (Deegan, 2008a), networks of teachers, teacher educators and student teachers with a shared interest of promoting lifelong teacher education. Redesigning teacher education programmes which are informed by the philosophy of lifelong learning would also go some way to converting the rhetoric of lifelong learning into reality, thus addressing some of the criticisms which have been raised in the literature review (Henkel, 2001; Longworth and Davies, Frost and Taylor, 2001; Chapman and Aspin, 1997).

When mature learners are included in large cohorts of adult students who are primarily school leavers, there is a danger that their uniqueness is not recognised or that their potential development is not realised. Female students are not homogeneous and their individual stories clearly showcase the individuality of each student. Female students in this study comprise a diverse group by virtue of their different identities, cultural locations, previous experience, subjectivities, histories and stories. The female mature student has to deal with the consequences of balancing different roles. They differ from early school leavers in terms of the nature and extent of their previous life experiences. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, previous events which have been filtered through structural realities of gender, class and education inform the development of self and identity. Each of the interviewees had powerful stories to tell. It was quite humbling to listen to them and I was left with tremendous respect and admiration for the students afterwards. These adult women have led very full and varied lives to date. They demonstrated incredible determination to become primary school teachers in spite of the odds.

It is imperative for colleges of education and indeed all universities to treat all students, but most especially, mature students as adult learners. The students in this study cited examples of valuable learning experiences for them which took place during the programme. These included the third year elective programme and the alternative education experience. In both instances the students had a choice. They selected their

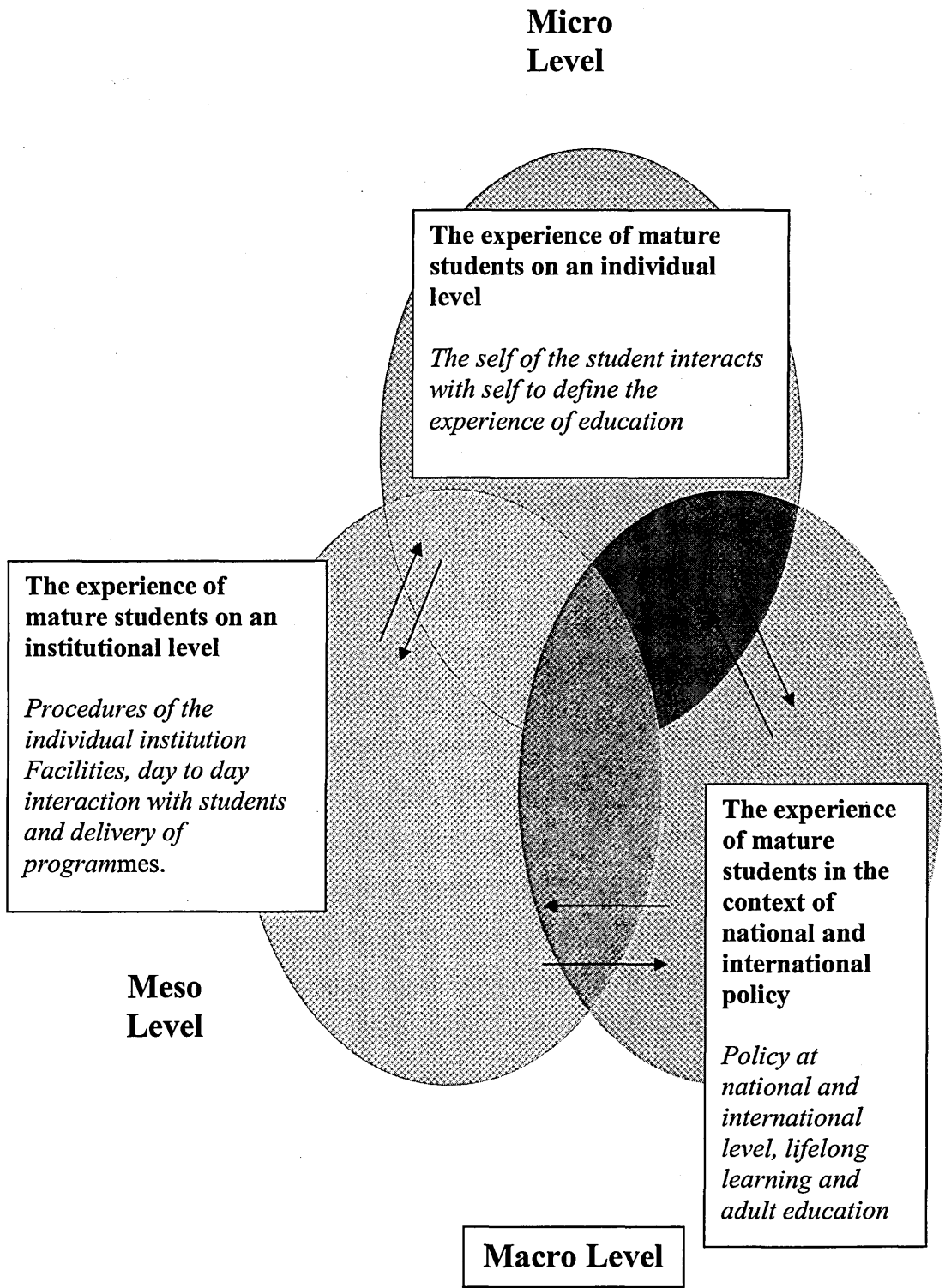
option for the elective from a menu of options and the alternative education placement was also organised by the students themselves. Again this stressed the student-directed nature of learning, which according to the students was highly effective compared to other examples of teaching and learning adopted within the programme. The distinct features of the adult learner in general and of adult education in particular are well documented in the literature (Jarvis, 2004; Houle, 1992; Knowles, 1990; Brookfield, 1985). Consideration therefore must be given to the type of learning which is experienced by mature students in the context of the extensive literature available on adult education. It is equally important for mature students to view themselves as adult learners and to act accordingly. Mature students need to research all options carefully before embarking on a teacher education course. Talking to other mature students who are currently enrolled and those who have recently completed teacher education programmes is also highly advisable. There is a requirement for mature students to complete an interview to obtain a place on a programme, but there is nothing to stop the mature student from interviewing personnel in the college, to see if the college is in a position to meet her needs and requirements. If students ask for certain provisions, colleges will be in a better position to accommodate such needs. It is also important for mature students to be aware of the competing demands of two 'greedy institutions' i.e. home and university life. Therefore, before a student embarks on a course, she needs to establish boundaries for both institutions, e.g. mature students should shop around before they make their final choice. They should ask about crèche facilities and childcare arrangements. If these facilities are not demanded by mature students, then colleges will not be under any pressure to make 'student friendly' budgetary decisions.

