



Learning choices: a grounded theory study of adult returners

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**LEARNING CHOICES: A GROUNDED THEORY
STUDY OF ADULT RETURNERS**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This research is a grounded theory study of the learning choices of adult returners. For the purpose of this research, 'adult returner' has been defined as somebody who left school at the earliest opportunity who, after a period away from formal education, has identified a desire or a need to re-enter the system. Forty-three semi-structured, in-depth interviews and three focus groups have been conducted with a total of 58 adult returners at various stages of the returning process. Some adults had just started to think about returning to education, but had not identified an entry route, whereas others were progressing through their chosen entry route, whether in adult education, further education or higher education.

A process of theoretical sampling and comparative analysis, whereby data are jointly collected, coded and analysed, was adopted for this research. Using this method, themes and categories were inductively generated from the data. Processes, rather than static accounts, were taken into account by conducting a number of repeat interviews. By doing this it was possible to consider how learning choices might change as adults progress through their chosen entry route.

The aim of a grounded theory study is to develop a core-category and a number of related sub-categories. The core category for this research is 'parameters of choice' which describes how adults appear to have their choices framed by a number of parameters which effect the perceived degree of choice available to them. The related sub-categories which have been developed from the data are 're-balancing', 'self-assessment', 'becoming attuned' and 'awareness-raising'.

By describing these categories and illustrating how they relate to each other, the research goes beyond other studies which consider easily identified and articulated influences on choice, such as those studies which look at barriers to participation. This research suggests that adults do not consider their choices to be blocked by barriers, but instead see their choices as being framed by a number of constraints. If their first choice is not possible, they will go on to consider alternatives within their existing parameters, or wait until these parameters widen.

The research relates the findings to both theory and practice within the field of adult education and in relation to the notion of lifelong learning. In this way, the research serves to enrich at a theoretical and practical level the understanding of adult returners' learning choices.

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This research would not have been possible without the co-operation of the adult returners who agreed to be interviewed and give of their valuable time so generously. I extend my thanks to all these people and hope that they enjoyed taking part in the research.

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SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION
AND
BACKGROUND

Introduction

The topic for this research arose from several years working on two projects as a researcher in the field of adult education, both as a university employee and as a freelance researcher. The first project investigated the public perception of change in higher education and the second was concerned with age and participation in adult education. During the public perception research many adults were encountered who had no intention of returning to education - they reported having no interest in further and higher education, could not see the relevance or benefit to their lives, and felt that it was 'not for the likes of us' (Dawson, 1994b). The public perception research began at a time when there was much political discussion about increasing access and widening participation, especially for 'non-traditional' entrants, with colleges and universities undertaking new and innovative projects in an attempt to improve participation. However, it was found that these initiatives were not filtering through to most of the people at whom they were aimed. These people were unaware of the changes taking place, indeed, some of them mentioned such changes as being desirable, but as not existing during their lifetime, in their opinion. This began to raise questions about how information was disseminated and at whom these initiatives were targeted. Also, if adults were aware of some of the changes taking place in higher education, were they able to relate these changes to their own lives and did this influence their learning choices in any way?

At the time, the adults who appeared to be benefiting from the changes were those who had experience of further and higher education, either directly through their own participation, or indirectly through having a close friend or relative who had returned or was in the process of returning. These adults had returned to education through a variety of routes which began to raise questions about what had influenced their choices of entry route.

These questions became increasingly pertinent during the work on age and participation, as patterns began to emerge between age, subject choice and the postcode of adults. The figures suggested that participation levels within a red brick university adult education department were highest amongst the 60 - 70 year age group, that these people were enrolled mainly on arts courses and that they lived in postal areas dominated by expensive residences. This contrasted sharply with the adults at the local adult residential college who tended to be younger and from postal areas dominated by cheaper residences and council housing. The former group of people seemed to fall very much into the 'liberal' extra-mural tradition of continuing education, whereas the latter group reported taking up a course mainly for vocational reasons (Dawson, 1994c). From this research, further questions were raised about supply and demand, perception of personal attributes and skills and perception of institution. It was clear that the two institutions described above were targeting different sections of the population, but how had adults themselves heard about the institutions and come to perceive that the one they chose would be an appropriate place at which to study?

When the literature was reviewed in an attempt to obtain answers to the emerging questions, it was found that there had been a considerable amount of research into adult participation and motivation, adult learning and barriers to participation, but, at the time, no literature could be identified which pertained specifically to the learning choices of adults returning to education.

Also, it became evident that research into the learning choices of adult returners would be especially pertinent at a time when the development of a culture of lifelong learning has been prioritised on the political agenda. It would coincide with the establishment of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning and with the publication of the Kennedy and Dearing reports (Kennedy, 1997; NCIHE, 1997), both of which 'provide valuable policy steers for the development of lifelong learning' (Fryer, 1997: 1). It would coincide also with the publication of a national survey into

participation in adult learning (Sargant, 1997). In addition, this type of research is pertinent at a time when the number of mature students has more than doubled throughout the 1980s, an expansion which has taken place largely within the then polytechnic sector (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 41). Tight (1996: 131) points out that there is a lack of 'detailed' and 'narrowly focused' qualitative research which is concerned with the development of a 'comprehensive and successful theory' about the learning choices of adults.

Before the research began, there was a need to delineate the research population, describing very clearly who would be included in the study. Having reviewed the literature, and from the conclusions drawn from the research described above, it became clear that the researcher's real interest was not with adults who had participated in some form of education for most of their lives, many of whom were already educated to degree level or higher. Instead, it was with those adults who had returned to education later in life, after having had a period away from education since leaving school. However, even the use of the term 'adult' was problematic, as Rogers (1996: 34, original emphasis) points out:

A wide range of concepts is involved when we use the term 'adult.' The word can refer to a *stage* in the life cycle of the individual; he or she is first a child, then a youth, then an adult. It can refer to *status*, an acceptance by society that the person concerned has completed his or her noviate and is now incorporated fully into the community. It can refer to a social *sub-set*: adults as distinct from children. Or it can include a set of *ideals and values*: adulthood.

Add the word 'returner' to the word 'adult' and there are further complications.

Returning to what? The word 'returner' implies that an individual has been part of the system, left and returned later in life, and in this respect the term must imply returning to some type of formal education. However, some adults would argue that they have never been part of the education system, that they have felt alienated from a system which was seen to have little relevance to their lives, thus influencing them to leave at the earliest opportunity. Would they perceive themselves to be 'adult returners'? Certainly, during

the first few interviews the term was discarded when it was found that some adults were unable to identify with the term or relate it to themselves and their own lives. However, the term has gained prominence in the academic literature over the last decade, and was thus deemed to be appropriate for a publication such as this.

A NIACE discussion paper, in 1993, identified four broad overlapping groups of 'mature student' (aged over 21 on entry). Firstly, there were 'deferred beginners' who represented approximately one quarter of all mature entrants. These students tended to be in their twenties, studied full-time and received standard financial support from public sources. Secondly, there were 'returners' who were taken to be mainly women in their thirties or forties who had experienced some form of life transition, who also were supported financially by public sources. Thirdly, 'developers' were interested in developing their skills and career prospects, usually vocationally orientated and tended to be supported financially from private sources or by employers. The last category identified in the report were 'enrichers' who tended to be middle-aged and were interested in non-vocational higher education for personal development (NIACE, 1993). Although 'returners' are identified as a specific group, this category was felt to be too narrow for this research and a definition was needed which was flexible enough to incorporate all of the above categories to enable a comparison of learning choices within and between the different 'types' of returner. For the purpose of this research then, 'adult returners' are taken to be people who left school at the earliest opportunity having obtained few or no qualifications, who, after a period of time away from education, identify a desire or a need to re-enter the education system. 'A period of time away from education' was not specified in years and months, but left to the discretion of each adult - indeed, this appeared to be more of a state of mind than a specific time period, in that some adults may have only left school three years ago, but for them, the distance in time was huge in terms of what they saw as intellectual maturity and changing attitudes towards education.

During the planning stages of the research, it was felt that it would be important to interview adults at all stages of the 'returning' process so that changes in choice could be documented as people re-entered the education system and progressed through their chosen route. Thus, some adults had identified a desire or need to re-enter the education system, but, at the time of the interview, had not enrolled on a course. Others were interviewed once they had begun their course, either within further education or adult education. Finally, 'adult returners' within higher education were interviewed. Thus, this research is not concerned solely with 'adult returners' within higher education, but also with adults in further education and adult education.

It is important to note, also, that for the purposes of this research 'education' was defined as any type of formal course provided by an educational institution. Thus, the courses could take place at the institution or could be correspondence courses. They could be at a variety of levels from basic skills education to higher education, and a variety of lengths from short courses to three year degree study.

Finally, it was necessary to define what is meant by 'learning choices'. Initially, it was presumed that this would involve mainly 'subject' choice, but it soon became very clear that, unlike subject choice research with school pupils, it was not possible to focus specifically on this issue, especially as subject choice also involves institution, course and qualification choice. Also, it became apparent early in the research that *what* people decide to study is inextricably linked with *why* and *when* they return to education. It was for these reasons that the term 'learning choices' was adopted so that all these factors could be included in the analysis. Thus, 'learning choices' are taken to mean any thoughts, decision-making or choices which involve an individual's future learning.

Once the definitions of learning choices and adult returners had been established, the following aims and objectives were developed for the research.

Aim

To identify, describe and produce an analysis of the interacting factors which influence the learning choices of adult returners, and to develop associated theory.

Objectives

The research seeks to determine:

- The nature, extent and effect of psychological influences on choices, including a desire to achieve personal goals or meet individual needs.
- The nature, extent and effect of sociological influences on choices, including background, personal and social expectations, previous educational experience and social role.
- The nature and influence of individual perceptions of courses, institutions and subject, and how these relate to self-perception and concept of self.
- The influence on choice of a number of variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and social class.
- The role and possible influence of significant others on choice, such as advice and guidance workers, peers, relatives and employers.
- The nature and extent of possible influences on choice of available provision, institutional advertising and marketing.

- The nature and extent of possible influences on choice of mode of study, teaching methods and type of course.
- How and to what extent influencing factors change as adults re-enter and progress through their chosen route.

Section 1 of this thesis consists of Chapters 1 - 6 which set the scene for the research. Chapter 2 looks at the significant historical and political developments which have influenced and shaped educational provision for adults in Britain. Chapter 3 brings this historical account up to the present day, locating the discussion within the wider political and social context. Both these chapters relate the discussion to issues of adult decision-making and choice, raising themes which will be addressed in the analysis and conclusion of the thesis. Chapter 4 goes on to consider the development of research within adult education, relating this development to changing ideological and theoretical perspectives. Similarly, in Chapter 5, the subject choice research is reviewed within this framework. In Chapter 6, issues of individual decision-making and choice are discussed, with questions raised about the amount of freedom individuals have to make decisions, thus relating the discussion back to themes raised in Chapter 2.

Section 2 consists of Chapters 7 and 8 which provide a description and justification for the chosen methodology and research methods. In Section 3, Chapters 9 - 14 provide a discussion of the data analysis, under the core category and four related sub-categories which have emerged from the research. Section 4 consists of the summary and conclusion, with the grounded theory laid out in Chapter 15 and Chapter 16 providing the conclusion to the thesis. Section 5 contains the six appendices which include the recruitment leaflet and letter; personal profile form; description of participants and interview setting; description of each interview and two examples of interview transcripts.

CHAPTER 2:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF

EDUCATION FOR ADULTS:

HISTORICAL AND

POLITICAL OVERVIEW

The Development of Education for Adults:

Historical and Political Overview

Adult education is changing and evolving constantly. In order to understand the system as it appears to be in the latter part of the 1990s, it is necessary to review some of the important philosophical, ideological and political developments over the last few centuries which have informed and influenced educational debate and provision. These include the growing desirability for mass education and the possible reasons for this; the influence of industrialisation and the need for a better trained workforce; the growing importance of vocationalism. The discussion in this chapter will illustrate how changes such as these have impacted upon adult education provision, and how this in turn has a great deal of relevance to issues of individual learning choice. However, it must be noted from the outset that:

...all historical accounts are, of course, partisan, selective and contested, and any question about how the story of English education is to be told is itself a political question. (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 72)

These authors go on to point out that, up until the eighteenth century, the educational philosophy of Plato had an enormous influence on the evolution of education in the western world. In *The Republic*, Plato laid out his vision of a just and good society, which, he believed, had to fulfil three basic needs - the economic need, the military need and the administrative need. His system of education was geared towards finding out which members of society had the most appropriate attributes and abilities to fulfil one of these roles. Individuals would proceed through a series of five stages, only moving onto the next if they passed the former. Thus, only those who successfully completed four stages would go on to be trained in the fifth stage of political leadership. Plato believed that knowledge of what constitutes a just and good society can only be taught to, and judged by, an intellectual élite, and this élite should be able to decide what is best for others (Plato, 1974). His ideas, therefore, were about sustaining an aristocratic élite, the implication being that an individual's place within society was determined from the

initial, continuous phase of education, and that there was no chance of moving between roles once this initial phase was complete.

These ideas began to be challenged in the eighteenth century during what has been termed 'the Age of Enlightenment'. This was a period:

...of intellectual ferment leading up to the French Revolution, which was distinguished by a fundamental questioning of traditional modes of thought and social organisation, and sought to replace these with an exclusive reliance on human reason in determining social practices. (Jary and Jary, 1991: 11)

One influential philosopher of this time was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 - 78). He believed that in pre-social times, humans lived according to nature, and that they only became entrapped as societies were formed. This was mainly because the politically powerful used social and political institutions to oppress the politically weaker. For Rousseau, the only way to overcome this was to make the consent of all members of society as the one and only source of political control. Thus, this would constitute a good society as all people would be involved in its creation, and the only way to enable people to become involved was through education. However, this had to be done away from the corrupting influence of existing societal structures so that individuals would be able to capture their natural innocence (Rousseau, 1968; 1974).

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 36) point out that both of these ideas still have great influence on educational debate today. Plato's ideas can be seen in schooling when discriminating between pupils by age, aptitudes and abilities, and with the justification for maintaining separate élite schools. Rousseau's ideas can be seen in the recent 'progressive' conceptions of education. Also, it could be argued that these ideas can still be seen within adult education, with 'liberal' university adult education maintaining the élite traditions of passing on 'higher culture' on the one hand, and adult educators who concentrate on the importance of self-directed learning and student autonomy on the other.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century political philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham (1746 - 1832) and James Mill (1773 - 1836) concerned themselves with how Britain could become democratic, still maintain individual liberty and prevent a type of 'mob rule' by the masses which they feared could replace the present aristocratic rule. These philosophers believed in the basic utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, advocating a form of 'protective' democracy through which this could be achieved (Bowring, 1938; Mill, 1937). However, they based their work on the basic assumption that human beings are exclusively driven by the desire to maximise their own happiness, an assumption which was rejected by Mill's son, J.S. Mill (1806 - 93). He believed that individuals could only achieve happiness if they were sufficiently morally and intellectually developed to enable them to rationally understand and evaluate their own desires and needs. However, J. S. Mill was still fearful of mob rule, proposing a type of 'representative' democracy where political decisions were made only by suitable people, believing that 'people ought to be masters, but that they are masters who must employ servants more skilful than themselves' (quoted in Arblaster, 1984: 280). To make sure that the country was run by the wisest people he advocated a system of plural votes for the more intelligent and better educated, and single votes for the masses. He was a great believer in the educative role of participatory democracy, but could not reconcile this with his fear of mob rule. J.S Mill is often considered to be the person who founded modern liberalism, with his ideas about a better educated, intelligent leadership finding favour with the nineteenth century system which already had this type of education system in place (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 48 - 51).

These philosophers were putting forward their ideas in a time of rapid economic and cultural change as a result, in part, of the Industrial Revolution which began in the eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth century. Indeed, Fieldhouse (1996: 1 - 2) believes that a major turning point in the development of British adult education coincided with the Industrial Revolution. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a

freedom by pointing out that, although the 1870 Education Act served to restrict individual freedom by requiring children to attend school, by educating people it was freeing them from the ignorance which had previously restricted their freedom (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 51 - 52).

In terms of adult education, despite some of the powerful élite believing that educating poorer labourers was dangerous and not good for them, some employers began to recognise the importance of having a skilled workforce, as, with industrialisation, came a greater range of occupations which required higher levels of education and training (Jarvis, 1985: 21). As schools, at this time, had not provided an adequate schooling, employers, employees and philanthropists shared an interest in developing adult education. Fieldhouse (1996: 391) believes that other reasons for employers and philanthropists improving and increasing educational provision included incorporation of the workers into bourgeois society, alleviation of the alienating affects of industrialisation and to assist in the struggle for social justice. On the other hand, alternative interpretations include a misguided notion of cultural superiority by the élite or a need to ease the conscience of the powerful and wealthy, especially because of the appalling living and working conditions which the working classes had to endure. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 79 - 84) believe that, at this time, the élite used education as a way of 'gentling the masses' and that educational policy reflected the Victorian obsession with authority and power and dealing with the education of the poor. They were interested in raising a new race of working people who were respectful, cheerful, hard-working, loyal and religious. Negative characteristics were attributed to the working classes, such as apathetic, ignorant and status-seeking, and by blaming the position of the working classes to themselves, educationalists were able to justify a system of education which taught them how to accept their position in society.

The American philosopher, John Dewey (1859 - 1952) was concerned with the consequences of major intellectual, cultural and economic transformations for social and

economic life at the end of the nineteenth century. Of particular importance to him were Darwin's theory of evolution, the rapid growth of modern science and industrialisation. He was concerned about the disintegration of traditional forms of community life, such as the separation between home and work and the new division of labour which, Dewey felt, were no longer conducive to the spirit of co-operation which had characterised pre-industrial life. Also, rapid industrialisation had led to greater class divisions which Dewey felt could only hinder the development of democracy. However, technological progress created more positive possibilities as they provided a way of controlling nature which could improve the way people live together. By recognising the role of education in reproducing existing patterns of cultural, economic and political life, Dewey realised that there had to be a great democratic transformation of the education system to overcome this. To Dewey, the dualism of liberal and vocational education was legitimised by a profoundly anti-democratic educational philosophy which saw the two as being separate, one for the élite and the other for the masses (Dewey, 1916).

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, it was becoming increasingly obvious to many social reformers, intellectuals and politicians that, despite the rhetoric of liberal democracy, the Industrial Revolution had increased the division between workers and the élite, that individual freedom was exercised only by the powerful and wealthy. These contradictions between individualism, democracy and an unrestrained market economy led to an erosion of the classical conception of liberal democracy towards a type of social democracy where state intervention could be justified on the grounds of addressing societal inequalities. A more positive role of education was conceived in which individuals could be educated to participate more actively in the civil, political and cultural life of their society (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 93).

Fieldhouse (1996: 3) points out that this ideological shift from self-help individualism to social collectivism began to change the nature of further education, adult education and

higher education. This need for a greater social collectivism was enhanced by a growing fear of foreign competition and the increased recognition of the need for a skilled work-force. This led to the creation of the Technical Education Committees at the end of the 1880s which placed training firmly on the adult education agenda.

Also, adult education policy, at this time, was influenced by the Benthamites and later by the Fabians who wanted to establish a bureaucracy of experts who, although subject to ultimate public control by Parliament, could remain detached and 'administer publicly owned industries and welfare state solely for the good of society as a whole' (Fieldhouse, 1996: 4). However, Savage (1983) notes that members of the civil service were far from neutral, especially in terms of education policy. For example, between 1919 and 1939, 60% of the 179 administrative class male officials who worked in the Board of Education had attended Oxford and Cambridge. They played a key role in supporting policies and practices which emphasised the importance education placed on maintaining a small meritocratic élite, viewing education as academic and non-vocational, and which involved training the mind and moulding the character.

Although Trade Unions and other radical working class movements remained on the fringe of adult education, there was, in the early 1900s, an increase in small, left-wing organisations within the work-force. An increased fear of mass unrest led to the powerful élite legitimising such activities by incorporating them into the mainstream and providing educational opportunities through such organisations as the Labour Representative Committee which later became the Labour Party. Fieldhouse (1996: 4) believes that although organisations such as the Labour Representative Committee were set up initially to combat the increasing threat of socialist and Marxist ideas, it was actually the first world war and the consequent rise of nationalism which did the most to combat these left-wing movements.

In 1906, a reconstructed Liberal Party returned to power with their view of liberal democracy which was built upon the notions of positive freedom and social justice. They introduced a free places scheme into secondary education so that children of working class parents might have access to some of the best schools which had been previously reserved for boys with wealthy, upper class parents. It was accepted, at this time, that members of the working classes, if they had the intellectual ability and motivation, could rise above their station, both during their initial education and through further education. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) had been founded three years earlier in 1903 as the Association for the Higher Education of Working Men, embracing these new ideas of positive freedom and social justice. It started out as an organising body to promote university extension lectures for working class people and, although the WEA and universities were partners at the beginning of the twentieth century, they began to drift apart, establishing themselves as separate adult education bodies during the inter-war period (Fieldhouse, 1996: 394). As the WEA began to promote its own provision, the universities developed their extra-mural departments. Watson and Taylor suggest that the extra mural tradition at this time was dominated by two concepts: 'learning for learning's sake' and 'learning for social purpose', neither of which included the importance of certification:

In neither context was there much room for certification (the assignment of credit); the first stressed the importance of personal development and the sheer joy of learning, and the second the wider social and political goals of emancipation and empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. (Watson & Taylor, 1998: 62)

After the war, a small adult education sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee was set up to consider international, imperial and domestic reconstruction. It was concluded that, for the nation to recover economically and for the many new voters, including women, to properly exercise their right to vote, the creation of a more intelligent public opinion was necessary. Adult education was seen to be the way to do this and it was suggested that a uniform system should be systematically spread over the

country (Fieldhouse, 1996: 5). Non-vocational adult education as a public service, Arthur believes, was strengthened considerably by the publication of the 1919 Report by the Ministry of Reconstruction (Arthur, 1992: 358). However, the depression of the twenties and thirties, and the second world war, meant that little was actually done about the recommendations put forward in the report. Also, increasing economic difficulties, coupled with no real commitment to improve adult education, meant that the far-reaching clauses of the 1918 English and Welsh Education Act in which it was stated that part-time education should be compulsory for school-leavers up to the age of eighteen, were set aside in favour of the clauses relating to schooling (Bell, 1996: 159).

The inter-war period was characterised by the development of WEA tutorial classes, extension lectures, adult schools, residential colleges and voluntary organisations which provided a wide variety of adult education opportunities. Arthur (1992: 358) suggests that, at this time, the term ‘adult education’ was used in a ‘pioneering sense of an adult education movement promoting liberal education for social reform’.

Within higher education a significant landmark occurred with the outbreak of the Second World War when the number of full-time students fell from just over 50,000 in 1938-39 to 35,648 in 1943. Radio and technical expertise were required urgently for the war effort and the government, who were concerned about these falling numbers, introduced a system of two-tier bursaries to support students in relevant subject areas (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 84). Prior to this, financial support for students had been obtained from a small number of state scholarships, endowments, special funds, family and parents. At this time, the majority of students entering higher education were young males who studied in universities close to their homes. The system of student financial support was expanded in 1946 when the government introduced supplementary awards which met both maintenance costs and fees, although many students received this support partly as a loan rather than a grant.

Another significant landmark occurred in 1944 when the Coalition Government introduced a new Education Act which stated that primary, secondary and further education was to be the responsibility of Local Education Authorities and that further education was to include full-time and part-time opportunities in both training and recreational activities. In Section 7 of the Act, Local Education Authorities were charged to ‘contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community.’ In Section 4 the notion of ‘education as leisure-time occupation’ was introduced as something distinct from goal orientated and purposeful learning. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 11) believe that these reforms were designed to:

...promote equality of educational opportunity and so help the eradication of those social and economic inequalities that were preventing the majority of people from exercising their democratic freedoms.

However, adult education remained the optional extra and was seen to be a topping up process which was left to the discretion of individual adults. Bell (1996: 159) believes that, although historical perception favours extra mural classes and WEA provision, the majority of participation was in night classes to top up apprenticeships with theory, learn a language, top up household skills, improve on schooling or follow a personal interest.

However, despite Labour commitment to implementing the Act, the outbreak of the Cold War in 1947-8 meant that much of the money ear-marked for social reconstruction went on the development of nuclear weapons and the fight against communism. A Conservative Government returned to power in October, 1951, and as economic problems increased with the decline of Britain as a world power and with increased arms spending, the Ministry of Education froze grants for 1952-3 and threatened a ten percent cut the following year (Fieldhouse, 1996: 6).

However, as the fifties and sixties progressed, full employment and higher earnings led to increased demand for home-produced goods, and this, along with a decrease in military expenditure, contributed to a boom in consumption and home ownership. Optimism ran

high once again and this growing confidence in the economy led to an increase in reports recommending educational expansion, such as the Robbins Report. At this time, education 'was believed to have a positive role to play in the economic, political and social advance of society' (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 118). As a consequence of this, and possibly due to the increasing finance available to students, the number of students in higher education was growing rapidly. In 1946 - 47 there were 68,456 full-time students, whereas the number had risen to over 138,000 in 1964 - 65 (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 84). Patterns of study were beginning to shift, with students moving away from home and studying elsewhere. Demand was rapidly outstripping supply, with eight students chasing each university place. This was not surprising, as Watson and Taylor (1998: 84) note:

The universal availability of relatively generous student finance, and the opportunity for bright middle-class and lower middle-class adolescents to spend three years away at university, were obviously key elements in this expansion of demand.

The Robbins Committee was established to look into this expansion and review the development of education, and the report from the committee is commonly recognised as a landmark for change in higher education (Robbins, 1963). Wagner (1995: 15-18) believes that, in the five years after the publication of the report, six major changes took place which altered considerably the structure of higher education in Britain. Firstly, there was a rapid expansion of student numbers and funding. Secondly, new, campus-based universities were created. Thirdly, colleges of advanced technology were transformed into universities, and, fourthly, polytechnics and the Open University were established. In establishing polytechnics as a group of institutions which now had a national identity, the local influence of governance and planning was reduced. Fifthly, the Council for National Academic Awards was established, along with the new Department of Science and Technology which marked more of a 'hands-on' approach to the financing of universities. Lastly, there was a substantial increase in overseas student fees.

Robbins proposed that students should be able to study a wider range of subjects which would create a broader knowledge, rather than study one subject and create an in-depth knowledge about that one area. Although much of this broadening out has been undertaken by the old polytechnics and the Open University, there is still, even today, an acceptance of the single honours degree as the most valuable and prestigious award. Burgess (1981: 3) believed that the dominance of single subjects is, in part, to do with the organisation of universities into subject departments or faculties of allied departments which occurred after reforms that took place in the late nineteenth century. In an OECD report on 'interdisciplinarity' it was noted that the different disciplines were the basis of the organisation of universities into autonomous sections and that they provided a convenient way to break down knowledge, teaching and research into their component parts. The report pointed out that to meddle with this was to meddle with the whole structure of the university (OECD, 1972). Indeed, Burgess (1981: 5) felt that attempts to increase student choice during the seventies through 'modules' and 'options' had failed because of the 'resilience of the subject department.' He went on to note:

It is clear that existing subject disciplines are ways of organising knowledge from particular points of view. They were so organised to solve the problem of their practitioners. But these problems may no longer actually be those even of existing practitioners, let alone those of students or potential students. The presentation of knowledge as bodies of organised facts is a way of ensuring its unhelpfulness to most people. (Burgess, 1981: 14).

The overall philosophy behind the changes outlined in the Robbins Report appeared to be that separation was more appropriate - separating the different type of institutions which could offer different courses for different sections of the population. These changes took place 'in a mood of optimism and confidence' which was, Wagner (1995: 17) suggests, due to the fact that there were plenty of funds available for the expansion, both for recurrent and capital expenditure, which, he points out, has not been the case in recent years.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, during a period of economic growth and increasing public expenditure on education, higher education expanded enormously. Neave (1976) suggested that the reasons for this were a post-war population ‘bulge’, a need for highly trained employees, including personnel within higher education and growing demands for higher education amongst groups previously excluded. However, Watson and Taylor (1998, *introduction*, xiv) point out that in practice Robbins, rather than increase access for under-represented groups:

...perpetuated a system with an essentially élite structure, recruitment and culture, based upon full-time study (usually away from home) for 18 - 21 year-olds’.

Nevertheless, the authors go on to point out that there were positive benefits from moving towards a mass system of higher education as it demonstrated that ‘the traditional élite university system had no monopoly of learning and knowledge’ and that the ‘assumptions both of exclusivity and of rigid boundaries were shown to be false’ (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 63).

However, the rate of expansion began to decline during the mid 1970s as previous optimism turned to pessimism with the declining national economy caused, in part, by the oil crisis of 1973. Rising inflation and the long-term decline of British manufacturing exacerbated these economic problems. Also, with rising unemployment and attempts to reduce the power of the unions, industrial unrest intensified, culminating with the introduction of the three day working week and the miners’ strike. These problems produced a backlash against the egalitarian principles which had driven education policy through the 1960s, with social democracy seen to be the cause of the loss of British greatness and economic decline.

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 20 -21) point out that the dawn of the Thatcher era heralded a shift away from the more humanistic and egalitarian social democratic ideology which had dominated the 1960s and early 1970s to the more utilitarian political ideology of

Thatcherism. This shift in ideology was seen to be a political issue, so that the agenda that had previously dealt with 'educational problems' was radically altered. In the 1960s, the issues of class, race and gender inequalities had been high on this agenda, but in the 1980s, major political problems were defined in terms of economic need and moral decline. The political discourse thus shifted to talk of market forces, individual responsibility and economic freedom. In this way egalitarianism could be portrayed as the cause of the problems, rather than as the solution to the problems. Instead of inequalities being viewed as political, economic and social problems which could be addressed through a series of Reform Acts, they now began to be viewed as individual problems which had to be addressed through individual mobility and motivation. Policies were thus designed to vocationalise education and raise moral standards. Educational discourse moved away from concepts embodying notions of social justice, such as recurrent education, social equity, decentralisation and participation in planning (Tennant, 1997: 40) towards an educational discourse which became associated with economic decline and failure in which education was seen to be an integral part of the economic system.

At this time there was much political debate about the need for education to become more responsive to both the economic needs of society and the labour requirements of industry. Again, the debates centred around the importance and value of 'liberal' and 'vocational' education. The effect upon adult education was that the Government used its influence to increase the amount of vocational training on offer in an attempt to aid economic recovery (Fieldhouse, 1996: 8). Arthur (1992: 358) suggests that, as a consequence, adult vocational training and formal second chance education were, at this time, accepted by many people and developed as a means for individual and social enhancement.

Economic uncertainties and instability made way for a political discourse which emphasised the authority of basic institutions which were seen to enhance stability - the

family, religion and the state. Right-wing politicians began to build a structured and coherent case around the 'old ideas of choice and freedom, excellence and quality, tradition and stability, authority and respect' (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 129). However, growing unemployment led to a dramatic rise in poverty, homelessness and crime, with the working classes and minority ethnic groups affected most severely, which contributed to the race riots in the early eighties. Despite the Thatcher Government attempting to tackle these problems by creating a culture of enterprise in which individuals were encouraged to help themselves and return to the old fashioned values of the Victorians, unemployment was not reduced and instead a socially deprived 'underclass' was created. Again, returning to the nineteenth century class education system, vocational and technical education was seen to be the way forward to the detriment of other forms of further and adult education (Fieldhouse, 1996: 8).

The implications for individual choice were great, especially with the establishment of such organisations as Training and Enterprise Councils in 1989, a move which devolved responsibility for training from the state to public and private providers. Training became linked to benefits. The long term unemployed were 'encouraged' to take part in vocational training with the offer of financial benefits, or if they refused, financial penalties. However, the choice of training could be limited and was often inappropriate to the needs or wants of individuals, being prescribed by advisors who were under pressure to reduce the number of people registered as unemployed. Providing this type of training became a lucrative business for organisations and there was a danger that the standard of training offered could be of poor quality. Also, many individuals resented being sent on courses which they saw as impractical and irrelevant and about which they had very little choice.

In 1988, the Thatcher Government passed the Education Reform Act which stated, in section 120, that 'it shall be the duty of every local education authority to secure provision for their area of adequate facilities for further education.' However, the term

‘adequate’ was ill-defined and open to interpretation. All 116 Local Education Authorities had to submit detailed plans to the Department of Education and Science concerning the future of further education in their boroughs, but this only applied to large further education colleges, which meant that many of the smaller institutions providing adult education were left marginalised (Arthur, 1992: 360). Also, the 1988 Education Reform Act reduced the powers of the LEAs and, Fieldhouse (1996: 392) believes, contributed to the ‘growing fragmentation and destruction of a comprehensive adult education system’.

Thus, by the end of the twentieth century, Britain had moved from an industrialising society to an industrialised society and on to a post-industrialised society. During this time the state seems to have come full circle from self-help individualism through to social collectivism and the development of the welfare state, and on to the enterprise culture and back to individualism and the reduction of the welfare state. These changes have had a profound influence on the development and provision of education for adults and may be characterised, as Fieldhouse (1996: 392) notes, by the adult education *movement* being transformed into an adult education *service*. If this is the case, the change has a great deal of significance in terms of at whom adult education is targeted and in terms of adults’ expectations of education. For example, one interpretation of this is that if the system has become a service, it might be targeted at those who can most afford it and succeed in the system, thus improving the reputation and marketability of institutions. Students become customers and it is the duty of staff to make sure that customers obtain value for money. If they do not obtain this, they can appeal, receive their money back and move to an alternative provider. Disempowered adults who may have been targeted within the adult education movement might no longer be considered viable within an adult education service.

Bell (1996: 158 - 159) suggests that the reason why adult education is commonly viewed as an extra luxury for which individuals should pay, is not only the result of, but also the

reason for, the fact that policy makers have never marked it out as being of primary concern. In 1982 the report of the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, *Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice*, called for English and Welsh institutional provision to be brought more into line with the provision in many European countries. In this report it was suggested that England and Wales should regard all education as something to be planned as a continuing process throughout life, advocating a national system of continuing education. However, this was discarded by Keith Joseph, the Secretary of State for Education, and the council was abolished.

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 108) believe that the problems faced by English education stem, in part, from a lack of coherence, a preoccupation with the importance of social class and a heavy reliance on voluntarism. All of these factors have meant that the issue of how educational institutions in a democracy should be organised and controlled has never been properly addressed. Also, the authors claim that one of the reasons why élite education in Britain continues to flourish is that the distinction between ‘liberal’ and ‘vocational’ education is rarely critically questioned. However, changes in funding since 1992 have meant that the distinction between liberal and vocational education has become more of a debated issue recently. As Tight (1996: 30) points out, the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘vocational’ are ‘imprecise, emotional and ideological’. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 194) believe that maintaining the distinction serves to preserve aristocratic educational assumptions and traditions and that education in a democracy should be both liberal and vocational, liberal in the sense that individuals should have their capacities raised to be both happy and socially useful, and vocational in the sense that they are prepared for everyday life. The authors conclude by saying that British education needs to move towards some form of liberal vocationalism, which is not a narrowly defined vocational training, but an education which enables individuals to act autonomously and reflectively within the labour market.

A political and historical overview of this type can only be brief and does not do justice to many of the changes, movements, initiatives and policy documents which have been introduced over the last few centuries. For example, the development in community education and the adult literacy campaign are just two areas that are worth some mention. The next chapter will go on to provide the social and political context of this research, that is, what is happening at this present time within adult education, social policy and related developments, thus bringing this historical overview up to the present day.

CHAPTER 3:

BRITISH EDUCATION FOR

ADULTS IN THE 1990s:

POLITICAL AND

SOCIAL CONTEXT

British Education for Adults in the 1990s:

Political and Social Context

Chapter 2 described how, during the seventies, a shift in ideology meant that the agenda which had dealt previously with 'educational problems' was radically altered so that educational discourse became part of political discourse. In this way education was seen to be an integral part of the economic system and, as such, was linked much more closely with economic decline and the hope of economic regeneration. During the eighties and nineties, Carr and Hartnett (1996: 11) point out that the Thatcher Government attempted to reverse the trend towards a more democratic and socially just education system back towards a system which emphasised individual freedom and *laissez-faire* economics. This was a move towards creating a non-interventionist state which would be sceptical about using education to further democracy:

In the kind of liberal society being promoted, 'democracy' would be primarily valued as a political mechanism for protecting individual freedom and the future of education would be determined by the only mechanism which can safeguard and preserve individual liberty: the market. (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 11)

The implications of Conservative policy in the 1990s for student choice depend on ideological standpoint. Free market economists might believe that education will react to student demand, that competition will raise standards and that supply will meet demand, thus providing courses that people really want and in which they are interested. Social democrats would argue that education would only be available to those who can afford it and mean less choice for those who cannot. Provision would move away from non-cost effective areas and into more cost-effective, bigger profit margin areas. Also, less popular, low attendance courses will cease to run, thus restricting student choice and undermining much of the hard work that has been put in with under represented groups. Indeed, a study referred to in Chapter 4 (Clenell et al. 1987) concluded that choice of subject tended to reflect the pattern of current provision within different institutions. Social democrats would question whether it is possible to widen access when education

is driven by the market. In 1994, a committee was set up to advise the Further Education Funding Council on widening participation. Chaired by Helena Kennedy, QC, the committee concluded that 'market principles alone will not widen participation', and that competition between institutions may inhibit widening participation as some institutions compete for those students who will succeed, or, more importantly, who they *perceive* will succeed, which tend to be the 'traditional' students from white, middle-class backgrounds (Kennedy, 1997: 35) .