Because of the association of teaching with women's traditional role as carers for young children, women were traditionally expected to be especially suited to primary teaching. Drawing on the gendered conceptions of teaching and teacher education discussed in the literature review, it is important to challenge these gendered perspectives on education. Schools and colleges of education as key agents in society can perpetuate gender inequality if issues of caring and gender identity are not addressed as fundamental areas in teacher education. Teacher education programmes in general and St.Catherine's

programmes in particular need to make explicit the micro-political nature of teaching. If student teachers do not critically reflect on these issues, then they will not have an opportunity to recognize the pervasiveness of gender inequality in our schools and in our society.

This study demonstrates the complex environment which informs the experiences of mature students. A framework for conceptualizing the experiences of mature students is set out in figure 8.1. This framework is informed by symbolic interactionism, critical realism and Murray and Maguire's (2007) work.

Figure 8.1. Framework for conceptualizing the experiences of mature students.



8.3. Long Term Recommendations: New Part Time B.Ed. Programme Specifically for Mature Students

Currently, the same B.Ed. programme is provided simultaneously for mature students and school leavers. There is no difference in the content or methods of teaching adopted, although some lecturers try to engage more with the mature students.

I am proposing the introduction of a part-time B.Ed. degree specifically for mature students. I believe it is unfair to subject mature students to the pressures of full-time education which has been designed for school leavers. Flexible alternatives have been devised for post-graduate students such as Hibernia College's on-line training courses. In my opinion it is only a matter of time before private colleges devise a course of this nature. Therefore, if colleges of education are serious about the promotion of lifelong learning, and specifically about the provision of lifelong teacher education, the introduction of a part time B.Ed. degree is essential.

There are many flexible options which could be considered. Classes could be offered on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings or alternatively during Thursdays and Fridays. The teaching on these days would be intensive; therefore the students' on-campus time would not be wasted. Arrangements would have to be made for block sessions of teaching practice. These would have to be arranged during term time for obvious reasons.

One of the biggest problems with this proposal is that part-time students are currently not eligible for free fees. This discrepancy in policy between full-time and part-time students has been highlighted by many commentators, most recently by the OECD (2006). There is a strong argument here for the Irish Government to tackle the issue of fees for part time students. As Greenbank (2006: 161) argues 'if the government is to make real progress on widening participation (and the statistics suggest they are not doing this), they need to be more courageous in the policies they adopt'.

There is also a need for national policies to accredit prior learning of mature students (Murphy 2003). If policies of lifelong learning are to be taken seriously, then systems for

recognising prior learning will have to be developed. This study demonstrates the experience and skill which mature students bring to this B.Ed. programme. Some formal recognition of this experience would act as a motivator for students; it would formally acknowledge and value their previous experiences and would thus enhance students' self esteem.

8.4. Short Term Recommendations: Alterations of Current Degree Programmes

The B.Ed itself is clearly in need of reform (DES, 2002). Part of this reform needs to address the needs of mature students. On a very basic level, it is possible for every college of education to 'mature student proof' their courses. This can happen by consulting with mature students and making simple alterations which would go a long way towards meeting their needs, such as making simple changes on the timetable. Again, there should be considerable opportunities to do this if plans go ahead to revise the B.Ed from a three year to a four year degree programme (DES, 2002).

Wright's (1989:99) distinction between access and accessibility is useful, as it reminds us that efforts to support entry to higher education alone are not sufficient. There is also a need for higher education institutions to change internally in order to make its practices and procedures more accessible for mature students, rather than expecting mature students to make all of the compromises. In order to model the philosophy of lifelong learning, colleges of education should become lifelong learning organisations. This process could start with the development of a comprehensive policy on the college's procedures and programmes for mature students in the context of lifelong learning.

Such a policy should outline the current number of mature students on campus, targets for the future, recruitment information, support services for students and names of staff working with mature students. Procedures for applications and selection should be documented clearly. Some institutions organise interviews for mature students, whereas others operate a lottery system. When interviews are used, training for interviewers is helpful as this can be a highly stressful experience for the mature student. Specialist advice should also be available during Open Days. It is important to remember that

allocation of places for mature students is not sufficient in itself. This needs to be backed up with a whole range of services and a mind shift within the academy. Needless to say the first step to drawing up such a policy is to consult with mature students currently on campus.

While there is general information available for mature students including an annual booklet produced by the Department of Education and Science, there is a need for each college to produce its own booklet and /or video for mature students. This would include practical information on a range of issues affecting mature students including selection criteria, library hours, crèche facilities, times of classes and a map of the campus. Such information would enable each mature student to select the course and college which best suits his/her needs at a particular time.

If colleges are serious about attracting, recruiting and retaining mature students, then they must be prepared to be more flexible in the design, delivery and assessment of courses. Increasingly, private colleges are offering on-line and distance learning facilities for students. The demand for these options indicates that there is a real need for the main stream colleges to explore more flexible options, e.g. part-time degree courses during the day and flexible modular programmes. Assessment options also need to suit the needs of mature students. Assessment should be planned carefully in consultation with mature students. Temptations to over assess should be avoided as time is precious for all students but more so for mature students. Facilities for feedback should also be part of the assessment cycle.

The following suggestions provide a check list for third-level institutions, when planning their approaches, programmes and social activities for mature students. These can be divided into facilities and teaching approaches. Some of these proposals admittedly have been adopted in British universities, where there is a larger cohort of mature students in attendance. Some of these proposals are also relevant in terms of the entire third level student population, but their urgency is even more acute in the context of mature students.

This study highlights the urgent need for their adoption in teacher education programmes in Ireland.

Facilities	Approaches to teaching and learning
<p><i>A dedicated space for mature students</i> It is important to review supports which are available for mature students. In the first instance a 'space' for mature students would be a good place to start. Such a designated place could be a coffee room, a lounge or a social room. While colleges and universities and colleges are actively seeking funding and contribution from past alumni, such a project could surprisingly be an attractive venture for funders or past students. This space would symbolically indicate to the students that the college does value its mature student population.</p>	<p><i>Training for tutors and lecturers</i> As stated previously there is extensive literature available on the field of adult education. It is imperative for universities to provide training and support for staff in the basic tools and practices of education in general and adult education in particular.</p>
<p><i>Child care</i> Even though child care facilities have improved in third level colleges in Ireland in recent years, there is an urgent need for this area to be prioritised. While lack of childcare facilities is a serious inconvenience for staff and other students with children, it is akin to climbing Mount Everest for mature students who are mothers. It is literally easier to stay at home and mind one's children than to expose oneself to the difficulties involved in juggling study, childcare and a range of other family commitments.</p>	<p><i>Talk to mature students</i> Conversations with mature students can achieve a great deal for all. Mature students may feel isolated and neglected. Lecturers and tutors are often unaware of these feelings. It is important not only to remember that the mature student is an adult, but also to treat the student as an adult. Higher level institutions have much to gain from inviting mature students to offer their opinions, to critique courses and to advise on a policy for mature students. On completion of a programme, an exit interview with a panel of mature students would generate invaluable learning for programme planners, especially those who are serious about meeting the needs of mature adult learners.</p>

<p><i>Increase the range of support services for mature students.</i></p> <p>There is a need for a dedicated support service within each college for mature students. Such a service could include access to counselling, tutorial support and supplementary facilities e.g. study skills, assessment procedures, library facilities, and adequate crèche facilities. While these supports are necessary to support participation by mature students in general, they are absolutely essential in the case of mature students from socially and economically disadvantaged background.</p>	<p><i>Community of Practice</i></p> <p>The mature students exist as a ready made group within the B.Ed. programme. The learning potential of this group and for this group could be more usefully exploited by employing some of the approaches of 'Lave and Wenger's (1991) Communities of Practice'.</p>
<p><i>Appoint personnel with responsibility for working with mature students</i></p> <p>The university setting can be quite strange and formidable for any student, but even more so for the mature student. A friendly face and an open door can make all the difference. The appointment of a mature student officer is important, and such a person should have a clearly defined job description. He/she should adopt an outward, proactive approach. The mature student officer should regularly contact mature students providing assistance when appropriate. Ideally, access to a mentor from within the academic staff would also be useful.</p>	<p><i>Orientation for mature students</i></p> <p>I have stated earlier that first impressions are very important therefore careful consideration should be given to orientation for mature students. Bourgeois et al., (1999) mention the importance of induction days for breaking down anxieties which students experience and especially students who have not been in formal education for some time. Rather than grouping everyone together in one hall, I would strongly recommend that a separate programme is organised for mature students. Obviously, there is a menu of possibilities which a college could consider, but at least one induction day should be offered for mature students and they could join the larger cohort for the rest of orientation. Ideally, all of the orientation should be offered to the mature students as one distinct grouping. Such a programme would provide opportunities for the students to acquaint themselves with their fellow students and with the new environment in a relaxed atmosphere.</p>

Sufficient resources

The students in this study talked about the queues for photocopying and computers. While all of the students are experiencing these practical difficulties it could be argued that it is a further barrier for mature students who have the additional burden of dealing with home commitments and commuting. In the absence of sufficient resources, a case should be made that if policy makers are serious about lifelong learning and widening participation the provision of increased places for 'non-traditional' students simply is not sufficient. If institutions are planning to increase participation of mature students they must plan accordingly. They need to aspire to obtaining the necessary resources i.e. teaching staff and sufficient physical resources and they must make appropriate changes to the way teaching and learning are conducted.

Adopt a sensitive approach

It is important for personnel in higher level education institutions to be sensitive to the unique needs of mature students especially in relation to resources, timetabling and childcare. Many mature students are unable to attend classes at particular times e.g. 9.00am. due to commuting constraints and family responsibilities. Administrators need to more flexible when designing the timetable. Inflexible assessment deadlines are also problematic for students who may have more immediate deadlines in their family lives.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter presents a set of conclusions and recommendations arising from my study of the experiences of mature student teachers. A framework for conceptualizing the experiences of mature students is presented. Collins (2000) calls on universities to embrace an adult learning critique. This adult learning critique places the student back at the core of the university's agenda. While mature adult learners remain in the margins of the higher education system in general and teacher education in particular, there are now many more opportunities to create an educational landscape, which places the needs of the learner and not the institution at the epicentre of the teaching and learning process. There is much here for a third-level institution to consider. In the meantime, it is important to remember that the life of the adult mature student can be greatly enhanced by adopting an 'adult-friendly' policy to teaching and learning.