These issues of student choice and individual freedom were central to the ideological thinking of the Conservatives. However, freedom to choose in higher education has not led to individuals making choices which coincide with vocational and economic policies, as Watson and Taylor (1998: 27-28) point out:

Associated with the market ideology of Conservative thinking on higher education was the primacy of student choice. However, as in many other contexts, this supposed commitment to populist democracy conflicted with the government's ideological agenda. As it emerged that student choice and governmental preference for choice of study were imperfectly aligned (as in the preference of the majority for arts and humanities over applied science and technology), a new term of art was coined: 'informed choice'. A problem is that, instrumental though students may be when choosing options in post-compulsory education ... their choices will rarely match central assumptions in human resource planning.

Part of the problem, the authors believe, is due to the 'uneasy relationship' between marketing and advice and guidance in institutions of further and higher education, suggesting that the needs of the institutions outweigh the needs of individual students. Indeed, a study referred to in Chapter 4 (Keddie, 1980) points out that this is the case in terms of the curriculum as it tends to reflect a providers model rather than a needs model, in which the interests, experiences and political motivation of those who control the curriculum are responded to rather than the perceived needs of adults.

Alongside, or as a result of, this shift in ideology, have been a number of changes in society which, the Conservative Government believed, emphasised the importance of

their vocationally-orientated policies. These changes included an ageing workforce and rapid technological and scientific advances. If British companies were to compete successfully in the global market, they would need to make sure that their workers received constant up-dating of their skills to take full advantage of technological progress. Also, there were changes in graduate employment patterns such as the growth of the financial and service sectors. Jobs were less secure, harder to obtain and graduates were likely to change their employer more frequently than had occurred in the past. Again, the Conservatives believed, if individuals were to succeed in this changing market, the emphasis was on constant updating of technological and personal transferable skills.

One positive outcome of the rapid technological changes and alterations in working patterns outlined above, is perhaps that there will be less acceptance of the importance of the single honours degree from élite institutions. Tennant (1997: preface, viii) points out that we are moving towards a postmodern interpretation of society where:

...fragmentations, diversity, difference, and multiple identities are replacing cohesion, convergence, sameness, and singular identities in our working, civic and private lives.

He believes that the demarcation between formal and non-formal are breaking down and that new inter-disciplinary groups are being set up which challenge old disciplines.

Indeed, Sir Ron Dearing endorses new and interdisciplinary projects in an attempt to break down rigid disciplinary boundaries, following the call by Robbins for more breadth in the curricula and courses. However, there still exist many of these élite and powerful institutions, such as those found in law, which continue to emphasise the importance of single honours degrees from Oxbridge. Nevertheless, advancing technology opens up many possibilities for developments in education, especially in areas such as distance learning, work-based learning and the University for Industry. However, the implications for teaching and learning are wide. Culturally, such technology could break down barriers as adults would not have to attend a university which is so culturally different to

their own environment. However, equipment is expensive and will be difficult for those on low incomes to acquire. Also, many employers still do not invest in equipment or training for manual workers as they are influenced by financial reasons and the fact that the perception still exists that these people do not want, or require, this type of education and training. Indeed, one third of all employees say that they have never been offered training by their employers (Fryer, 1997: 2).

This ideological shift and political thinking of the New Right led to a number of significant changes in the early 1990s. In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act once again reduced the significance of LEAs which, Fieldhouse (1996: 392) believes, contributed to reduced resources, staff cuts, higher fees, reduced programmes and loss of flexibility and variety. Also, it did away with the binary divide and set up the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, university adult education had developed in an unfocused and ad hoc way, with a gradual move towards vocationally orientated continuing education and the increasing importance of certification in the seventies and eighties. The approval of the Government for this type of education was given in the way of increased funding in the 1980s, and after the Further and Higher Education Act, the HEFC stated that there would be little funding available for university liberal adult education unless it was accredited and led to a university award. Opportunities in higher education for adult returners traditionally had been either in extra mural departments or in access courses in the former polytechnics. This provision was not evenly spread geographically and many courses were not open socially and culturally to a large amount of the population. Most part-time adult returners, therefore, studied on a non-credit, non-award basis (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 39). However, in 1995, the funding councils required the mainstreaming and accreditation of continuing education (CE) provision which had previously been non-credit bearing. There was strong resistance to this move from tutors and students alike, especially as many of the students were older, already qualified, retired and learning 'for learning's sake' (Dawson, 1994a). These

students felt, in 1994, that their choices would be severely curtailed if courses were accredited. However, Watson and Taylor (1998: 40) believe that mainstreaming potentially 'represents a most important access initiative' as it enables universities to provide certificate, diploma, first degree and masters programmes specifically for CE students. Nevertheless, they do question whether these changes will actually bring CE into the mainstream and thus help to change pedagogic action and HE culture, believing that the extent to which this happens is likely to vary between institutions.

Another significant change in the 1990s was the development and endorsement of National Education and Training Targets (NETTs), later to become National Targets for Education and Training (NTET). These have the overall aim of improving the UK's 'international competitiveness by raising standards and attainment levels in education and training to world class levels'. This would be achieved by ensuring, firstly, that all employers were encouraged to invest in the development of their employees; secondly, that access to training and educational opportunities is available to all individuals; and thirdly, that education and training develops 'self-reliance, flexibility and breadth' (NACETT, 1997). In the Kennedy Report (1997) it is made clear that if the National Targets for Education and Training are to be met, then there needs to be an expansion of further education as well as higher education, in addition to more effective preparation and development of disciplinary knowledge and generic, transferable skills.

In addition to the development of national targets, the notion of 'lifelong learning' has grown in popularity throughout Europe, leading to the designation of 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Watson and Taylor (1998: 22) suggest that, as with the development of national targets, it has been the vocational and economic arguments which have dominated the European Union view of lifelong learning, with the importance of investing in the skills of members of the population viewed as a formative element in the international economy. For example, the centrally promoted priorities included the importance of providing a smooth transition for young people to their

working lives, and developing the ability to adapt to a changing working environment; the promotion of vocational training to enhance personal development, and motivating adults, in particular those from under-represented groups, to take part in lifelong learning; and promoting links between business and education. Each member state was allocated funds to develop nationally based projects. In the UK the five themes identified were adults in work, higher education, adult education, issues around information and guidance and young people who were preparing for work.

In terms of its influence on higher education, the ideological shift of the Conservative Government led to a gradual, albeit tentative, acceptance that the system is part financed by non-public sources such as individual students and employers, with more movement towards vocationally orientated provision and partnerships (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 18). However, most of this movement has taken place within the new universities, with some of the older universities still resistant to such change. Writing in 1981, Burgess (1981: 5-7) distinguished between the two 'dominant traditions' of higher education which still have relevance today, despite the removal of the binary divide. The first is the 'autonomous tradition' which:

...sees higher education as an activity with its own values and purposes, affecting the rest of society obliquely and as a kind of bonus.

It is an 'aloof, academic, conservative and exclusive' tradition in which academics concern themselves with the 'preservation, extension and dissemination of knowledge' and the pursuit of truth or excellence. In this tradition change is difficult to implement, especially in terms of introducing new subjects or new teaching methods. Also, many sections of the population are excluded from these institutions on the grounds of maintaining standards and academic excellence.

The second is the 'service' tradition which 'explicitly expects education to serve individuals and society and defends it in these terms'. It is a 'responsive, vocational,

innovating and open' tradition which responds to the needs of society. Students are not excluded on the grounds that they are not properly prepared, with 'maturity' and 'experience' accepted as an alternative to academic qualifications. Institutions within this tradition:

...must accommodate growth, must accept new kinds of students, offer them new kinds of courses, create new structures of study, pioneer new forms of governance, recruit new kinds of staff. (Burgess, 1981: 7)

Ten years before the removal of the binary divide, Burgess was concerned about what he termed 'academic drift' (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 12, believe a better term is 'mission convergence') where institutions within the service tradition were intentionally attempting to adopt some of the more 'prestigious' characteristics of institutions within the 'autonomous tradition'. For Burgess (1981: 8), this drift was inevitable:

Their chief object (like that of everyone else) is the good life. In unequal systems, the less favoured tend to interpret this (sometimes wrongly) in terms of the situation of the fortunate. Universities explicitly have status in the eyes of the government and the public.

In 1992, with the removal of the binary divide, the criteria with which institutions were judged if they wished to adopt university status, were based upon many of the characteristics of the autonomous tradition. Indeed, prior to 1992, there had been a:

...mad rush by certain institutions to meet the numerical and other criteria for polytechnic and then university status, the consequences of which are still unfolding in both funding and reputational terms. (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 10)

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 12) point out that expanding education served the pro-democracy movement by opening up education provision to previously excluded groups, but, as the new educational institutions were still embedded in, and judged by, those elitist criteria, they failed at serving the needs of previously excluded groups by

creating an alienating environment and assessment procedures which favoured the élite.

Official discourse of education is firmly entrenched in the past:

...education, like democracy, has evolved in such a way that old aristocratic educational institutions - such as the ancient universities and the élite public schools - have not only survived but continue to provide the criteria of success for the new state educational institutions that have been created. Thus modern universities largely imitate the structure and culture of the old universities; polytechnics define their own success by becoming 'universities'. (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 12)

Indeed, Watson and Taylor (1998: 39) point out that the rapid expansion which has taken place in higher education over the last fifteen years has occurred unevenly in traditional universities, and that much of this expansion has been with students of similar backgrounds and age profiles. This point was highlighted by Bob Fryer at the 1998 UACE conference when he pointed out that many of the recent changes in education benefited only those who were in positions of power or who already have been through a significant amount of formal education. For example, in 1991, 1 in 3 individuals from professional backgrounds had degrees, whereas in 1996 - 97 this had risen to 2 in 3. At the same time, in 1991, only 7% of individuals from unskilled households had degrees and in 1996 - 97 this figure had fallen to 2% (Bob Fryer, UACE Conference, 1998). Similarly, in two national surveys of participation in adult learning, it was found that in 1990, 21% of social class C2s were participating in some type of learning, whereas in 1997 this figure had dropped to 17% (Sargant, 1990: Sargant et al. 1997). Also, in 1997, over half of all upper and middle-classes (AB) respondents were current or recent learners, whereas only one quarter of unskilled working class (DE) respondents reported being current or recent learners. Wagner (1995: 20) believes that these changes have meant that British higher education has indeed become mass in size, but that it still remains élite in its values. In particular, this is so in the old universities which has created an 'unparalleled diversity in the system' (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 63).

The first official examination of higher education to take place since the Robbins report was undertaken by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing and set up in 1995. The Committee was asked to make recommendations about contemporary issues and problems within higher education and to consider developments for the next twenty years. The committee published its final report in July, 1997 (NCIHE, 1997). The establishment of the committee was, in part, as a response to the financial crisis in higher education which had worsened when the Conservative Government, since 1992, had allowed institutions to expand at marginal costs. This had opened up an ‘uncapped commitment to pay both fees and maintenance to the extra students’ and was accompanied by a ‘sense of bad faith across the sector’ (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 10). Although the Dearing Report can be viewed as student-centred with the emphasis on the student as consumer, client and member of the institution, it has been produced within the ideological framework outlined above, and, as such, emphasises the vocational and technological importance of the higher education experience in relation to economic and social advancement. This point is clearly highlighted in the Dearing ‘purposes’ of higher education (NCIHE, 1997, Main Report 5.11):

- To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capacities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well-equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment.
- To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society.
- To serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels.
- To play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised and inclusive society.

Robbins (1967), on the other hand, had viewed the main aims and objectives of higher education as instructing in the skills necessary for employment, promoting the ‘general

powers of the mind', advancing learning and 'transmitting a common culture and common standards of citizenship'.

Since the publication of the Robbins Report, there have been moves to increase the amount of student choice both within and between institutions, through such schemes as Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) and the introduction of modularization and semesterisation. However, Wagner (1995: 18) notes that although the idea of CATS had been raised in the Robbins Report, the introduction of the scheme was slow, especially within the traditional universities. Perhaps more successful, however, have been the Open College Networks (OCN) which, as Arthur (1992: 365) points out, are a:

...consortia of colleges, guidance and career services, voluntary and community organisations, trade unions, private and public sector employers, universities and polytechnics involved in provision of learning opportunities.

The aim of OCNs is to provide a collaborative accreditation system where learning is 'certified within a framework of levels and credits which denote various stages of learning'.

Certainly, within the new universities, developments such as modularization and credit accumulation and transfer do seem to have opened the door for student choice and mobility. In 1996 the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) in their 'In-focus' series published a document which looked at the issue of modularization in higher education, framing the discussion in terms of 'for' and 'against' arguments. These arguments illustrate that the issues concerning modularization depend on ideological perspective which has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. For example, in terms of 'flexibility', arguments for modularization include an increased choice and opportunity to make constant adjustments if and when required, whereas arguments against see this in terms of a lack of coherence, lack of progression and a 'watering down' of specialist disciplines. In terms of 'progressive assessment' arguments in favour of this suggest that

it influences programme choice in a healthy way and that it plays to an individual's strengths whilst moving away from weaknesses, whereas arguments against progressive assessment suggest that this leads to tactical choices instead of principled choices. When the issue of 'public understanding' was considered, arguments for claimed that modularization was viewed as flexible and interchangeable, that there were possibilities for student achievement in non-traditional environments, increased negotiation and opportunities for lifelong learning. However, arguments against suggested that modularization was confusing to employers, schools, colleges and careers advisors.

This illustrates the fact that a huge shift in attitude is still required amongst some staff within the older universities who are liable to guard the boundaries of their academic discipline. Watson and Taylor (1998: 30) believe that the problem is enhanced by the 'conservative tendency' of admissions tutors in the traditional universities. Indeed, in 1994, the author of this thesis attended a training session on NVQs and GNVQs for admissions tutors in a red brick university. The staff were reluctant to take on people with these 'new-fangled' qualifications, pointing out that they had more than enough applications from 'good A level' students who had specialised in their disciplines and would, therefore, be more suitable to study at this institution. In particular, they worried that students from other routes would 'bring down the standards of the university' and of their academic disciplines. However, since the mid 1980s, the modal honours degree classification has shifted from a lower to an upper second class (Taylor and Watson, 1998: 33). Yet many traditionalists still resist the move to mass participation by arguing that it will bring down standards.

However, Robertson (1996: 283 - 284) is more optimistic about the future of higher education, believing that the 'new culture of learning' is moving away from the more traditional system of post-compulsory and higher education in which student choice has been restricted by closely guarded, professional definitions of discipline and appropriate learning needs. He believes students will be given more control over defining their

personal learning needs and that there will be greater choice within learning programmes, with students being able to move between academic and vocational learning experiences, within and between institutions. Robertson points to several significant initiatives which lead him to these conclusions. Firstly, he believes there has been a commitment in several White Papers to the 'promotion of an open and accessible post-secondary and higher education system' in which students will be able to exercise more choice as consumer. Secondly, he points to the establishment of various Commissions and policy forums, such as the Higher Education Study Group and National Commission on Education. Thirdly, he believes the development of, and investment in, GNVQs, NVQs and other complementary awards will open up the way into higher education. Fourthly, he sees as significant explorations in shifting FEFC funding methodologies away from a distribution based principally on enrolments to an allocation of resources which reflect individual student learning programmes. Fifthly, Robertson believes that changing attitudes of the National Union of Students towards recognising structural reforms to academic programmes such as modularization and semesterisation are significant. Finally, he points to the development of a national framework of credit accumulation and transfer as being a further vehicle for enhancing student choice and mobility.

Over the last decade, there have been considerable changes in full-time student financial support. The Conservative Government, fearful of losing middle-class voters, appeared to be reluctant to take drastic action on student grants, instead reducing public support by reducing entitlement to benefits, capping the maintenance grant and introducing the Student Loan Scheme. Alongside this they introduced 'Access Funds' for institutions to allocate to students who were facing serious financial hardship. The Dearing Committee spent a considerable amount of time discussing the issue of student financial support, eventually settling for a system which would consist of 50% means tested grant and 50% income contingent loan for living costs, along with a 25% contribution to tuition fees with an income contingent loan for full-time students. For part-time students the committee recommended restoring benefits, 'forgiven' fees for certain categories of

students such as the unemployed which would then be reimbursed to the institution, and enabling part-time students to apply for Access Funds, which should be doubled from 1998/99. Also, the Dearing Committee recommended the establishment of a 'unified student support agency' which would have responsibility for carrying out their recommendations. In terms of lifelong learning, this new financial system should be supportive by:

...making the choices between full-time and part-time, between continuous and discontinuous study financially neutral; and reducing the disparity between support for students at further and higher education levels. (NCIHE, Main Report 20:2)

However, Labour's response to the issue of student financial support was to put forward their own proposals which were not any of those suggested by the Dearing Report, but which 'built upon' these proposals. Labour's new funding arrangements are set out in their response to Dearing and 'are based on the principle that the cost of higher education should be shared between those who benefit'. Students are to pay £1000 towards their tuition fees, with the rest of the cost being met by public funds. However, students will be means-tested, and the Government estimates that 1 in 3 students in England and Wales will pay no tuition at all, whereas another third will not have to pay the full amount. Repayment of contribution to living costs are to be collected through the Inland Revenue, to begin on a monthly basis once the graduate has an annual income of £10,000. The long term impact of these funding arrangements on student choice and participation levels is yet to be assessed.

The Labour Government has pledged its commitment to the notion of lifelong learning and, in June 1997, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment established the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, chaired by Bob Fryer. The group was asked to advise on the preparation of a White Paper on Lifelong Learning, and, in November, 1997, the first report was published (Fryer, 1997). In this report, a ten point agenda is laid out, which, the group believes, is possible for the Government to achieve within the lifetime of this Parliament. This includes the setting

up of a strategic framework for the promotion of lifelong learning which lays out the foundation for a 'fundamental change in attitudes to lifelong learning' (Fryer, 1997: 3 - 10).

This agenda illustrates that this report differs from previous discussions on lifelong learning by shifting the emphasis away from economic regeneration and international competition, towards the individual, provision and funding. It offers a holistic view in which the authors' vision of a lifelong learning culture is set against the challenges of cultural transformation. However, in their response to the Dearing Report, 'Higher Education for the 21st Century', the Labour Government seem to have taken a step back by reiterating the importance of economic competitiveness which had been so central to conservative policy. In the forward of their response to Dearing, the Government point out that their Green Paper on Lifelong Learning:

...sets out our vision of the future development of the knowledge based economy and investment in human capital which will place the United Kingdom at the cutting edge of world economic change in the new Millennium.

Again, the long term impact of this Labour Government policy is yet to be assessed.

In conclusion, the 1990s under the Thatcher Government has experienced a move away from a socially just and democratic education system towards a system which emphasis individual freedom and *laissez-faire* economics. Issues of student choice and individual freedom were central to the ideological thinking of the Conservatives who believed that competition would raise standards and that supply would meet demand. However, student choice did not appear to coincide with Conservative vocational and economic policies, with many students opting for arts and humanities courses. Despite recent reports which have offered a more holistic view of lifelong learning in which the emphasis has been shifted away from economic regeneration, the Labour Government have reiterated the importance of economic competitiveness which was so central to Conservative policies. The implications of both Labour and Conservative policy for

student choice depend upon ideological standpoint, with some believing that choice is greater and standards will rise, and others believing that provision will be reduced with disempowered groups suffering the greatest loss.

CHAPTER 4:
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Theoretical Perspectives in the Education of Adults

In the previous two chapters the discussion has illustrated how the provision of adult education has been influenced by ideological, political and technical change over the last few centuries. This, in part, helps to explain why certain types of educational provision are available in the late twentieth century. However, this provision has been influenced also by theoretical developments on the education of adults. In this chapter, important theoretical developments will be reviewed as this helps to explain further why certain adult education provision might become more popular, whereas other types decrease in popularity. As each of these developments is reviewed, the relevance to, and possible influence on, individual choice will be highlighted.

During the planning stages of the research it was felt that the issue of adults' learning choices should not be located within one discipline, but that it was important to draw from a number of disciplines, most notably sociology and psychology. However, both of these are internally contested disciplines - there are no single sociological or psychological perspectives which enable a systematic study of adult education, learning and participation. Education is a social phenomenon and therefore open to analysis from a variety of perspectives which inevitably means that any such analysis will include strengths and weaknesses inherent in these alternative perspectives. It is for this reason that the following discussion includes theoretical developments from a variety of perspectives, noting the strengths and weaknesses, whilst highlighting the relevance to individual choice.

Initially, when sociologists tried to untangle the web of sociological theory, their work suggested dichotomies, that all schools of sociological theory could be divided between two categories only. The debate between these 'two sociologies', a phrase coined by Dawe in 1970, has been both wide and complex so that it is not possible to cover all these arguments in this discussion. However, put simply, the first of these 'two sociologies' assumes that for a society to exist it is necessary that order is imposed on

individuals. The boundaries of this order are maintained by power structures which have properties independent of individuals. Constraints are placed on individuals who must adhere to the rules so that social order is maintained; without this order, society would collapse. Maynard (1989: 9) points out that over the years the different theorists have termed this 'normative', 'problem of order' and 'positivistic' theory. Within this theoretical perspective are the various forms of structuralism, including structural functionalism and Marxism.

The second is a sociology of social interaction which assumes autonomous individuals are able to realise their full potential and create a truly human social order only when they are freed from external constraint. In this view, individuals are capable of exerting control over existing situations, relationships and institutions and the social system is regarded as an outcome of human action. In this 'sociology' society is a creation of its members and individuals actively construct meanings about, and understandings of, their social situation. Maynard (1989: 9) points out that these have been termed 'interpretative', 'problem of control' and 'phenomenological' theory. Within this theoretical perspective are placed symbolic interaction, phenomenology and ethnomethodology.

The distinct types of adult education which have arisen from these alternative theoretical perspectives prompted Gelpi (1984: 79) to suggest that 'two educations' stem from these two 'sociologies'. The first education is seen to be oppressive, controlling, segregating and intolerant, intent on social reproduction, whereas the second is democratic, participatory, creative and co-operative.

In the field of psychology and adult learning, Tennant (1997: 3-6) points out that attempts to analyse the wide variety of theory also has been through similar dichotomies to the 'two sociologies' described above. He distinguishes between theories which take the person and theories which take the social environment as their point of departure.

For those theorists concerned with the social environment, learning and development is explained in terms of external forces, with the person being understood as a product of social influences. Examples of this type of work include the behaviourism approach of researchers such as Skinner (1938) which view the person as a passive receiver, and theories which consider how learning and development proceed through constant interaction between the person and their social environment, such as the work of Freire (1985), Lovett (1975) and Brookfield (1994).

For those theorists concerned with the person, learning and development is explained in terms of the internal make-up of that person, the implication being that the person has a certain amount of autonomy and is largely independent of the social environment. Examples of this type of work include studies which look at emotional development and the concept of self, such as the area of humanistic psychology and the work of Rogers (1951) and Maslow (1968), and the psychoanalytic theory of Freud (1949). However, Tennant (1997: 3) goes on to point out that this categorisation is an oversimplification and that many theorists include elements of both in their work. Nevertheless, it does provide a useful starting point for discussing existing theories concerning psychology and adult learning.

Research which takes the social environment, or social structures, as the point of departure include discussions on the social and institutional policy factors which include the influence of local and national government, in particular, the level of funding for different types of adult education, the demands of the market place, marketing strategies and provision of information. These include the changes in government attitude and policy towards vocational qualifications described in Chapters 2 and 3, which Field (1993:40) believes is the governments:

...attempt to match the functions of socialisation and qualification with what is perceived as rapid changes within the workplace and the organisation of work.

Thus, the belief in the value and the consequent importance attached to the development and maintenance of vocational education can be traced back to this theoretical perspective. The two basic assumptions of vocational education are that, firstly, knowledge and skills exist externally to individuals, and secondly, that a rapidly changing social system exists in which adults must constantly update their skills if they are to function successfully within this system (Jarvis, 1985: 28). All these factors serve to limit the options available to individuals, for example, Clennell et al. (1987) in their quantitative study of adult learners over the age of sixty, found that choice of subject tended to reflect the pattern of current provision within the different institutions. Indeed, Keddie (1980: 54) found that the curriculum tended to reflect a providers model rather than a needs model, in which the interests, experiences and political motivation of those who controlled the curriculum were responded to rather than the perceived needs of adults. Although the concept of lifelong learning may originally have been conceived as a means of developing the individual, over the past few years it has been linked closely with issues of social and economic change, with the emphasis placed on the individual to update their skills in response to this change. In terms of student choice, this implies that there is less choice available to individuals, that they must respond to something beyond their control and that options available to them will be limited in breadth and scope. This implies that a study concerned with the issue of student choice would concentrate more on social structures than on the individual.

In contrast to this were the developments in liberal adult education, 'general' adult education and moves towards self-directed learning. Tennant (1997: 12) believes self-directed learning was influenced, in part, by developments in humanistic psychology which emerged as a protest against the traditional scientific explanations which viewed the person as object. Taking, instead, as the point of departure the person as 'self', humanistic psychology reaffirmed human qualities such as personal freedom and choice, emphasising the validity of subjective experience. Within this theoretical perspective, the basic assumption is that individuals exist in isolation from other individuals and that they

are driven by their own needs and interests, which are naturally given rather than socially formed. In terms of student choice, education should respond to the needs and interests of individuals, thus increasing the amount of choice available. This implies that a study into learning choices would concentrate on individual choice and the wide and complex issues which might influence these choices, rather than the negative influence of social structures.

When research and theory within the field of adult education is scrutinised closely, it appears that there are four specific areas which can be analysed. Firstly, there are those which are concerned with adult development; secondly, there are those which address the issues of adult learning and the implications for teaching method and practice; thirdly, there are those which consider levels of participation in adult education, and finally, closely connected to these theories, and often overlapping, are those which consider adult motivation. In this review theories of participation and motivation will be discussed together as these theories are closely connected, with considerable overlap and strong interrelationships.

Theories which are concerned with adult development, as with the work of Piaget (1973, 1977) in childhood development, suggest that adults move through a number of stages or phases throughout their adult life. These theorists believe that adult development is a central concept in adult education, the implication being that programmes should respond to this development by offering courses suitable to the different stages of a person's life. However, these theories take for granted the notion that adults pass through these specific stages and as such are open to cultural, social, historical and class bias. For example, McCoy (1977) describes the various tasks associated with the stage 'becoming an adult' which include selecting a mate, beginning a career, becoming a parent, owning a home and so on. Educational institutions, the author suggests, should respond to these various tasks by providing marriage workshops, parenting workshops, home-maintenance workshops and so on. In this respect, adult education could be

viewed as little more than a vehicle for maintaining social order in which individuals have very little freedom of choice, other than to take part in what is suggested to them as right and proper within their culture. From this perspective, a study into the learning choices of adult returners might be limited in scope as individual choice could be seen to be predetermined and predictable!

Other development theorists do not apply theory to practice in such a naive way, yet they all imply that some form of growth and progress takes places, with the implication being that development is good and desirable, whereas no development, as they define it, is bad and undesirable. For Kohlberg (1969) in his theory of moral development, progress is towards autonomy and principled morality. For Erikson (1963) growth is towards inner unity. For Maslow (1968) the development is towards self-actualisation. Not only can these theories be criticised for their basic assumptions about what is good and bad, desirable and non-desirable, but also they can be criticised methodologically. For example, Kohlberg's moral development stages were based on research undertaken with boys, by a male researcher, so that what can be seen as socialised 'male' qualities are valued, whereas socialised 'female' qualities are undervalued, and it comes as no surprise that females score lower on his scale than males. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) addressed this methodological bias by conducting their own research with women which illustrated that the development of self and mind in women is quite different to that put forward in these traditional development theories. In terms of relevance to learning choices, development theories such as these might be useful in that they emphasise the importance of gender difference, whilst indicating that learning choices might vary at different stages in an adult's life.

Theories in the field of adult learning have had a long and varied history from the behaviourist theories of Pavlov (1927) and Skinner (1938), through theories of cognitive development and theories of situated learning to those which consider learning styles and the implications for teaching adults. Theories of behaviourism which tended to involve

animal experimentation have been well documented and equally well criticised. Although these theories may have offered some valuable insight into adult learning in the early part of the twentieth century, in the words of Burgess (1981: 9):

...this is not the place to discuss the various competing and often incompatible theories of learning derived from the habits of those pigeons, rats and circus apes that have had the misfortune to be captured by learning theorists.

However, a study which may seem to have more direct relevance to adults' learning choice was an influential study into cognitive development which was carried out by Horn and Cattell (1967, 1968) who separated intellectual ability into two areas which they termed 'fluid' and 'crystallised' intelligence. Fluid intelligence was measured by tests of complex reasoning, memory and figural relations and was supposed to be 'culture' fair, although it is debatable whether such a condition can actually exist. Crystallised intelligence was measured by tests on information storage, verbal comprehension and numerical reasoning, so that the abilities measured tended to be those associated with experience and culturisation. The researchers found that as people get older there is a decrease in fluid intelligence and an increase in crystallised intelligence. They concluded that intelligence remained stable with age, but that the balance shifted between the two types. However, work such as this depends on a number of assumptions, not least the actual definition of the word 'intelligence' and the cultural and gender biases associated with this term. As John Dewey (1930) pointed out, the notion of intelligence as a fixed and innate personal endowment was 'the great conceit of the intellectual class'. Nevertheless, this type of research may be pertinent to the issue of learning choices as it suggests that as people age they might cope better with disciplines in which crystallised intelligence can be utilised.

Moving on to theories of situated learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) present a social theory in which learning is a social practice which involves participation within individuals' local communities. In this work the focus is shifted from the individual

learner to the structures of social and cultural practice. This moves away from the idea that learning can come from reflecting on practice, instead viewing discourse as a social and cultural practice and not as a representation of practice. The researchers were concerned with identifying the conditions which enhance or distort learning in communities of practice, concluding that, within these communities, conflict reduces learning. This is an important study as it draws attention to the need to understand knowledge and learning in context, illustrating how new knowledge comes to be invented in practice. This type of research might be useful at a time when reflecting on experience and practice has become an important area of study within adult education.

Learning style theories perhaps received prominence because they highlighted issues of teaching processes rather than teaching techniques, raising issues of power and control in the classroom and stressing the importance of difference rather than strengths and weaknesses. An influential study, from which many other projects have developed, was that of Witkins (1950). The research was concerned with the influence of context in making simple perceptual judgement. He claimed that his tests were able to measure the ability to separate figure from context and that some people found the tasks easy to do and completed them quickly, whereas others were slower, finding the tasks harder to complete. The former were described as 'field independent' and the latter as 'field dependent'. From this research, Witkins concluded that different cognitive styles exist. Other research which has developed from this work, Tennant notes, has considered the correlation between field dependence and independence and personal characteristics, social interaction patterns and life choices, which, he believes, has meant that:

the concept of cognitive style has been extended from a narrow description of perceptual capacities to a more global description of different ways of knowing the world. (Tennant, 1997: 82)

In terms of learning choices, Tennant (1997: 83) summarises a variety of research findings to suggest that field dependent people are more likely to choose 'interpersonal

domains which require social skills such as elementary school teaching, social sciences, rehabilitation counselling, welfare', and that they are more likely to favour disciplines with a 'people' emphasis. However, he suggests that these people are more undecided about occupational choice and less committed to this choice. On the other hand, field independent people are more concerned with occupational planning, having more specialised vocational interests. They favour 'analytic and impersonal domains such as physical and biological sciences, mathematics, engineering, technical and mechanical activities', favouring disciplines which are 'impersonal and require cognitive skills'.

Kolb and Fry (1975) developed a model of the learning process which consisted of a four stage cycle comprising a concrete experience, observation and reflection, formulation of abstract concepts and testing the implications of the concepts in new situations. They argued that in any learning situation, adults experience tensions between the polarities of at least two of the dimensions of this model, although the ideal learner should be able to operate at either pole of both dimensions. They went on to develop a Learning Style Inventory (Kolb, 1976) which was designed to measure an adult's position on the 'concrete experience' versus 'abstract conceptualisation' dimension and the 'active experimentation' versus 'reflective observation' dimension. From this procedure they developed four basic learning styles, all of which have implications for vocational choices, learning choices and preference of teaching methods. 'Convergers' are unemotional and would rather deal with objects than people, having narrow interests and choosing to specialise in the physical sciences. 'Divergers' have broad cultural interests, are interested in people and specialise in the arts. 'Assimilators' would rather deal with abstract concepts than people, preferring basic sciences and mathematics.

'Accommodators' solve problems intuitively, are risk takers and are found in action orientated jobs such as marketing and sales. Kolb and Fry (1975) point out that each learning style has its strengths and weaknesses and that a person locked in one style is an incomplete learner. However, many people display characteristics from more than one style. Although there are many problems associated with dividing the whole learning

population into 'types', this research does have some relevance to a study concerned with learning choices as it helps to illustrate possible connections between learning style, learning choice and occupational choice.

Knowles (1984) believes that as adults develop they naturally move towards self-direction, but that the skills and abilities needed to foster this self-direction are not nurtured by western culture. He puts forward his theory of andragogy as a way of narrowing the gap between learning process and the need for psychological growth. However, Hanson (1996: 100-101), in her response to Knowles, points out that any theory of learning which ignores the structural conditions which limit individual choice is fundamentally flawed:

To assume that an adult entering an institution will believe that things will be different from when they were at school, when in fact, due to external control on the institution and internal administration, they are not, could be dangerous. In the context of subject areas increasingly pre-packaged in numbers of credits, pre-determined levels of achievement and final certificates, the possibility of exercising completely autonomous self-direction is, in many ways, severely curtailed. Any theory of adult learning which advocates the importance of each individual, but avoids issues of curriculum control and power does little to address the actual learning situations of adults.

Hanson goes on to point out that, in searching for a separate theory of adult learning, researchers have concentrated on issues of age and stage of development rather than question issues of purpose, how knowledge and skills are defined and the relationship between individuals and society. These ideas have a great deal of relevance to learning choices as they highlight the importance of institutional structures and the constraints these play on individual choice.

In addition to these theories of adult development and learning described above, are developments in the areas of adult participation and motivation. Research into these areas has become more popular over the last twenty years, especially in Europe and the United States. These studies have a great deal of relevance to this work as it became

evident early in the data collection stage that it was difficult and indeed inappropriate for adults to separate their actual learning choices from reasons for returning to education (see Chapters 9 - 14 for further explanation). Blair, McPake & Munn (1995: 633) identify four conceptualisations of adult participation and motivation from the literature. Firstly, there are those publications which concentrate on what Blair et al. label as the 'quantitative identification of individuals' objectives'. For instance, Harrison (1993: 10), when summing up previous research, suggests ten categories which include objectives such as a desire for knowledge and a need to meet personal development goals, whereas Daines, Daines & Granham (1992: 6), from their experience of working with adult learners, identify fourteen categories ranging from interest to enhancing self-esteem. Many of these researchers attempt to categorise reasons into order of importance, with most illustrating how 'instrumental' factors, meaning instrumental in terms of vocational relevance and preparation, appear to be the most important. For example, in her pilot investigation into tracking adult learner routes, McGivney (1992: 13) found that the locally based research projects she reviewed tended to suggest that adults 'engage in informal as well as formal learning for mainly instrumental reasons'.

Secondly, Blair et al. discuss what they term 'highly generalised models of motivational types' which, they point out, include the often quoted typology of Houle (1961), in which there are three 'types' of adult learner. The first 'type' are those people who are goal-orientated, seeking to fulfil conscious objectives. The second 'type' are those people who are learning-orientated, seeking knowledge for its own sake. Lastly, there are those people who are activity-orientated, taking part to fill time or for some reason of championship.

Thirdly, there are the 'theories of life transitions' which relate to the situations people find themselves in, enabling the identification of some happening in their lives which caused them to return to learning. In the author's own qualitative research with adult learners it was found that transitions such as divorce, death of a close relative or

redundancy were highly significant (Dawson, 1995). In their quantitative, national study of American adult learners, Aslanian and Bricknell (1980: 60-61) found that 83% were able to describe some past, present or future event which changed, or will change, their lives and was seen to be a reason for learning. The majority of these transitions, the researchers found, related to career (56%), family (16%) and leisure (13%). These researchers concluded that 'to know an adult's life schedule is to know an adult's learning schedule' (Aslanian & Bricknell, 1980: 61).

Finally, Blair et al. identify those studies which consider the institutional and social contexts of participation. Many of these are concerned with the various types of barrier which prevent people returning to education. Cross (1981: 98), in her comprehensive summary of the literature, identifies three types of barrier to participation which she terms the 'deterrent concept'. Firstly, there are the situational barriers which relate to a person's situation at that time and can include issues such as child-care and employment; secondly, there are institutional barriers which consist of 'all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities' such as geography, finance and structure; and finally, there are dispositional barriers which arise from a person's attitude towards self and learning. Harrison (1993: 25) expands these categories by adding educational barriers which include issues such as qualifications and preparation. McGivney (1990) in her study of adult learners, found that attitudes, expectations and perceptions are the most powerful barriers to participation, and that these have developed over time through schooling and through life, whereas Aimes (1985) found that financial barriers were a major deterrent to participation. Weil (1986) looked into barriers identified by mature students themselves by conducting 25 in-depth interviews with 'non-traditional' undergraduates in an urban polytechnic. From these interviews, she developed two related constructs of a 'learning context' and of a 'learner identity'. She believed that the emerging sense of self as a competent learner is crucial in empowering adults and enabling them to progress with their studies. Barriers were encountered as a number of 'disjunctions', such as the

disjunction adults encounter between expectations and experiences. In summing up existing studies, and based on previous experience of working with adult learners, Brookfield (1994: 5) felt that 'previous educational attainment and participation' is the 'most statistically significant variable in determining future participation in formal education'.

After categorising the different theories of adult participation, Blair et al. (1995), however, point out that adults do not fit neatly into any one category because their circumstances are so different, and go on to describe their new conceptualisation which considers the interaction of goals and circumstances. Similarly, West (1995: 154), when discussing psychological motivational theories, concludes that in isolation they are incomplete and that more meaning about adult participation can be obtained by considering the interaction of 'intimate personal processes' and 'broader cultural patterns'.