Chapter Nine: Evaluation of the Study.

This chapter presents some of my reflections on the research process and indicates the learning that I have experienced as part of my continuing professional development.

9.1. Evaluation

I enrolled for the Ed.D. in 2003. Since that time my father died, my two daughters were born and I moved house. For me these were all life changing events to differing degrees and from a symbolic interactionist perspective they influenced the manner in which I conducted and reflected upon the research study. I could empathise with many of the issues and emotions described by the students as I endured similar emotions as part of the doctoral programme. I can fully concur with Edwards (1993) reference to the two 'greedy institutions' of home and study. I will always remember the guilt and resentment I felt because of the time I could not spend with my two daughters and my husband. My husband has a Ph.D. and hence understood the challenges and difficulties involved. Therefore he was in an excellent position to support me along this lonely and confusing route. Without his support and understanding, this thesis would never have been written.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, I can now reflect on my own experience as a mature student undertaking an Ed.D. As I interacted with my own self, with my supervisors, with the requirements of the Ed.D. programme, with the interviewees and with the literature, I struggled to complete this dissertation. During the process my initial supervisor left the university to take up another position and this was a challenge for me. Having established a comfortable relationship with one supervisor, it takes time to do so again and this was somewhat disruptive in the overall process. It is somewhat humbling to become a student again and to experience the insecurities and anxieties that we as lecturers sometimes forget.

This study has highlighted the challenges faced by mature students in one college of education in Ireland. I now realise that what I set out to do was somewhat ambitious. I initially feared that I would not have enough data. However, the multilayered theoretical

approach which I adopted generated substantial amounts of incredibly rich data. Undertaking this research for the doctorate in education has resulted in considerable personal learning which has been both exiting and rewarding. It was a privilege to interview the mature students. I am now personally committed to communicating some of the messages from this research to a wider audience with a view to improving experiences for mature students in general and in my own college in particular. This commitment to improving practice is one of the strong motivations behind doctorates in education (Lester, 2004; Wellington and Sikes, 2006).

While rewarding, this journey was also intensely frustrating, difficult and uncertain to the extent that I, like the other mature students was tempted to withdraw on several occasions. I constantly worried that my research would not reveal anything new. That however has not been the case. Sometimes the process could best be described as driving in the dark without lights. I admit to feelings of isolation, uncertainty and self doubt. However, this kind of approach to naturalistic research requires an ability to deal with ambiguity, uncertainty and high levels of trust in the process (Patton, 2002). While the process has been difficult the outcome and learning have been worthwhile. This research has brought me into new areas of reading. I have learned new research tools, including use of the *Nvivo* package and use of *Refworks* which is a web assisted programme for compiling reference lists.

The literature for this study brought me into the fields of adult education, lifelong learning, mature students, narrative, symbolic interactionism and critical realism. Again this was very ambitious but necessary. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, reality is constantly changing. This research represents a snap shot of six perspectives of a B.Ed. programme. Even though the analysis is based on a small sample, it has proved to be a rich source of knowledge. It might be argued that the number is too small or the findings may differ each year depending on the cohort of students. But symbolic interactionists embrace this challenge arguing that reality is constantly changing. Nevertheless, the structure and content of the B.Ed and the procedures adopted by the college provides that enduring backdrop which is a key feature of critical realism. The research also brought me

in touch with six courageous women each of whom told a remarkable story characterised by courage, determination and strength of character.

The research has opened up new avenues and thoughts about future research activities. I would like to interview mature students who return to complete the 18 month graduate diploma in education. I would also like to interview mature male students to explore their experiences. If funding became available, I would also be interested in expanding this study and interviewing a selection of mature students from all colleges of education in Ireland.

It would also be interesting to interview students in other countries from a comparative perspective. Apart from becoming involved in future research projects, this process has increased my confidence as a dissertation supervisor and that is one of the roles I will have to attend to in the future. I feel I am now well equipped to advise students on the practicalities and pitfalls of research in a way that is respectful of their other multiple identities.

9.2. Limitations of Study

The timing of the interviews was somewhat problematic. I wanted to interview the students towards the end of the B.Ed. programme. However, the students were consumed with anxiety about their examinations. If I had waited until after the examinations, the students would have left college so there were time restrictions and this may have affected the findings.

There were other women who wanted to participate in the study and they simply could not commit the amount of time needed for three interviews due to family and child caring commitments. This was I feel a great loss as I think their stories would have been very insightful.

The process created a mountain of fantastic data maybe too much in hindsight considering the word limits of a doctorate dissertation.

When I interviewed the women for this study I was physically moved by their stories. Other than taping these interviews on video and including these as a DVD recording as part of this thesis, it is impossible to convey the depth of emotion which arose as they told their stories. Therefore, I am conscious of the limitations of the transcribed text. Kvale (1996:165) describes this quite well:

transcriptions are decontextualized conversations, they are abstractions, as topographical maps are abstractions from the original landscape from which they are derived.

During the study one of the students claims that her experience of the course 'just puts a different perspective on life'. The same is true for myself. This experience of studying for a doctorate in education has radically changed my perspective, my way of looking at my teaching, my students and the course itself. I too feel that I have progressed from presenting the self in Sheffield in 2003, to enduring the difficulties of self in transition, to the final stages of redemption of self. Working through the data and finalising the final analysis has been somewhat of a cathartic experience, intensely frustrating and challenging, yet also deeply rewarding.

I conclude with a quotation from Bob Marley's Redemption Song which I consider to emphasise the role of the self in education:

*'Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery,
None but ourselves can free our minds'*

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Appendix One

The Interviewees

In the interest of protecting the participants, their real names have not been used in the transcripts.

Interviewee No. 1

Amy is thirty years of age. She is married with one child (ten months). Amy herself is the middle child with one older brother and one younger brother. Her husband is an auctioneer and runs his own company. This is her first degree. After completing her Leaving Certificate she completed a two year business course. Then she travelled to America for three months. When she returned to Ireland she started job hunting, where she got her first job as a secretary with an auctioneering company. She stayed with this company for seven years and in this time qualified and worked as an auctioneer. Teaching was always at the back of her mind so she decided to apply for a place. As she did not have sufficient grades in her Leaving Certificate Examinations, she returned to study whereby she repeated one subject and obtained the necessary grades.

Interviewee No.2

Susan is twenty eight years of age. She has one brother and one sister and is the oldest in her family. All she ever wanted to do was primary teaching. However, when she completed her Leaving Certificate ten years ago, she admits that she did not apply herself sufficiently and therefore she did not acquire sufficient points for a place in a college of education. After completing her Leaving Certificate, she obtained a place on an Arts degree programme. Her intention was to complete this course and then proceed to the 18 month postgraduate course in education, a qualification for primary school teaching. She completed one and a half years of the Arts Degree and then took a year out, but she never actually returned to complete the course. She spent the next three years travelling extensively and working in a range of jobs, including child care and factory work. She completed a three month course in childcare.

On her return she was so determined to get a place in a college of education that she worked as a substitute in her local primary school and in another nearby primary school. She visited the local Montessori school. She contacted the admissions office to ask for advice. In her own words she tried to make her CV 'as child friendly as possible'. In preparation for her interview she practiced her spoken Irish with her friend who is a secondary school teacher. She applied to two colleges of education and was successful on both counts. However, to her dismay she discovered that because she had dropped out of an earlier degree programme, she had to pay fees for the first two years of the B.Ed. Degree. If she had waited for one more year, she would not have to pay fees, but at this point she was incredibly determined and she decided to go ahead.

Interviewee No. 3

Cathy is twenty seven. She has one brother and three sisters and she is the second youngest in the family. Cathy has a huge interest and lots of expertise in a range of different sports. She spent five years as a scouts leader, training young people in a variety of sports and orienteering related activities. After Cathy completed her Leaving Certificate examination, she took a year out and then went back to repeat the year, as her points were not sufficiently high. She wanted to do either PE teaching or primary teaching. However, she only continued for three weeks and subsequently withdrew. She worked as a shop assistant for one year. Afterwards, she enrolled for a Health and Leisure course. Once again she withdrew early from this course after one year.

Cathy has had some difficulties with alcohol since she was fifteen. Alcoholism has played a major role in her life. However, Cathy became aware of the detrimental effects of alcohol on her life personally, socially, physically and emotionally. Therefore she underwent an intensive course of rehabilitation treatment and as a result has not had a drink in recent years. As Cathy was unemployed for six months previous to starting college, she was entitled to a *Back to Education Allowance*. She also received a grant and she did not have to pay fees. She took out two student loans while she was in college and these will have to be re-paid once she started teaching. Cathy battled with an illness throughout second year and part of third year. She was unable to complete her

examinations at the end of second year, but successfully completed the repeats the following September.

Interviewee No. 4

Rachel is thirty seven years of age. She grew up on a farm. She has two daughters aged six and five. After she finished secondary school, she completed a two year European Business Diploma. She travelled to England for work. After a year she returned to Ireland and worked with a banking company for three years. She got married and left her job because she wanted to work closer to home. When she was pregnant with her first child she gave up work. After she separated from her husband, she wanted to take up a career option, which would guarantee security for herself and her two daughters. Both nursing and teaching came to mind. However, teaching offered more possibilities in terms of family friendly hours. As she did not have the sufficient entry requirements, she returned to education where she repeated two Leaving Certificate subjects. At the same time she started a foundation course offered by St. Catherine's. This is an access course which offers participants a place on their degree programmes provided they have sufficient entry requirements.

Interviewee No. 5

Bernie left school when she was seventeen years old. She did not get enough points for teaching which was what she wanted to do. She completed a two year heritage course in a regional technical college. The course included folklore, archaeology and history and it was recognised as a qualification for working as a tour guide in heritage centres. After the course she had a range of part time jobs in bars and call centres, whereby she saved enough money to travel in Australia for a year.

On her return home, she continued to travel in Europe and America. When she reached the age of 23, she applied to St. Catherine's College and was successful on her first attempt. However, because she was previously enrolled on a course she had to pay fees for the first two years, and she was not eligible for a grant, to which she would otherwise have been entitled. Throughout her time in college, she has had to work to support herself. She took

some part-time work on Thursday evenings, Friday evenings and on Saturday and Sundays.

Interviewee 6.

Laura is thirty six years old. She comes third in her family with two older brothers and one younger brother. Laura wanted to be a primary school teacher since she was ten years old. She has vivid memories of primary school when she went to supervise the junior infants when she was in fifth class and she loved it.

Laura changed secondary schools after fourth year. She describes herself as a 'books person' and during transition year she was somewhat dismayed at the school's relaxed approach to learning. She changed schools, to a fee paying private school specifically to obtain sufficient points for a place on a teacher education programme. During her Leaving Certificate year, her uncle died and this had a considerable impact on her and on her family. However, she missed her chance by two points, as in 1994 the points requirement jumped from 435 to 465. She found the Leaving Certificate Examination very pressurised and was disappointed with her final result.