The majority of the research into adult participation appears to have been carried out within formal educational institutions. As the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 has illustrated, access to educational opportunities is not equally available, especially geographically and culturally, and, as a consequence, when researchers have attempted to portray a 'typical' adult learner, they described them as white, relatively affluent, middle-class, in paid employment, fairly young and well educated (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Cross, 1981; Aslanian and Bricknell, 1980). However, these characteristics depend on where the research is conducted, for example, the author's own research into participation within a red brick university adult education department found that whilst the majority of students were indeed white, well-educated, middle-class and relatively affluent, the majority were not young and were not in paid employment. Many of the students attended classes for leisure and recreational purposes after retirement, or for social and interests purposes when they were not in paid employment, with the largest number of students in the 60 - 64 age range and female (Dawson,

1994c). Compare this with students attending a local adult residential college, and the profile is very different, with students spanning the age ranges, formally educated to a lesser extent and with many of them unwaged and unaffluent (Dawson, 1995). These differences necessitate a clear definition of what is meant by ‘adult learner’ and ‘adult education’, something which, when lacking in the literature, makes judgement of the effectiveness and validity of the results difficult. However, this is no easy feat as McCullough (1980: 158) points out:

Is adult education a practice or a program? A methodology or an organisation? A ‘science’ or a system? A process or a profession? Is adult education different from continuing education, vocational education, higher education? Does adult education have form and substance, or does it merely permeate the environment like air? Is adult education, therefore, everywhere yet nowhere in particular? Does adult education even exist?

During the 1980s, the number of mature students in higher education more than doubled, with most of the expansion taking place in the locally or regionally based new universities. Watson and Taylor (1998: 41) point out that the category of ‘returner’ has been a large element in the constituencies and cultures of these new universities which are ‘pluralistic, multifaceted institutions with less of a monolithic culture’. As a result of this type of expansion, the term ‘adult returner’ has increased in prominence, and, towards the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s, there has been more research which deals specifically with adult returners, in particular with adults who enter higher education and their experiences once in the system. One such study of particular significance is that by Pascall and Cox (1993), a qualitative study of the perceptions, experiences and interpretations of 43 women returning to higher education. The researchers found that the women interviewed had four main expectations of education. Firstly, they expected it to increase their opportunities in the world of paid employment. Secondly, they expected it to increase their independence from traditional family structures. Thirdly, they expected it to help them survive in cases where these traditional structures had broken down. Fourthly, they expected it to give them a new identity ‘where the domestic one had failed’ (Pascall & Cox, 1993: 139-143). However, the

researchers believed that returning to education was not a rejection of domesticity, and that other responsibilities in the lives of the women, such as child-care, remained a priority. They concluded that:

education had played a key role in enabling new choices to be made about the balance between private and public life.

When reflecting on why there are so many conflicting theories of adult participation and learning, the answers become a little clearer by returning to the theoretical perspectives which were described earlier in this chapter. This philosophical dualism of individual versus society was one of the more traditional ways of dividing up social theory. Later critics (e.g. Craib, 1992) point out that these divisions are flawed because they regard society and individuals as being of similar types, whereas they are of radically different types with very different properties. For example, human action is intentional with humans being able to monitor this action and reflect upon it, whereas societies are structures of social relationships, in which a structural notion of cause is implied. Layder (1994) points out that this dualism is a false dichotomy as it implies that individuals somehow reside in a private world where they are not influenced by society, and that society exists as separate and 'out there' and is not influenced by people within it. Another criticism is that theorists, have, in the past, assumed that human beings normally live in one social world at a time, whereas humans may inhabit multiple worlds simultaneously (Calhoun, 1995). This leads onto a third perspective which is that individuals and society are 'intertwined and inextricably fused' (Layder, 1994: 207).

Each adult experiences a complex web of highly visible and less visible interacting and interrelated influencing factors, some of which are easily articulated and obvious, whereas others are articulated with some difficulty and are less obvious. Researchers may be forgiven for basing their theories on easily identifiable reasons for participation, for, as McGivney (1992: 17) points out, adults:

may find it simpler to express a simple, concrete and easily understood purpose for their involvement than to disentangle the mesh of inter-related and perhaps not fully recognised motives that have led them to this step.

The implication of this is that adults can describe their learning choices only using the socially and culturally available discourse of the time.

Carr and Harnett (1996: 6 - 8) point out that in the 1960s educational theory received a 'barrage of heavy-handed attacks' during which much of it was denounced as 'grand theorising'. This, they believe, had the effect of dividing educational theory between a number of disciplines - philosophy, psychology, sociology and the history of education, in which the boundaries were clearly demarcated and difficult to cross, despite the rhetoric of interdisciplinary enquiry.

One type of theory which sought to avoid this effect and which moved on from the philosophical dualism described above, was 'reproduction theory' which aimed to expose:

the interconnections between forms of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school organisation and the larger ideology of the society in which they operate and apply. (Carr & Hartnett, 1996: 8)

This type of theory considers the sociological factors such as the selection from, and transmission of, culture where adult education might be seen to be a middle class pursuit which serves to reinforce middle class values and devalue the experience and culture of the working classes. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) believe that choice of discipline and attitude towards education are influenced by family background. A person learns from 'pedagogic action' which has three components - firstly, 'diffuse' education which includes interaction with competent members of a social group such as peers; secondly, 'family' education and thirdly, 'institutional' education. This 'pedagogic action', they believe, reflects the interest of dominant groups and classes in society. These dominant groups serve to legitimate their interests by imposing their own systems

of symbolism and meanings on less dominant groups. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 5) term this imposition 'symbolic violence'. Because this culture is experienced as legitimate, power relations within it are obscured and the system is reproduced through pedagogic action. This pedagogic action, they suggest, reflects the interests of dominant groups and classes, thus reproducing the existing social structure. Because the dominant culture favours what they term 'symbolic mastery' over 'practical mastery', pedagogic action also favours this. As dominant groups, through a process of 'family' and 'diffuse' education, are already being taught in symbolic rather than practical ways, they have a huge advantage within education over dominated groups. Some pupils and students thus feel at home within the education system, whereas others constantly have to struggle. Yet because the system is seen as legitimate, neutral and free, privilege is ignored and everyone is treated as equal, with privilege being translated into merit.

However, theories such as this illustrate that there is still a tendency towards too much analysis of culture and power with not enough attention placed on social relationships and issues of social integration, cultural non-conformity and cultural deviance. Also, as Carr and Harnett (1996: 9-10) note, this type of theory, by suggesting that individuals have little power or control over reproduction processes, ignores those who hold different views about the future direction of education, and who contest these existing reproduction roles. In addition to this, these theories seem to accept a basic belief in the liberal democratic vision of society, without a philosophical critique of this notion. The authors believe that this means that these analyses are partial and incomplete, and that a theoretical framework is required which treats the 'process of educational change and the process of social change as mutually constitutive and dialectically related processes'. They believe that the different disciplinary perspectives on education have to be 'integrated into a unified theoretical perspective.'

There are many problems associated with viewing the same event from different theoretical perspectives, within one discipline, let alone between a number of disciplines, as Tennant (1997: 138) points out when discussing psychological perspectives:

... an adult student may express disappointment with a course, claiming that it has failed to meet his or her need for a stimulating, exciting and challenging experience. A psychoanalytic interpretation may hold that such a demand is unrealistic, and is really an expression of an infantile wish to be totally loved and cared for unconditionally. A humanistic interpretation may hold that the same person is expressing a desire for growth and fulfilment which is a natural and healthy thing to do.

Indeed, Reese and Overton (1970: 144) believe that it is not possible to assimilate theories which have been developed from different perspectives:

Theories built upon radically different models are logically independent and cannot be assimilated to each other. They reflect representations of different ways of looking at the world and as such are incompatible in their implications. Different world views involve different understanding of what is knowledge and hence of the meaning of truth.

Another important point to note is that all thoughts, ideas, constructs and concepts which develop from different theoretical perspectives, are themselves located within the dimensions of time and space. They all have a history and the understanding of these ideas differs over time, from place to place and between cultures. For example, the theory of andragogy is based on the relationship between a person and society. How a person views society in turn influences perceptions of political, economic and moral issues, which means that views on adult education are greatly influenced by historical and social variation. Also, when research is viewed within its particular historical location, that is, what is happening at the time in public discourse, social policy and economically, it could be argued that it is often no surprise that research finds what it does. For example, Rinne and Kivinen (1996: 185) suggest that the importance of 'instrumentality' is to be expected at a time when there is widespread concern about a skills gap with rapid science and technological progress, and that:

the idea of information deficits triggering educational needs fitted very comfortably with an expansionist ideology of vocational education.

Also, underlying social variables such as gender, ethnic origin and age and their relationship to thoughts, ideas and concepts are a main concern of the social science activity. Yet these, also, must be located in time and space as their relationship varies through history and within the different ideological perspectives.

In conclusion, this chapter has reviewed some of the important theoretical developments in the education of adults, in particular, in relation to adult development, adult learning, adult participation and motivation. The discussion has been related to the wider ideological perspectives outlined in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 and to developments on the sociological analysis of theoretical perspectives. Some of the pertinent themes to arise from this discussion include the connections between individual freedom to choose and the restrictions imposed by institutions and governments; the relationship between ideology, theory, practice and how this might influence provision and the choices available to adults over time; how the socially available discourse of the time influences what people are able to say about their learning choices. In addition to these themes, there has been provided a review of the relevant literature within the areas of adult development, learning, participation and motivation. Some of the pertinent themes to arise from this discussion include the connection between reasons for returning to education and actual learning choices; the relationship between stages of development, types of intelligence, gender and learning choices; and finally, the possible connection between learning styles and learning choices.

CHAPTER 5:

RESEARCH INTO

SUBJECT CHOICE

Research into Subject Choice

When the idea for this research was initially conceived and developed, it was felt that the main focus for the study would be the issue of 'subject' choice. However, it became evident very early in the data collection stage that often adults did not make a distinct 'subject' choice, that some would instead make a 'qualification' choice or an 'institution' choice. For example, some adults described how they had decided to study on a diploma course at a local adult residential college, whilst being unaware of the subjects they would be studying. This suggested that the holistic concept of 'learning' was more appropriate to the phenomenon under investigation and that the term 'subject' is not only narrow but potentially misleading. Nevertheless, despite this change in emphasis it was felt that existing literature concerned with the issue of subject choice would still be pertinent to the study, especially when adults talked about their 'subject' choice at school.

Research into subject choice concentrates on the subject choice of school pupils and students at significant choice points, with the majority of this work conducted in the 1970s and 1980s before the introduction of the National Curriculum. The significant choice points, at that time, were seen to be at the ages of thirteen and fourteen when pupils came to choose their options for possible O Level and/or CSE examination; at aged sixteen when pupils came to choose A level subjects or to leave school; and at eighteen when students came to choose their subjects for degree study or possible future careers. Although there have been some studies which look at the option choices of students entering or within higher education (Archer and Freedman, 1989; Baldwin, 1990; Thomas, 1990; IES, 1996), and a national survey into adult participation which touches upon subject choice (Sargant, 1997), literature could not be found pertaining specifically to the issue of the subject choice of adult returners.

Before going on to review the subject choice literature, it is necessary to discuss some historical and political developments within education which influenced the type and amount of research undertaken. For example, in the following review, only one of the studies has been conducted after the introduction of the National Curriculum (Watson et al., 1994), illustrating, in part, that pupil choice, and hence the importance of pupil choice to researchers, has significantly decreased over the last ten years.

The seventies and eighties were characterised by a significant amount of change within education. As was noted in Chapter 2, during this time there was a shift away from the more humanistic and egalitarian social democratic ideology which had dominated the 1960s and early 1970s, to the more utilitarian political ideology of Thatcherism. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 121) believe that, in the mid 1970s, the English educational system 'had acquired many of the characteristics of a modernised democratic educational system' which was characterised by 'more progressive forms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment'. Also, there were moves towards creating a more egalitarian system in terms of gender, for example, the passing of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act outlawed discrimination on the grounds of gender within employment, education and training. However, some of the research reviewed in this chapter will illustrate that, in practice, this legislation had little impact on gender inequalities in terms of subject choice. Also, despite comprehensive educational reform which was aimed at reducing social class inequalities, it was clear that these changes had achieved only limited success, and that opportunities for working class pupils had not increased significantly, especially in terms of entry into higher education (Embling, 1974; Neave, 1976; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980; Halsey, 1993). Carr and Hartnett (1996: 105) believe that this failure was, in part, due to the fact that comprehensive education was never adopted as a universal system, and that in 1978, 70 out of 104 local education authorities 'still retained forms of secondary education based on selective principles'. Also, there was evidence that within comprehensive schools themselves, selective principles were still being applied, whether directly, or indirectly, as the following review will illustrate.

With the economic decline, rising unemployment and industrial unrest which characterised the middle and late 1970s, the education system came under attack from the emerging New Right movement. Egalitarianism, 'progressive' education and social democracy were blamed for the economic crisis, and the New Right began to talk of 'traditional' values, the importance of the family, religion and the state. Economic recovery was linked with increased industrial, technological and vocational training. When Sir Keith Joseph became Secretary of State for Education in 1981, he extolled the virtues of the traditional 'basic' subjects of English, mathematics and science, and talked about the importance of 'useful' subjects such as business and technology. On the other hand, Joseph argued that subjects such as peace studies, sociology and politics should be confined to élite universities (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 162). During his five years in office, Joseph succeeded in initiating discussion about a 'national curriculum'; increased parental representation on the governing bodies of schools; introduced new forms of in-service training for teachers which were under the direct control of the Secretary of State; introduced the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) which gave resources to schools if they followed a centralist line.

In this chapter, the literature concerning subject choice will be reviewed in two sections. The first discusses research which is concerned with the identification of factors which influence the subject choice of school pupils and higher education students. Most of these studies tend to be quantitative, survey based research, although some include an element of qualitative investigation. This type of research suggests that pupils are able to make active choices about what they study. For example, a comprehensive investigation into subject choice has been carried out by Stables (1996) who drew together the subject choice research which he had conducted during the 1980s, including the work undertaken for his doctoral thesis. Stables (1996: 13) gives the following description of what he means by subject choice:

...‘subject choice’ (or ‘course choice’) implies two things: that pupils/students have thought actively about different possibilities in terms of future subjects and courses, and that they feel that their thoughts have been heavily influential in determining which courses or subjects they have ended up following.

The second section of this chapter will discuss those studies which suggest that school pupils have very little choice about what to study. It is an issue which Stables addresses at the end of his book in a short chapter entitled ‘Free Will, Choice and Socialisation’ in which he asks whether ‘it is possible to discuss *how* people make choices without thinking about *whether* they make choices...’ (Stables, 1996: 224). The issues pertaining more specifically to decision making and choice will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In 1986, before the introduction of the National Curriculum, Stables undertook a study into the option choices of third year pupils in thirteen state comprehensive schools in the south west of England. Triangulating his methods, he first of all devised an ‘attitude scale’ to investigate attitudes to science and to school. Secondly, he asked pupils to rank-order subjects in terms of preference and perceived importance. Thirdly, he interviewed a small sample of the above, both in the third year and when they had moved on into the fourth year (Stables, 1996: 29).

The attitude scale into science and school revealed a ‘highly significant gender difference’, with boys having a more positive attitude to science, physics and chemistry and with girls having a more positive attitude towards biology and school generally. Finding that gender differences were greater among co-educational pupils, he concluded that ‘single-sex education tends to reduce polarisation of attitudes between sexes generally’ (Stables, 1996: 31).

From the subject preference and perception questionnaire, Stables found that of the optional subjects available, physics, chemistry and history were the most prominent in the boys’ list, whereas home economics, biology and art were most prominent in the girls’ list (Stables, 1996: 32). This led him to conclude that:

...sex-role stereotyping does not refer merely to what people of either gender *think* they ought to be doing: it appears that there are genuine differences in the enjoyment of subjects. (Stables, 1996: 33).

Stables went on to interview 144 pupils drawn from four of the schools, selected as a stratified sample from their verbal reasoning score on entry to the school and from the attitude scale mentioned earlier. He hoped that these interviews would give a clearer insight into pupils' own perceptions of option choice, although, by quantifying his results, he falls short of achieving this aim. In these interviews, Stables found that jobs and careers were the main priority for the choice of boys, with interest and enjoyment second, whereas for girls he found that these were reversed. For both boys and girls he found that ability was the third priority (Stables, 1996: 39).

Reid, Barnett and Rosenberg (1974) approached their research using three different data collection methods with fourth year pupils in five outer London schools. Firstly, they tested ability and basic skills; secondly, they used an attitude questionnaire on subject choices; and thirdly, they used an attitude questionnaire to look at general views on school. They found, also, that school pupils were most influenced by two considerations, firstly, whether they liked the subjects and were interested in them, and secondly, whether they felt the subjects would be of use for future careers. However, the pupils who were seen to be less able chose subjects because of negative reasons, for instance, being deterred from some subjects because they thought they were not very good at them, or because they did not know what else they could do (Reid et al. (1974: 184). These researchers found that parents tended to have the most influence over pupils and their choices of subject. In addition to influencing subject choice, Ching (1970) noted that parents heavily influence level of study, with two thirds of university graduates reporting that their decision to enrol for a degree was made by the fifth year of school and that this decision was influenced mainly by their parents.

In contrast to this, in her study of A Level subject choices with 175 first year students at tertiary college, Garratt (1985: 128) found that the factors which had the most influence

on subject choice were interest value, previous performance and career value. Parents and teachers were reported to have had minimal influence at this stage and Garratt questions whether this is because pupils are older, have more independence or find it fashionable to deny the influence of the establishment (Garratt, 1985: 131).

Taylor and Hawkins (1978) employed what they termed an 'Expectation Preference Inventory' for their research with school pupils. This inventory consisted of twenty phrases divided between the categories of peer group influences, teacher characteristics, perceived cognitive style of the subject, previous success and subject utility. They found that subject utility was the most important, followed by previous success and teacher characteristics. Peer group influence was found to be the least important. These researchers, surprisingly, given these results, concluded by advising pupils not to be influenced by their peers, or to be fooled by choosing something because of previous success, but above all, to make sure they chose a subject with a good teacher (Taylor and Hawkins, 1978: 19-21).

Watson, McEwen and Dawson (1994) in their research with school pupils used a repertory grid which comprised twenty items and was modelled on that used by Duckworth and Entwistle (1974). The grid was based on four parameters of subject choice influence: perceived difficulty, level of interest, freedom to express own ideas and the social benefit of the subject. Pupils were given eight subjects to rank under each of these parameters. Mathematics, physics and chemistry were rated as above average in their perceived difficulty, with maths and sciences seen to be geared more towards future careers. It was concluded that girls do not find these subjects so important because they do not reflect the type of career girls want. Under the parameter 'freedom to express themselves,' girls and boys rated those subjects in which they were over-represented, and for social benefit both girls and boys rated the 'traditional' subjects more highly. The authors concluded:

The indications are that girls prefer those subjects in which they are more able to utilise their perceived greater facility with written language and that they believe that English, French and biology as opposed to mathematics and physics will allow them enhanced outlets for their creativity and self-expression. (Watson, et al. 1994: 48-49).

This research was conducted six years after the introduction of the National Curriculum, and the researchers questioned whether science becoming compulsory would lead to more girls studying sciences after school. They concluded that this did not appear to be the case with girls who chose to study either maths or science as single subjects, although there had been an increase in those who chose to study maths or science *with* other subjects (Watson et al. 1994: 44).

The final two pieces of research to fall within this quantitative, survey-based category are not concerned specifically with subject choice, but do include sections on this topic and are, therefore, relevant in this review. The first piece of work was concerned with 'future student numbers and the challenges for universities as they move into the 21st century' and was undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies for the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (IES, 1996). The research reviewed and analysed existing data from such organisations as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and undertook a survey of fourteen universities to investigate individual institutional trends. In terms of subject choice at universities, the researchers found that the highest proportion of students at all levels of study were studying business and administration studies (14%), with combined studies accounting for the next highest proportion (12%) and engineering the third highest (9%). The lowest proportion of students were found to be studying veterinary science (0.2%), agriculture and related subjects (0.9%) and librarianship and information science (1.0%), although the authors point out that there has been a marked increase in the number studying the latter category since the late 1980s. In terms of gender choice the following patterns perhaps come as no surprise, given the results of other research reviewed in this chapter (Jones, 1983; Holland, 1987; Brady, 1987; Thomas, 1990). Men were found to dominate

engineering and technology, computer science, physical and mathematical science, whereas women were the majority in subjects allied to medicine, education and languages (IES, 1996: 25). Subjects which had declining application levels were mechanical engineering, law, especially at postgraduate level, built environment, physics and languages, whereas subjects with increasing application levels were psychology, sports science, leisure, media studies, health-related studies and professional studies (including law and social work). The report offers no explanation for these trends, nor does it account for the fact that law appears to be both declining and increasing in applications. Also, an important point to make concerns how specific courses are categorised, for example, 'subjects allied to medicine' includes degree studies in nursing which have altered the statistics considerably over the last few years.

The second piece of research was undertaken by the Gallup Organisation for NIACE (Sargant, 1997). In this research, 4,755 interviews were conducted with a 'representative' sample of 'adults' aged 16 and over living in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, to find out about participation in education and learning. In terms of subject choice, vocational, professional and work-related studies dominated current study, with computer studies heading the list of the *main* subject of study. Second was business administration, followed by social science and social work/care. In this study, the author points out that the number of people studying computer science has increased significantly and that, unlike the findings in the IES (1996) survey, is no longer dominated by men. Also, the take up of computer studies peaks amongst 35-44 year olds and 65-74 year olds. For learners between the ages of 25 and 54, 48% cite work-related reasons as accounting for the choices, whereas for the majority of older learners, personal development reasons account for the choices.

These research projects described above tend to concentrate on demonstrating the patterns of choice, and in doing this there is a danger that they offer a deterministic, consensual and passive view of school pupils, students and adults. It can be argued that

research which ignores the influence of school organisation and the wider issue of socialisation and attitudes towards gender, social class and perceptions of ability, is fundamentally flawed. The methods described above make no allowances for the attitudes of girls and boys which have developed as a result of social expectations about their gender roles and the influence of school and teacher philosophies and ideologies, as well as the influence of the school curriculum. The methodologies place an emphasis on reliability, validity and scientific method rather than adopting a holistic, student and pupil-centred approach. However, the projects described above were useful in that they made visible the patterns of choice. The second section of this chapter discusses research which explored why these patterns were occurring from interactionist, ethnomethodological, phenomenological and sociology of knowledge perspectives all of which view pupil experiences as a primary source of data.

Ryrie, Furst and Lauder (1979), although beginning their research with the assumption that Scottish school pupils made active choices about what to study, were led to other conclusions when their research did not reveal significant results:

Our failure to account for the patterns in the subjects studied by an examination of the formal procedures for choice and the direct influences on pupils' choices leads us to consider the possibility that background or unseen influences may have been operating. (Ryrie et al. 1979: 80).

In a later study of older Scottish school pupils, Ryrie (1981) concluded that there were three steps to how decisions about subject choice were reached. Firstly, decisions could be the result of deliberate choices on matters where choices were actually possible. Secondly, decisions could be the result of deliberate and conscious actions by teachers and school authorities who could determine the curriculum and the options available to pupils. Thirdly, decisions could result from the 'tacit acceptance of a situation as it has come to be mutually understood'. Ryrie went on to point out:

During the long period of schooling teachers influence their students in various ways, intentional or unintentional. As a result, young people come to internalise certain expectations, and adopt certain taken-for-granted assumptions. Such mutually accepted assumptions may result in decisions being made about courses or paths to be followed without any conscious choice on the part of individuals, or deliberate allocation on the part of the school. (Ryrie, 1981: 3-4).

Woods (1976: 131-143) looked at 'choice points' from a group perspective, where pupils 'develop and gain strength as a result of group interaction'. He believed that educational experience is dependent upon social class origin and that school structures serve the aims of society rather than the aims of the individual. Group perspectives develop in reaction to 'pedagogical orientation' which includes the aims, methods and organisation of teaching which are determined by the philosophies and ideologies of the teachers. He found that teachers' definitions of success and failure is 'the most powerful factor underlying all others in the acceptance of pupils to subjects', and that for pupils in the lower streams there was no choice available. Some of these pupils would make light of the situation, others were vague and some would let others make the choices for them, often not knowing what had been chosen. Pupils from these lower streams considered what Woods terms 'social and counter-institutional factors', such as the subjects being hard work, nasty and horrible, boring, too controlled and without their friends. However, high ability pupils used different criteria which were based on instrumental reasons such as the subject being job-related, interesting, a good learning situation and in which they had a strong ability. Woods concluded that once students had got to their third year they knew their place within the school social structure and a group perspective had formed, with subject choice having been socially constructed.

Harvey (1984) in his research with school pupils, was interested in finding out how school organisation factors influence pupil differentiation. In conducting 80 semi-structured interviews with a stratified random sample of pupils, he found that streaming pupils was the 'most prominent school organisation factor which influenced educational success, independently of social class' (Harvey, 1984: 53). In addition to this, he was interested in looking at 'status passages', that is, stages through which an

individual moves throughout the life cycle, which may be accompanied with changes in status or social identity. Status passages within the school include activities such as curriculum placements and subject choice, and Harvey was interested in finding out how such status passages influence future educational and occupational opportunities. He found that pupils viewed the curriculum as a 'graded sequence of activities which become more demanding with passage through the school'. Some pupils found the activities interesting and rewarding whereas others thought them to be 'difficult, irrelevant to one's future or threatening to the self-concept' (Harvey, 1984: 61).

Jones (1983), in a survey of 1208 school pupils, found that the higher the pupil 'ability' the more likely they were to choose subjects from those labelled 'academic', whereas the lower the 'ability' the more likely pupils were to choose subjects from the 'non-exam' band. Jones (1983: 38) pointed out that, as pure academic subjects are deemed to be more important in assessing 'a person's suitability for the higher echelons of society', future life chances are 'inextricably linked with the kinds of subjects chosen at fourteen years of age'. The organisation of the school curriculum and the option system employed by schools was seen to channel pupils in a certain direction and socialise them into accepting this system as legitimate. Pupils were seen to be given a choice when in fact they were exercising very little choice. Jones (1983: 42) found, also, that the 'percentage of pupils denied one or more original choices increases as the ability level decreases'. Similarly, Holland (1987: 9) found that the family, school and long periods of socialisation made the notion of subject and career choice inapplicable, that school served to reinforce class structure.

In terms of gender choice, Jones (1983: 53) found that 'sex differences are firmly entrenched', blaming schools for providing options which made it 'difficult for pupils to stand up to the social pressures inherent in choosing a subject associated with the opposite sex', and thus schools were 'abdicating their responsibility' in overcoming gender stereotypes. In this respect the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, although outlawing

discrimination on the grounds of gender, had little influence on what was actually happening in schools. Indeed, Holland (1987: 9) found that school served to reinforce gender differentiation and relations, but pointed out that pupils believed it to be their own knowledge, ability and experience which had led to their career decisions.

However, Brady (1987: 3) criticised studies which had in common an 'over-socialised conception of human behaviour' which were 'neo-behaviourist in their approach to learning', pointing out that they failed to account adequately for the behaviour of females and males who deviated from the norm for their gender. Brady's research concluded that gender affects educational behaviour in two ways, firstly through socialisation and social control, and secondly, through the social, psychological and financial costs and benefits involved in choosing a gender identity. Deviations can be explained because people weigh up the costs and the benefits, depending on their own particular circumstances, with these costs and benefits varying from person to person (Brady, 1987: 3).

Thomas (1990) in her study of the subject choices of university students, attempted to go beyond this 'over-socialised conception of human behaviour' pointing out that choices were indeed governed by socially accepted behaviour, but that issues of subject and career choice were framed by questions of conformity and rebellion. She found that woman tended to have more choice about whether to behave conventionally or unconventionally, whereas men were less likely to behave in a way which was seen to be 'unmasculine' and therefore were more likely to conform, thus restricting their choices. However, men failed to realise their own subservient position because they were able to still feel superior to women (Thomas, 1990: 175). Thomas concluded by stating that:

Higher education does not reproduce gender inequality by actively discriminating against women. What it does is to make use of culturally available ideas of masculinity and femininity in such a way that women are marginalized and, to some extent, alienated. (Thomas, 1990: 181).

In conclusion, this literature review raises many issues and questions pertinent to a study of adults' learning choices. Firstly, it is clear that any study concerned with issues of individual choice is incomplete if it does not take into account the wider social, political, economic and historical context within which choices are framed. These forces may serve to constrain individual choice, either by directly limiting choices available, as can be seen with the introduction of the National Curriculum, or indirectly and more subtly, as with issues of 'socialisation' influencing the different choices of girls and boys. This issue raises important questions, for example, to what extent are individuals able to make choices? What are the 'internal' dispositional and situational factors which influence choice, such as family background, culture, personal perceptions and attitudes? What are the 'external' institutional factors which may constrain choices, such as selection, option bands and teacher perceptions of pupil ability and how might these issues relate to choice in adulthood? What influence, if any, do the various 'choice points' encountered throughout schooling have on learning choices later in life? Most of the participants in this study experienced schooling before the introduction of the National Curriculum, and some before the introduction of the comprehensive system. Do the choice patterns and experiences differ between, say, those who went to grammar schools and those who went to secondary modern schools? Do choice patterns and experiences differ between those who went through school within the 'progressive' 1960s education system, and those who went through school within the 'utilitarian' 1980s education system, or are their choices, as adults, framed solely within the economic, social and political context of the 1990s?

The studies reviewed in the chapter help to provide a deeper understanding of the issue of subject choice especially amongst school pupils. This is relevant to this thesis since many of the adults in this study discussed their experiences at school, pointing out that memories of school subjects, in particular whether experiences were positive or negative, did have some pertinence to their learning choices as adults. Other themes which are of particular relevance include, firstly, subject likes and dislikes, which might stem from

perceived level of difficulty, teaching methods or teacher characteristics. Secondly, issues of gender expectations and socialisation - what girls were expected to study at school, when they were expected to leave, which jobs were deemed to be appropriate for their gender and how this influences their experiences and perceptions as adults. Thirdly, the influence of peer pressure and, in adulthood, the influence of significant third parties.

This literature review has been useful as it has highlighted these themes and raised further questions for the study. However, most of the studies reviewed in this chapter fail to address the fundamental issue of individual choice and decision-making. The next chapter will focus on this issue as it raises a whole series of new questions pertinent to any study concerned with individual decision making and choice.

CHAPTER 6:

DECISION-MAKING AND

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE:

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Decision-making and Individual Choice: Theoretical Perspectives

It is the researcher's personal belief that a study concerned with the issue of choice is incomplete without a discussion of the conceptual understanding of choice and an examination of the theoretical underpinning of the concept of choice. To do this, it is necessary, first, to take a step back to the discussion concerning the notions of liberty and democracy and the implications these might have for issues of freedom to choose (see Chapter 2). Secondly, it is necessary to consider some of the influential philosophical and theoretical developments which relate to the notion of 'rationality' and the implications these developments have for a study concerned with individual choice.

A question which has concerned political philosophers over the centuries is what sort of state do we live in? Are individuals free to make choices, and if so, to what extent? Indeed, what does liberty actually mean? Carr and Hartnett (1996: 27) believe that 'modern realists' see individual freedom as the key to a 'good' society, interpreting this as 'the freedom of individuals to pursue their own private interests with minimal interference from the state'. Berlin (1969: 22) called this 'negative' liberty, defining it as 'the extent to which someone is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be without interference from other persons'. Thus, this definition of liberty is negative in the sense that nothing should interfere with, or act to constrain, an individual's freedom. In this view of liberty, all individuals are free to pursue their own personal goals, all have the same rights and are not unfairly disadvantaged by social origins, wealth, gender and so on. Education, in this view, is organised in a way which enables every individual to have an equal chance of succeeding.

However, there is a view that there are inequalities in society and that a possible way to tackle this is to change society so that these inequalities do not exist and individual freedom is not restricted. In this view, a 'good' society is one which provides the political, social and economic conditions for members to exercise their freedom on equal terms and, as such, was termed 'positive' liberty (Berlin, 1996: 22).

For liberals the individual is 'prior to society and has a higher moral value and political importance than any collective entity or social group' (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 46).

The basic assumptions are that individuals exist in isolation from other individuals and that they are fundamentally selfish and driven by their own needs and interests. As individuals are motivated by the pursuit of self interest, personal ambition is justified. Only individuals understand their own personal interests and desires, which are naturally given rather than socially formed. Individual autonomy lies at the heart of a liberal democratic society and thus this is a dominant theme within the present day model of liberal adult education. Freedom for individuals implies the development of the capacity to think, act and choose on the basis of rational reflections.

As was noted in Chapter 2, a major concern of political philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was how to achieve democratic rule without resorting to 'mob rule' and chaos if individuals were left to pursue their own individual desires and interests. The solution was to impose a rule of order so that individuals were free to pursue their own desires. However, this in itself illustrates ideological perspective as it suggests that if people are free to act rationally, they will pursue only individual interests which are at odds with the collective interest. Also, by imposing rules, some individuals were having their freedom curtailed so that others could be free. Jarvis (1985: 37) believes that this is so in liberal adult education which is available to some and not to others, that it benefits some and not others. In this respect 'liberal adult education may be seen to be embracing individualistic and elitist ideologies'. In terms of individual learning choices, this would suggest that some adults have a great deal more choice than others.

John Dewey (1930), however, argued that the nineteenth century distinction between individual and society did not exist, that individual people were a product of social relationships. He felt that individual freedom was not a natural right given at birth, but

something towards which a good and just society should aim. For Dewey, social progress and individual freedom could best be understood in terms of the growth of social intelligence. By participating in the search for collective solutions to social change, individuals constantly reconstruct themselves and their social institutions in a way which is conducive to individual freedom. Thus, although decision-making is carried out on a collective basis, it still places an emphasis on the freedom of individuals. In this view education is a constantly changing and evolving system which must be re-shaped to meet the needs of a rapidly transforming society. It should enable individuals to develop their intellectual, communal and social skills so that they can participate equally in their democracy, and as such should involve problem-solving and collaborative learning. In terms of learning choices, one implication of this is that all adults have equal choices available to them, but that these choices might be restricted to reflect the needs of a rapidly transforming society.

Weber (1964, 1967), also, was interested in society and its rapid transformation. He believed that the increasing emphasis on 'rationalisation' in the modern world was due to the growth of modern technology and scientific knowledge which had led to a consequent reduction in the importance of magic, superstition and religion. For Weber, this was characterised, firstly, by a loss of meaning for individuals who had lived within these world views, and, secondly, by a loss of freedom due to the rapidly increasing bureaucracy which has accompanied the development of capitalist forms of economic activity. Modern society has become dominated by instrumentality in reason and action so that 'rationality' has become the focus for social analysis. Craib (1992: 70 - 71) makes the point that one of the main assumptions which has had a 'long and respectable' history in sociological thinking, is that human social relationships 'are patterned and stable' because people act rationally. Indeed, a study which contains the notion of 'learning choices' would seem to suggest that there is an element of rational decision-making involved.

However, are adults really free to make a 'rational' choice, and if so, how might this be done? Parsons (1937, 1951), although rejecting the notion that human activity is simply economically motivated and that people act purely on rational self-interest, believed that people act rationally within a set of certain values or social norms. He, as did Durkhiem (1982), viewed these values as a type of social 'glue' which bonded people together and created an ordered society. Parsons felt that capitalism is basically a fair system in which individuals are rewarded for the amount of effort they are prepared to expend. He believed that people have the capacity to make decisions and act as they choose, although guided by this set of social norms.

In the late nineteenth century, Marx recognised the importance of these social norms, but viewed them as ideological in the sense that they represent the interests and values of dominate groups and, as such, serve to justify positions of power (see Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 1968). Subordinate groups 'consent' to these norms because they are portrayed as general or universal values. Inequalities and social injustice are seen to be natural, eternal and universal. Wealthy and powerful groups are driven by the type of economically determined, rational self-interest which was rejected by Parsons. However, subordinate groups are driven by the need to survive, suffering the 'de-humanising' effect of capitalism which leads to a lack of 'connectedness' between individuals and other people. These groups have very little control over their own lives, with individual decision-making and choice severely restricted. Again, this would suggest a two-tier system in terms of learning choices, with the wealthy and powerful having far more choice than the poor and disempowered.

However, unlike Parsons, Mead (1967) believed that the reason individuals act is due to social processes rather than some prior motivational drive. He suggested that the individual and society are firmly interlocked and that, therefore, an individual's self and mind are intrinsically social processes. Behaviour develops through social interaction with individuals constructing a social world which is meaningful to them, personally.

People act on stimuli according to the meaning those stimuli have for them. This suggests that individuals may act differently to the same stimuli, but that they can all be seen to be acting rationally in terms of their own social world and constructed meaning. Mead believed that individuals are conscious, rational beings who are largely in control of their social performances. Phenomenologists believe also that individuals make rational choices about the direction in which their lives should go and that these are based on their personal experiences. People are seen to be intentional, self-reflective and able to make a difference to their lives. The implication of this is that adults are able to make a rational decision about what to study based on previous experience and thoughts about how returning to education will benefit their lives.

However, Giddens (1976), in his structuration theory, departs from the phenomenologist point of view in that he believes society is not a creation of individuals, but that social institutions pre-exist individuals. He suggests that individuals are capable of resisting the constraints imposed upon them by society and that, by reflecting on their own behaviour and circumstances, they are able to exercise individual choice, in a rational, coherent manner. People are skilled and knowledgeable and as such are not mere puppets of the social system. In terms of learning choices, this would suggest that institutions pre-exist individuals but that adults are able to make rational, coherent choices about what to study.

Habermas (1986, 1987), working within the Frankfurt School of critical theory, was interested in human freedom and the way this has been curtailed through domination and repression. He was interested in finding out the nature of social change needed to produce a just and democratic society, believing in the growth of certain forms of rational thinking and its potential for social emancipation. However, he was critical of theories which assert the dominance of instrumental reason in human beings as they tend to view the operation of reason in one-dimensional terms, ignoring the role of reaching a decision through shared understanding. Habermas believed that, on the one hand, action

is determined by instrumental purpose, motivated by practical concerns such as economic advancement, where one person persuades another. However, on the other hand, shared understandings lead to action which is motivated by reason. This could help to explain further the development of the liberal and vocational traditions in education, and the importance of instrumentality at this present time.

Some theories, most notably within the field of economics, are concerned specifically with the notion of rational choice. Craib (1992: 70-71) offers a description of the purpose of such explanations:

A rational choice explanation is an intentional explanation, in that it assumes that an individual's desires and beliefs are reasons for her action, but it goes further in the claim that they are also causes of her action.

However, the author goes on to acknowledge that rational choice theories are not suggesting that all actions are rational and that every person acts rationally all of the time. Instead, rational choice theories seem to be suggesting that 'enough people act rationally enough of the time to make the theory a workable proposition' (Craib, 1992: 75). Elster (1986: 4) describes the elements of rational choice theory thus:

In order to justify and explain behaviour, rational-choice theory appeals to three distinct elements in the choice situation. The first element is the feasible set, i.e. the set of all courses of action which (are rationally believed to) satisfy various logical, physical and economic constraints. The second is (a set of rational beliefs about) the causal structure of the situation, which determines what course of action will lead to what outcomes. The third is a subjective ranking of the feasible alternatives, usually derived from a ranking of the outcomes to which they (are expected to) lead. To act rationally, then, simply means to choose the highest ranked element in the feasible set.

However, a major criticism of this type of rational choice theory is that there are many situations in which individuals are unclear about the 'feasible set' and unaware of the range of options available to them. As advertising and marketing strategies intensify, individuals are offered selective information. Databases hold information about the

‘types’ of people to occupy specific postal districts, which are then sold to companies who can target their mailings occupied by the ‘type’ of person who is likely to buy their product - hamper and catalogue agencies to unaffluent areas dominated by young families, personal investment and pension schemes to affluent areas dominated by middle-aged professionals. Supermarkets are stocked with products which the ‘type’ of local people are expected to purchase. As educational institutions improve their marketing and advertising strategies in the wake of increasing competition for funds, are we witnessing a similar trend? Certainly, in previous research (Dawson, 1994b) this was found to be the case, with children from a school located in an affluent area of a large city having a much larger ‘feasible set’ than those from a school located within an unaffluent area of the same city. In the former school children had received comprehensive guidance interviews, visited both local universities, received publications from universities throughout the country, received talks from admissions tutors and local employers and discussed higher education with friends and parents. However, none of this had occurred in the latter school. For these children, concerns revolved around whether they would get a job or be on the dole when they left school. For them, choices were not theirs to make. This example highlights the point that rational choice theories are fundamentally flawed when they ignore the wider economic and social structures within which decisions are made.

Another criticism of rational choice theory is that in many situations the outcome of a given course of action cannot be determined prior to making the decision. An individual may expect that a certain outcome will occur, but nothing can guarantee the expected result. Returning to education is an example of this type of uncertainty. Political discourse backed up by official statistics suggest that higher qualifications lead to a ‘better’ and higher paid job. However, nothing can guarantee that this will be the case and an individual needs to try and make a judgement based on uncertainty and speculation. Bring past experiences, present circumstances and future considerations into the equation and all sorts of subjective, and perhaps subconscious, factors may

confuse and hinder an individual's decision. Also, in Elster's rational choice theory described above, it is unclear to what extent third parties, especially those who have influence, may play a part in an individual's choice.

These two criticisms of rational choice theory highlight two important ways in which individual decision-making and choice are influenced. Firstly, there are all those factors which are external to a person's life, such as institutional provision, Government policy, marketing and advertising. Secondly, there are all those factors which could be seen to be internal, such as personal experience, family background, personal expectations and future considerations. Both internal and external factors become inextricably linked when an adult considers returning to education as any action will involve merging the internal and external worlds in some way. It is for this reason that any research which is concerned with individual decision-making and choice has to consider these two worlds and what occurs at the interface between the two. This brings the discussion back to the problems highlighted above, where social analysts have grappled for many years with the problem of taking the individual or society as their point of departure.

Whether social analysis began with the individual or society, there was still a commonly held assumption that 'rational' principles underlie any form of organisation. However, with the increase in post-modern thinking which 'denies the existence of a universal rationality' (Craib, 1992: 178), this emphasis on the basic assumption of rationality began to be critically re-assessed. Indeed, Thomas (1994: 17) believes that it is 'diversity, rather than rationality or reification' which has marked the rough passage from modernity to postmodernity. For example, Foucault (1980) rejects the phenomenologist idea that the individual is the origin of meaning and thus the centre-point of any social analysis. Instead, he believes that individuals are not inherently free, but are hemmed in from all sides by social determinations. He sees discourse as a social phenomena which constructs an individual within a field of power relations and a particular set of practices. Foucault is critical of social analysis which considers individuals to be rational and fully

conscious beings who are in control of their lives, especially as theories of this type ignore irrational and contradictory feelings over which individuals have little control. In terms of learning choices, this would seem to imply that adults can only consider and discuss their choices in light of the socially available discourse of the time.

Bourdieu's conception of 'habitus' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) refers to the basic stock of knowledge retained by people which has been developed as a result of living within a particular culture or sub-culture. Habitus is a Latin word 'which refers to a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body' (Jenkins, 1992: 74-75). Jenkins believes that it has three meanings in the work of Bourdieu, firstly, that it exists only inside the head of each actor; secondly, that it exists only because of the interaction and practices of actors; and thirdly, that it is rooted in the body. Bourdieu believes that the explanation of behaviour is to be found in the habitus, that actors, due to certain circumstances, may think they are making a rational decision, but in fact it is the habitus which influences these decisions:

Times of crises, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted, constitute a class of circumstances when indeed 'rational choice' often appears to take over. But, and this is a crucial proviso, it is habitus itself that commands this option. We can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principle of these choices. (Waquant, 1989:45)

Thus, behaviour is influenced by environment and background. This conception is similar to Giddens's notion of structure as both suggest that a set of 'dispositions' which influence behaviour are not consciously talked about, with individuals often unaware that they exist. Bourdieu believes that the habitus serves to produce and reproduce the circumstances in which people live, and that they are controlled by the habitus in a mechanical, determined way. Bourdieu is thus extremely critical of rational choice theory, particularly that developed by Elster (1986).

Many of the theories outlined above ignore or play down the situation of women, concentrating on a hierarchical, male-dominated occupational structure and on social status. These theories have been developed in a patriarchal society in which social status and worth are measured in terms of paid employment and economic factors where the unpaid work of women in the home is devalued and delegitimised. A major feminist criticism of previous sociological analysis is that 'the economy' is seen to be an abstract system which is not based within the realms of human action. Also, the concept of 'labour' is linked closely with modern capitalism so that 'labour' is equated with 'commodity' which serves to devalue women's unpaid work in the home, considering it to be not 'true' labour. This is especially so with theories which are concerned with capitalist forms of production such as Marxism. Indeed, the philosophical emphasis on liberty grew from a male dominated society, and, as Marshall (1994: 10 - 11) points out,

There is no question that the individual of liberalism was male: women were excluded from the public in both its political and economic senses, being subsumed under the authority of their husbands and/or fathers.

Individual freedom and liberty, then, extended only as far as the male. 'Rational choice' was, and often still is, defined in male terms, that is, what would 'rational man' do, given the situation in which he finds himself? For example, Durkheim (1951: 385) asserted that while men are 'almost entirely the product of society', women remain 'to a far greater extent the product of nature'. The implication of this line of thought is that women are biologically driven and therefore incapable of male-defined rational action. Parsons (1937, 1951) believed that the division of labour between home and external employment was a 'natural' consequence of 'role differentiation' and that this division created an interdependence between family members which led to social stability. For Parsons, individuals had two 'roles'. The first was the instrumental role which was externally orientated towards goal attainment. The second was the expressive role which was internally orientated towards integration and tension management. Although it was possible for females and males to occupy either role, women were predisposed towards the expressive role because of their biological role in child-bearing. Again, this

implication of a natural predisposition suggests that women are biologically motivated, rather than 'rationally' motivated.

Dorothy Smith (1988) set out to redress this imbalance and move away from the male-dominated discourse which had prevailed in sociology. She believes that domination in society is due to a mixture of economically determined class position and patriarchal rule, which exists in multiple sites from government to educational institutions. Women are not part of this 'relations of ruling' and, as such, experience a disjuncture between their own personal lives and that of official, male-dominated organisations which 'invade' their lives in the forms of 'texts' and 'documents'. Women, she believes, have to learn the established culture and develop a consciousness that problematizes it on the basis of their personal experience. For men there is no need to problematize because they do not experience this type of disjuncture. Women do not, necessarily, experience their lives as something to be mastered and controlled, instead often suppressing their own interests to cater for those of family members. Unlike theories which suggest rational, self-interested motivation, Smith suggests that women have to survive by learning the expectations and meanings of dominant groups, whilst suppressing their own interests. In terms of learning choices, this has a great deal of relevance as it implies that women have less choice than men and that they suppress their own interests in favour of the interests of others.

Farganis (1994: 70) believes that, at this present time, 'two aspects of the current crisis of gender politics are explicable in both cultural and institutional terms', describing them in the following way:

First, communities have cultures that elaborate the ideas, norms, and values that demarcate their identity. Second, these ideas are lodged in institutions such as the family, religion, the government, and the worlds of business and the arts and they shape the collective identity. In the modern world, these communal values are in creative tension with values of liberty and equality, with the right and the ability of people to define themselves. While we are encouraged to assert our individual autonomy, we are also encouraged to feel responsible for - in the sense of not trampling on - the rights and values of communal others.

'Liberty' and 'equality' thus have different meanings for women and men. Through socialisation women are taught to adhere to and respect the views and rights of others, whereas males are brought up believing it is their right to follow a more autonomous direction. This suggests that the notion of 'choice' may be different for women and men:

Are women oppressed and forced to make one set of choices rather than another? Are they coerced or brainwashed into acting in certain ways? Are gendered patterns accepted not out of fear but out of an acceptance of their legitimacy and the legitimacy of the authorities who formulated them? (Farganis, 1994: 65)

If, as Smith (1988) suggests, women survive by learning the expectations and meanings of dominant groups, then, to women, these choices may still be 'rational' given their 'feasible set' from which they choose. However, their 'feasible set' is much narrower than it is for males, and the above quotations would seem to suggest that women are constrained more than men by external conditions beyond their control, and of which they may be unaware. Due to these constraints, women may believe that they are acting 'rationally', making the best of their situation, but it is not 'rational' action as defined in male terms, and therefore, an alternative biological interpretation for their action has been sought by male theorists. This leads to fundamental questions about what, exactly, is meant by 'rational'? How is it defined? Who's 'rational' is it? One person's 'rationality' may appear to be another person's 'irrationality'. For example, people in positions of power who have benefited from an élite education may believe it to be totally irrational that individuals 'choose' not to go to university. The discussion above has illustrated that social scientists and philosophers tend to equate 'rationality' with a good and just society, but Barry and Hardin (1982: 368) point out the contradictions inherent in this notion:

It is scarcely too much to say that rationality has displaced both truth and morality as the ultimate criterion for judging both belief and conduct. Even if we do venture to use terms like 'true', or words out of the moral vocabulary such as 'just', we are liable to construe them in some way that derives them from the more basic concept of rationality. Common sense might suppose that it is rational to believe things because they are true, and rational to do things because they are just. But we are more likely to reverse the relation and say that truth is what is rational

(in ideal conditions) to believe, and that principles of justice are what is rational (an ideal condition) to adopt.

Margolis (1982: 16), suggests, also, that theories which emphasize self-interested motivation, are fundamentally flawed because of the narrow definition of rationality which means that it cannot account adequately for social choice:

Rationality has been defined by the conventional theory only for the case of self-interested motivation. But what if it turns out, as indeed it does, that rationality defined in this narrow way cannot describe the way human beings we regard as reasonable (such as you or I) behave in the context of social choice? Then unless you are prepared to argue that, by definition, social motivation must be irrational unless it can be formulated in terms of self-interest, there appears to be something wrong with the conventional definition: it is too narrow to account for actual behaviour.

In conclusion, research which is concerned with learning choices should consider both the conceptual understanding of choice and the theoretical underpinning of the concept of choice. To do this, the concepts of 'liberty' and 'democracy' and the implications these have for individual decision-making and choice have been discussed. The development of the present day model of liberal adult education can be traced back to the importance placed on individual autonomy which lies at the heart of a liberal democratic society. However, it has been demonstrated that within this liberal adult education tradition, some people have more choice than others.

Also important in this discussion is the concept of 'rational' action and the implication this has for individual decision-making and choice. The extent to which a theorist agrees or disagrees with the concept of rational action depends in part, upon ideological and theoretical perspective, and whether one takes society, the individual or both as the point of departure. It depends also upon the definition of 'rationality' and how this might change over time and differ between cultures. A study into the learning choices of adult returners implies that there is some element of rational choice, and this issue will be considered later in the study.

SECTION 2:
RESEARCH
METHODOLOGY
AND METHODS

Methodology

When deciding upon an appropriate methodology for this research, it was useful to begin by returning to the aims and objectives which have been discussed in Chapter 1. The first point to note from these aims and objectives is that the research was concerned with attitudes, perceptions and influences on individual choice, necessitating the need for a qualitative methodology. Also, as the first and second objectives illustrate, a flexible methodology was required which enabled the research to draw from a number of disciplines if and when they became appropriate. It has been noted in Chapter 4 that theory in adult education draws from a variety of disciplines, most notably sociology and psychology, and it was felt that enough scope had to be provided to enable the incorporation of relevant theories. Also, it was important to try to view their social world through the eyes of adult returners in order to gain a deeper understanding of what learning choices actually meant to themselves. A methodology was required which did not presume an objective truth, but which represented the participants' truth, which was able to look at, and describe, the experiences of adult returners. The aim was not to find facts which could be generalised to the whole population, but to find themes which capture the essential features of adults' learning choices. The researcher was not looking for causes of learning choices, although the adults themselves might have provided explanations for this. Finally, the aims and objectives indicate that a methodology was required which enabled the inductive generation of new themes and concepts. The intention was to consider an as-yet uncharted area of adult experience, not to test hypotheses.

A possible methodology which was considered early in the planning stages was phenomenology which is concerned with:

How we come to interpret others and their actions; with the complex ways in which we understand those with whom we interact; and with the ways in which we interpret our own actions and those of others within a social context. (Bernstein, 1976: 141)

Phenomenology was considered to be important as it recognises that every experience is unique and that the researcher must not adopt any position on the correctness or falsity of the claims made by research participants. An important part of phenomenology is that researchers must begin by 'bracketing' and setting aside existing assumptions so that they can describe the ordinary, conscious experience of the everyday life of participants. However, in the introduction it was illustrated that the idea for this research has arisen from a number of research projects which, it was felt, contained important and valuable data which could help to inform a study on adult learners. In their article on the similarities and differences between phenomenology and grounded theory, Baker, Wuest and Stern (1992: 1357) note that:

From the grounded theory perspective, the researcher is a social being who also creates and recreates social processes. Therefore, previous experiences are data. No effort is made to put aside ideas or assumptions about the situation being studied. On the contrary, the researcher uses these in order to understand better the processes being observed.

Another qualitative methodology to be considered was discourse analysis in which data are interpreted as expressing one or more culturally available discourses (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This suggests that participants do not actively construct their own world, but instead act as a channel through which flows the culturally available discourse (Ashworth, 1997: 17). In this way, discourse analysis is opposed to the dualism of individual and society which was discussed in Chapter 4. However, it was felt that where learning choices are concerned, there has to be included a discussion on structural influences, in particular concerning available provision, rules and regulations about entry requirements and so on. This was the reason why discourse analysis as a possible methodology was rejected. Nevertheless, it was felt that the concept of discourse should not be discarded as it alerted the researcher to the issue that adults might possibly only be able to talk about their experiences using the culturally available discourse of the time. Again, a methodology had to be chosen which would enable this to be taken into consideration.

After having rejected phenomenology and discourse analysis, it was finally decided that grounded theory would be an appropriate research methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory has its roots in symbolic interactionism, which suggests that objects, people, situations and events do not have their own meaning, but that meaning is conferred upon them by individuals. The definitions people apply depend on their personal situation in life, their culture and their experiences. Blumer (1969) was the theorist who coined the phrase 'symbolic interactionism' and, for him, interactionism has three premises:

- Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- These meanings are a product of social interaction in human society.
- These meanings are modified and handled through an interpretative process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs he/she encounters.

People interact with others, being driven by a series of social symbols and, although individuals may share meanings of these symbols, this does not imply consensus. Some people may take these meanings to be the 'truth', whereas others may discard particular meanings and adopt new ones which leads to change (Boyden and Biklen, 1982).

Interactionism suggests that 'facts' do not have a uniform existence which can be readily observed and reported. Instead, 'facts' are the ways in which different people come to define a situation.

Symbolic interactionists suggest that the individual and society are inseparable units, that:

society is to be understood in terms of the individual making it up, and individuals are to be understood in terms of the societies of which they are members. (Blumer, 1969: 2)

The individual is seen as existing in dual systems, which Mead (1932: 77) referred to as 'sociality' (see Chapter 6). Blumer (1969: 2) goes on:

In the interactionist image, human beings are defined as self-reflective beings. Human beings are organisms with selves, and behaviour in society is often directed by the self. The behaviour of men and women is 'caused' not so much by forces within themselves (instincts, drives, needs, etc.), but by what lies in between, a reflective and socially derived interpretation of the internal and external stimuli that are present. In turn, this idea is related to another aspect of the interactionist image of men and women: the social origins of the self and human nature.

Human behaviour is seen to be accumulative and does not occur in isolation to what has happened, and will happen, in the past, present and future. All acts, responses and perceptions are continually built upon. The idea of the self is developed through interaction, with the development of a person's character influenced by how others perceive that person and how that person *thinks* others do, or should, perceive her or him. Further interaction may alter perceptions so that the idea of self changes and develops, depending on what is happening in an individual's life.

Symbolic interactionism shares with rational choice theories the concern with the unit act (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on rational choice theory). However, it differs from these theories by viewing interaction not as a matter of choice of the most useful course of action, but as a negotiated reality in which power relations are unequal. Unfortunately, this inequality is subsumed under the micro analysis of face-to-face interaction which tends to neglect the structural inequalities of wealth and power (Craib, 1992: 90).

Indeed, one of the major criticisms of symbolic interactionism is that it ignores the wider features of social structure and, as a result of this, has nothing useful to say about power, conflict and change (Layder, 1994: 72). One of the strengths of grounded theory, however, is that it enables the incorporation of social theory from other schools of

thought, thus allowing for the consideration of structural conditions which influence choices, such as patriarchy. In this way it is possible to incorporate those influences on adults' action of which they may be unaware or over which they have little control. However, it is important not to fall into the 'researcher knows best' trap and make judgements on the correctness or falsity of their claims.

Although the term 'grounded theory' was coined by Glaser and Strauss in the latter part of the 1960s, grounded theory generation as a methodology was being used long before this time. For example, the methodology is evident in the work of Malinowski (1944) and Whyte (1943). However, partly as a response to the sustained attack on qualitative methods, Glaser and Strauss laid out their systematic set of rules and procedures as a 'scientific' approach to analysing large amounts of qualitative data. This, coupled with Glaser's strict training in quantitative methods, which led to the use of terminology used in quantitative circles, such as 'coding' and 'comparison groups', has laid open their work to criticisms of neo-positivism (Ashworth, 1996). Certainly, at one end of the continuum, if the specific rules and procedures set out by Glaser and Strauss are strictly adhered to with no room for flexibility, then accusations of neo-positivism may be justified. Indeed, as Ashworth (1996: 9) notes:

Because of its relative clarity, grounded theory, whereby the discovery of 'theory' governing some social phenomena is made inductively on the basis of the painstaking analysis of data, is coming to be a favourite form of qualitative research, going beyond the boundaries of sociological research in which it arose. A step-by-step account of a process of data analysis is provided which is comforting to the researcher who is perplexed about what to do with the mass of information that even a modest qualitative project generates. However, there is a very real danger that grounded theory can be taken as a *technology* for doing qualitative analysis.

Robrecht (1995) notes that the way grounded theory has evolved has led to a concentration on procedures and processes, with literature attempting to guide researchers through the specific methods. Unfortunately, this has meant, also, that the wider methodological concern with inductive theory generation grounded in the data is

often subsumed under this set of procedures, so that it does, indeed, become a qualitative analysis technology. However, in this research, grounded theory is not seen to be a specific list of rules and procedures which guide the research, but instead is perceived to be a constantly evolving methodology and as such is concerned with the conceptual, theoretical and research aspects of knowledge, rather than with the specific research methods themselves. From the grounded theory perspective, as with symbolic interactionism, it is assumed that meanings are a product of social interaction and that these meanings are modified through a process of interpretation. The researcher is a social being who creates, recreates, modifies and interprets social processes. As such, it is assumed that the researcher brings to the research process perceptions and expectations about the situation being studied. These will be based on the researcher's personal experience and interaction with significant others. As this cannot occur in a vacuum, it has to be historically and culturally specific. Following this line of thought, it stands to reason that grounded theory, by its very nature, has to be a constantly evolving methodology which adapts to the changing ideological, philosophical and epistemological debate. In this case, the emphasis on methods and procedures can be understood during a time of rapid epistemological transformation - perhaps this reliance on procedure provided researchers with a methodological 'safety blanket' during a time of intellectual turmoil and uncertainty. Nevertheless, this is not to say that grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss does not have a considerable amount of useful methods from which this research can draw. Indeed it does, and the title of this thesis reflects the importance of these methods, which will be discussed in the following chapter. However, it is the overall methodological aim of inductive theory generation grounded in the data, rather than a systematic working through of a prescribed set of methods and procedures, which has moved the research forward. This negates arguments of neo-positivism and emphasises the flexibility of grounded theory, re-positioning it within its qualitative roots from whence it originated.

Although researchers might choose and change their paradigm for a number of reasons which depend on autobiography and personality, it is possible that they are exercising very little choice, as Jones (1993: 158) notes:

The dominance of one paradigm and the knowledge its practitioners purvey is not, therefore, caused by any monopoly over truth it may have, but because of its monopoly over *power* and, as a result, its means socially to control what *counts* as truth. The production of scientific knowledge is thus underpinned by choices, preferences and judgements not *freely* chosen by scientists, but orchestrated and reinforced by the political activity of a scientific establishment. Scientific knowledge is therefore not powerful because it is true; it is true, because it is powerful.

Indeed, Foucault (1990: 38) points out that human beings have developed as a result of 'subjection'. This refers to particular, historically located, disciplinary processes and concepts which enable people to consider themselves as individuals whilst constraining them from thinking otherwise. These processes enable people to tell the 'truth' about themselves. Following this line of thought, changes in private individuals can only follow changes in public ideas. This research began in 1995 at a time when the researcher had, through interaction with others and the development of shared meanings, come to locate herself within the 'feminist, postmodern' tradition of academic thought. It was from within this tradition that grounded theory as a methodology was approached. As the researcher brings with her perceptions and expectations based on this tradition, it can be argued that her view of grounded theory might be different to the view of researchers who would locate themselves within a different tradition.

Before discussing how grounded theory is viewed from within this feminist, postmodern tradition of academic thought, it is important to review, first of all, developments within feminist and postmodernist research. In this way it will be possible to illustrate how these developments have influenced both the theoretical thinking of the researcher and the methods used in this study.

Unlike previous sociological analysis which views gender as a biologically determined variable, in this work it is viewed as a social category, a social construct which has been put together by agents of socialisation such as the state, the family and the church. Gender has been shaped, constructed and reconstructed throughout history. Farganis (1994: 9-10) believes that, as gender is socially produced, it is necessary to understand the specific social order responsible for its historical specificity. Also, feminist theory itself does not occur in a vacuum, but is shaped by these historical forces. Indeed, McRobbie (1982: 52) believes that research is a 'historically-charged practice' and as such it is extremely important to describe the historical developments which have proceeded the research, along with the social and political context of the present time (see Chapters 2 and 3). Farganis (1994: 23-24) points to three distinct stages within the development of feminist thought throughout the twentieth century. The first stage dealt with the issue of equal treatment between women and men, advocating anti-discriminatory legislation which would eventually lead to a reduction in discrimination on the grounds of gender. The second phase stressed a more emphatically gendered view, recognising and glorifying differences between women and men. The concern within this phase was not with legal discrimination, but with the experiences, emotions and feelings of women themselves. In the third stage it is recognised that women's experiences differ, that there is no one single truth, with the emphasis instead on the diversity and variety in women's lives.

These three phases are mirrored by the developments in feminist epistemologies which have emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century. The first is feminist empiricism where the aim is to discover a more objective truth by eliminating such biases as gender, class and race from the research process. Traditional western scholarship and science is seen to have been developed purely from a white, male, middle-class perspective and research has been conducted from this standpoint, eliminating or belittling the experiences of 'subordinate' groups. Examples of feminist empiricism include research

into discrimination in psychology departments (Fidell, 1970), and research into the ways in which women evaluate the work of women (Goldberg, 1968).

The second epistemology is that of feminist standpoint research, a phrase which developed from the continual debate about whether it is possible to have feminist methods because feminism itself is constantly changing and being redefined (Harding, 1991; Griffin, 1995). The term itself indicates the 'complex and contradictory relationship between feminism and research' (Griffin, 1995: 119). Standing between essentialism and relativism (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995b: 16) feminist standpoint research suggests that knowledge is shaped by the social context of the knower, that the perspectives of marginalised groups in society is most complete because it reflects the experience of the disadvantaged within the dominant culture (Wuest, 1995: 126). As knowledge is constructed from the position of the knower, science is part of the social order and is viewed and produced exclusively by the powerful in society:

Standpoint theorists argue that science is part of the social order, since knowledge is *always* situated and constructed from the perspective of particular social positions and locations ... Standpoint theory builds in an analysis of power relations, describing dominant conceptual schemes as the outcome of knowledge produced exclusively from the social activities of the powerful in society (typically, although not necessarily, men). (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995b: 14)

The main elements of feminist standpoint research, according to Griffin (1995: 120), are firstly, that women's experiences are focused upon as a basis for the research and the development of theoretical frameworks. Secondly, that the researcher is accountable to the research participants and to a wider feminist constituency. Thirdly, that the personal and private realms are also political, and finally, that through reflexivity and self-conscious awareness can be gained a deeper understanding of how the process of research is structured by relations of dominance.

The third epistemology, feminist postmodernism, suggests that there is no single truth which can be researched and reported, as women's experiences vary according to age,

race, class, culture, sexual orientation, education and other variables. Basic concepts of power, knowledge and truth are questioned and acknowledged as ever-shifting realities created through the process of social interaction (Wuest, 1992: 126). Certainly, black feminists have criticised the overtly white, middle-class stance taken by academic feminists in the past, illustrating how their experiences have been very different (Collins, 1990; hook, 1989). Feminist postmodernism recognises that there are multiple explanations of reality, that it is important to look for the basic social process which leads to this variation in behaviour within the conditions imposed by the existing structure of society. This enables the incorporation of changes in power and social processes and the consequent effect on social interaction into the research process.

Reinharz (1992: 178-179) suggests that feminist research should be orientated towards feminist goals but that these should be loosely defined and remain vague because they are limited by our current experience of feminism which is ever-evolving. She believes that feminist research should be antipositivist, antipatriarchal and open-ended with an overall aim of raising consciousness and empowering individuals, although Stanley and Wise (1983) reject the notion of consciousness raising as elitist.

Bhavnani (1993: 98) illustrates how research can be evaluated to find out if it is indeed feminist research. Firstly, the research should be accountable to both individuals and the overall goal of feminism, for example, are the participants described as deviant (against the male-imposed norm) as passive victims or slotted into previously male-defined categories? Indeed, a major criticism of previous social analysis is that it often suggests passive subjects who are not active in constructing their own social world. Secondly, how are relationships between researcher and researched negotiated and carried out? Is someone dominant, another subordinate? How are these relationships discussed in the research report? Thirdly, how are issues of difference dealt with during the research and when it is written up? All of these points were considered in great detail when the methods for this research were developed, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Shields and Dervin (1993) believe that feminist research should be *for* women, not *on* women, and that it should provide information which will help women to improve their lives. They point out that taking part in research can lead to improvements, for instance, through consciousness raising it can lead to personal empowerment. Research should be directed towards emancipation by altering economic and social conditions which oppress women. However, Reinharz (1992: 178 - 179) believes that this may influence feminists to argue that all research should be applied and lead to change. Certainly this should be the aim of some research, but feminists need also to contribute to the theoretical debate if they are to raise their profile within the academic sphere. However, findings should be made available to people who matter, not just to the academic worlds, and should include educating professionals who may have closed attitudes and biases. It is important that research findings are available for anyone who can use them and benefit from them, and, as such, the language has to be accessible to the perceived audience. Although McRobbie (1982: 51) notes that 'there is no such thing as "pure" printed speech' and that 'by acting upon speech, it is invariably shaped in one way or another', researchers must be careful not to obscure women's voices, as DeVault (1990: 107) points out:

Standard practice that smooths out respondents' talk is one way that women's voices are distorted; it is often a way of discounting and ignoring those parts of women's experience that are not easily expressed.

Data are interpreted and made meaningful through theory and Henwood and Pidgeon (1995b: 12-15) caution feminist researchers against what they believe is a naive view that it is possible to do purely descriptive, participatory research. They believe an intellectual analysis entails some degree of abstraction. Also, the researcher should be accountable for her analysis which is done through justification, and be accountable for her interpretations and possible consequences on herself and her participants. Theorists:

occupy a relational and historical site in the social world which is likely to shape and set limits to the knowledge formulations produced. (Cain, 1993: 88)

Feminism itself has developed within patriarchy so that the way women think is affected by traditional assumptions (Sawicki, 1991: 10). Science cannot be described as value-neutral and exclusively objective:

because the assumptions underlying science in general, as well as particular scientific projects, are always set by the culture, politics and value of society. (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995b: 8)

Nicholson (1990: 3) points out that feminist scholarship emerged in an academic environment which was strongly governed by rules of scientific objectivity. These rules were challenged by feminists as they were used to de-legitimise and devalue their work, which was described as 'faddish' and lacking in scientific rigour. Arguing that the notion of objectivity was fundamentally flawed as all scholarship is influenced by its creator, feminists suggested such narrowness could be avoided by the inclusion of a multitude of points of view.

Over the past two decades, under the label of 'postmodernism', have emerged further critiques of the claim to objectivity, along with a critique of the modernist emphasis on the subject and the idea of history as linear and evolutionary. As Farganis (1994: 109) notes:

Postmodernism rejects the subject as a clearly defined person capable of giving a single and precise meaning to who she is, why she is behaving as she is, and what she intends by her action. In other words, it assumes that behaviour is neither fully known to actor and observer nor fully explicable. There is no fixed central core to the person's identity out of which all meaning emanates. Factors that have little or nothing to do with the person affect who people are. Situations and people are more ambiguous than is allowed by theories that assume principles of rational action and rational discourse.

Some feminists may sceptically question the emergence of postmodernism within mainstream academia at a time when oppressed groups were beginning to get their

voices heard. By declaring that there is no single truth, but multiple realities dependent on historical and cultural specificities, it is possible to obscure their voices by incorporating them back into the mainstream and declaring emancipatory theory obsolete. As Nicholson (1990: 9) notes:

Thus, the dangers of postmodernism as seen by some feminists are those of both relativism and the abandonment of theory. While many reject the modernist 'view from nowhere', they question whether postmodernism would not lead us to the equally problematic 'view from everywhere'. Are coherent theory and politics possible within a post-modern position?

Jones (1993: 110) believes that arguments against truth and reality are 'catastrophic' for the project of modernity as they suggest that any social analysis is itself a social product, and, as such, cannot be judged to be right or wrong, only different. This, according to postmodernists, is precisely what is desirable within postmodernism, as the charade of value-neutral science and the idea of 'superior knowledge' will gradually come to an end. Postmodernism represents a reaction against the Enlightenment emphasis on truth and reality, emphasising instead what Jones terms the 'ephemeral nature of contemporary human life'. No knowledge is superior to other knowledge, and each person's 'truth' and 'reality' should be respected and acknowledged.

The discussion presented above illustrates the need for a methodology which avoids implications of passivity and an over-emphasis on rationality; emphasises the need for, and importance of, participatory and collaborative research; recognises the importance of difference, alternative 'truth' and 'reality'; provides the opportunity to take the research onto a higher level of abstraction. Also, it was important that the methodology enabled the incorporation of processes, rather than static accounts, as this would allow the research to consider how and why adults change their choices as they progress through their chosen entry route. It was felt that grounded theory would go some way towards meeting this criteria.

Wuest (1995: 127) believes that there are several similarities between grounded theory and feminist methods and that 'grounded theory is consistent with the post-modern feminist epistemology in the recognition of multiple explanations of reality'. It talks about theory as process and considers the influence of structural conditions and is therefore consistent with feminist theories that consider structural influences, such as patriarchy. Grounded theory does not reject *a priori* theory, but instead compares it with other data in the emerging theory and uses it to elaborate on emerging concepts. In feminist research, feminist theory will help to influence what is observed, but only concepts which have emerged from the data are used in the developing theory, so that the emerging theory is driven by the data and not by a theoretical framework. Also, as one of the basic tests of grounded theory is whether it 'works', has 'fit' and 'grab', that is, that those closely associated with the areas of research are able to identify with it and see the relevance to their own lives, so feminist research has similar aims, especially in terms of being 'true' to the participants.

Grounded theory discovers social processes within social structures. Researchers interact with the participants and must be responsible for the interpretation of their data, as consistent with the feminist research. Wuest (1995: 129) lists three basic requisites for feminist research: firstly, that the research should be useful to the participants; secondly, that the methods should not be oppressive; and thirdly, that the method should be reflexive, allowing for reflection on both intellectual traditions and the progress of the study. All of these requisites are consistent with grounded theory, especially the latter which is the fundamental way in which a grounded theory study moves forward.

Feminist and personal awareness throughout the research process are extremely important. Grounded theory should enable the researcher to view the social world through the eyes of the participants so that personal biases can be reduced. It is important for the researcher to constantly review thoughts and processes, continually reflecting on what is being done, which is another component of feminist research

(Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995b; Griffin, 1995). Theoretical sampling should help to reduce cultural and social biases and enable the researcher to lessen the influence of androcentric theories and models (this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 8).

Postmodernism recognises the importance of difference and grounded theory, within a feminist framework, can help to deal with these differences and not ignore the voices and experiences of minority groups as 'grand theories' have done in the past. Indeed, 'diversity must be explained and integrated to enrich rather than disprove an emerging theory' (Wuest, 1995: 132). Finally, both feminist and grounded theory are incomplete and continually evolving; they are not static.

McRobbie (1982: 52) describes research as 'a historically-charged practice; that it can never present more than a *partial* portrait of the phenomenon under study'. There comes a time in any research when the data collection and analysis has to stop and the writing up has to begin. Making this transition is especially difficult in a grounded theory study, because, although 'saturation point' may have been reached, public discourse, social policy and history is moving on, changing at a rapid pace which will have repercussions on the findings of the research. This thesis represents the situation between 1995 and 1998, presenting an historically and culturally located analysis of individual decision-making and choice in the last few years of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a detailed account of the way in which both phenomenology and discourse analysis were rejected in favour of grounded theory as a suitable methodology for the research. This is because it was felt that grounded theory would allow for the incorporation of theories from a number of disciplines if and when they became relevant, thus allowing for the consideration of structural conditions which might influence choices; enable the incorporation of processes rather than static accounts; and help the researcher to provide a description of the social world through the eyes of adult returners themselves. However, the research began in 1995 at a time when

the researcher had, through interaction with others and the development of shared meanings, come to locate herself within the 'feminist, postmodern' tradition of academic thought. It is from within this tradition that the both the methodology and the methods for this research have been developed. The next chapter will provide a detailed description of the methods used for this research.

Methods

In order to access the thoughts, memories and perceptions of individual adults concerning their learning choices, and enable them to express these in their own words, it was felt that a number of one-to-one interviews would be the most appropriate research method, followed up by focus groups to obtain a group perspective on the emerging theory. Adults were contacted through a variety of methods. Firstly, one thousand red leaflets were distributed to community organisations, advice bureaux, job centres, health centres, hairdressers, libraries, churches and personal contacts (See Appendix 1). Posters were sent to similar places and cards put up in the windows of shops. Letters were sent to newspapers covering the geographical area of the study - Yorkshire, north Nottinghamshire and north Derbyshire (see Appendix 2).

Once adults had contacted the researcher and expressed an interest in taking part in the research, they were sent a 'personal profile form' which they were asked to complete and return in a reply-paid envelope (see Appendix 3). A total of 87 adults responded to the various types of publicity, with the letters to the local newspapers generating the most responses. Of these, 62 adults returned their personal profile forms.

Initially, it was hoped that the first few interviews could be conducted with adults who had not taken part in any formal education since leaving school. During the planning stages it was felt that this would be important because it was perceived that adults' learning choices might change once they re-entered the education system. Therefore, it was felt that the first stage of the work should be with adults who had not had their choices influenced in this way. However, this proved to be difficult for several reasons. Firstly, some people had forgotten that they had attended a course and would therefore not mention it on the personal profile form, remembering about the course only during the interview as they talked about their experiences. Secondly, some said that they did not consider the course to be 'important' and thus failed to mention it on the form.