Laura decided to do an Arts degree in university where she studied German and History. However, she left after second year. After that she went to secretarial college for a year and got a job in an accountant's office. She worked there for five years. During that time she did a three year Diploma course in Business Studies by night.

Social Background of Interviewees

In Ireland, official analysis of the social background of higher education entrants is based on the occupations of parents, as classified into one of the socio-economic groups used in the Census of Population. These socio-economic groups are divided into two categories as follows:

Category 1	Higher Professional, Lower Professional, Employers and Managers and Farmers.
Category 2	Non-manual, manual skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, own account workers and agricultural workers

Category 1 and 2 largely correspond with the traditional terms of middle class and working class respectively. Three of the students are from category 1- (Amy, Rachel and Laura) and three of the students are from category 2 - (Cathy, Susan and Bernie), based on the occupations of their fathers.

Appendix Two

Revised Primary Curriculum

The Revised Primary Curriculum was launched in 1999. The vision for primary education espoused in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) is to nurture the child in all dimensions of his/her life: spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. The curriculum incorporates the child centred principles of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) but also includes new content and embraces new approaches and methodologies. It is learner-centred. It emphasises the importance of literacy, numeracy, and language, while at the same time responding to changing needs in science and technology, social personal and health education, and citizenship. The Curriculum is presented in seven curricular areas as follows:

Language	English, Gaeilge
Mathematics	
Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)	History, Geography, Science
Arts Education	Visual Arts, Drama, Music
Physical Education	
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)	
Religious Education	

The curriculum is firmly based on a set of beliefs and values about children and learning.

These include:

- the focus on the process of learning, and on the many ways in which children learn
- the importance of active, independent learning and in particular active exploration of the local environment. Opportunities for using concrete materials and hands-on approaches are provided in all curriculum areas.
- the vital role of language in children's learning. Much learning takes place through the interaction of language and experience. Language helps the child to clarify and interpret experience, to acquire new concepts, and to add depth to concepts already grasped.
- the importance of the social and emotional dimension in learning and the need to build the child's self confidence and self-esteem and provide opportunities to develop his/her interpersonal and intrapersonal skills
- the importance of collaborative learning and the need for a variety of classroom management strategies
- the emphasis on creative problem-solving, critical thinking and the importance of helping children to investigate, to question, to observe and to make informed

judgements. The development of these higher-order thinking skills is incorporated in every curriculum area.

- skills of inquiry and investigation are a particular feature of the science curriculum which is given a renewed emphasis
- the emphasis on school and classroom planning. There is a wide range of support materials in the documentation that gives guidance on planning.
- the recognition of the importance of assessment, the use of a varied range of assessment methods and tools and an emphasis on assessment as part of a cycle which includes planning, teaching, learning and assessing. (Source: DES 1999)

Appendix Three

Form for Volunteers for Research Study

Experiences of Mature Students in Initial Teacher Education

Anne Dolan

Name:

Address:

Mobile Number:

I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education Ed.D. with Sheffield Hallam University. The research for my thesis aims to explore the experiences of Irish mature student teachers who are in their final year in the B.Ed. programme. If you are willing to participate you will be asked to attend three interviews which will last approximately one hour each. These interviews will take place over a three week period. Please complete this form if you wish to be interviewed and please state the times which would suit you best. Thank you for your assistance.

Week 13	Time	Week 14	Time	Week 15	Time
Monday May 8 th		Monday May 22 nd		Monday May 29 th	
Tuesday 9 th					
Wednesday 10 th					
Thursday 11 th					
Friday 12 th					

Any other time which suits you _____

Many thanks for your assistance

Anne Dolan

Appendix Four

Form of Consent for Participating Students

Ms Anne Dolan is conducting a research study on the experiences of mature students in the final year of the B.Ed. programme. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of mature students, with the intention of improving provisions within the B.Ed. Degree for mature students. The study is being carried out as part of the Doctoral programme that she is currently engaged in with Sheffield Hallam University.

I have agreed to participate and I understand that I will be asked to attend three interviews for approximately three hours at pre-arranged times. I am also aware that my participation is totally voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the process at any stage. Anne has explained to me that I will be given a pseudonym to protect my identity and to ensure confidentiality. I fully understand that the material from these interviews will be transcribed and used as the basis of Anne's doctoral thesis.

As Anne Dolan is not one of my lecturers, she is not responsible for any of my final grades.

I give my consent to be interviewed by Anne Dolan

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Five

Interview Schedule

The six students were interviewed over a series of three in-depth interviews. I adopted an approach articulated by Shuman (1982) (cited in Seidman 1998:11), namely the three interview series.

Interview 1. Focused life history;

Interview 2. Details of experience; and

Interview 3. Reflection on the meaning.

Each interview was based on open ended questions and on the students telling their stories and describing their experiences.

Interview one focused on their life experiences before they became a mature student.

Interview two focused on their experiences during their time in college.

Interview three focused on their reflection on issues which were raised during interview one and two.

The following prompt questions were used over the series of the three interviews:

Interview One

1. How did you decide you wanted to do a B.Ed?
2. Tell me a little about yourself and your family.
3. Tell me about your life before you came to this college.
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. What kind of educational experiences did you have before this course?
6. Is there anything you would like to add about your life before you became a mature student?

Interview Two

1. Tell me about your experience as a mature course on the B.Ed.
2. What were the highlights of your experience?
3. What were the low points?
4. What is your overall assessment of the course?
5. How well do you think the college delivered the course?
6. What challenges/ obstacles did you face throughout the duration of the course??
7. How did you manage to deal with these challenges/ overcome these obstacles?
8. Is there anything you would like to add about your life as a mature student?

Interview Three

1. How do you feel about our previous conversation during the previous two interviews?
2. Are there any issues which you would like to clarify?
3. What were your initial expectations before you began the course?
4. How did the course measure up to your expectations?
5. In a nutshell, how would you describe your overall experience as a mature student e.g. is there a metaphor which could best describe your experience here?
6. How have you gained from the programme, personally and professionally?
7. How would you describe your losses personally and professionally as a result of undertaking the programme?
8. If you were employed as a consultant to re-design the course for mature students, what changes would you make?
9. How do you feel about becoming a primary teacher in a couple of months?
10. Have you any future plans for study?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add in conclusion?

Appendix Six: List of nodes generated with assistance of NVivo Programme

NVivo revision 1.2.142 Licensee: Anne Dolan

Project: Thesis 2007 User: Administrator Date: 26/08/2008 - 08:40:15

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Nodes

Created: 20/08/2007 - 08:59:03

Modified: 20/08/2007 - 08:59:03

Number of Nodes: 240

- 1 (1) /Personality traits
- 2 (1 1) /Personality traits/Positive disposition
- 3 (1 2) /Personality traits/Personal Initiative
- 4 (1 3) /Personality traits/Positive feedback after practice int
- 5 (1 4) /Personality traits/Determination
- 6 (1 5) /Personality traits/Self esteem
- 7 (1 6) /Personality traits/Organised personality
- 8 (1 6 1) /Personality traits/Organised personality/Need for structure
- 9 (2) /Personal circumstances
- 10 (2 1) /Personal circumstances/Family details
- 11 (2 2) /Personal circumstances/Interests
- 12 (2 3) /Personal circumstances/Relationships
- 13 (2 4) /Personal circumstances/Personal problems
- 14 (3) /Previous work experience
- 15 (3 1) /Previous work experience/Skills
- 16 (4) /Previous educational experience
- 17 (4 1) /Previous educational experience/Primary
- 18 (4 2) /Previous educational experience/Secondary
- 19 (4 3) /Previous educational experience/Third level
- 20 (4 4) /Previous educational experience/Other courses
- 21 (5) /Previous life experience
- 22 (6) /Travel
- 23 (7) /Initial career decision
- 24 (8) /Desire to be a teacher
- 25 (9) /Previous teaching experience
- 26 (10) /Efforts to obtain place on B~Ed~
- 27 (11) /The Interview
- 28 (12) /Initial expectations
- 29 (13) /Emotions
- 30 (13 1) /Emotions/Positive emotions
- 31 (13 2) /Emotions/Negative emotions
- 32 (13 2 1) /Emotions/Negative emotions/Feeling low after interview
- 33 (13 2 2) /Emotions/Negative emotions/Stress
- 34 (13 3) /Emotions/Self doubt
- 35 (13 4) /Emotions/Sense of achievement
- 36 (13 5) /Emotions/Nervousness

37 (13 6) /Emotions/Anxiety
 38 (13 7) /Emotions/Initial excitement
 39 (13 8) /Emotions/Sense of alienation
 40 (13 9) /Emotions/Self esteem
 41 (13 9 1) /Emotions/Self esteem/Positive self esteem
 42 (13 9 2) /Emotions/Self esteem/Negative self esteem
 43 (13 10) /Emotions/Disappointment
 44 (14) /Administrative staff
 45 (15) /Academic staff
 46 (16) /Services
 47 (17) /Fellow students
 48 (20) /Lack of flexibility
 49 (21) /Assessment
 50 (21 1) /Assessment/Grades
 51 (22) /The B~Ed Course
 52 (22 1) /The B~Ed Course/Changing perspective
 53 (22 2) /The B~Ed Course/Reflexive practice
 54 (22 3) /The B~Ed Course/Micro teaching
 55 (22 4) /The B~Ed Course/Gap between theory and practice
 56 (22 5) /The B~Ed Course/Structure of course
 57 (22 6) /The B~Ed Course/Diploma in Religion
 58 (22 7) /The B~Ed Course/Lecture format for teaching
 59 (23) /TP
 60 (23 1) /TP/Perspective changed
 61 (23 2) /TP/Perspective about supervisors
 62 (23 3) /TP/Working with a partner
 63 (23 4) /TP/lack of flexibility
 64 (23 5) /TP/TP Grade
 65 (23 6) /TP/TP expenses
 66 (23 7) /TP/TP preparation
 67 (24) /Education subjects
 68 (25) /Arts subjects
 69 (26) /Pedagogical option
 70 (27) /Alternative Education Experience
 71 (28) /Irish
 72 (28 1) /Irish/Irish College
 73 (29) /Workload
 74 (30) /Perspective about education
 75 (31) /Perspective about teaching
 76 (32) /Perspective about learning
 77 (33) /Support from instituion
 78 (34) /Childcare
 79 (35) /Study skills
 80 (36) /Family support
 81 (37) /Fellow mature students
 82 (37 1) /Fellow mature students/Competitiveness
 83 (38) /Finance
 84 (38 38) /Finance/Finance
 85 (39) /Motivation to keep going
 86 (39 1) /Motivation to keep going/Friends