Thirdly, some adults did not consider the course to be 'education', either because they had taken it on only for 'interest' or because it had been related to their work. These perceptions, in themselves, provided valuable data. However, an important comparison could be made between those who had attended a course previously and those who had not, and it became clear that adults had not been influenced in their choices by attending these courses in the way that was initially envisaged.

To begin the interviewing process, three adults were chosen who had returned their personal profile forms promptly. On the forms these adults had indicated that they had not taken part in any formal education since leaving school (see David, Dawn and Julie in Appendix 1. This provides a detailed description of each of the participants and the setting for the interviews. All names have been changed to protect anonymity). These first three interviews were unstructured in the sense that the researcher had not developed a list of questions but, instead, once the topic had been introduced, encouraged the participants to talk about what was important to them, probing where appropriate. (The first transcript in Appendix 6 illustrates this process). This enabled the participants to discuss what they deemed relevant to the topic rather than have an agenda imposed upon them. As Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990: 114) point out, even when a comprehensive literature review has been carried out, participants will still alert the researcher to themes and issues which have not been considered.

Once the first three interviews had taken place, concepts and themes began to emerge which enabled the researcher to develop an interview schedule, so that subsequent interviews became semi-structured in the sense that specific topics were discussed but the order and wording of questions was not defined beforehand (Minichiello et al. 1990: 92). There was enough flexibility within each interview for participants to raise issues they deemed important and thus generate new topics for inclusion on the schedule. It was important not to be restricted to one set of questions or topics for each person, but instead have the flexibility to ask questions specific to each of their circumstances (Rubin

and Rubin, 1995: 45). However, to ensure that interviews did not stray completely off the subject, transitions were used to return the conversation to the topic (Minichiello et al. 1995: 113). The interview schedule was used as a general reference point and by referring to the broad, relevant headings, it was possible to ensure that the discussion did not digress too much, but enabled participants to discuss issues relevant to them. The schedule served also as a prompt if the interview faulted or was disrupted for any reason.

After each interview had been completed, the interview schedule was changed and updated as new themes and concepts emerged which needed to be discussed in subsequent interviews. These new themes and concepts not only served to help develop the interview schedule, but also helped inform where to go for the next data. A total of 62 personal profile forms had been received back from adults who had expressed an interest in taking part in the research. From these forms and from initial telephone conversations, participants were chosen who, it was felt, would help to explain further the emerging themes. For example, if the issue of child-care was raised, other participants with children would be sought out to help consider this issue in more detail. Also, adults without child-care responsibilities would be sought out to ascertain how their learning choices might differ. Appendix 5 describes in detail how and why participants were chosen.

Each interview was taped and fully transcribed by the researcher. By taping the interviews it was possible to listen perceptively to what was being said and pick up on any important issues, asking further questions where necessary. Also, this meant that a permanent record of the discussion in written and oral form could be kept, enabling a copy of the transcript to be returned to the participants for verification, for additional information and for the personal interest of the participants. The tape recording itself provided a useful tool to pick up on verbal clues, the subtleties of pauses, hesitation, voice tone and so on. Often, by listening to a tape several times, new insights were developed about issues that were not so evident from the written record.

An analytic induction method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of data collection and analysis, whereby the two processes are carried out simultaneously, was adopted. As each transcript was coded and analysed, new categories emerged which were added to the interview schedule for subsequent interviews (see Appendix 5 for a detailed description of this process). These categories were in the form of a word or a phrase, in the terminology of the participants or in the researcher's own words. Existing categories were revised in light of the emerging data. As the data collection and analysis progressed, detailed abstract concepts were developed. Grounded theory uses a 'constant comparative analysis' method to generate abstract concepts and help to organise the data collection. It involves searching for data for comparison groups according to ideas, hunches or working hypotheses, which are continually evolving as the analysis proceeds (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). It is not a linear process, but is cyclical, with previous data constantly referred back to in the light of new themes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that, for grounded theory, concepts need to be both analytic, in the sense of being sufficiently generalised, and sensitising in that they are able to yield a meaningful picture. In this way, concepts which are sensitising rather than defining are sought. A tentative conceptual framework is formed, and, through a process of continual expansion and reduction, selective sampling and literature review, new data is added and revised. Writing the theory is part of the research process and is done throughout the data collection stage and stored in memos which are 'written capsules of the analysis' which help to generate ideas about the data (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986: 8).

In grounded theory the sampling is theoretical because it is driven by the emerging theory - the themes and the categories that emerge from the data suggest where to go for the next data, so that a procedure of selective sampling of specific data sources takes place (this process is illustrated in more detail in Chapters 9 - 14). Theoretical sampling thus refers to the joint processes of collecting data, examining it to decide which source

might yield more information about a particular area of interest, and collecting the next piece of data from that source. The 'source' does not refer merely to the next interviewee, but may refer to a relevant piece of research or to observation. Indeed, Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that 'everything is data'. For example, several of the interviewees had discussed the importance of first impressions at mature student open days, especially as negative impressions could lead them to look elsewhere for a course. The researcher wanted to experience this for herself, and thus attended a number of these events in an attempt to understand what this experience had meant for the participants.

The process of theoretical sampling continues until 'saturation point' is reached, which, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest, occurs when there is no new information being elicited from the data source which helps to explain the situation further. This concerns the richness and completeness of the data rather than the frequency with which it is said. However, it is debatable whether this situation can ever occur in a study concerned with individual decision-making and choice, as these decisions do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, they are influenced by external factors which are not static, but constantly changing. In this sense, 'saturation point' is perhaps more a state of mind for the researcher, in that she believes the categories and themes have been developed as fully and as richly as possible, and that data collection on that theme can cease.

The interview technique assumes that everybody has a certain amount of knowledge, and that by engaging in a free and equal discussion, the researcher can access that knowledge (Lather, 1991: 118). It was important, as Rubin and Rubin (1995: 7) point out, to hear the meaning of what was being said, that qualitative interviewing:

requires listening carefully enough to hear the meanings, interpretations, and understandings that give shape to the worlds of the interviewees.

This includes the symbols and metaphors which people use to describe their worlds. However, the authors go on to point out that:

an interview is a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time. (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 7)

Although these interviews have taken place at one moment in time, knowledge accumulation and reporting is not static, as a research project based on one-off interviews would suggest. The participants do not have one self-identity which has developed from experience. They have many identities, many roles which change over time and which depend on whom a person is interacting with at any given time. The role they adopt in front of a researcher from a university will be different to the role they would adopt with a work colleague for example, and, as they progress through education, even beginning to undertake research themselves, they will interact differently with a researcher over time.

Previous research (Dawson, 1995) suggests that adults returning to education experience huge shifts in self-perception and self-identity, in addition to role-transitions which can alienate them from previous taken-for-granted roles. This illustrates the importance of repeat interviews, especially as people progress through their chosen route, and an advantage with grounded theory is that it focuses on processes rather than static accounts, thus avoiding the danger that 'a singular truth can be oppressive objectification of the participants' experience' (Wuest, 1995: 131). It was felt that, through a series of repeat interviews, meanings could be discussed and negotiated, with data compared and contrasted, to gain a more complete understanding of the interacting factors which influence learning choices. Thus, six repeat interviews were conducted with adults who were chosen, firstly, because it was felt that they would be able to provide further information about how their learning choices might change; secondly, because they had been especially keen about returning to education; and thirdly, because they had indicated a willingness to be interviewed at a later stage in the research.

Initially, it had been decided that it would be useful to complete the research by conducting several focus groups with adult returners in which a collective opinion on the

relevancy of the emerging theory could be obtained. It was hoped that adult returners would be able to discuss this tentative theory, suggesting modification or amendments if they found that it did not 'fit' with their own experience. However, after the first three focus groups had been conducted, it became evident that adults found it difficult to talk about the emerging theory and that they were more interested in talking about practical issues concerning their own personal experience. It was interesting for the participants to share these experiences and present their own in the light of what other people had said, but they were less interested in commenting on the developing theory, which was too abstract for this sort of informal discussion.

With hindsight, focus groups would have been a useful tool to run alongside the one-to-one interviews, as they did provide a collective dimension on what was initially seen as individual experience. Indeed, Johnson (1996: 532) found that focus group discussions were useful as they:

spurred a *collective* will for change and a preparedness to move from individual troubles towards *socialised* solutions.

However, at this stage of the research it was important to obtain opinion on the emerging theory rather than receive further discussion on personal experience. In some of the previous interviews, the emerging theory had been discussed with participants who had appeared willing to discuss this and offer comments (for example, see Interviews 37 and 38, Appendix 5). It was for these reasons that the decision was taken not to continue running two further focus groups, but instead to continue interviewing adults on an individual basis. Two repeat interviews were held at this stage of the work, (see Interviews 40 and 41, Appendix 5) along with two final interviews with postgraduate adult returners (see Interviews 42 and 43, Appendix 5). Table 1 provides an interview timetable - for a more detailed description, see Appendix 5.

Table 1
Interview Timetable

INTERVIEW	PARTICIPANT	DATE
1	David	2nd July, 1996
2	Dawn	5th July, 1996
3	Julie	8th July, 1996
4	Charlie	19th July, 1996
5	Louise	23rd July, 1996
6	Pat	23rd July, 1996
7	Karen	24th July, 1996
8	Anne	25th July, 1996
9	Ellen	26th July, 1996
10	Bill	30th July, 1996
11	Joan	30th July, 1996
12	Kirsty	31st July, 1996
13	Dorothy	31st July, 1996
14	Harsheem	6th August, 1996
15	Linda	8th August, 1996
16	Tracy	9th August, 1996
17	Enid	12th August, 1996
18	Steve	15th August, 1996
19	Val	12th September, 1996
20	Geoff	8th October, 1996
21	Roy	17th October, 1996
22	Andrew	17th October, 1996
23	Vicky	29th October, 1996
24	Sandra	29th October, 1996
25	Simon	31st October, 1996
26	Ben	1st November, 1996
27	Vera	1st November, 1996
28	Sally	8th November, 1996
29	Geoff (repeat)	18th March, 1997
30	Steve (repeat)	5th May, 1997
31	Colin	7th May, 1997
32	Matt	24th June, 1997
33	Don and James	30th June, 1997
34	David (repeat)	24th September, 1997
35	Roger	2nd October, 1997
36	Dawn (repeat)	9th October, 1997
37	Ian	10th October, 1997
38	Joe	24th October, 1997
39	Peter	28th October, 1997
40	Linda (repeat)	14th November, 1997
41	Tracy (repeat)	18th November, 1997
42	Annabelle	26th November, 1997
43	Jerry	18th February, 1998

The two final participants were chosen because it was felt that, as they were postgraduate adult returners, they might be able to offer further comment on the more abstract theoretical issues. Also, the researcher felt that these participants would be able to provide deeper insight into some of the emerging themes, in particular those which involved expectations about individuals' lives after their courses. This proved to be especially useful, and with hindsight it might have been fruitful to conduct a focus group with recent graduate adult returners who might have been able to comment further on the emerging theory.

Forty-three interviews were conducted with a total of 38 participants - two adults were present in Interview 33 and six were repeat interviews. Of these 20 participants were women and 18 were men. On the personal profile form, 36 adults ticked the 'white' category, one person described herself as 'British Asian' and one person described himself as 'Romany Gypsy'. Ages ranged from under 25 to 65 years of age, with 14 of the adults falling within the 25-35 age band and 13 of the adults falling within the 36-45 age band. Four adults indicated that they had some type of physical disability and 2 indicated that they felt that they had 'problems with learning'. Of the 38 adults, 7 were working in part-time, paid employment; 5 were in full-time, paid employment; 25 were unwaged and one woman obtained a part-time job between interviews. Nineteen adults were enrolled on a course at the time of their interview.

Ann Oakley (1981: 42), in her research on transitions to motherhood, found that her interviews were most productive when carried out in a non-hierarchical way, in which she was prepared to invest her own personal identity and do her utmost to answer the questions posed by the women. It was hoped that the interviews for this research could be conducted in a similar way, as adult returners, at the stage of first thinking about returning to education, may well be feeling very vulnerable, nervous or overwhelmed. However, experience has shown that it is not always possible to carry out interviewing in

a non-hierarchical way, especially when interviewing both women and men and because of the perception adult returners might have about a researcher from the local university. Also, Reinhartz (1992: 26) points out that it is not possible to empathise with all women, especially those who hold very different beliefs to those of the researcher, noting that 'every aspect of a researcher's identity can impede or enhance empathy'.

All the adults interviewed in this research had expressed some desire or need to re-enter the education system and it was inevitable that they would have questions to ask about this process. It was explained at the beginning of each interview that the researcher would be willing to try to answer any questions participants might have about returning to education, but they were asked to keep these questions until the end of the interview, so that any answers they might receive would not influence their responses. It was stressed that the researcher was not trained in advice and guidance techniques, but each participant was given an information sheet, produced by the researcher, containing information about where they could go for further advice and guidance, addresses and telephone numbers of local adult, further and higher education provision, and details of organisations providing other forms of training. The researcher felt that it was important to provide information if requested, especially as the participants had volunteered their time to help with the research. However, this meant that the aim of achieving 'non-hierarchical' interviews could not be achieved if the researcher was perceived to be a source of information.

Wuest (1995: 130) points out that both grounded theory and feminist research are concerned with the:

fine line between genuineness, self-disclosure and manipulation in the interview process both in grounded theory and feminist research.

It was important for the researcher to be aware of this and keep a personal diary of day-to-day reflections throughout the interview process. This helped the researcher to

come to terms with her personal biases, which, as Rubin and Rubin (1995: 14) note, may influence the interview:

Part of the philosophy of qualitative interviewing is that interviewees and interviewers are both individuals, with emotions and interests and biases that affect how the research is done. Personal involvement is a great strength of the methodology, but it also creates problems that must be addressed. An interviewer has to be sensitive to his or her own biases, to the social and intellectual baggage he or she brings to the interview.

This diary enabled, also, the researcher to come to terms with the possible influence of ideology on the interview, for, as Wuest (1995: 133) notes:

not only does it influence the lens through which we view the world; it also affects the very language we use to express our thoughts and thus the impact on the interview process.

Rubin and Rubin (1995: 7) point out that interviews are invented anew each time they occur and that they are 'wonderfully unpredictable', emphasising that part of the skill of the researcher is to be able to adapt quickly to the different, often unexpected, situations. No two interviews were the same. Some participants discussed freely their thoughts and experiences and needed fewer questions, whereas others needed constant questioning and probing. This had to be done in a sensitive, non-exploitative way, so that it was possible to gain access to thoughts, memories and perceptions which were in the participants own words and not obscured or hidden by obtrusive research methods and researcher bias. Length varied because of the interviewee-guided nature of the interview (Reinharz, 1992: 25). The shortest interview was for a duration of thirty minutes, whereas the longest interview took place over two and a half hours.

Participants were asked where they would like the interview to take place. Most opted for their own home, whereas some preferred to meet the researcher at the university. The geographical region of the study covered South and West Yorkshire, north Derbyshire and north Nottinghamshire, with participants' houses located in both rural

and urban areas. A 'contact summary sheet' (Miles & Huberman, 1984) was completed as soon as each interview has finished. This included factual information about the time, place and venue, along with a description about how the interview had progressed, the main themes which had emerged and the first impressions about what issues would be interesting to follow up in subsequent interviews, literature searches or observations. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible after it had taken place while it was still fresh in the mind of the researcher. A 'transcript diary' was kept close by so that ideas and reflections on verbal cues could be jotted down as the transcripts were produced.

In conclusion, this chapter has described the research methods adopted for this study. However, the way in which a grounded theory study proceeds is perhaps best illustrated by the description of the analysis itself, as this will show how the emerging themes helped to revise and refocus the research questions, thus driving the data collection. The analysis section of this thesis has been written in a way which illustrates this process, describing why and how 'extreme cases' were used; why and when it was deemed appropriate to conduct repeat interviews; how existing literature was woven into the theory. Chapters 9 - 14 will be descriptive, making full use of quotations from the participants, whilst illustrating the process, and influence, of the research itself. Chapter 15 will lay out the grounded theory so as to contribute to the theoretical debate and thus avoid the accusations levelled at some feminist research that it is purely descriptive.

Introduction

In a grounded theory study, the inductive generation of new themes and concepts which have arisen from the participants themselves is the aim, rather than the testing and verifying of existing theory. As the interviews began it became very clear early in the research process that it was not possible for adults to discuss their 'subject' choice without discussing their reasons for returning to learning. Also, some adults appeared to be indicating that they did not make a 'subject' choice, but instead made an institutional or qualification choice. In these cases, the actual subject would be incidental to this choice (see Chapter 5). It was for this reason that the focus of the research changed from 'subject' choice to 'learning' choice and was expanded to include reasons for returning to education.

In grounded theory, one of the main aims is to develop a 'core category' which is 'the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated'. It is described as the 'sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 116-124). The core category for this research emerged as 'parameters of choice'. When participants discuss their learning choices, they seem to 'frame' these choices by a number of parameters which appear to affect the perceived degree of choice available to adults. Chapter 10 will describe the development of 'parameters of choice' as the core category and in doing so, the process and methods of grounded theory, as described in Chapter 8, will be illustrated in detail.

Once the development of the core category has been described, the discussion will outline the development of the related sub-categories. Each of these sub-categories provides the title for the next four chapters. The first of these has been termed 're-balancing'. During the interviews the adults described a number of conditions which they perceived had influenced, or would influence, the stability of their lives. They talked about a desire or need to re-balance their lives in some way, and education was seen to

be one type of re-balancing strategy. Chapter 11 will describe the development of this category.

When adults think about how they might re-balance their lives, they do so through a process of self-assessment. This might involve consideration of public and private identity, who they perceive themselves to be and who they perceive others perceive them to be. Also, it might involve a consideration of role and how this might change through life transitions. Through a process of self-assessment they think about goals and ambitions and how these fit with what they perceive to be their personal disposition and characteristics. Chapter 12 will describe the development of this category, illustrating how this process of self-assessment helps adults to consider or reject possible learning options.

However, education is not seen to be a re-balancing strategy unless adults are attuned to the idea that returning to education will help them to successfully re-balance their lives. But how do adults become attuned, especially when many of them have had negative experiences of education in the past? Chapter 13 will describe the ways in which adults become attuned to education, illustrating how they come to believe that it will be an effective re-balancing strategy for themselves.

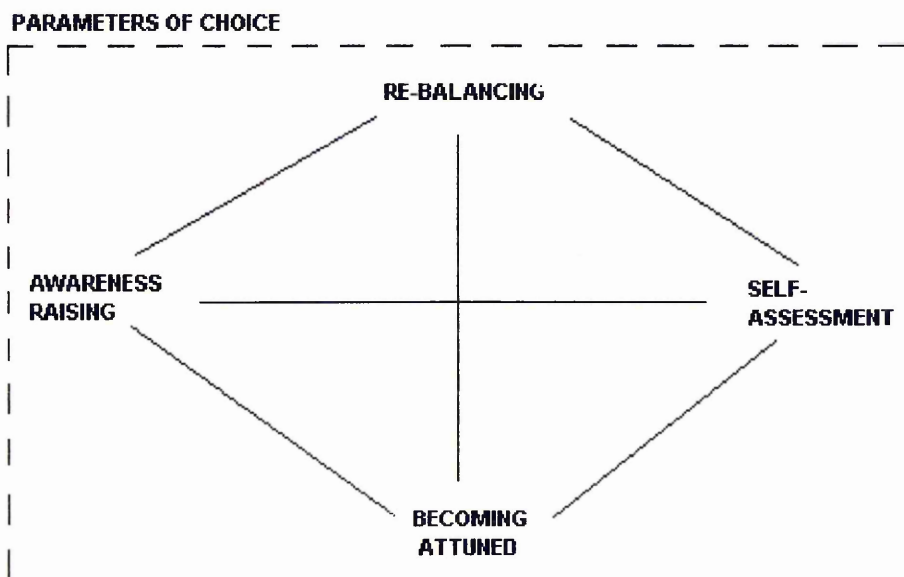
Once adults have come to believe that returning to education is an appropriate re-balancing strategy, having worked through a process of self-assessment and having become attuned to the idea, they go on to raise their awareness. However, this is not a distinct and separate stage in the process of making learning choices, but occurs at all stages. This is especially so when awareness is raised without adults realising this has happened. However, for those adults who believe that education is an appropriate re-balancing strategy, there is a perceived need to raise their awareness, especially in terms of possible learning options. Chapter 14 will describe the process of awareness

raising, illustrating how different levels of awareness help adults to make their learning choices.

The decision to consider each category in a separate chapter implies a linear structure. However, the relationship of the core category and sub-categories should not be viewed in this way. Although the need or desire to re-balance appears to be the main condition for adults thinking about returning to education, it does not necessarily imply that it is the first stage in the process. Indeed, some adults may have been undergoing a process of 'becoming attuned' before they have felt the need to re-balance their lives. Others may have begun the 'self-assessment' process before perceiving that they had already become attuned to the notion of returning to education. Some adults, on the other hand, may have had their awareness raised which has helped them to perceive that there is a need to re-balance their lives in some way. The interrelationship between these categories is illustrated in figure 1.

Fig. 1

The Interrelationship of Learning Choice Categories



However, it must be remembered that all these stages are sub-categories and, as such, are subsumed under the core category of 'parameters of choice'. This provides the 'frame' within which choices are made, and includes issues such as policy parameters, gendered parameters, cultural parameters and so on. Nevertheless, this does not imply that these parameters are static and restricting. Indeed, many parameters are malleable and enabling. It is for this reason that the 'parameters of choice' category, in figure 1, has been depicted with a broken line, illustrating that it is open to change.

One of the advantages of grounded theory is that it enables the incorporation of theory from a number of disciplines. However, a disadvantage is that this makes the analysis difficult for someone who has not received training in those disciplines. The research could thus be expanded and improved upon by having some of the categories reviewed and developed from the viewpoint of other disciplines. For example, the category of 'self-assessment' could be explored in more depth by a social psychologist who would be able to offer deeper insight into issues surrounding identity and role. The category of 'becoming attuned' could be explored further by a sociologists who specialises in culture and cultural transformation. However, this researcher has been trained in humanities and adult education, and it is from this background that this research has been approached.

Chapters 10 - 14 will describe the development of the core category and the sub-categories, illustrating the relationship between each of them. Quotations are used extensively in the following five chapters: firstly, so as not to obscure participants' voices, and secondly, to illustrate how the themes emerged from the data and how these themes helped to raise further questions and guide the data collection. All the names of participants have been changed to protect anonymity. For a detailed description of each participant, see Appendix 4.

CHAPTER 10:

PARAMETERS OF

CHOICE

Parameters of Choice

The core category is the phenomenon most central to the investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 120). As the interviews progressed, adults discussed the process through which they were moving in order to make their learning choices. However, this process appeared to be 'framed' by a number of negative influences over which they reported having very little control. These influences were termed 'parameters' of choice, in the sense that they appeared to be defining or determining the outer limits of choice. As the data collection and analysis stage of the research continued, this emergent theme became more and more significant, so much so that at the end of the study 'parameters of choice' was felt to be the phenomenon most central to the investigation. This chapter will describe the development of this core category. Appendix 5 gives a detailed account of each interview which illustrates the theoretical sampling procedure.

The most easily expressed parameter involved, firstly, issues of the lack of personal time which were seen to restrict individual choice. For example, Dawn (for a description of each participant, see Appendix 4) had to find a course which fitted in with her child-care responsibilities:

... but the reason I haven't enrolled on them were more because I've got Billy and like he can only get half a day at nursery. He'll never get full-time until he goes to school because of places, so I've got to, like, think about that.

David had to find a course which would fit in around his working hours. Although a course had been available to him previously, it had ceased to run which, David believed, had reduced the options available to him:

... I've been looking through 'Choices' for creative writing courses they used to do at [the local college] and they don't do it anymore, or if they do it's in the day. Like most of the courses I would like to go on are in the day. Obviously there are ones at night, but you haven't got much choice.

At this stage of deciding whether or not to return to education, if a course did not fit into these personal and family vacant time-slots, it had to be discarded as an option.

Although David had tried to study previously, he found that the course did not fit well into his working and life schedule, and that he was unable to attend all the sessions because he was too tired:

... it started at nine in the morning and I came home at two, have a shower, by the time you get into bed and fall asleep it's three o'clock. I would be up at what, seven, and I'd be knackered, you know. A couple of weeks I missed going there because I was just too tired to get out of bed. So now I'm on mornings I want to look for something.

However, here David indicates that his working schedule has changed so that he can once again begin to look for a suitable course. The second easily expressed, negative influence, involves the issue of personal finance and the perceived cost of returning to education. Again, at the initial stages of thinking about returning to learning, this is seen to be an insurmountable problem which restricts choices, especially between full-time and part-time study. This distinction between part-time and full-time study is interesting in that some adults choose to study full-time because they feel it would cost less, despite the fact that they are not too concerned about finishing their studies quickly, as in

Vicky's case:

Yes, I mean at first I thought part-time but then I didn't realise you actually have to pay don't you, for part-time courses which I can't do, I just can't afford to do that. Ideally I would have liked to do a part-time one because then I think I could have fitted the work in better, and I'm not restricted to I don't think oh I want to have done this in three years, I don't feel that, I think any time in the next eight or nine and I'm OK.

However, other adults felt that it would be better for them to study part-time as they were unable to afford to give up their present employment. For example, Steve pointed out that no one else will pay his bills and that this limits his choices to part-time study which reduces the list of options available to him:

I mean it was very limiting on what there was available. I found it, as I say, you had to be in a certain line of work or you had to be in full-time study. I live on my own, at the end of the day who's going to sort of pay me bills, council tax, this, that and the other? I've got to earn a living. So you take all those factors and it narrows it down anyway. So you've got a book that thick and when, you know, you end up with a couple of pages that you can actually make work, and you've got to make your choices from there.

This need to earn a living and pay the bills meant that, for Steve, there was very little choice available:

I don't think you do have choices in fairness. You sort of cut your cloth accordingly. You don't really, because as I say, the fact is, particularly if you're going back to part-time education, you've got to earn a living at the end of the day and it's got to fit around that because that is paramount to it. So that then eliminates a lot of choices.

The difference in attitude seemed to stem from present paid employment and whether adults felt they needed to, or wanted to, stay in their current job. If adults did not have a paid job, or if they were in a job they did not like, it appears that their parameters of choice were widened to include full-time study. For example, Sandra had thought about studying part-time and obtaining a part-time job at the same time, but came to the conclusion that she could put up with financial hardship if it meant that she would secure a good job at the end of her studies:

Yes, well that was another consideration, it was like right am I going to find a crappy job in a shop up at [the local shopping centre], or am I going to be skint for a few years but have the opportunity to get a good job? And I thought I can't afford not to raise my chances of a good job, you know, I can't afford not to really, so yes, I'm going to go full-time, go for it and enjoy it.

Others felt that full-time study would better suit their personal disposition, as James noted:

I wanted full-time because I've always had full-time jobs in the past and I've worked sixty-six, seventy-two hour week so I've always been quite busy in the past so I wanted something full-time. I wanted something to occupy my time because I get very depressed, you know, when I've got nothing to do. I've tried to

get some voluntary work during my holiday but I've not succeeded as yet. So I like full-time study.

This raises the issue of 'self-assessment' which will be discussed in Chapter 12. Also, it raises the theme of personal disposition and how this might influence choices by limiting the available options to what adults think they are capable of doing. These 'dispositional parameters' are related closely to 'self-assessment' and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 12.

Returning to the theme of restrictive financial parameters, David blamed the Government for not providing the financial support required for adults to return to education, despite political rhetoric to the contrary. This is seen to be external and beyond his personal control, suggesting that it is not so much an issue of lack of personal finance, but more an issue of Government policy restricting his choices:

So, well, the only reason I can't go back to college full-time is I can't give up my job because I won't get money like dole. I won't get dole because I give it up voluntary. Like the Government make a big thing about adults going back to education but they don't do anything to help you. Like even if you sign on the dole, like I know a couple of people and they've got to tell the dole office about it. They're only allowed to do so many hours and sometimes they throw them off the course because they're not looking for work. So the Government go on about all this yet they do nothing to help you.

In the fourth interview, Charlie, felt also, that he had been constrained unfairly by Government policy which was seen to be beyond his control:

You see I miss two courses next week, me last two courses next week and I've got to go in, the law says. But I mean it's like anything else, what are they going to tell me I'm doing more than I'm doing now? I mean yes, sure I could sign on at [the local college] and go there full-time, but the point is I'm not classed as able for work then. So what do they want out of me? They want me to miss me courses and go on this stupid thing. It's like the lady told me at the job centre, you can't do much more than you're doing now.

When considering their personal learning choices, adults seemed to be suggesting, in the first few interviews, that they looked to the wider economic and social situation, which again, was seen to limit individual choice, as Julie illustrates:

... there's a hell of a lot of people with all these qualifications, like I know there's probably down at the university ... and can't get fixed up with jobs. And I think that is just terrible because I come across it so often with people with qualifications, and they've said oh, I can't get fixed up with work. And I think there's not much hope with me, is there?

The negative influences described above can be seen to be chronic in that they continue from day to day and are not expected to change in the immediate future. However, in the third interview, Julie suggests that negative influences can be acute in the sense that the effect is immediate:

I think it was only a sort of two day thing, erm, some writing thing that I'd seen advertised, and I was just getting ready to go to it and I got a panic 'phone call from home, you know. Oh, dad's fallen and I can't manage. And I thought oh god, I can't go, it's no good, you know. I had to cancel it.

All the above influences are seen by the adults as being driven by external forces which impinge on individual choice. Any decision they make is 'fenced in' by these external forces. In previous research, these forces have been discussed in terms of 'barriers' or 'deterrents' to participation (Cross, 1981; Aimes, 1985; McGivney, 1990; Courtney, 1992). However, these publications are concerned with returning to education, rather than actual learning choices, although they provided a useful way of thinking about this type of negative influence in the early stage of the research. For example, Cross (1981) distinguished between three categories which were named the 'deterrent concept'. These included situational influences such as family circumstances and financial situation; institutional influences such as entry requirements and the subjects offered in the geographical area, and dispositional influences such as personal perceptions and self-confidence. To this list, Harrison (1993) adds educational influences which include educational preparedness and personal qualifications. However, a problem with this

categorisation, especially with 'situational' deterrents, is the over-emphasis on individual circumstances rather than social structures. The quotations above suggest that some adults view issues such as financial considerations, not as a personal problem which can be overcome, but as external to their personal situation and beyond their personal control. To them, this severely restricts choices.

However, the participants appear to be suggesting that these forces do not always act as a 'barrier' in the sense that they stop them returning to education. Often, it means that adults have to look for alternatives. It is for this reason that the term 'parameters' has been adopted as adults seem to be suggesting that their choices are framed within outer parameters, but that it is still possible to make choices within those parameters. They are not barriers which deny opportunities, but instead are parameters which constrain and restrict choices. Returning to education is still possible if the right option falling within these parameters is available.

As the next few interviews took place, it was important to find out whether there are any other parameters within which choices are framed. Also, the 'deterrent concept' described above is framed within negative terms - could an opposite 'enablement concept' be identified? Indeed, Chapter 11 describes how life transitions alter circumstances which may widen choice. Do adults 'frame' their choices by a number of influences which have a positive effect and over which they perceive that they have more control? Also, child-care and finance have emerged as two important themes early in the study - do learning choices differ for those adults who are not struggling financially and for those who do not have child-care responsibilities? These questions helped to determine where to go for the next data. From the personal profile sheets and initial telephone conversations, participants were chosen who might be able to provide further insight into these developing themes.

Karen was a married woman who did not have children. Also, her postal code suggested that she lived in an area dominated by slightly more expensive houses than those areas in which other participants in this study lived. As the interview progressed, Karen discussed the fact that the cost of a course was still a consideration for her, but that it would not restrict her choices as she had ways of obtaining the required amount of money:

I think the foundation costs about two hundred pounds a year which, like I say, if I do decide to do it, I've got to explore with work if they would be willing to cough up, and if not, probably go and have a word with mummy, can you lend me some money [laughter]. Or whatever you were going to buy me for my thirtieth birthday, can I have money instead? So I mean it's not an immense amount of money, it's not sort of thousands and thousands. Obviously when it gets into a degree I don't know how much that is. But no doubt by foregoing something else like a bar of chocolate or something. I'll have to just save up for it. I mean it's one of those things if you want to do it enough you'll make sure you've got enough money to do it.

Nevertheless, despite this perceived ability to raise the required amount of money, Karen still felt that her choices were limited to part-time study:

There's no way that I can, or that I would want to particularly, give up work. I couldn't afford to but I enjoy my job anyway, so it would be something to do as well.

These comments contrast sharply with those from other women in this study who appear to have much narrower financial parameters which served to limit their choices. For example, Anne felt that she was able to choose only those courses which were free, and as the local college would allow her to only study on two of these, her choices were limited:

That was another thing that came out. They told me I can only take two courses, two courses not paid for. You see, I'm a non-wage earner, I'm reliant on Paul. We're not married and I didn't want him to have to subsidise my education. So when I went down I was only allowed to take two courses.

Similarly, Ellen felt that she was unable to choose a course which was not 'funded' as she was not prepared to let her children suffer financially because she wanted to enrol on a course:

It's funded, without having to take the funding on yourself which on a low paid job is difficult. And I couldn't justify saying to the kiddies, right, you're not going swimming anymore, you not doing this, you know what I mean? Just so I can do it. I can do a cleaning job, do you know what I mean? I don't see why the kids should have to miss out at this age while they're young.

Both Ellen and Anne indicated that their learning choices had to be framed within their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, their role as 'mother' and what this role meant they should provide for their children. This is part of the 'self-assessment' process which will be discussed later. Also, practical issues of child-care responsibilities served to limit choices for women, both in terms of learning choices and in terms of what they would hope to do after their course. This indicates that learning choices have to be framed within these parameters of present and future child-care needs. For example, Anne had to think about what she would be able to do in paid employment terms which would involve working from home, thus framing her choices within these parameters:

You see my partner's self-employed and, er, he's a self-employed builder. His hours are difficult so really I can't go out to work, even when the kids are going to start school because I can't cover school holidays, no jobs going to allow me. So I wanted to do something where I can work from home, and with the people he knows and the contacts he knows. I thought accounts would be very good and book-keeping would be a good thing that I could do from home. Pick my own hours around the kids and, you know, hopefully be some financial help but still be working from home.

Similarly, Ellen had to think about child-care when considering courses, but although her child-care parameters have been widened by her youngest child going to school, they have been narrowed again by institutional parameters:

Last year my problem was child-care because they didn't have nursery facilities. They did a computer one last year that I was interested in, but there was, as I say, no nursery facilities, so I couldn't do it. And I'm thinking this year that she will be

at school in the mornings, I'll be able to do it, but they don't offer it now. It's in the evenings now which is no good because my husband doesn't always know when he's finishing work. So again, that's a problem, to commit myself when I might be having to miss classes. It's quite frustrating really.

Narrow child-care parameters limit choices for women which means that they have to consider other options if their initial choices do not fit in with existing parameters. As a single mother on Income Support, Linda explained how her choices were restricted by a number of situational parameters:

I'm open to change, I'm not set it's got to be [the local university], it's got to be law, it's got to be part-time. I can't afford to be like that. As long as it fits in with everything else, as long as it slots in those little, between my mum and my daughter and the work that I do do, and the Income Support people, and the time that I've got available. As long as it just sort of slots in there then I'll do it as long as I've got an interest in it.

For Val, restrictions imposed on her learning choices by her personal life meant that she was unable to commit herself totally unless her personal circumstances were to change:

If I'd only got myself to think about and I could give myself a hundred per cent to doing something like that, I don't think it would bother me so much. But while, in the immediate future, while I've got the ties that I have, I need something that's not going to tax me too much because I can't give a hundred per cent to doing it.

Also, some of the women felt that they needed to 'test the water' before they made too large a commitment as they believed that family circumstances might distract them from their studies and that they might be taking on too much, as Vicky notes:

The reason I did this course over a year is to get some sort of feel about how much work is going to be involved. I mean I think there will probably be more next year if I was to go to university but I want to see if I can fit it in with the rest of me life, and I don't know whether I can yet. I mean like come March next year I will have a good idea, but at this point I really don't know, so at the moment I'm a bit like I don't actually know what I'm doing, I just really don't think I can make a choice about what I want to do for the next three years now. I really don't know what I'm going to do to resolve that. I'm just playing it by ear at the minute.

Although the indication seemed to be that Karen's personal financial parameters were wider than those of other people in this study, and that she was not restricted by child-care responsibilities, she still had to frame her choices within other situational parameters. Because her learning choices were framed within these parameters, Karen felt that her present situation would mean that returning to education would have less of an impact on her life:

I've made this decision and it's different in that I've got to fit it in around doing a full-time job and having a house and having a husband and everything. So I feel as though it's not got as much, it's not going to be able to have as much influence on me possibly as it would have done. Because there are all these restrictions that I've got to sort of place on it. It's got to fit in with what I've got already, rather than me just sort of meandering away and doing whatever.

The final parameters within which choices are framed concern disciplinary parameters. Initially, these parameters may be quite narrow, having been established from the subject choice on offer at school and memories of what adults enjoyed and at which they succeeded. This is connected to the category of 'awareness-raising' and to the theme of awareness parameters which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 14. It relates also to the theme of dispositional parameters which will be discussed in Chapter 12. In the following example, Louise illustrates how she thought about what she enjoyed at school and how she has related this to what she was doing during her paid employment:

I suppose I was always quite good at English and I liked my history, and I liked art as well, erm, I suppose I was quite good at maths. I don't know really, I think we have quite a lot of maths to do with nursing and drugs and everything, you know. And I seem to grasp it quicker than other people so I think I must be a bit, you know, quite good at maths really. I suppose it will tell when we start the course.