87	(39 2) /Motivation to keep going/Dropped out of earlier courses
88	(39 3) /Motivation to keep going/Relationship
89	(39 4) /Motivation to keep going/Family support
90	(40) /Recommendations
91	(41) /Critical turning point
92	(41 1) /Critical turning point/People who were of significant influence
93	(42) /Stumbling blocks
94	(43) /Thoughts about the future
95	(43 1) /Thoughts about the future/Postgraduate studies
96	(44) /General impressions
97	(45) /Social life
98	(46) /The College
99	(46 1) /The College/Close knit community
100	(46 2) /The College/Physical structure of building
101	(47) /Facilities
102	(48) /Reactions to being interviewed
103	(49) /Identity in transition
104	(49 1) /Identity in transition/Roles
105	(49 2) /Identity in transition/Seeing oneself as teacher
106	(50) /Identity
107	(51) /Metaphors
108	(52) /Sense of powerlessness
109	(52 1) /Sense of powerlessness/Critical incidents
110	(53) /On being a mature student
111	(53 1) /On being a mature student/Personal sacrifices
112	(53 2) /On being a mature student/Commuting
113	(53 3) /On being a mature student/Positive experience
114	(53 3 1) /On being a mature student/Positive experience/Lecturers
115	(53 4) /On being a mature student/Negative experience
116	(54) /Timetable
117	.An Emotional Journey
118	.An Emotional Journey.Critical turning point
119	.An Emotional Journey.Critical turning point. People who were of significant influence
120	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions
121	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Anxiety
122	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Disappointment
123	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Initial excitement
124	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Negative emotions
125	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Negative emotions. Feeling low after interview
126	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Negative emotions.Stress
127	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Nervousness
128	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Positive emotions
129	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Self doubt
130	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Self esteem
131	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Self esteem.Negative self esteem
132	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Self esteem.Positive self esteem
133	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Sense of achievement
134	.An Emotional Journey.Emotions.Sense of alienation
135	.An Emotional Journey.Stumbling blocks

136	.Emerging Identity
137	.Emerging Identity.Identity
138	.Emerging Identity.Identity in transition
139	.Emerging Identity.Identity in transition.Roles
140	.Emerging Identity.Identity in transition.Seeing oneself as teacher
141	.Emerging Identity.Reactions to being interviewed
142	.Emerging Identity.Thoughts about the future
143	.Emerging Identity.Thoughts about the future.Postgraduate studies
144	.Goals and Aspirations
145	.Goals and Aspirations.Desire to be a teacher
146	.Goals and Aspirations.Efforts to obtain place on B~Ed~
147	.Goals and Aspirations.Initial career decision
148	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits
149	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Determination
150	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Organised personality
151	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Organised personality. Need for structure
152	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Personal Initiative
153	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Positive disposition
154	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Positive feedback after practice interview
155	.Goals and Aspirations.Personality traits.Self esteem
156	.Interactions with the B~Ed~
157	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Alternative Education Experience
158	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Arts subjects
159	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Assessment
160	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Assessment.Grades
161	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Education subjects
162	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Irish
163	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Irish.Irish College
164	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Pedagogical option
165	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Study skills
166	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course
167	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Changing perspective
168	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Diploma in Religion
169	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Gap between theory and practice
170	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Lecture format for teaching
171	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Micro teaching
172	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Reflexive practice
173	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.The B~Ed Course.Structure of course
174	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Timetable
175	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP
176	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.lack of flexibility
177	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.Perspective about supervisors
178	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.Perspective changed
179	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.TP expenses
180	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.TP Grade
181	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.TP preparation
182	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.TP.Working with a partner
183	.Interactions with the B~Ed~.Workload
184	.Interactions with the College
185	.Interactions with the College.Academic staff

186	.Interactions with the College.Administrative staff
187	.Interactions with the College.Facilities
188	.Interactions with the College.Lack of flexibility
189	.Interactions with the College.Services
190	.Interactions with the College.Support from instituion
191	.Interactions with the College.The College
192	.Interactions with the College.The College.Close knit community
193	.Interactions with the College.The College.Physical structure of building
194	.Interactions with the College.The Interview
195	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections
196	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Fellow mature students
197	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Fellow mature students.Competitiveness
198	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Fellow students
199	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Finance
200	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Finance.Finance
201	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Metaphors
202	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student
203	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student.Commuting
204	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student.Negative experience
205	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student.Personal sacrifices
206	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student.Positive experience
207	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.On being a mature student.Positive experience.Lecturers
208	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Recommendations
209	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Sense of powerlessness
210	.Life of Mature Student~ Reflections.Sense of powerlessness.Critical incidents
211	.Previous Educational Experiences
212	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous educational experience
213	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous educational experience.Other courses
214	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous educational experience.Primary
215	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous educational experience.Secondary
216	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous educational experience.Third level
217	.Previous Educational Experiences.Previous teaching experience
218	.Significant Life Events
219	.Significant Life Events.Childcare
220	.Significant Life Events.Family support
221	.Significant Life Events.Personal circumstances
222	.Significant Life Events.Personal circumstances.Family details
223	.Significant Life Events.Personal circumstances.Interests
224	.Significant Life Events.Personal circumstances.Personal problems
225	.Significant Life Events.Personal circumstances.Relationships
226	.Significant Life Events.Previous life experience
227	.Significant Life Events.Previous work experience
228	.Significant Life Events.Previous work experience.Skills
229	.Significant Life Events.Travel
230	.Stepping into a New Identity
231	.Stepping into a New Identity.General impressions

- 232 .Stepping into a New Identity.Initial expectations
- 233 .Stepping into a New Identity.Motivation to keep going
- 234 .Stepping into a New Identity.Motivation to keep going.Dropped out of earlier courses
- 235 .Stepping into a New Identity.Motivation to keep going.Family support
- 236 .Stepping into a New Identity.Motivation to keep going.Friends
- 237 .Stepping into a New Identity.Motivation to keep going.Relationship
- 238 .Stepping into a New Identity.Perspective about education
- 239 .Stepping into a New Identity.Perspective about learning
- 240 .Stepping into a New Identity.Perspective about teaching