There are several ways in which adults appear to come to a decision about which subject to study. Some adults were unsure about what they wanted to study and what, exactly, they wanted to do after their studies. In one case, Vicky illustrates how she decided that a process of elimination would be the most appropriate way for her to choose what to study at university:

I think again a lot of it was a process of elimination. I got rid of a lot and ended up with just a few, I suppose, there wasn't, that's part of my problem, there isn't one that just stands out and yes I want to be a, I want to do that, that's part of my problem.

Vera, on the other hand, looked through a list of courses available at her local college, choosing those which she thought sounded interesting. However, she found that her initial choice was unavailable and, as she was determined to return to education, had, therefore, to make an alternative selection:

It was just a case, I just really wanted to go back into education. I didn't know what and it was a case of that looks interesting on that list there, and there were probably like two dozen on this list and I picked one out and it were full. And I said, oh right, fine, business studies then, and there happened to be a place there so that's the one I finished up on.

When Vera was asked in what way the course she had chosen looked 'interesting' she was unable to describe how, pointing out that the whole process had been very fast and that she had enrolled on the course before she had received too much detail:

Just because from the brief description it looked quite interesting. I mean don't ask me to say what the description were now. It were all a bit of a whirl actually because I went up to see the careers advisor, I think it was [the local college] where I went, and she just stuck a list in front of me. And I said yes, that looks interesting, and then three days later I got a 'phonecall, do you want to come in and join our course? So it was very rushed, so I didn't really go into it in any great detail. I just knew I wanted to do something, and that was what was presented to me, so that's what I did.

Similarly, Annabelle was unable to describe exactly why she found something interesting, but felt that it was perhaps more a process of knowing what she did not want to do:

I find that really difficult. I didn't think I would quite like to do a degree, what subject shall I study, there was never any consideration of studying anything else, that's what I was interested in studying, but answering the question where do my interests come from, I find that quite hard. I know there's a lot of things that I have a lot of barriers around so if something had got the word economics in I'd think no, I'm not doing that.

James felt that he was lucky in that he was able to try out new subjects at the college he had chosen, so that his choices were not limited by previous experience:

Erm, I don't know, it's just preference in't it? You think you like a subject because you've done that always, I mean I did sociology for two years at an FE college and I thought I liked it, but because I hadn't really like studied many subjects, you know, I did law and I did psychology, and I thought I liked sociology best, but when I went to [a local college] and they had more subjects than that, I found out that history and social policy were more interesting than that. So if it hadn't have been for the choice at [a local college] I wouldn't have known about it, it wouldn't have brought that out in me, you know, that quality of liking that.

For James, this meant that he was able to change his choice of discipline as he progressed through his chosen entry route:

Well, erm, at first my interest was sociology, and I knew they had that on offer there because I saw it in the prospectus, but because it was a combined studies course and they had different subject areas, it gave me the opportunity to decide what subject I really did like. Because if you go to a normal college you might just pick one or two subjects and you limit yourself, but if you have many subjects to choose from and you actually do them, you find out that you might like one of those other subjects instead, right, do you see what I'm saying? Right, and when I was there I decided I liked social policy more than sociology, and I've actually transferred over to do a social policy degree this year. I wouldn't have done that normally, right, I probably would have gone on and done a sociology degree but when I went to [a local college] I found out that social policy was the subject for me.

Other adults know what they want to do when they finish their course and choose a discipline which will give them a chance to obtain their desired occupation. Often these adults choose a course which they perceive will provide the fastest route to achieving their aims, as Sally illustrates:

Mainly because this can lead on to social work, you know, for coming to university, and it was the only way without qualifications. Otherwise I just felt I'd be doing qualifications for ever and a day. So it's like the easiest way into university and the easiest way into social work.

The example from Vera above illustrates that disciplinary parameters can be influenced by institutional parameters, especially in terms of first choices not being available because they are full or not running. Institutional parameters have a great deal of influence on disciplinary parameters in a number of other ways. One of the most frequently mentioned, and most pertinent to adult returners, is the issue of having to fill in their UCAS forms before they feel they are ready to make a decision about what to study for the next three or four years, as Vicky illustrates:

But I mean I've got this UCAS form to fill in but I don't really know what I want to do yet. I think it's going to be a problem, because we've got to fill it in, they seem to be asking us to make a choice very early to me. I mean one of the reasons, whilst I've narrowed it down a bit what I wanted to do, the other part about doing this course was that it was a wide base and I thought I would be able to pick from it what I like and then go from there. But like I say, this first term we've not actually done much apart from the, well just getting you back into the swing of writing essays and just discussing things and showing us, you know, I mean things like using this CD ROM, I'd never used a CD ROM, I'd never used a computer before, so just getting us used to doing them things. And to make a choice about what I want to do for the next three years at this point is just totally impossible for me. Like I say, one of the reasons for doing it was to look at the different things and I haven't had chance to look at them yet, so I don't know how I can make a choice having not seen them.

Matt felt also that his choices were being narrowed by institutional forces, but that he was determined to stick to what he wanted to study, rather than be driven in an undesirable direction:

What I found which I didn't like and I did question, er, combined studies to me means combined studies, picking certain things that you want to do, but they were trying to direct us in routes, the sociology route where you would get a sociology degree, or the social policy route. And I said I don't want to do that, you know, and every choice that you had you were like confined to these choices and I've been narrowed down into, I haven't gone down a route because if you have eighty credits out of hundred and twenty out of a certain area, it changes to that degree, so I've done it sixty/sixty.

In conclusion, then, adults' learning choices appear to be framed within a system of parameters. Some of these parameters are seen to be external and as such are beyond

individual control. Others are seen to be internal in the sense that they are unique to an individual's life. These can be narrowed and widened, either deliberately, such as increasing awareness, or unexpectedly, as adults experience life transitions. Some parameters are highly visible and easily articulated, such as financial and child-care parameters, whereas others are largely invisible and difficult to articulate, such as cultural, gendered and dispositional parameters. The influence of some parameters is chronic, in that they appear to restrict choice over time, whereas the influence of others is acute in that they may restrict choice over a short period of time.

Parameters frame choices rather than create boundaries. Adults will seek alternative courses within the parameters which frame their own lives, although in some cases parameters are so narrow that adults perceive there are no options available to them, until such a time as these parameters begin to widen. The next four chapters outline the development of the four sub-categories, illustrating how they are related to this core category of 'parameters of choice'.

Re-balancing

Within choice parameters adults described the process through which they were moving when considering their learning choices. In grounded theory, process:

is a way of giving life to data by taking snapshots of action/interaction and linking them to form a sequence or series. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 144)

Figure 1 (see Chapter 9) illustrates that adults described a process which involved the desire or need to re-balance their lives, self-assessment, becoming attuned and awareness-raising. These four aspects of this process form the categories which are subsumed under the core category of parameters of choice. This chapter will discuss the development of the first of these categories, describing the conditions of imbalance, which, the participants feel, have led them to consider the need to re-balance their lives in some way. The discussion will illustrate how adults come to believe in education as a re-balancing strategy.

After the first three interviews had been conducted and an initial analysis of the transcripts had taken place, the theme of 'life transitions' appeared to be of particular significance, especially when adults talked about reasons for returning to education. As was noted in Chapter 4, Aslanian and Bricknell (1980: 61), in their survey of American adults, found that the majority of these transitions related to career (56%), family (16%) and leisure (13%). However, of the first three participants, only Dawn was actually experiencing one of these life transitions relating to her family with her children about to start school (see Appendix 4 for a description of each of the participants). Neither David nor Julie were experiencing *actual* transitions, but instead discussed *desired* transitions. For example, David felt that he was 'stuck in a rut', undertaking a job which he hated and desperately wanted to leave, although he perceived that he was unable to do so due to financial circumstances. Throughout the interview he referred back to this unfulfilling job, talking about learning choices in terms of how they could enable him to break free

from his mundane working life. For David, being happy in his work, rather than financial reward, was a desirable life transition:

... I just want to be, like a couple of my friends work with steel. Oh, I don't know, they're getting brain dead as well. Like they might be earning shit-hot money, but I think there's more to life. You've got to be happy in your work. To go to work in the morning and it's oh God, another day, five days a week of this.

Julie, on the other hand, felt that she had not made the most of her life, and that, through circumstances beyond her control, she had missed opportunities to return to education. For Julie, her possible learning choices could improve her personal financial situation and increase her self-esteem:

Obviously, from the money angle it would be nice if I could get something to be a little more independent so I wouldn't have to live entirely on state benefit. And that would ... build my self-esteem and make me feel a lot better.

As life transitions appeared to be an important theme which had emerged early in the data collection, adults, in the next few interviews were questioned about what these life transitions actually meant for themselves, their families and their lives. How did they perceive the transitions would influence their lives? Had they decided to return to education because of these transitions? Why had they not followed an alternative course of action? Through this line of questioning, the participants seemed to be suggesting that transitions could influence choices in two ways. Firstly, many of the transitions were seen to be beyond the control of adults, but could be turned to positive personal advantage, as they opened up previously unavailable time to pursue personal ambitions. For example, Louise had been a nurse for most of her working life. As she had undertaken shift work which meant that she had different days off each week, for her, undertaking a regular adult education class had been out of the question. However, the hospital at which she worked was due to close which enabled Louise to consider trying 'something different':

Well, really it's er, I'm a nurse at the moment and where I work it's shutting in October so it's a case of either finding another job in nursing or doing something different. So I thought it might be a good time to try something different.

Geoff, who had been a builder by trade, felt that external transitions concerning the economy and the building industry were occurring which were beyond his control, but that he could regain some personal control by choosing to 'walk away from it':

But I think had the economy not been so bad I would have stuck with the building industry because I did enjoy it, but it just got too tough. I would have had some ill-health through it, you know, because it's just bloody war, you know. You did jobs for people and they were looking for ways of saving money that weren't honest, you know. It was just, I don't know, it just used to wind me up, so I thought the best thing to do when it's like that is walk away from it.

The above two examples were external, unplanned transitions, which were seen to be beyond the control of individual adults, but which could be turned to positive personal advantage if the adults felt they had made the right choices as a result of these transitions. In addition to this, there were unplanned transitions which affected only the individual, but which again, were seen to be beyond individual control. However, these too, could be turned to positive personal advantage, as Bill illustrated when discussing problems with ill-health:

I went to see doctor and within about three days of seeing doctor, he sort of said right, if you don't finish you'll be in a chair within a couple of months, you've got to finish here and now. When that comes it's a right shock, so I gave it a couple of days to sink in and then I went down to see them at [the local adult education centre].

Unexpected and unplanned life transitions can have a detrimental effect on learning choices as David found out when his wife left him half way through an O level psychology course on which he had enrolled:

Yes, but I stopped in March, erm, I was getting really good grades, I was getting ninety sixes, ninety seven percent, you know, with the homework he was setting and I really enjoyed it. But me and my wife spilt up and I got custody so I had to stop, I couldn't get baby-sitters and all that so. He was upset as well, the lecturer,

he kept 'phoning up as well, I'd been out with him for a drink, he asked me if I could get a baby-sitter to go back to it because, you know, he said you were good at it, you would have done well. So I would have stuck with it if it weren't for him.

The second way in which transitions appeared to influence learning choices was when the transitions were expected and were seen to affect only the individual and their family.

The most common transition of this type concerned young children about to start school and how this would affect the daily routine of mothers who had been at home looking after the children. For some women, the impact of this transition had not been predicted until it had actually happened, as Tracy illustrated:

I think once your kids start school you take them for the first day and you come home and you think oh what am I going to do now? There isn't someone pulling at your skirt going mum do this, do that, you know. You think right, it's nine o'clock and I've got to pick him up at half past three, what do I do now? I mean the first few weeks are great, I've got all this freedom, all this time to myself, I'm not working. And then you think this is boring, I can't do this for the rest of me life. And then you sort of think, you know, when your kids have left home and that, what am I going to be doing, you know? You're like going to be a bit useless and I don't want that. I want to do something and, you know, have a purpose in life.

Although Tracy had not anticipated the impact of this transition beforehand, once her son had gone to school she felt that she had become 'a bit useless', that her role as full-time mother had changed and that she needed to do something else to occupy her time (see Chapter 12 for further discussion on this issue). However, for other women, the expected transition enabled them to begin to plan ahead and think about the opportunities which might become available to them once their children had started school, as Ellen noted:

Well, Alice starts in September and then she'll be full-time school at Christmas, so I feel as though I've got that time to do something, whereas before I've been looking after her. And now I've got no excuse. But like being at home I want to get out. And my husband's situation job-wise, he works very hard for very little, and I just feel that I could work, you know, just to ease pressure from him.

It is interesting that Ellen believes that once her children go to school she will have 'no excuse' about going on a course. Is she suggesting that she has used child-care responsibilities as a reason for not going on a course in the past? Is she attempting to justify her perceived lack of inaction to a female researcher who has been university educated? Is it a bone of contention between her and significant others? A lack of probing in this area means that these questions remain unanswered. However, an important issue here is that women's work in the home is devalued, that child-care is seen to be merely a distraction which provides an 'excuse' for not pursuing what are perceived to be more worthwhile courses of action. This quotation highlights an important contradiction faced by women - their work in the home is devalued and they perceive they need to do something to 'improve' themselves. But this is viewed in terms of how this course of action will affect the family and is justified in terms of how it will help the husband and benefit the children, rather than the women themselves. Anne illustrates this point, firstly by discussing how she has 'not done anything' (despite raising three children and holding down various part-time jobs), and how she wants 'something more':

I've been a mother and that's it, as I say, you could say I more or less left school at thirteen and a half and I've not done anything, you know. Waitressing and bar work, that's what I've done, erm, I want something more. I always feel as though if I had stuck in at school then I probably could have done something, you know. I'm just hoping it's not too late.

Later in the interview, Anne returns to this issue, intertwining her own desires for personal fulfilment with her perceived role as mother and wife who does 'nothing' while her husband is out working:

But I'm determined that I've got to do something because I'm fed up of relying on Paul, I really am. I'm fed up with being stuck in the house and feeling like he's out working all the time and I'm doing nothing. I just want to be able to prove myself to myself, to him, you know, keep up with the kids. I don't want to be a mother for the rest of my life, you know, only a mother. It's not that I don't want to be a mother, I do want to be a mother, but not only a mother. I want to be able to do something else and hopefully help the kids as they get older.

Here Anne illustrates that she is 'fed-up' of 'relying' on her husband, which she means in a financial sense, again illustrating how her own work in the home is devalued. Although Anne had been happy being a mother she feels that this role is no longer enough, that she needs to do something more. However, the women in this study appeared to have their learning choices curtailed to a greater extent by family circumstances than the men, so much so that family circumstances could provide a barrier to returning, as illustrated by Dorothy:

I keep thinking my circumstances are going to change whereby I could, you know, hive off some of this time and be dedicated and selfish, but I always seem to be overly influenced by external problems, other people's problems. At the moment, you know, like the family, I'm helping them a lot because they've got problems. So anyway, it was a good job I didn't take anything because it would have been disastrous.

For Dorothy, any decisions which involved making choices concerning herself, rather than her family, were seen to be 'selfish' - her family came first and her personal learning choices suffered as a result. Smith (1988) felt that this situation is explained by the fact that women don't experience their lives as something to be mastered and controlled, instead suppressing their own interests to cater for those of family members.

It was at this stage of the research that a significant breakthrough in the data analysis occurred. As the theme of life transitions was developed further, adults seemed to be suggesting that it was concern about how these transitions would affect their present and future lives which had influenced their decision to return to education. When previous transcripts were returned to in light of this new insight, the participants seemed to be suggesting that they felt that the transitions would influence the stability of their lives in some way and that action was needed to redress this perceived imbalance. This 'situational imbalance' relates to individuals' lives and the situation in which they find themselves. Adults discussed it in terms of transitions in employment, whether this be in paid employment or unpaid employment in the home, or in terms of unemployment. For example, in the following quotation, Andrew describes his employment history,

illustrating how he felt that he was 'stuck in a rut' and that he knew he had to take action if he was to succeed in obtaining the type of job he actually wanted:

Basically I've been working in factories since I've left school. I managed to get promoted quite well in the steel works, got up to chief inspector and basically just didn't enjoy the job at all, never put much effort in at all because I didn't like it. Ended up leaving there, through force really because I think they realised I wasn't going to put the work in, erm, then I just found odd jobs in other factories and realised basically that I'm in a rut, so if I don't get out of it now I'm in it for the rest of my life. That's the main reason.

Although Andrew had been able to find work in the past, he had not enjoyed it and did not want to continue doing the same work in the future. He felt that he needed to take control over his life so that he was able to choose the type of work that he wanted, which, for him, was working outdoors, after his years of working in factories.

However, for Joe, the imbalance had come not from his personal employment history, but from external transitions which were seen to be beyond his control. He considered how these changes would alter his future employment and found that he did not like what he saw, feeling the need to take control over his own future:

... I was being tipped by Government policy, I was being tipped so that I couldn't possibly do that, I was going to have to change my lifestyle in quite a drastic way. I would have to become much more working class, much more at the beck and call of managers and I wasn't going to do that.

Taking control over their future employment prospects was seen to be important for adults experiencing situational imbalance. Unlike some of the others in this study, Matt enjoyed his job, but found that he was being held back because of his lack of formal qualifications:

I got a job after two weeks on me own shift and I revelled in it, I really enjoyed it, and they gave me a short term three month contract, no holidays, no sick pay, no pension etc., and then after three months I were still there. This bloke were still off sick, so they gave me another short term three month contract. This went on for twelve months, during that period I applied for various jobs within that company,

and always somebody else got it, even though I were actually doing it. People from outside were coming in with loads of qualifications, degrees, and getting jobs, and it got to the stage where the bloke who I were covering for handed his notice in, so due to equal opportunities etc. they advertised the job. I were doing it taking this in to mind, doing the job, and twenty-eight applied, I didn't even get an interview. Somebody else got the job and they asked me if I'd train him up before I left, so I left on spot. I said see you later, I'll go and get the qualifications that he's got and come back.

For Matt the only option, if he wanted a similar job, was to obtain qualifications. His sense of urgency was acute, and he felt that he had applied to college out of anger about what had happened to him:

Purely that is the sole reason, the first one I told you, why I went. I didn't sit and think about it for months and months and worry shall I go back into education, I did it out of pure anger and not getting that job which I'd done. And people in company were saying well you should have it, it should be your job but we can't bend the rules it has to be done, we want more black workers, we want more disabled workers, we want more women workers, it has to be put into papers, qualifications, you haven't got them and I would say well I'm doing job, why did you give me job in first place? That's 'cos they're desperate.

Also, adults pointed out that gaining qualifications would provide them with a type of job security which they would not have if they did not have the necessary qualifications, indicating that job security, to many of the adults, was another way in which situational imbalance could be redressed, as illustrated by Don:

Before I've been on temporary work, part-time and that, you know, and I thought this will give me the opportunity to be permanent because temporary workers there's no security, I mean I've worked there and I've got no trade union rights, you know, they can just get rid of you when they want to get rid of you and they'll set you on when they want you. It's hire and fire as they please, you know, and I don't want to be under that all the time, I want a career where I know I'll be kept on until I'm sixty-five, you know, rather than being told oh that's it, you've done now, the following month because that's happened twice now.

As this theme was pursued in more depth, it was necessary to ask what 'situational imbalance' actually meant for adults. Although it appeared to be to do with an easily expressed dissatisfaction with present working conditions, it was felt that there had to be

other reasons why the adults returned to education as a way of redressing this imbalance. After all, it could be argued that there are many people who are not happy in their work, but they do not return to education as a way of coping with this dissatisfaction. When this theme was pursued with Simon, he suggested that it was dissatisfaction with his working situation, but that this was coupled with a feeling of knowing that he could do better for himself:

It was after two days of working at Bassets separating Siamese jelly babies. And I thought, oh God, I'm worth more than this, and that was it then. I thought there's absolutely no reason why I can't go out and prove myself academically, and get myself a bloody good job. And that's what I'm setting out to do.

Many of the adults in this study felt that they were 'worth more than this', that they were 'capable of more' and that they needed to prove to themselves and others that they were able to return to education. Participants appeared to be confident about their own, personal ability, although they had misgivings about the education system and being able to 'fit in' as they perceived that it would be an experience quite different to their usual, everyday experiences.

Although these reasons for returning to education would appear to be vocational, this may be because vocational reasons are perhaps the most easily expressed motivations for returning to education. However, as has been noted above, it is not purely vocational motivations, but issues surrounding emotional and intellectual dissatisfaction which have acted as a spur. This theme was pursued in more depth later in the research with Ian, who pointed out that for him, 'vocational' meant that returning to education would improve his work prospects, but that this was not the sole motivating factor:

You could say that it was vocational in that I had no choice, when I got back to Ipswich from Hungary I was faced with agency work basically, really mindless manual work. I had a job, the last job I left, the last proper job I had, nine to five, whatever, was at Hewlett Packard. I hated that in the end, but that was secure. I mean I was pretty well off and comfortable then, I was doing OK then, I had my own flat, a car, I had all the trimmings, you know, but it didn't make me happy.

So it was a vocational decision in as much as I had no choice really, but that doesn't mean to suggest I went into it reluctantly because I didn't. It must be vocational in that I do think that whatever happens at the end is going to be immeasurably better than what I had before, but it's really about me.

When other transcripts were returned to in order to look again for alternative reasons, it became evident that there was indeed much more to it than these easily expressed vocational motivations. Adults seemed to be suggesting that their personal feelings were important, discussing these in terms of personal satisfaction, contentment, happiness and stability. Initially, the researcher felt that 'emotional imbalance' would be an adequate label for this theme. However, the term 'emotional' has many different connotations, and could, for some people, be associated with issues of irrationality and impulse. It was for this reason that the term 'dispositional imbalance' was considered to be more appropriate. The term 'dispositional' in the researcher's view, has less association with impulse and irrationality, referring instead to temperament and state of mind. This theme of 'dispositional imbalance' seemed significant, although at this stage of the work it was not clear how important this theme was. Before further data collection could take place, it was necessary to return to previous transcripts and re-read them in light of this newly emerged theme. When the transcript from David's interview was returned to, it became clear that, although David was not experiencing life transitions which had unbalanced his situation, it seemed to be that he was experiencing an imbalance with his emotional and intellectual life, that he was unhappy, unfulfilled and dissatisfied, complaining about the 'brain-dead' people with whom he had to mix.

A repeat interview with David was arranged to discuss this emerging category. Looking back, he felt that returning to education would have provided him with the opportunity to get out of his employment situation which was causing him so much anguish. His ultimate ambition was to become a novelist and he saw returning to education as a way to realise this ambition and gain the fulfilment, satisfaction and financial security which, he perceived, would come with it. However, in the year between the first and second interview, David's wife had left him and he had received custody of his child. This was a

sudden, unexpected life transition which had left David with very little choice. He had to react against this transition and change his choices in order to adapt to his new circumstances. Having received custody of his child, David felt that he had to stay within the same job as it provided financial security for him and his son, even though he hated being there. Returning to education was no longer possible as a way to re-balance his life, so he had to adopt other ways to do this which included reducing his working hours, as illustrated in the following quotation:

... if I was still doing forty hours a week I would be going mad there. Because it's like I get there at ten to nine, by the time I start work, well it's gone. Five hours have gone so I just keep myself busy, out of everyone's way, do my hours. But if it was eight hours, oh God. It's like because I'm doing five hours my break has changed, you know, the time, because I'm starting late and finishing early and that. So the people that are a bit brain-dead, I'm not having a break with them, so it's like I'm normally on my own. I have a break on my own which don't bother me. I grab a newspaper and sit down for twenty minutes. I'm not with them listening to them talk about bloody football all the time.

This section of the interview was important as it illustrated that adults may attempt to re-balance their lives reactively or proactively, depending on whether transitions are expected and planned or unexpected and unplanned. For example, Dawn knew her life was going to change when her children went to school and was, therefore, able to plan in advance. Louise knew the local hospital at which she worked was going to close and was, therefore, able to take time to choose an appropriate course of action. Joe suspected that his work would change as a result of the imminent privatisation of the railways so he, too, was able to plan in advance. David did not know that his wife would leave him and, therefore, had to take action after this had occurred. Bill had no idea that a doctor would tell him to give up work so abruptly and thus, also, had to take action after this had occurred.

This theme of 'dispositional imbalance' was followed up by asking adults what they wanted from life. It was found that other adults, as Joe had shown, wanted to maintain a dispositional and/or situational balance in their lives, discussing this in terms of job

security, financial security, satisfaction, happiness, fulfilment and enjoyment. Life transitions were perceived to threaten this balance which is why adults said they had felt the need to take action in some way to redress this imbalance. Participants seemed to be indicating that they were experiencing a dispositional and/or situational imbalance and that returning to education was a way to re-balance. 'Re-balancing' was thus the category to develop from this line of questioning.

With hindsight, this is perhaps not so surprising as ours is a culture of balance and stability - the importance of financial independence, stable family life and emotional stability, are taught and valued from an early age. If we accept the notion that our personal identities are shaped both by identification with significant others and with society as a whole, and if we accept that our social world has been constructed by humans, it follows that personal dialogue will reflect the discourse contained within these identities. Is it no wonder then, that theories concentrate on these notions, when both the theorists and the research participants are a part of this discourse? Reigal (1976: 690) however, points out that there is a danger that theorists concentrate on issues of maintaining a balance, rather than considering the issues of transition and change which have led to conditions of imbalance:

The preference for an equilibrium model in the behavioural sciences has been as firmly established as has the preference for abstract traits or competencies. Without any debate it has been taken for granted that a state of balance, stability and rest is more desirable than a state of upheaval, conflict and change. Thus we have always aimed for a psychology of satisfaction but not of excitement. This preference has found expression in balance theory, equilibrium theory, steady state theory, and indirectly in the theory of cognitive dissonance. With the possible exception of the latter, these interpretations fail to explore the fact that every change has to be explained by the process of imbalance which forms the basis for any movement. Once this prerequisite is recognised, stability appears as a transitory condition in the stream of ceaseless change.

By using the term 're-balancing' to describe this category, and by describing the conditions which have led to the perception that adults need to rebalance their lives in some way, this process of stability and change has been illustrated. Adults are concerned

with maintaining a balance, although what is meant by 'balance' is defined differently from individual to individual. However, the perceived need to 're-balance' appears to stem from some form of situational and/or dispositional imbalance, some actual or perceived change which has affected their own lives and personal identities. Thus, other theories were taken into account which looked at the issue of maintaining an 'equilibrium', although it was recognised that the need to re-balance is as the result of some type of instability, whether a life change, or dispositional imbalance. It is this actual or perceived instability, coupled with a desire to rebalance, which forms the conditions of action, although this action will vary from individual to individual.

In conclusion, through actual, perceived or desired life transitions, adults come to think about ways in which the stability of their lives has been, or will be, affected. Through these transitions, they are experiencing a situational and/or dispositional imbalance and, perhaps partly due to the fact that the socially available discourse of the time is one of balance and stability, adults perceive that they need to take action to redress the balance. There are many ways in which adults consider re-balancing their lives, some of which are planned, deliberate courses of action, whereas other strategies are unplanned and perhaps only visible with hindsight. Returning to education is one such re-balancing strategy. However, before adults come to consider education as a re-balancing strategy, they go through a process of self-assessment and need to become attuned to the idea that returning to education will help them to re-balance their lives in some way. These two themes will be discussed in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 12:
SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-Assessment

When adults think about ways in which they can re-balance their lives, they do so through a process of self-assessment. In some cases this involves a consideration of their public image and private identity, that is, who they perceive themselves to be and who they perceive others believe them to be. In other cases it involves a consideration of role and how this might, or could, change over time. If returning to education is considered to be an appropriate re-balancing strategy, self-assessment concerns also an assessment of 'education' and how perceptions of this might relate to perceptions of the self. This may include an assessment of courses, institutions, qualifications and disciplines, along with an assessment of individual capability to succeed and 'fit in' to the educational environment. This chapter will describe the development of the category of 'self-assessment'.

In Chapter 11 it was noted that adults look to their past and present circumstances, along with a consideration of future conditions, when thinking about ways in which they might redress the perceived imbalance in their lives. When considering what to study, the participants suggested that previous experience, firstly, was an important factor because time was moving on, they were getting older and would not have the time left in their lives to completely change direction, as Linda pointed out:

I've always had an idea that I wanted to stay in commerce because I might as well build in the bricks that I've already got. It's no good to be, I'm thirty-seven, I always wanted to retire at fifty [laughter]. There's no point me completely changing direction now because I'm so under-qualified to do that.

Here, Linda felt that she would not be able to change direction because she was 'under-qualified' and would not have the time left in her life to re-train and gain the qualifications necessary to move forward in a new area.

The second way in which previous experience was important was that adults looked to what they had done in the past as an indication of what they felt they could do, and succeed at, in the future. As Steve illustrated in the following quotation, this experience was considered in light of what were seen to be personal characteristics, such as being 'disciplined' and 'neat and tidy':

I ran my own business, so in effect I had to become me own accountant by drawing up books and doing VAT returns, and I learnt that quite simply because if I went to an accountant, he had to put the accounts in at the end of the year, but if I went to an accountant and said look, do me VAT return, I ended up with a bill for a hundred quid when I worked out I could do it myself anyway. So all the books and the rest of it I kept myself and then just passed them to him. He prepared the accounts and sent them into Inland Revenue. And I found that, well, I wasn't perfect, I don't think you can ever be if you're self-taught, but I found I quite enjoyed, and I'm very sort of disciplined on things, I like it all neat and tidy, and, you know, to know where I'm going.

This quotation is interesting in that Steve seemed to be grappling with what constitutes 'legitimate' knowledge, suggesting that if someone was self-taught there was always something lacking. He felt, therefore, that he needed to go to college to legitimise his self-taught knowledge and skills.

The third way in which previous experience was seen to be important was that although adults may not have been entirely sure about what they wanted to study, they are able to learn from past experiences and make sure they do not make the same mistakes again, as Andrew illustrated when asked if he would move to a university in another city:

I would do but not unless I'm dead certain of what I want to do. I wouldn't want to have to leave the city and set up and basically uproot myself totally if I'm not definite on what I'm actually going to do as a course wise. You see if I take a course and I don't like it, I can't see myself sticking because it's basically same as being in the steelworks again isn't it? That's what I would think anyway, if I start a course and it's not what I want to do, I'm going to be doing something I'm not enjoying again and I don't really want to spend three years doing it. I've made that mistake, I don't want to double back on myself.

When this theme was discussed in more depth with Ian, he felt that it was inevitable that learning choices related to past experiences as these experiences tend to reflect personal interests:

Does the course I've chosen relate to the past? Well I tend to think sort of holistically anyway, that if you have an abiding interest then it's bound to manifest itself in past, present and future isn't it? So it was inevitable that I would choose something like this. I think it would be really foolish to choose something like medicine or law or something that I've never had an experience or interest in, just on a whim, that would be fatal, because you've got to choose something that fascinates you, it's got to drive you, hasn't it?

Ian knew what interested him and thought that it was sensible to follow that interest with his learning choices rather than choose something different on a 'whim'. This seemed to suggest that Ian's learning options were framed by his personal interests and past experiences. Was this the case with other participants? When Dawn's transcript was returned to, Dawn seemed to be suggesting that her previous experience served to confirm, or help justify, her perception of her personal abilities, of what she felt she was capable, and what she thought she would, and would not, like doing in a job, as the following quotation illustrates:

Like I say, I ran a play-group for two year and I right enjoyed it because I'm childish in a way. I'm quite happy to sit on the floor and play with plasticine and, do you know what I mean? It's something that I know I can do. I mean I wouldn't imagine myself working in an office or a shop. I wouldn't fancy something like that. But it's just something I know I could do and enjoy it.

Dawn's learning options have been framed by her self-perception and attitudes which have stemmed, in part, from past experience. Although she had never worked in a shop or office, she could not imagine doing so as this type of work was quite different to what she had enjoyed in the past.

Similarly, Karen felt that she could look to what she had enjoyed doing in the past as a way of helping her to decide what subject area she should study:

I think it's just something that I've always been interested in. Even when I was younger I were getting sort of textbooks out of the library on subjects like that, before I really knew what they were. And I've always been interested in like why people do things and, you know, if there's been a documentary on about cities and things like that then I'll watch it, you know, about what people do and why they do it. Trying to find out more.

For Vicky, school had been an important experience which had helped her to assess herself as being good with figures. As she had enjoyed mathematics at school it seemed sensible, to her, to choose similar subjects as an adult. Vicky expanded on this theme when she illustrated that previous experience not only has a positive effect in that it draws people to learning choices which fit in with their personal experience, but that it can also have a negative effect in that it pushes people away from what they have previously done:

The only other influence I can think of is that I steered away from caring type, social work, type jobs because I thought I've done that, I don't actually want to do that again, I've done it. I'm not saying I don't like it, there are good parts to it but there are down sides to it as well which out weigh I think the good sides. So I purposely steered away from social work type courses. I mean I looked at things like teaching and thought I love being with my own kids but I couldn't cope with other folks so I steered away from that sort of thing. So it was a matter I think of ruling some out, you know, not so much of oh I really want to do that, but I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that, and see what's left, it was a little bit like that.

Ellen looked to the experience and knowledge she had built up as a mother, thinking about how she could use her skills to help in schools:

Well, like I say, I like working with children and I like that side of things, you know? I do think there's a great need for this kind of back-up in schools. They seem to be wanting, you know, sort of somebody there to help the teachers discuss child behaviour. So I know there's probably jobs there and a need for jobs later if the funding is available of course.

In this quotation, Ellen illustrated that she was aware of the wider, external social and economic context in which her choices were to be made, hinting that these choices could be constrained if funding was not available. In both of the above examples, Ellen and

Dawn seem to be suggesting that their past experience has helped them to assess themselves in a way which is closely related to this experience and which they believe can be developed further in the future. Both have mentioned child-care because their experiences over the last few years have involved raising their own children. At this stage of the research, it was important to take a step back and consider how other experiences had helped to shape adults' initial learning choices. In particular, questions were raised concerning this issue of child-care amongst women. Do women who have raised children choose other options, rather than child-care? If so, why? Why might their learning choices differ when they have all been involved in intensive child-care for a number of years? How might choices differ between women who have child-care responsibilities and women who do not?

In the example from Linda, quoted above, she suggested that she was considering the area of commerce. Linda had an eight year old daughter who was attending junior school at the time of the interview and had, therefore, been in full-time education for a number of years. Linda struggled financially, and, as a way of helping to pay the bills, continued to undertake book-keeping for a friend. Also, she had worked in accounts prior to having her daughter. Linda appeared to assess herself as a person working in 'commerce', whereas both Dawn and Ellen appeared to assess themselves as a 'mother'. An important point appears to be that their children, at the time of the interview, were still too young to go to school and both were engaged in full-time child-care. On the other hand, Tracy had a son who had been in full-time education for a number of years, during which time she had worked as a market researcher. Although not assessing herself specifically as a market researcher, she considered the aspects of the job which she enjoyed and related these to her perceived skills. Also, her mother appeared to have had a significant influence on her choices:

I've always sort of, me mum for years has said you should be a social worker because doing market research obviously you meet all sorts of people. And when I've been sort of, I know it sounds awful, but in deprived areas shall we say, and I've met like old ladies and things, and they're so grateful for somebody to talk to.

And I'm more interested in talking to them and discussing things with them than I am with doing me work.

Adults in these examples seem to be suggesting that their choices are framed within those experiences which, to themselves, are the most significant in terms of self-perception, personal identity and role. These appear to be the experiences which have helped to shape who they are, who they perceive themselves to be and who they think significant others perceive themselves to be. For example, Vicky also had children at school but had not worked in paid employment since her children had been born. Although she had spent several years in full-time child-care, her learning choices did not involve child-care. Instead, she looked firstly, to other skills she had developed whilst raising her children, and secondly, to subjects she had enjoyed at school:

Erm, you see I tend to look at what I do in my own life, more in my personal life in like, erm, like with my kids. I know that I'm quite good at organising my time because I do it...[laughter]...I do it a lot with me kids. Things like money, I know I'm quite good at organising money because I look at other people's finances and I think what you doing that for? So them sort of things influenced it a little, but I think the biggest thing was I looked back to school and thought what did I enjoy studying when I were at school and my favourite subject were maths, so probably my biggest influence was that.

Neither Harsheem nor Sally had children of their own and neither mentioned child-care as a possible learning choice. However, again, they both looked to personal experiences from the past, framing their learning choices within these experiences. Harsheem had required counselling when she was younger and felt that as she had been through these personal experiences, she would be able to provide a better service than she had received:

I'm quite interested in counselling. I've had different problems myself and I've been through the system and I think it's quite important to have people in there who have experienced problems themselves rather than people just thinking I will do some counselling and not having a clue what the actual person who they're counselling is actually going through. And I've had to deal with quite a few different things.

Also, Harsheem wanted to become a counsellor because she felt that Asian patients coming to the surgery, at which she worked as a receptionist, were getting referred to an inappropriate type of counselling for their cultural needs:

It's like get up and go kind of thing, you know, think about yourself. It's mainly finding things that are important to you and getting through it, you know, yourself. And in the Pakistani community everything revolves around the family, rather than yourself ... you've got to resolve things around the family and you've got to keep your problems under the carpet, and you've got to try and sort them out without letting anybody in the family know, because as soon as it gets out then everything's just drawn out of proportion and it's really difficult.

Sally also looked to her past experiences with social workers, believing they had offered inappropriate advice because they had not experienced what homeless people were going through, and were thus unable to empathise with their situation:

Erm, it sounds like I'm being critical of this but I found that, like the social workers that I'd met, I found that they just had no idea, you know, sort of what you were feeling and what you were going through. I just remember being homeless in London and they were saying well go and claim benefits and it was like, you know, you can't just go up to people and say you should be claiming benefits, you know. It's like you don't really understand why you're not going to claim benefits, or why you don't want to, you know, the ins and outs of it. And then when I went into the drug rehabilitation I had a social worker then who just seemed to sort of spend more time talking about her problems and her children, and like half the time she didn't turn up and she'd say oh my baby's not well and I'd sort of think I'm sure there must be easier ways of getting through to people.

Sally's experience of social workers not being able to empathise with their clients continued when she began to work in a women's hostel:

And then again I worked in a women's hostel and there were people there who were talking about the politics of everything. And I remember being there and they were sort of talking to a group of prostitutes and saying no, this is the reason why you have to do this and why you have to do something else. And when she went they all sat around, I was sort of in the background, but they all sat around saying what a load of rubbish, you know, where do they get these people from, you know? And so I just, I think it was then that I started to think I'm sure to be a social worker you must have had to have done something, you know, you can't just leave school and say right I'm going to be a social worker, you know. But half the social workers I met they were from really well to do families and I

thought, you know, years of reading books about homeless people and prostitution and things, I don't think you're still going to get an idea, you'll get a basic idea of what they're like but I don't think you'd fully understand the way that they work and, you know, things like that. And I thought I've done all this, I'm sure I could go into it and not sort of be, like to me they were like holier than thou type of people, you know. I didn't want to go into it saying oh yes I've done all that, I know all about it and I know how you're feeling because everyone's individual and you don't know how they're feeling. But I thought I must have a better chance than these people sort of saying well it's the Government I blame, you know, you really don't want to know who it is to blame, you know.

Both Sally and Harsheem's contact with 'professional' people in the past had been a negative experience. However, both felt that their personal experiences were valid and could be turned to positive use by helping them to become a more empathetic counsellor and social worker. It is interesting that both of these women felt that they were unable to identify with these people in the past as they occupied alternative cultures, but that both, at this stage of their lives, were able to begin to re-assess themselves as a future 'counsellor' and 'social worker', thus illustrating that their personal identities and cultural spheres were beginning to shift.

This began to raise further questions about the issue of personal identity and role and how learning choices are influenced by self-assessment and a perceived need for reassessment. For example, Dawn's children were getting older and would soon be going to school which had enabled Dawn to begin to reassess her life and herself. Although she felt she had no complaints about her life, she believed that she had the capability to be more than a 'wife' and a 'mum', that this involved a reassessment and modification of what she called 'me', as the following quotation illustrates:

I don't know, I think like I said I'm happy with what I've got, I'm happy being a mum and a wife but it's not enough for me I don't think, do you know what I mean? I think I am a good mum and a good wife but I know I can do more with me life. I'm not just a mum and a wife, I'm me as well and I think, well I know I can be more than that. I just need to have a go, see how I go.

As Dawn had previous experience of working in a play-group and had enjoyed the work, she felt that, initially, a nursery nurse course would provide the opportunity for her to do something she enjoyed, was capable of and which would help to modify her private identity and public image:

I want to do something, do you know what I mean, so I can say oh, when they say what do you do then, instead of saying well I'm a housewife I can say I'm a nursery nurse, work at so and so, do you know what I mean? I want to feel as though I can do something.

This quotation illustrates that social interaction is important to adults, that learning choices do not involve only an assessment of self perception, but also an assessment of public perception of self. Part of this assessment appears to involve the issue of identity and it was at this stage of the work that the researcher felt it necessary to explore what might be meant by this concept, especially as she is not a trained social psychologist. Berger and Luckmann (1967: 153) show how personal identity is a social construction which is constantly open to change - personal identity is shaped, maintained and transmitted. They suggest that personal identity is not biologically determined, but a sense of who we are develops as we interact with 'significant' others who inhabit our social world. This developed identity is expanded to include not only roles and attitudes of significant others, but an identification with society as a whole. Individual identity is not static but develops throughout life as people interact with others. As Tennant (1997: 55) notes:

Identity, as a social construction, needs to be maintained through social interaction. The routines of everyday life serve to confirm the reality of the world and our place in it. In particular, the language used in everyday conversations confirms for us the silent, taken-for-granted world that forms the foundation of our personal identity. In modern, pluralistic society, however, there is a multiplicity of world views or realities. Because there is no common social reality there is (after primary socialisation) no socially produced stable structure of personal identity. This means that achieving a stable personal identity in modern society becomes an individual, private enterprise. Moreover, the possibility of transforming one's identity is always present. Indeed, one could argue that many life events require a change or re-orientation of identity (e.g. retirement,

caring for children, death of a spouse).

As has been noted in the previous chapter, life transitions do require a reassessment of identity, but this reassessment is based on previous personal experience and how that has shaped personal identity. For example, Dawn's children would soon be starting in full-time education which had led to a gradual and tentative reassessment of her identity as wife and mother. Joe was worried about privatisation of the railways and how this would affect his working hours and family life. Having already begun to question the juxtaposition of his working and social identities, he felt that imminent privatisation would provide the impetus he needed to make the change he had been considering for a while. David was 'stuck in a rut' - he was unable to identify with his work colleagues and knew he had to make a change so that he could be 'himself', which meant realising his ambition of becoming a writer. Julie felt that she needed to gain the self-respect which she felt she had lost as a result of living on benefits and being perceived as a second class citizen:

I've had years of existing on state benefit, bringing up my daughter and looking after my parents, when you feel like a second class citizen. You feel as though you've been left by the wayside and that nobody's interested in you. And I think that you lose a lot of self-respect that way.

For some adults, the need to go through a process of self-assessment became more pressing as they grew older and began to think about what else they might have done with their lives. This is most clearly illustrated by the inevitable life transition faced by everyone - ageing. For example, Karen felt that reaching the age of thirty had made her think about what she was doing at work and how this could be aided by further learning:

I'm coming up to thirty, I'm thirty this year, and I don't know. In my work I've got a job in the training section so I'm getting more involved with things like that, and I'm just finding that the more I'm learning through the job, the more I want to go and learn other things as well. Like I say, there's this little thirty hanging over me as well.

For Karen, it was important not just to return to education for herself, but also to return for her parents:

Me mum failed her Eleven Plus and sort of went into work straight from school, and I've always felt there's like me and me brother, that we got into this top stream at school and got O levels and stuff like that. And I always feel in a way that they were disappointed when I left sixth form college, and I suppose in some way I'm still trying to get over that and say well, it's not anything you did, it's just the way that things worked out. But I can do it, so I suppose in a way it's still getting their approval, you know, sort of showing you can be proud of me, I can do it.

Tracy felt also that reaching the age of thirty was a turning point as it had led to her taking stock of her life and concluding that she was doing 'nothing':

I sort of hit thirty and I thought what am I doing, nothing, you know. Time you did something, like a turning point, you know, a crisis of being thirty.

Although reaching a certain age had acted as a catalyst for adult's thinking about returning to education, they seemed to be suggesting that it was not the actual age as such, but what was happening in their lives when they reached that age. It appeared as if participants had a set of variable criteria by which they judged the success of their lives, variable both between participants and over time. Steve highlighted this when he pointed out that at a younger age he had been satisfied with his position as salesman, but as he grew older this was no longer the case:

I'm thirty-eight year old and there's two salesmen down the road and one is fifty-eight and the others fifty-five, and I don't want to be a fifty-five year old salesman. There's people coming up through their mid twenties as I was ten years ago, who are hungrier. And at that age you just want a quiet life I think. So, I mean at one stage when I first went into this job, I thought it was the be all and end all of everything, because you do, don't you? You're going at five hundred mile an hour all the time. But now, as I say, I'm coming up to thirty-nine year old in the next couple of months, so if I don't do it now I'm never going to do it.

The final sentence in this quotation illustrates the urgency with which some adults felt they needed to make their decisions - they were getting older and had to make their

choices before they perceived it was too late. This sense of urgency meant also that adults felt they had a greater commitment to the course, as Ian illustrates:

There was no question really with me not staying on the course, I was just very determined, and in common with a lot of my colleagues on that course we were kind of, it was our last chance, you know, it was that or nothing really, we'd all had a taste of the other option and although a few did drop out, obviously we all had different motives, but the bulk of us were faced with our last chance to make good I think and that's where I was.

As was noted in the previous chapter, adults do not appear to be too unconfident about their personal ability. Instead, the issue appears to be more that they are entering unfamiliar ground and their perceptions are often rooted in bad educational experiences or poor schooling. In the following quotation, Simon illustrates this point by discussing the fact that he always knew that he was capable of progressing within the education system, but that he lacked the personal confidence:

I think I always even as youngster knew that I was intelligent enough to take on board something like this. It's a lot of lack of confidence, self-esteem sort of thing. I think I was over-looked. I think there were things that they could have done at school to help me. And they just sort of, oh he's getting along OK, and they just sort of left me to it.

However, when thinking about personal capabilities of returning to education, some adults hinted that the ways in which they assess themselves can hinder learning choices, as Julie illustrated when discussing her 'capacity to assimilate' information:

I think the main thing I'm frightened about at the moment is my capacity to assimilate information. I feel that my concentration isn't as good. Probably that applies to everybody that's older.

For Louise, having assessed herself as a 'practical person', returning to learning caused added concern because she was not sure whether she could make the transition towards becoming a 'student' and sitting in the classroom:

I'm quite a practical person though. So there's another reason I think with this studying is can I actually sit down and do it, you know? 'Cos, er, in me job you're always on the go and this is like completely different. You'll be sat down in one place and doing something and you think oh will I be able to just sit and do something, rather than up on your feet all day.

Charlie had assessed himself as someone who was afraid of computers. However, by becoming a student he had been brought into contact with information technology. He was able to reassess his own thoughts, try out the equipment and find out that it was nothing of which to be afraid:

I've always been afraid of anything like that. I've always thought that's not for me, you know. I've sat and looked at the [local college] where we're surrounded by them, and I sat and I looked and I thought. I had a go on it one day and I found it easy and I looked at it and I thought I can do this.

This process of self-assessment appeared not only to influence attitude towards learning, but influenced also adults' choice of institution. For example, for Geoff, some choices were much more obvious than others, in particular at which university he should study. Again, the following quotation illustrates that the way in which Geoff assesses himself is influenced by previous experience:

I think perhaps because it seems more of a practical place, I mean I grew up when it was the poly, you know, and the bright lads I went to school went there, you know. But the sort of, [the old university] has always been more academic I think than practical. I guess it's not true today, but that's how I grew up perceiving it all, you know. And to be honest I've got to say I think it was a little bit high brow at [the old university], I felt as if it was a bit beyond me really. I'd be more comfortable going to [the new university], I'd be more comfortable going there. I thought I might be out of my depth going to [the old university].

Similarly, Don seemed to suggest that the process of self-assessment and the outcome of this had influenced his choice of institution:

I originally did see [a local college] advertised in the Daily Mirror and I think there was something in a particular advert that said it was for adult students, adult returners, and in particular it devoted it's time towards disadvantaged people or

disadvantaged citizens. So I thought that's why I originally applied there. And because I'd not had a good time at school, I'd had a bad time at school, originally, so that's why I applied there.

Here, Don illustrated that he considered both his institutional perception and his perception of self, and, as the two appeared to be compatible, he came to the conclusion that this institution would be an appropriate place at which to study. Simon illustrated that he, too, had gone through a process of self-assessment and institutional assessment. This had helped him to decide what would be an appropriate institution at which to study, as the following quotation illustrates:

[The new university], I was really impressed with that because they've spent a lot of money which means that they've got a good, long-term view, outlook, you know. They're aiming well for the future and they're providing a lot of things for the students which I think is a good thing. It's a good thing that they invest so that they get, I don't know, not necessarily better calibre, but the right type of people. It's probably going to attract more people like myself who haven't got any real academic background, so I will be amongst like-minded people instead of lots of people with three A levels in As and Bs.

Similarly, Andrew took notice of what was happening in the two universities which were located in his city, with these perceptions helping to influence his choice of course and institution:

Erm, I've gone through UCAS and things like that, but all the courses that I can find for [the new university] which is the uni. that I want to go to really because it's the most expanding one and it's probably got the better, well from what I've been told they've got the better teaching practice, [the old university] is supposed to be a bit old fashioned and they get you in a lecture and just talk to you and tell you basically. In [the new university] they're a bit more personal, supposedly, I don't know if that's right or not.

However, although this process of self-assessment had helped adults to think about institutions which might be appropriate for themselves, some realised that their learning choices might change, perceiving that it was better to keep their options open, especially in terms of subject choice. For example, Geoff knew that he wanted to return to the local university, but he recognised that his learning choices might change as he began to

understand more about himself as he progressed through his chosen route. He felt, therefore, that he would keep his options open to allow for this type of change which was already beginning to occur on his access course. In this quotation he illustrates how the way in which he has assessed himself is intertwined with his learning choices:

[The local university] is a superb place so I thought right, I'll go for that, you know, and then maybe when I'm there I'll be able to work out which direction I want to go in, what my strengths and weaknesses are. But I mean even after five weeks I've realised things I didn't know before, like law for instance. I'm a positive sort of person, I've got to have an answer, whereas lawyers aren't like that. They've got to sort of stand back and accept things more don't they? So I know to stick clear of law, you know, it's a learning process isn't it?

Similarly, Simon was willing to wait and find out what he was good at, knowing that his learning choices would be influenced by this in some way as he progressed through:

I'd spotted early within a couple of weeks that out of, I mean they're all intelligent people within this group, and I'm one of the best at maths. And I mean I didn't even sit a maths exam at school, which showed me that these people, some of them have got O level in maths, and I'm better than them at maths, you know. So I had an idea early on that it would probably be a mathematics based degree that I would take. But to actually, you know, I pin-pointed the course when I went to [the new university] for the day and I had a listen to what he'd got on offer.

Success, in particular unexpected success, can draw adults to courses they might not have chosen otherwise, as Dawn illustrates in a repeat interview:

I think because I were surprised how much I enjoyed it, it were brilliant, do you know what I mean, it's a great subject. I wasn't going to do A level, I thought that's it, I've done me bit. But when I got me results I thought God, bearing in mind that we'd moved and I'd had a few family upsets and I thought if I can do this when I've had so much on and working, I felt I needed to do something else, do you know what I mean? I thought right I'm going to go for A level and I did, I phoned up next day and I enrolled, so it were more of a quick decision to do the A level based on the fact that I got a good result because I was surprised.

The above quotations illustrate that the self-assessment process not only applies to adults' lives before they re-enter the education system, but applies also to their lives once

they are enrolled on a course. For example, an important part of the self-assessment process, for many adults in this study, was when they began to reassess themselves as 'student' or as 'learner'. Steve felt that his past experience at giving presentations would help his confidence, and that he was not concerned about what people thought of him. Similarly, Bill felt that his age had helped him to cope with returning to education as he was no longer embarrassed about admitting that he was unable to do something:

I've gone now because I'm not embarrassed, I'm not frightened to tell that teacher who's teaching me that I can't do things. Whereas at one time I'd have been embarrassed and ashamed to, you know, you get this er, when you're in your twenties and thirties, I daren't tell them I can't do such and you're ashamed that you can't do it and really it's not your fault, it were the system.

For Geoff, the transition back into education had been easier because he was able to assess himself as being a capable learner:

I think it's the type of person I am, I just like to learn, you know. I always watch the news and like we get to college and they say well you've got to start reading a good newspaper because you've got to know about this. Well, I used to do that anyway because I'm interested so that's again stood me in good stead really.

On the other hand, Andrew felt that his past experiences in education had influenced his attitude towards learning as an adult, so that, for him personally, returning to learning was something which was perceived to be quite difficult:

I find it difficult to learn now because, I want to learn now but I still find it difficult because if I find something difficult I always have a laugh if I'm finding things hard. And basically even at this age I still have a little bit of a tendency to start giggling or have a muck about with the kid sat next to me, so I find it difficult. I think that's actually come from there, I think it's stemmed from that, the fact that we mucked about in class and we didn't care about it. I think people who didn't muck about in class find it a bit, er, find it something that they daren't do more than anything else. They're a bit scared of the teacher still, it's that figure of having somebody in front of them, I think they're scared of that and I think I just haven't got that which is a bad thing really, because I know I can do the work so think oh I'll do it later when I'm at home, I'll have a laugh at the minute.

Finally, when adults looked back on the transformation they had experienced, they pointed out that they would not have believed, previously, that they were capable of returning to education, as Geoff illustrates:

But at one time when I was working, if you'd said to me one day you're going to end up at [the local university], I wouldn't have believed it, you know. I would have said there's no way, I can't do it, I'm not clever enough. But when you get to a certain age you realise that's only down to yourself.

This chapter has described the development of the sub-category of 'self-assessment'. When undertaking a process of self-assessment, issues of 'actual self' and 'ideal self' seem to be important, as perceptions of these appear to influence how a person wishes to reassess themselves, which, in part, has some influence on subsequent learning choices. But on what are these perceptions based? How does a person decide who they want to be? What role does public discourse play? Why are certain identities and/or roles seen to be good and desirable, whereas others are not? For what are people striving? Why are they not happy with their perceived 'actual self?' Why are they reaching for an 'ideal self?'

Many of these questions have been researched and discussed within the field of psychology. It is worth here referring to the pioneering work of Kelly (1952) as it provides insight into the themes which have been raised in this chapter. In this work Kelly distinguished between reference groups and membership groups. As he saw it, reference groups perform two functions of self-reference, firstly, as a group with which people compare themselves to evaluate their situation and attributes, and secondly, as a group from which people take their norms and values. He further distinguished between positive reference groups which people privately accept or aspire to belong to, and negative reference groups which people privately reject or with which they dis-identify. Membership groups, on the other hand, are groups to which people belong through some objective criterion, although they may not identify themselves with that group or use the group for self-evaluation and the development of social values.

Certainly, Kelly's theory has relevance to the learning choices of adult returners, although there is perhaps an over-emphasis on a conscious movement, or illusion of movement, between groups. As was noted in Chapter 10, many adults find that they are questioning their current membership group, that they feel that they do not belong, even though some objective criterion, such as 'being a mother' or 'working in the bus depot' suggests common group membership. For these adults it appears that common group membership does not imply common group meanings. They point out that other people within that group are happy with the group membership and can share common meanings, but the adults themselves are no longer able to do this. When this change in meanings has occurred as a result of life, and hence, role transition, and is accompanied by some form of role confusion, then it appears to be important for adults to consider positive reference groups to which they can aspire. This, in turn, has an effect on learning choices as the choices adults make are influenced, in part, by consideration of this positive reference group and the attached meanings. For example, to Steve, 'accountancy' meant a better paid job, more security, better working hours. He regularly dealt with accountants and felt that he was not 'so different' to them - he no longer identified with being a 'salesman' as both the nature of the job and the people within the job had changed. To Steve, an accountancy course seemed a sensible learning choice which would help him move towards what could be seen to be a positive reference group occupied by high earning, satisfied accountants.

However, the experiences of other adults suggests that it is much harder to distinguish between what constitutes a positive reference group and what constitutes a negative reference group, especially when adults might belong to multiple groups. On the one hand, they might aspire to belong to another group, viewing that group in a positive light, but they might view the group they perceive themselves to be leaving in a positive light also. For example, Joe considered his learning choices in social class and cultural terms - as he saw it, he was moving away from the working classes and being pulled towards the middle classes. However, he still identified with his work colleagues as he

shared membership meanings, often more so than with the group to which he felt himself being pulled. This illustrates the importance of what happens to adults and their personal identities as they move between both membership and reference groups. Also, the 'reaching' and 'rejecting' aspect of moving between groups is important as it enables adults to begin to reassess themselves in light of the new groups to which they aspire or to which they feel themselves being drawn.

The transitory stages are of great importance also, especially as adults begin to reassess themselves as 'student'. This could be seen to be a membership group to which they belong by some objective criterion, but with which they may not identify in the initial stages. This is evident on the personal profile forms when people who were studying on access courses described themselves as 'unemployed'. If adults have viewed returning to education as a means to an end, they express surprise that they begin to find themselves identifying with other students. Also, through interaction with others, they might begin to expand upon, or alter, positive and negative reference groups as they perceive that new opportunities and possibilities are opening up to them, but also as they begin to move away from previous groups.

In conclusion, then, adults in this study appear to go through a process of self-assessment which involves a consideration of who they perceive themselves to be, how they think others perceive them, and what is actually happening in their lives. This need for self-assessment and a perceived need or desire for reassessment appears to stem from expected or unexpected life transitions which have led to some type of situational or dispositional imbalance, or through a desire for change where no change is imminent. Returning to education is perceived to be a strategy for dealing with this imbalance. However, the world of education can be quite different to an adult's life-world, and, although adults may not lack confidence in their own intellectual capabilities, they are concerned with their ability to fit into this new environment.

Choices adults make depend, in part, on their self-assessment, especially in terms of how their perception of self has developed from past and present experience. Also, their choices appear to depend, in part, on the perceived need or desire for self-reassessment due to present or future life transitions. Self-reassessment takes place within existing experiences and interaction and through new experiences and interaction. Learning choices appear to be made within this context - adults can only make choices within the boundaries of their existing experience and knowledge. Also, the way in which these choices are described is limited by the socially available discourse of the time. However, they can set out to increase this knowledge or change their experience in some way. This might be done either deliberately, as in the case of purposeful information gathering, or may occur without adults being aware that this is happening, such as in the case of 'becoming attuned'. The development of the category of 'becoming attuned' is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 13:
BECOMING ATTUNED

Becoming Attuned

When adults perceive that they will experience, or are experiencing, some type of imbalance in their lives, whether this be situational and/or dispositional, they think about ways in which they can redress the balance. Chapter 11 described events which had happened, or will happen, in adults' lives to affect this balance, illustrating how a perceived need to re-balance influences their learning choices. However, before a decision is made and action is taken, adults need to perceive that this action will begin, in some way, to redress this balance. In other words, they need to be attuned to the idea that their action will be an effective re-balancing strategy. So, how do adults come to perceive that returning to education will help them to re-balance their lives, especially when some of them have had negative experiences of the education system in the past? Why is it, at this stage of their lives, that they perceive that returning to education will be a more effective re-balancing strategy than other strategies? How do adults become attuned to education? This chapter will outline the development of the sub-category of 'becoming attuned'.

A theme which appeared to be especially significant early in the research concerned the issue of 'time' and how much of this adults felt they had available in their lives. Unexpected life transitions appeared to be turned to positive personal advantage by shifting adults' perception of the availability of 'time' within their personal lives. As more 'time' became available, so the 'time' seemed to be right to return to education, as Louise illustrates:

I suppose in the past I've never really had the time with working three shifts and working full-time. It's very difficult to fit something else in because our week spans over seven days so, you know, you don't have the same days off every week and things like that. So it's been very difficult in the past actually to do something else. But now I think it's the opportunity to do something.

If adults enrolled on a course and the 'time' was not right, that is, the time was not perceived to be available within their personal lives, courses were abandoned, or left uncompleted, as Geoff illustrates:

I tried to attempt an Open University course, but I never really got going with it. I couldn't really devote the time because I'd got my business to sort out.

Geoff went on to say that he felt people get to a certain stage of their lives where 'the opportunity is easier at that particular time than it is at other times' to return to education. In a later interview, Ian expanded on this theme by illustrating that the time being right did not refer only to the physical availability of time, but that it also involved the psychological and emotional state of the individual:

Going back years during one of those periods of unemployment between the last builder's merchant and the party shop, I tried to do some A levels. I enrolled on two A levels but felt incredibly uncomfortable in the lessons. I was not in a psychological or emotional state to do it I don't think. That was at the end of, I've been married twice, that was at the end of my first marriage, and things were really tumultuous and I couldn't do it.

Here, Ian was suggesting that if the time is not right to return to education in terms of psychological and emotional state of mind, then it is unlikely that adults will be able to stay the course. In subsequent interviews, participants were asked whether they felt that they had returned to education at the right time for themselves, or if they wished they had returned earlier in their lives. Although some of the adults said that they regretted missed opportunities, in particular as a result of poor schooling and inappropriate careers guidance, most were sure that they had returned to education at the right time for themselves, as Annabelle illustrates when asked if she wished that she had returned to education sooner in life:

No, not really. I think I would but then I'd have to wish myself into being a different person because it wouldn't have suited me at that time and I know that I made the right choices given me and the kind of material that I had to work with, so no. And in fact the people that I talk to that have done it probably didn't enjoy

the whole, as far as the experience went I enjoyed it immensely and still continue to, and because I actually made it an active conscious choice, you know, I feel that I probably got more out of it. And also I liked being a mature student at university, that was great because I just felt so much more at ease with life than all those people that were sort of like, you know, I was the agony aunt, so I liked that, so I don't wish I'd done it earlier.

This seemed to be suggesting that adults have to believe that returning to education is the right thing for them to do at that particular time in their lives, and that it will benefit their lives in some way. It was at this stage of the work that the theme of 'attunement' began to become significant. When previous transcripts were returned to in light of this newly emerged theme, it became evident that some adults felt that entering university, for themselves, was not a possible course of action. Why was this? Why had they been so adamant that university was not a suitable course of action for themselves when others had expressed a desire to enter university in the future? When it was pointed out to Ian that some people in this study had said that university was not for them, he felt that this was probably the case as people had to be attuned to university study to succeed:

They may be right, they say it's not for them then it probably isn't because with that sort of mind set they're not going to do very well at university, with those kind of prejudices and ideas they couldn't do it I don't think. Because your mind's got to be a hell of a lot more open than that to even begin, so yes, I think when people say oh that's not for me, they're right probably. I mean I decided it was for me and it is, nobody suggested it to me, so yes, they exclude themselves.

These quotations from Ian and Annabelle highlight the importance of being attuned to education, both in terms of the actual experience and the benefits to be gained, but also in terms of making what they perceive to be a personal, conscious choice to return. When Joe was asked whether he felt that he had returned to education at the right time, he couched his answer in terms of how his chosen discipline had changed over the years, illustrating that the time also has to be right in terms of discipline, institution and technology:

I don't know, I mean I'm not sure about this, I don't think so really because the subject I'm studying, psychology, is much more interesting nowadays than it would

have been then. It's not a formal subject, it's always changing, it's got a fairly shaky theoretical base and I think I wouldn't have wanted to be stuffed full of behaviourism back then, that would have been awful. It's much more exciting now, I think I'm lucky in that, I'm lucky to be here at this time when we've got computers, IT.

Once adults perceive that the time is right for them to return to education, and they have become attuned to the idea of returning, opportunities which were once perceived to be irrelevant, become relevant, as Dorothy illustrates:

I work for [the local university] anyway, so they send all the staff a lot of things, and when they used to come I used to put them away and say oh, they don't apply to me and just leave it. But now I'm finding that I read things more to find if there is a way in.

Available opportunities not only become relevant, but also become more visible, with adults making connections about these facilities where previously there were none, as Tracy noted after she had sought some advice about the availability of courses in the local area:

Well, she pointed out, is it the adult careers guidance place? I didn't know about that. But funnily enough me husband had been on a management update programme at [the local university] and he'd been there for a guidance interview, but it hadn't sort of connected that you could just sort of go in off the street. I thought you had to be in education or be sent there, or, you know, something like that. I didn't realise you could do that.

At this stage of the work, it was felt that further insight into this developing theme could be gained by referring to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term 'extreme cases'. Why was it that some people in certain situations, such as facing redundancy, would look towards education, whereas other people also facing redundancy, would look to other ways to redress the imbalance? Some of the later participants were asked if they knew anyone who had been in a similar position to themselves, but had chosen not to return to education. Peter's name was suggested as someone who had been made redundant but

who had no intention of returning to education and an interview was arranged to see if further insight could be gained from this 'extreme case'.

Peter felt that he had enough activities to occupy his time, and, because of this, had not considered returning to education:

I've taken on an allotment and I'm self-sufficient vegetablised now, and got a green house this year and started messing about with that. I can fill my time and I'm involved fairly extensively at the rugby club and if I want to fill some time I'll go and cut the grass or do some painting, I can always find myself something, something to do if left alone sort of thing. So I haven't actually thought about going back or taking any courses just for the sake of taking them, because I mean a lot of people are going onto that and taking qualifications for the sake of taking qualifications and it's never appealed to me.

Peter appears to be suggesting that he believes that some people enrol on courses just for the sake of taking qualifications, which, he points out, has never appealed to him. For Peter, obtaining qualifications, in his view, would have no personal benefit. This illustrates the importance of being attuned to education, especially in terms of perceiving that there will be some personal benefit to be gained by returning. Peter hinted that he was not attuned to adult education in other ways also, believing teachers were doing their job for the wrong reasons and that courses did not have a lot to offer:

Yes, well to be honest as I say, I don't think they've a lot to offer, er, as I was saying it's like these courses, the people that, it's probably a broad statement, but the people who run the evening type classes are there to provide the wear with all for them to go on holiday, I don't think they're there to impart knowledge.

For Peter, reaching a 'comfort zone' had been important, and once this was reached, for him, there seemed little point in changing his personal situation:

You tend to reach a comfort zone sort of thing and you don't do a lot about, I think that's what happened to me basically, to be fair I were very very well paid for what I did and just basically settled for that without thinking they'd be a need to. But I suppose if I'd have thought about moving, I mean if you're already in employment, you only get further qualifications if you think it's going to take you

somewhere, but as I say I didn't think I would ever need any. Like I say once you get over fifty I don't think it matters anyway.

This idea of reaching a 'comfort zone' appeared to be especially significant as it seemed as though Peter could be suggesting that he had achieved the type of stability in his life for which other people were striving. Peter was asked to describe what he meant by this 'comfort zone', doing so in the following way:

Er, well it basically becomes, your friends and family, you know, you can basically go out for a pint when you want to, you don't have to think God how much money have I got in my pocket and did I really ought to go out? But once you're there you just don't worry too much about anything, and I've been fairly fortunate in having a fair old period of nothing to worry about.

However, Peter had been made redundant, and he pointed out that his redundancy money would not last for ever. He realised that he would have to look for another income which, he hoped, would involve buying a small business with his redundancy money. This illustrates that if adults are not attuned to the idea of education as a re-balancing strategy, they do not consider the option but look elsewhere to redress the balance, such as, in Peter's case, buying a small business. Joe provided further insight into this theme when he gave a description of action he had undertaken throughout his life in order to maintain an 'equilibrium', as the following quotation illustrates:

I think even though I've always had a very sort of manual working class job I've always maintained this equilibrium without realising that's what I've been doing if you like. So I've been a member of theatre groups, so I've sort of learnt Shakespeare and I love Shakespeare. I've been to lectures of famous visiting academics ... and I've read, I read quality newspapers so I've always sought that quality if you like, that a lot of people miss. I've always tried to include as much of that as has been possible and because I didn't marry, well we've been married eleven years, so I married pretty late. I've always had quite a lot of disposable income so I can travel and I can go to the theatre and I can go to interesting places and talk to interesting people, you know ... if an equilibrium implies that there are scales if you like, this pan and that pan, I've always tried to make sure there is something in that pan balancing this one, yes, I don't know how come, it's just accidental.

Joe seemed to be suggesting that maintaining a balanced life was important to him, and that this balance involved maintaining an equilibrium between his working and family life, his emotions and his intellect. If he was unable to find fulfilment in one part of his life, he would look to another part to redress the balance. However, Joe pointed out that he had often not been aware that he was doing this, and it was only with hindsight that he was able to look back and realise that maintaining this balance had been important to him (this issue has been discussed in more depth in Chapter 11). Education had not been an appropriate re-balancing strategy previously because he had not been attuned to the education system. Indeed, Joe's initial experience of education, he believed, was that he grew up within a 'culture of failure', and that this was still influencing his attitude towards education:

I think I was brought up into a, my educational experience and my culture was you don't be too clever, you're not too clever, it's better not to get good marks than to get good marks. And I'm still surprised when people do well, you know, on my course because my experience is people don't do well. And very often it is a decision not to do well. I'm surprised when people complete their assignments because it's ingrained in me that you don't do that, you try to get away with it, you know.

The world of education, for most of the participants, is quite different to their present life worlds. The cultural distance adults have to travel to return to education was perceived to be great, especially as education was not considered to be important when they were growing up, as Steve notes:

As I say, from the background that we come from, me dad sort of brought us up, you know, work hard and do your best. It were about material things which we needed money for. That's what it were about, not particularly how educated we were. It were whether you got the biggest car on the street, on your drive, and the best house and this, that and the other. My grandparents were actually gypsies and one of me uncles couldn't read and write but he probably had more money in his life than you'll ever see, do you know what I mean? That's what it was all down to, so I suppose everything that you see as you're growing up, yes, it's got to have an effect on you. And I think to the majority of working class lads that come from that background, yes, money is important to 'em.

Here, Steve illustrated that having money was considered to be more important than obtaining an education. At an early age, Steve had been encouraged to go out and earn a wage, rather than concentrate on his studies. For other families, financial necessity meant that children had to leave school and find work. For Joan, it had been the working class attitudes of her parents which had led to her having to leave school, although she felt that this attitude was changing:

I think it's your background as well, because like my parents were working class, I think there was more of that pressure to just go to school and then go out to work than what there is these days.

Geoff believed also that the problem as he saw it is rooted in the British class system, although again he felt that the situation is not as bad as it has been in the past:

I think a lot of it to do with myself is, er, although I don't believe in it, but I mean it exists and that's the old class system, especially when I was younger, sort of twenty years ago when I was just leaving school. It was a lot more enforced then than it is now, it's broken down a lot now, although I think the Tories are just trying to make it rally round it a bit now. I'm not a very political person but I mean I know which side of the fence I've been born on, and I think that aspect, having grown up with that as a kid sort of got the idea set in my mind that people who went to [the old university] were obviously all lived up at [a wealthy area of the city] and their fathers were professional people, doctors, and could afford to send them there and things, you know, which in some cases is still true, you know. There are a lot of people who can't afford it, who haven't got the opportunity to do it who could do it, you know, but I think it tends to happen, it's sort of passed down.

As working class parents did not see the importance of education, adults felt that they were not given the required amount of support to help them succeed, as Charlie notes:

I can never remember me mum at any of the school things we went to, open days, or, you know, they sent a report home, he's no good at this, he's no good at that. Oh well, it'll be all right when he's working, he'll not need these.

Joe felt that because higher education was so far removed from the lives of many working class people, they were open to building up images of what 'educated' people

were like, which could act as a deterrent to participation, as he illustrated when asked if obtaining a degree was important to him:

I think that is important, yes, I think that is important because there is a mystique about having a degree and I think working class people who only encounter people with degrees usually in a professional capacity, they only meet sort of professional sort of presentation, and it does create a sort of mystique of what a degree is. It confers this sort of way of acting and behaving and talking and I think that is a deterrent to many people. Well I'm sure it is a deterrent to many working class people. It's very much outside their potentiality I think.

However, a paradox here is that, despite this apparent lack of belief in the importance of education, having a degree was considered to be important for people from a working class background, as Steve notes:

The respectability and the sense of achievement that you've done something. I mean there's not much, you'll probably tell me different, but from where I come from there's not much better than a degree.

Why should this paradox occur? Why should working class children be encouraged to leave school at the earliest opportunity but then come to believe that having a degree was so important? The participants felt that one answer might be that attitudes and social and economic circumstances have changed over time, that when Steve left school there were plenty of jobs available and unemployment was not the great social issue that it is today. However, the interview with Steve took place at a time of high unemployment, and, with the increasing importance of credentialism in the late twentieth century, qualifications are considered to be more important, even amongst groups who have not considered them to be important in the past. Geoff felt that this shift in attitude had made it both more accessible and easier for adults to return to education:

I think it's a lot more acceptable than it used to be, I think, when I left school kids of my age sort of, their perception of it was to sort of leave school, if you didn't get the A levels and go on to university then what you got is what you were stuck with for the rest of your life and you were going to go out to work and that was it. But the attitude is now that you sort of do as well as you can initially at school and at university and then if you don't do so well you can still move on and it can be an

ongoing thing which is totally different to what I was brought up with, you know. So that enables people like myself who've come to a career dead-end to sort of move on then and do something else which is, well there's not as much work around now but it does give you other opportunities where before you would have just been sat on the dole, you know, sort of twenty years ago. If you were a steelworker you were sat on dole for the rest of your life and you couldn't retrain, well, you could but probably not doing something you wanted to do. So it's changed.

In addition to these changes in public and private attitude which had helped adults to become more attuned to education as a re-balancing strategy, participants discussed also changes in their social worlds which had enabled them to mix with people who had benefited from further and higher education themselves. For many years of his life, Joe had not come across people who had been through further and higher education. However, as his wife had obtained a lecturing post and they had begun to mix with people who had been through further and higher education, Joe gradually found himself becoming more attuned to education. Nevertheless, this created tension as he still mixed with people who were not attuned to education:

... it's quite stressful mixing with people for much of the day who weren't interested in education and had very sort of primitive ideas and very strong emotions. Now when I say very primitive ideas I don't necessarily mean they're negative, nasty, bad people. Very often that's not the case, more often than not that's not the case, very simple. Things like using a big word in conversation, people would say oh that's a big word and you point out well it's an English word, I'm English, I speak English. I'm not saying that I'm special in this respect because I think a lot of people are like this. They think a lot of people are much more stupid than they are and they have to act stupid. I really do believe this is the case. So you've got this sort of presentation of yourself in this part of your life and the other part of your life is different, so there's a tension and your energies are distributed between these two ...

In this quotation, Joe discusses the tensions between how he presents himself to people who are and are not attuned to education. However, he found himself still mixing with both groups of people, although he felt himself being pulled towards one and pushed away from the other. David, on the other hand, found that the answer for him was separation and rejection of those who were not attuned to education. He did this by

altering his working hours so that he no longer had to mix with work colleagues (see Chapter 11).

Geoff found also that he no longer felt comfortable with the builders with whom he had mixed for most of his working life. Instead, he found himself being drawn to an alternative group occupied by surveyors and 'different professional people':

Because, er, it sounds really pious this, but I was fed up with working with idiots in the building trade, I mean it's a bloody shambles, it really is, you're working with people who don't know their arse from their elbows to be honest a lot of them. I mean a lot of them are just not bothered, a lot of them are dishonest and some of them are just downright ignorant, you know, and that applied to some of the public as well. And I'd worked with surveyors and different professional people and I found that I could deal with them on a more equal level than I could with some of the public and some of the building trade. So I thought it's just a natural progression for me to try and get a degree and do what I want to do, have a bit of control over my life rather than be dictated by, because I was just a number, I'd got no qualifications so I was limited in the job market, you know.

Although Geoff and David seemed to be suggesting that they had made a conscious decision to alter their social sphere, in a later interview, Annabelle suggested that her gradual change in who she socialised with was not a conscious decision on her part, but that it had a similar effect in that it had enabled her to become more attuned to the idea of returning to education:

I tell you what I think an influence on that might have been was when I moved into this house where there was all these people milling around and I was stepping over people pissed or stoned or something. I moved next door with people who became very close friends and they all had higher degrees so they'd all been to university. And in actual fact quite a lot of the people that would be round my house had degrees and would have been reasonably well educated, and some of them had PhDs, and I began to see that people were not boring old farts just because they read books sometimes and that changed my attitude. And also I think I saw that they had reasonably good jobs and still had a lot of fun and earned a lot more than me. But that wasn't a conscious thing because I still didn't see that as possible for me, but I think that might have been a factor in enjoying returning to learning.

Becoming attuned to education appears to be a smoother process when the cultural distance adults need to travel is shorter. For example, through situational circumstances Ian had come to socialise with people who were graduates and he was able to see that these people were 'no better' than himself:

Now during that period in Hungary I was almost exclusively in the company of graduates, certainly on the TEFL because that was a pre-requisite for that though they over-looked it, and my wife was an undergraduate, she's since graduated, we're separated now but at that time she was about to graduate so I was very much in this academic environment and I loved it and I also saw that these people were no better than I was and that we were certainly on the same wave-length.

Similarly, Steve felt that the people he might encounter at university would not be too different as he presumed that he had come across that type of person at his work-place:

I should imagine that a lot of them will be in that line of work anyway, bearing in mind I actually sell cars to quite a few of them, so it's not as if I would feel like a fish out of water or anything like that. And I don't care anyway because if I don't know anything I ask, no matter how stupid it might seem. You know, I'm used to standing up in a room full of people and doing a presentation which I've done for Vauxhall, so what people think of me or whatever I'm not really bothered about.

However, some adults found that when they began to occupy alternative social spheres it became very difficult for them, as they found themselves being pulled one way and then the other, as Sally illustrates:

Erm, my friends are very, I suppose they're a bit cautious with me. Because this friend that I did bump into, because I'd been in a drug rehabilitation centre and so I knew her from there. And to me I was sort of envious of her that she'd moved on a little bit further. But then when I got back in with my old friends and everything and I said oh I've seen so and so and she's doing an access course, they're all going oh you don't want to mix with those, stay here with us. So I thought I'll do that because to me this was one person on her own, whereas this was a big group on this side so it was almost like a push and pull factor. And a lot of them are still very cautious I think, a bit wary of me, you know, and some of them feel that I've broken away so they don't really want to know what's happening or they sort of ignore that part, you know. And there are others who just encourage me to go and they say you're doing well, you should go and you should have done it last year, you know.

Sally realised that she would eventually have to make a choice, that occupying both social spheres would be difficult for her. Although she felt that she was being pulled towards one rather than the other, it was still very difficult because the people within this sphere were so different to her previous friends and acquaintances:

I find it difficult more in because the people at college are sort of what you would call your average normal sort of people and the people that I've like associated with for so long now are sort of, you know, there's a lot of drug addicts and prostitutes and things like that. So I keep feeling that I've got like a foot in each camp, you know, and sooner or later I've got to decide which way I'm going to go. But I can see myself being pulled more into college now, the more I go. Each day as I go I think this is what I want to do and I find the more I spend with them the more I think they're talking about things I'm not interested in now, you know. So I almost feel that I should just leave that group and go into the college group so to speak. But I don't know, there's something that just pulls me back every now and again.

For Matt, mixing with his previous acquaintances became increasingly difficult, as they appeared not to understand why he had returned to education:

It's quite bad, people call me, say I'm, you know, they take the micky out of you because you're back at school. You don't want to work, this is what they say. Like people up at me local pub, they'll come after a hard day's graft earning their money and they'll say oh, are you supping your wife's wages away, because Sue works and I'm on a grant. They say oh why don't you get out and do a hard days work, and you know, that's the local attitude around here to education. Or they'll say to me, you doing a degree? You know, because they know me, I'm a local lad and I play football and I go out for a drink with the lads, and I'm just a typical local lad who's gone back into education and some people can't understand it.

Here, Matt suggested that within his particular social sphere, working class attitudes had not changed, that many of his friends still considered working and earning a wage to be preferable to being within the education system. This created problems for Matt who felt that he was having to move backwards and forwards between juxtaposing social spheres. However, as adults came into contact with more people who had degrees, especially those who were from similar backgrounds, obtaining a degree became a possibility for the adults themselves. These adults found the transition between cultures easier than

Matt had done because significant others had begun to occupy this alternative culture, as Andrew points out:

It depends who your friends are as well, I've got two, three, well two of my friends are at [the local university] at the minute and I've got a girlfriend in Liverpool. Well ex-girlfriend now who's doing nursing and she helped me quite a bit, and then me friends' girlfriends and such like they're all in education. So basically, for the last six years basically I've not known anyone in education, and in the last two years all of a sudden everyone's in it.

As Joe found himself being pulled towards an alternative culture which appeared to be occupied by his wife and many of his friends, he found himself going through a process of self-assessment (see Chapter 12). However, this was a culture which was still alien to him in some ways, despite the evidence being presented in his social and family life. Because he had little experience of this alternative culture, when he came to make his learning choices, he felt he was influenced by outside forces, such as the right-wing media:

... it all seemed to me pretty airy fairy, you know, there was things like sociology and gender studies and it seemed to me, I had prejudices against all these things, prejudices fostered by the right-wing media about these areas of thought because they actually threaten and then I didn't quite realise at the time, because these areas of thought threaten the establishment don't they? So I'd got this thought of all these airy fairy people with beards and earrings talking all this marshmallow sort of stuff that is a total waste of time, and that's what I thought, so I had that impression and I was deterred by it.

Once adults perceive that they are experiencing some type of instability, how is it that they come to think that returning to education will help them to re-balance their lives? People have 'meanings' about education which have developed from social interaction, in particular within their family, amongst peers and within formal schooling. What education means to them has developed from this, and, education to many of the participants meant alienation, or missed opportunities. In their social world, formal schooling had few perceived benefits for themselves, personally. However, participants are part of a larger society in which public discourse suggests that education is 'good'

and 'desirable' and that it benefits the individual. This helps to explain the finding by Sargant et al. (1997) that over 90% of adults interviewed felt that education does benefit people, even if the evidence of this might be lacking from their own personal experience.

Carr and Hartnett (1996: 70) suggest that it is the notion of 'tradition' which is important here, that traditions have stemmed from arguments about what constitutes a good and desirable life:

A 'tradition' is always in part an argument about the good life and the good society - an argument embodied in the stories that we tell each other about the past. It is an 'argument' because the 'official' stories can be - and always are - disputed and undermined by other 'non-official' and more subversive stories of those who have not yet 'won' political power. The educational 'tradition' is, then, a story we tell ourselves about educational institutions and structures which incorporate assumptions and taken-for-granted views about what it is to be educated; the nature of 'real' curriculum subjects; and the characteristics of 'proper' teaching and assessment. Teachers and pupils enter this tradition in circumstances not of their own making, and they have to work with the warp and weft of that tradition.

If these 'traditions' are not of adults' own making, why do they come to be believed by adults? How do people come to believe that returning to education will help them to balance their lives? How do they come to perceive that there will be positive outcomes when their personal experience of schooling has suggested otherwise? For adults who have had negative experiences of education in the past, expectations can be based only on previous experience and speculation unless they begin to change their meanings, which is achieved through interaction with others. This we have seen when adults begin to widen their awareness parameters through direct social interaction or through indirect interaction via a written or visual medium. Rather than risk basing their decisions on speculation, they seek to increase their awareness, either by gaining advice and guidance, or by trying taster courses and 'testing the water' (see Chapter 14). This enables adults to confirm or deny the educational 'traditions' that have helped to influence their perceptions.

But for that interaction to alter an individual's meaning of a social phenomenon, do they need to be open to the alternative viewpoint? Do they need a reason for changing their view? This appears to be the case with returning to education. If adults are not experiencing a situational or dispositional imbalance, they appear to have no reason to change their personal views. Education did not help them in the past, why should it do so at the present time? If it has no relevance to their lives, it appears that people will not be open to new interpretations. However, if they are experiencing some form of situational and/or dispositional imbalance, however small, they will be open to new interpretations. Some will actively seek these, others will receive them without actively seeking them. Meanings gradually begin to change and what was once viewed negatively might begin to be viewed positively, as being of personal benefit.

However, it is only through interaction within that setting, within education, that these new meanings can be confirmed or denied. Meanings may change through this interaction, but remain stable for other family members and friends, leading to problems of social interaction within an adult's previous social environment. Also, adults may encounter situations which contradict their newly developing meanings, such as the paradox evident in their belief that a degree will help get a better job in the face of rising graduate unemployment. These unemployment figures are cited as a reason for not returning to education by those who appear to have no interest in it, a finding which illustrates that people are able to back up their own beliefs with selective 'facts' whilst ignoring other 'facts', such as statistics which show that graduates receive higher wages than non-graduates.

Again, this has implications for issues of 'rational' choice, suggesting that this depends on a person's definition of rational and their own experience of education (see Chapter 6). For example, to someone who had returned to education and benefited with a better paid, and perhaps more enjoyable job, people who opt not to return to education might appear to be acting irrationally. However, for a person who has not benefited from

education in the past, and who believes they have a stable and comfortable life, it may be rational not to disrupt this life by returning to education.

In conclusion, for adults to go through a process of ‘becoming attuned’ to education, they appear to need to perceive that the ‘time is right’ both in terms of their personal situation and in terms of their disposition. For some adults the time needs to be right in terms of what is happening within their chosen discipline. Also, adults in this study need to perceive that they will gain, personally, in some way by returning to education. If it is perceived that there are no personal benefits to be gained, adults are less likely to become attuned to education and will choose alternative re-balancing strategies. Some adults become attuned over a long period, during which time their social circles have changed gradually so that they come into contact with more people who have been through further and higher education. For some adults there is a deliberate decision to change social circles, whereas for others it appears to happen in a non-deliberate way. Becoming attuned to education seems to be a smoother process when the cultural distance adults need to travel is shorter. Part of becoming attuned to education as a re-balancing strategy involves raising awareness and widening awareness parameters. The next chapter will discuss the development of the category of ‘awareness-raising’.

CHAPTER 14:
AWARENESS-RAISING

Awareness-Raising

In Chapter 10 the development of the core category of ‘parameters of choice’ was discussed. It was noted that ‘awareness parameters’ are more malleable than other parameters and that it is possible for these parameters to widen in a variety of ways. For example, in the previous chapter it was noted that some adults find that, through changes in their personal situation, they begin to come into contact with people who have been to university. This helps to widen their awareness parameters by providing informal information about university study, although this information may not have been deliberately sought out. When awareness parameters are widened through non-deliberate action such as this, it is part of the process of ‘becoming attuned’ and has been discussed in the previous chapter. The other aspect of widening awareness parameters involves a deliberate decision to gather information and raise personal awareness, whether this is done through formal or informal channels. This chapter will describe the development of the sub-category of ‘awareness-raising’.

As the interviews progressed, an important anomaly began to emerge from the data. It seemed to be that some adults perceived that there was very little advice and guidance provision available for them, as adults, in their city, and that they were unsure of where to start looking for the required information, as Ellen notes:

Well, I don’t really know what is available at what level of skill and what you could sort of promote to, sort of being out there. Because it’s only really you find out at school when we had careers, where they sort of advised you about your career and after that. I’ve not really looked into anything. I suppose really I would like some documents where you could read this course will enable you then to go on to this and this and this, or this course offers you retraining, and then after that you can do this which will then lead to this course, you know. But I haven’t found anything.

However, others felt that there was a large amount of this type of provision available and that it is up to them, as adults, to go out and find the required information. Why should this anomaly exist? What was it that had influenced the participants’ perceptions in this

way? If some adults know where to go for advice and guidance, does it follow that they have wider parameters of choice than those who do not know where to go for information? When Andrew was questioned about this, he felt that it was perhaps down to the fact that he had lived in the area for a long time and due to the type of person he considered himself to be:

Erm, I think I just knew basically, do you know what I mean, I've lived in [the city] quite a time and you just notice these places, I mean I'm quite forward anyway I just walk in anyway. Like a lot of people find it quite off putting just walking into a place like that, but I'll just walk in and ask somebody for help and from asking they'll tell me something further and collect the information like that.

Andrew considered himself to be quite 'forward', having no qualms about seeking out the information he required. On the other hand, Julie felt that she did not know where to go for advice and that her age acted as a psychological barrier to obtaining the required information:

I think that's probably the most difficult thing when you've been out of circulation for a long period of time. You just wonder where to go to get all the necessary information, particularly I think. And also I think you tend to get a little bit nervous too of when you're an older person. You tend to think people think, oh dear, why are they bothering at that age, you know. You feel a little bit self-conscious.

When adults discussed the type of advice and guidance they had received, whether formal or informal, they appeared not to distinguish between the different levels of advice. In the early stages of the returning process they described experiences which seemed to suggest that they had a lack of awareness about both the nature of the advice and of the person giving the advice, especially regarding issues of impartiality. For example, in the following quotation, Andrew describes the process through which he travelled in order to receive what he considered to be useful advice, but seems to be unsure about why some of this was more useful to him than other information:

[Two local colleges], I found that they weren't very, well they were helpful in giving you an idea of what courses you could go on but, I mean I went to one and

I said I want to do something environmental and I ended up being put on a social science course which is as far from environment as I could imagine. And that was a two year course, not a one year one, so basically I would have been on a two year course doing what I didn't want to do again. So I thought OK I'll try something else so I went to adult careers, the careers library and also, I think I saw somebody down at [the local university]. And out of all of them I think probably the adult careers was the most helpful because they basically told me what courses are available in environmental at the moment.

However, despite having sought advice and guidance from various places within the city, Andrew felt that he had eventually 'stumbled' on the right course:

But I actually stumbled across this one, it were quite amazing, I went to see somebody at another college for an interview, for H.E. integrated something. I can't actually remember what it were, and he said well basically this course has been full for four months, but by the sounds of it I know a good course which you could go on. So he actually put me onto it and that was a week before I started, so that was quite lucky. I'd been actually looking for four months, got nowhere and then within a week I was on a course so I could have just left it until the end really.

Karen felt, also, that she had enrolled on a course which was not quite what she had wanted to do, blaming herself for not putting her ideas across well enough. Here again, is illustrated the fact that some adults appear to be unsure of the type of advice and guidance which is available to them, relying instead on tutors who do not have the time to offer comprehensive advice at busy enrolment sessions. Nevertheless, Karen found that she had enjoyed the course, despite it not being what she had intended:

Well, when I went to enrol I think it was probably sociology that I wanted to do, but I think I had difficulty putting across to the person who was sort of doing the enrolling. They were like crammed full of people, and I don't think I put across to them properly what it was that I wanted to do. So I ended up signing up for this psychology. When I got there I thought well, it's OK, but this isn't really what I intended. But as I got into it I found that I did enjoy it, so it probably turned out to be quite a good thing really.

Tracy's experience of attending a guidance interview had been positive for her as she had been offered advice about how to proceed with her ambition of becoming a social worker:

I mean, the guidance interview, even if you've no idea what you want to do you can go and they'll point you in the right direction. But I went in and said right, here I am, I want to be a social worker, I've got no qualifications, where do I start? And took it from there.

Some adults found that advice about appropriate courses came from unexpected people, such as in the example of Charlie who had been sent on a Restart course:

I went on a Restart course actually and er, well, you know what the Government's like, they shove you in to these things. And we sat there, there's thirty in the room, and the first thing they do is drop a wad of forms onto you. And I just shoved it to one side and the guy comes up and says what's up? I says I'm sorry, I have spelling problems and he says that's no problem and he found this thing out, he found the course.

On the other hand, Simon felt that he had been passed from one person to another and had not received the information he required. Eventually, he received informal advice from a relation which he felt was more appropriate for his needs:

In the end I got the advice from my cousin's wife who's actually in the first year of a part-time access course ... and she was the one who gave me all the information basically, at the end of the day. She told me about all the different colleges, which one she thought was best.

The quotations above illustrate that adults have differing experiences of advice and guidance and that, in answer to the question posed above, choice parameters are not always widened when adults go for formal advice. The distinction appears to be between partial and impartial advice. Some adults felt that staff who were offering guidance were not as impartial as they should be, especially with the pressure imposed upon them to get more students onto their courses. However, if adults knew what they wanted to do in terms of paid employment after education, but did not know the best way to achieve this, a guidance interview could be very useful, as illustrated in the case of Tracy, described above.

It appears that issues of awareness do have a good deal of influence on learning choices and, as the interviews progressed, this theme was followed up in more depth. Again, awareness seems to be framed within 'parameters', but these parameters are much more flexible than convenience parameters, with some adults purposively seeking to widen their awareness parameters through formal or informal advice and guidance, as illustrated in the examples above. Other adults, however, do not purposively seek to raise awareness and widen parameters, but find that this happens unexpectedly in an opportunistic, informal way, of which they can take advantage, as Sally illustrates:

Erm, I enrolled this July, I think it was about last, it was something like February or March the previous year because I think I bumped into someone I knew and she said she was doing an access course and I didn't know anything about it. And she sort of showed me some of the work she'd been doing and told me what it all involved so I went to, I sort of asked her to enquire for me whether it was possible to enrol and they said not until July, but that July I just thought oh I'm not going to be able to do it so I waited another a year.

Awareness is raised and parameters widened through informal contact with significant others who have attended courses themselves. (This is part of the process of 'becoming attuned' and has been discussed in more depth in Chapter 13.) These significant others might be friends, relatives or work colleagues, and they seem to act as reassurance, helping to dispel negative perceptions adults might have, as Dawn illustrates:

I think I thought it were going to be sort of like school and I were talking to my friend who's just done it like I say, and she says God, it's nothing like school, it's like grown-ups.

Not only do adults receive informal advice through this type of opportunistic, informal meeting, but they also find that it inspires them, as they see that someone they know has been able to successfully return to education, as Ian illustrates:

It's not a nice place, it's full of wasted potential, Ipswich. There was only one option and that was to go into education. Bumped into somebody on the street when I first got back and they started telling me about. I mean they were at a similar kind of age and generation and scene as me and they'd gone to college and

they were just on to university to do journalism somewhere and it inspired me. I went down to the college careers and it was sorted out in ten minutes, enrolled I think two or three days later, just caught the planning period for the access course, the timing was perfect. Straight into that, loved it, straight into access and I felt delivered, I did really well.

For Matt, it was an informal discussion with his mother who had attended the same college which helped him to decide where to study. As Matt felt he needed to get into education quickly, he appeared not to need to expand his awareness parameters to include more than the one college, especially when he found that it suited his purposes and he was able to do well on the course:

Me mum told me, she did teacher training there when it were a teacher training college and she pointed advert out to me when I came home like fed up because I weren't going to get the job I'd been doing. And she said why don't you apply to this, and I only applied two weeks before diploma started and got straight on. It were all done really really quick, and er, I'd no idea what I were doing really, I went into it and I passed and I passed again so I'm carrying on.

Once adults have become attuned to the idea of returning to education (see Chapter 13), they appear to become more aware of, firstly, advertisements aimed at people like themselves, as David notes:

You get people coming into work and putting stickers on buses, adverts, you know, inside buses. A few years ago I've seen, like they're advertising now about 'Choices' magazine. It was really last year I've seen it advertised. In like the [local paper] they advertise about it. It's all over the buses now, loads of buses have got them now.

Secondly, they become more aware of the opportunities available to them, taking advantage of these opportunities, whereas previously they might not have done so, as Karen illustrates:

Erm, we actually had an open day where I work and we got people to come from various organisations and [the local college] was one of them ... so this guy came and it were a bit quiet, and I was actually manning our stall and he was on his, and I just thought well, a good a time as any. I'll find out in works time what's happening. So he were really good.

However, although awareness may be raised and parameters widened through advertisements, choices may still be limited by other narrow parameters. In the following quotation, Ellen illustrates how her awareness parameters were widened but how her options were limited by restrictive financial parameters (see Chapter 10 for further discussion on the relationship between parameters):

It was on the television and they were saying about if you're interested to do the courses, and it was actually child psychology, because I like working with, being with children. And it was the child psychology which would be a bit more to employers than just doing some child-care work. So I sent off and it's something like three hundred pound for the course which is just not possible for me.

Another way in which awareness is raised and parameters are widened is through visiting educational institutions. For adults who are apprehensive, first impressions appear to be extremely important, especially during college visits and at open days. As Roger illustrates, these first impressions can lead to decisions being made about institutions at which to study:

I think the college, everything was new and the people I spoke to were really helpful, more so, I went to the one at [another town], or at [the local new university] were big notices that somebody had chalked saying this way for computing, that way for that. There was nothing like that in [the university in another town], and people at [the local new university] had big things they'd written on, my name's John or my name's Mary, you know. I thought well that's just a little bit of thought helps people, whereas [the university in another town] you went in and said where can I find room 101 history department? It was just that at [the local new university] everybody was helpful, everyone was falling over themselves to help you, everything was well signposted, as I say they'd put notices up on coloured paper and written on chalk, you know, this way to that and that way to this.

In this example, Roger illustrates how important first impressions were to him. Similarly, Geoff, also, made up his mind on first impressions:

Er, [a local college] seemed to be, they didn't seem to take a lot of care over the building, you know. Having said that I think they've got some prefabs up there from when [a local school] burnt down, so they're obviously under pressure. And

you could just tell the building, they were under pressure, it had not been looked after, it had been abused by somebody or other, you know. Although the person who interviewed was very good. I just thought the overall, like the student services was very busy and a little bit unorganised and they were nowhere as near as professional as [a local college] was. I mean when you get older you get an instinct for these things. So something just said to me don't make your mind up, wait, go to [a local college], nothing to lose.

Some adults were unable to attend open days, but felt that they had perceptions about the different institutions which were confirmed by friends who had been able to attend the open days, as Sandra illustrates:

I just find [the old university] very serious and it seems very pompous and very stuffy, and like I said, unfortunately the week that the open days were there for both universities, for mature students I missed them. But my, probably rightly or wrongly, I've got preconceptions about how they both are and when I went back to college and spoke to everyone who'd been and I said oh what was it like, what have I missed, they all said the same, oh we don't like [the old university], you know, they're not helpful, they seem very snooty and all this that and the other. And everyone's like oh [the new university's] really good, so I were like oh that's all right because I want to go there anyway. But it seems a very serious university, [the old university], I suppose it's a very old university, it seems very, I don't know, very old fashioned in some ways, you know, a proper old institution with lots of rich people. Like I say I might be wrong and I perhaps shouldn't say things like that but that's the impression I get about it.

Simon felt that the old university was for people who were much more academic than himself, and that people would be expected to make a career of academia if they went to that particular institution:

Well, [the new university] is on the doorstep and [the old university] is too academic for me. When I say that their expectations are very high from their applicants, and I'm not of that standard, simple as that. I think they, the impression I got from [the old university] is they want someone to go there and end up living there for the rest of their life and become an old hat academic. And that's not me, I've got a few more goals than that.

Another way in which awareness is raised and parameters are widened is through actual participation in education. Several adults felt that the only way they could find out what it was like was to 'dip their toe in the water' and find out if they were suited to returning

to education. Due to previous experience in education, some of the adults had negative perceptions about what they would encounter, but, as they believed returning to education might help them to re-balance their lives, they were willing to try and find out what it was like. All of these adults expressed surprise that the experience was totally different to their school experience, as Sally illustrates:

... school was just horrendous to me and I think from that going to college, that's why I found it so difficult, because I'd found school difficult and I imagined it might be the same as school. And like I'm still surprised, you know, that you call tutors by their first names and they sort of sit and have a coffee with you. And things like one of them gave me a lift home the other day and it's like you're really a teacher and you want to do this, you know?

In addition to worrying about what their educational experience would be like, adults were concerned also about their ability to cope with the work and fit into an environment which they perceived would be quite different to their present working and social environment. However, the following quotation from Louise illustrates that her awareness was raised and parameters widened gradually as she began to find out more about the college:

A bit scary, er, I don't really, I thought well perhaps they'll all be about sixteen, you know, and I'll be sat there like an old woman. But I've seen a couple of other people that will be on the course, I presume with me, and they look about the same age as me so I feel a bit better now. But erm, it's just the thought of will I be able to cope with what they want you to do, you know? Like now I know at one time you would have perhaps gone to a library and looked through books and got your information that way, but now there's a lot of computerisation and that, in't there, and I suppose that worries me a bit.

Other adults were concerned also about new technology and how this had developed at a rapid pace since they had left school. This was perceived to be a reason to return to education for adults who felt that they needed to find out about new technology, as they perceived most jobs in the future would require these skills. Indeed, a recent NIACE survey found that computer studies leads the list of main subjects of study amongst adults participating in education (Sargant et al., 1997).

As adults' awareness is raised and parameters are widened, they begin to understand more about the subjects on offer and what, they believe, will best suit their personal attributes and personal goals (this issue is closely connected to the process of self-assessment and has been discussed in Chapter 12). For example, in the following quotation, Vicky felt that it is not appropriate to study on a course with a more theoretical base, but that work experience is important to her. This, coupled with her perception of staff at the local red brick university, made her decision easier:

Erm, they do a business studies one which sounded OK but it sounded much more, sort of, it talked about underpinning theories behind things and this sort of thing and I thought actually yes I do want to study but actually I want to get a job at the end of it as well. So the thing about [the new university] is they do the sandwich courses which really appeals to me that I'd get a year actually working somewhere. And this man from [the old university] were a bit pompous I must admit, he was a bit elitist, like this is, you know, what we expect, we expect A levels at grade B, A, B, or whatever, and he was a bit dismissive about people on access courses I found. He was like oh well I know you're doing the access course it's supposed to be equivalent to two A levels, but very poor A levels.

Finally, Annabelle illustrates how her increasing awareness of subjects offered at different places helped to influence her decision about what and where to study:

The other things that came into it were I didn't want to, I had a vague idea that, although it wasn't hugely rational I wanted to do something with human psychology. So I didn't want to do anything that was too experimental or scientific. So they had a human something course at Loughborough and Social Psychology at Sussex, but when I visited the universities they were still playing with rats and boxes in Bangor and it was a very archaic course ...

Thus it appears that once adults have become attuned to education as a possible re-balancing strategy, they begin to raise their awareness and widen their parameters. Although this is most often done in a deliberate way, awareness can be raised in an opportunistic way through informal contact with significant others. This not only raises awareness, but also helps to dispel negative perceptions of education and acts as an incentive to personal participation. When adults seek formal advice and guidance in the initial stages of the returning process, they appear to be unaware of the different levels of

advice on offer, especially in terms of the issue of impartiality. Also, adults have differing perceptions of the amount and availability of advice and guidance provision in their area.

Awareness can be raised and parameters widened in several ways: firstly, through informal contact with significant others and through formal contact with staff offering guidance; secondly, through college visits and open days; thirdly, through actual participation in education. Widened awareness parameters appear to increase the choice options available to adults although other parameters may restrict available options. This chapter concludes the discussion of the development of the core-category and related sub-categories. The next chapter will lay out the theory in a more abstract, conceptual way, as is consistent with the grounded theory approach.

SECTION 4:
SUMMARY
AND
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 15:

TOWARDS A

GROUNDING THEORY

Towards a Grounded Theory

The previous chapters have described the development of the core category of 'parameters of choice' and the four related sub-categories of 're-balancing', 'self-assessment', 'becoming attuned' and 'awareness-raising'. It is important now to lay out the theory in abstract, conceptual terms. This particular method of separating the descriptive from the conceptual, rather than intertwining the two has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, in Chapter 7 it was noted that a major criticism of feminist research is the 'naive' view that it should be purely descriptive, participatory research (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995b: 12 - 15). Instead, data are interpreted and made meaningful through theory so that an intellectual analysis must entail some degree of abstraction, especially if the research is to be taken seriously within academia. However, the analysis should be justified also through a detailed discussion about how the results were obtained in a way which does not obscure participants' voices. The second reason for separating the descriptive from the conceptual is that it enables the research to be available to different audiences who will bring with them a variety of methodological preferences. Those who prefer a detailed, descriptive account of the participants in this study may concentrate on the preceding six chapters, whereas those who are interested in a more abstract theoretical discussion, may concentrate on this chapter. However, it is desirable to read all seven chapters in conjunction with each other as the preceding six chapters illustrate how the theoretical discussion presented in this chapter has emerged from, and been grounded in, the data.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) point out that grounded theory must fit, have grab and work, so that people closely connected with the substantive area under study can see the relevance of the theory and relate it to their own lives. Although generalizability is desirable for this reason, it must not be confused with the scientific canon of generalizability relating to quantitative research. Instead, in this study, generalizability

relates only to the specific sets of action and interaction and the resulting consequences on the learning choices of adult returners.

When adults discuss the process through which they are moving in order to make their learning choices, they seem to have their options ‘framed’ by what, at first, appeared to be a number of negative influences. These influences were termed ‘parameters of choice’, in the sense that they seem to be defining or determining the outer limits of choice. Within these parameters, four aspects of adults’ experiences have been identified. These have been termed ‘re-balancing’, ‘self-assessment’, ‘becoming attuned’ and ‘awareness-raising’. Although each of these aspects has been discussed separately, there is a very close interrelationship between them, as figure 1 has illustrated (see Chapter 9). For example, although the need or desire to re-balance appears to be the main condition for adults thinking about returning to education, it does not necessarily imply that it is the first stage in the process. Indeed, some adults may have been undergoing a process of ‘becoming attuned’ before they have felt the need to re-balance their lives. Others may have begun the ‘self-assessment’ process before perceiving that they had already become attuned to the notion of returning to education. Some adults, on the other hand, may have had their awareness raised which has gone some way towards helping them to perceive that there is a need to re-balance their lives. Unlike the analysis section of this thesis which has presented the four stages of the process one after the other, this conceptualisation will illustrate both the relationship and the connections between the four sub-categories and the core-category.

When adults discussed their learning choices, it appeared that some of the parameters which framed their choices are highly visible and easily articulated, especially those which relate to a person’s life situation. These have been termed situational parameters. One of the most easily expressed of the situational parameters involves the issue of the availability of personal time and how this restricts choices, especially for women with child-care responsibilities and for adults in full-time, paid employment. If a course does

not fit into personal and/or family vacant time slots, it has to be discarded as an option. Another easily expressed, highly visible situational parameter involves the issue of lack of personal finance and the cost of courses. For those adults on low incomes this is viewed as an insurmountable problem which limits their choices. Also, many adults view financial parameters as external and beyond their personal control, indicating that it is not only narrow financial parameters which limits their choice, but also narrow institutional and policy parameters such as the cost of courses and the lack of Government financial support for individuals.

Where parameters of choice are highly visible and easily articulated, elements of rational choice appear to be significant as adults discuss how they have chosen between the options perceived to be available to them. However, some of these parameters are seen to be static, external and beyond individual control, such as the institutional and policy parameters described above. As such they limit and constrain choices, reducing options and requiring adults to consider alternative choices. In this sense, this type of parameter is seen to be restricting. However, expected and unexpected life transitions may narrow or widen these parameters, altering perceptions from restriction to enablement. For example, when children go to school, child-care parameters are widened, enabling women to consider courses during the day which were not open to them previously. Despite this, women with children appear to frame their choices within their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, their role as 'mother' and what they perceive they should be providing for their children. This means that women often have their choices limited by expected gender roles, curtailing their own desires in favour of their family. Also, practical issues of child-care responsibilities serve to limit choices for women, both in terms of learning choices and in terms of what they perceive they are able to do after the course. Narrow gendered and child-care parameters limit choices for women and mean that they have to consider other options if their initial choices do not fit into existing parameters.

Some parameters, initially, appear to be less visible and not as easily articulated.

However, as personal awareness increases, adults seem to become more aware of these parameters, pointing out that ‘with hindsight’ they are able to see how their learning choices were limited in the past. For example, some women talked initially about studying some type of child-care course, especially if they had been involved in intensive child-care for a number of years.. However, as they returned to education, they found themselves considering other options which they had perceived had been unavailable to them previously, thus indicating that both their dispositional and gendered parameters had adjusted as their awareness parameters had widened.

Dispositional, awareness and gendered parameters appear to stem from individual experience, socialisation, cultural background and ideology. Choices are restricted by what a person thinks they are capable of in terms of intellectual ability, but also culturally, socially and for their gender, that is what type of institution they believe they are capable of entering, whether they will be able to mix with other students and staff, and what they consider to be appropriate for what is perceived to be their gender role. Initially, it appears to be difficult for adults to make choices outside these dispositional, awareness and gendered parameters, although these parameters may begin to widen as adults start to raise their awareness and see that they are capable of succeeding in the education system. Thus, unlike those parameters which are seen to be static and unchangeable, often external and beyond individual control, some are seen to be malleable, pliable and open to manipulation, changing with transitions in awareness and personal situation.

Awareness parameters are perhaps the most malleable of all the parameters within which choices are made. These parameters may be widened through both non-deliberate and deliberate action. When awareness parameters are widened through non-deliberate action, this is part of the process of ‘becoming attuned’ to education. This may be a gradual process occurring over a number of years. The other way in which awareness

parameters are widened is through a deliberate decision to gather information and raise personal awareness about possible learning choices. This can be done through formal channels, such as seeking advice and guidance from professionals, or through informal channels, such as information supplied by a relation or acquaintance. Also, adults may raise their personal awareness and widen parameters through participation in education.

Adults' choices are framed by these parameters, with the level, number and intensity of each affecting choices in different ways. Within these parameters, four aspects of adults' experiences have been identified. There is a distinctiveness about each of these aspects, but also a very close interrelationship between them. The first of these has been termed 're-balancing'. Through actual, perceived or desired life transitions, adults perceive that the stability of their lives has been, or will be, affected in some way, and, perhaps partly due to the fact that the socially available discourse of the time is one of balance and stability, adults perceive that they need to take action to redress the balance. Feelings of imbalance can arise from dispositional disquiet, situational change, either planned or unplanned, or a combination of both.

Some adults see that their lives are about to change and, as a result of this, begin to consider their present and future roles. These future changes provide a useful justification for their chosen strategy, which may be something they have considered briefly in the past, but which has not been possible due to their situation. Examples of this type of situational imbalance may stem from fears about retirement or from reduced dependency of children. Because the change is planned and expected, these adults are able to take time to become attuned to returning to education, thus widening their awareness and dispositional parameters, in particular, by sampling short courses which are compatible with their existing life situation. These adults are more likely to seek professional advice and take time, in the first instance, to choose courses targeted at people like themselves. However, they may perceive these courses to be 'stepping stones' towards something else which may or may not have been identified as desirable

at the beginning of the returning process, but which is open to change as they encounter new experiences and their dispositional, awareness and gendered parameters widen.

In contrast to this situational imbalance is a dispositional imbalance which stems from no change and perceptions that nothing will change in the future. There are those people who believe they have relatively stable lives in terms of their situation, but they are unhappy or discontent with this life. This dispositional imbalance is characterised by a feeling of 'there must be more to life', with a steady accumulation of discontent over a period of time. It seems that this feeling of dispositional imbalance can take many years to develop, and it might be something which can be seen only with hindsight, especially as adults may adopt re-balancing strategies without knowing they are doing this. This dispositional imbalance is characterised by choices which are quite different from what a person does in their everyday life, although these choices tend to be constrained by situational and institutional parameters, which are often seen to be beyond individual control. Adults experiencing this type of imbalance perceive themselves to be constrained by their life situation, so that compatibility of choices relate not only to emotional compatibility, but also to situational compatibility.

Having described the situational and dispositional imbalance experienced by adults, the discussion will now move on to look at how these different phenomena affect the appropriateness of choices made and the likelihood of following through with these choices. Some adults experience a situational imbalance resulting from life transitions, which can occur quickly and may be unexpected, such as redundancy. Adults experiencing this kind of imbalance express an urgent need to redress the problem, hoping to adopt 'quick fix' re-balancing strategies and obtain an equilibrium as soon as possible. If they are attuned to the idea of education, returning will be seen as one strategy, but if something else comes along in the meantime, such as a new job, it may be given priority as a re-balancing strategy if adults think it will be more effective for their personal situation. These adults may need to spend some time becoming attuned to

returning, but as time is perceived to be short, they might not spend as much time as they need, which may lead to the wrong choices and deferment or alternative choices. Adults experiencing this type of situational imbalance appear to choose courses because of the perceived advantages they expect to gain in the future as a result of completing the course. Often, decisions to return are made quickly and impulsively. Choices are based on prospective speculation, that is speculation about a future advantageous outcome. Again, decisions are based on speculation and conjecture since adults cannot be entirely sure that the course will yield the expected outcomes. However, perhaps with the increasing importance of credentialism in the late twentieth century, some of these adults believe more qualifications will lead to better employment opportunities and courses are chosen with that in mind. They consider also the wider implications of what is happening with 'the economy' and unemployment, choosing courses which they perceive will lead to employment in areas of perceived growth such as management and accountancy.

It appears that maintaining a certain amount of balance throughout the returning process is important and if this is not achieved people will leave their course. Again this is dispositional and situational. Adults are willing to experience a certain amount of disharmony because it is a new experience for them, but if this is too great they will not continue. For example, dispositional balance concerns, in part, self-perception and expectations of success. Although adults often believe that people on the course will be different to themselves, they still expect some similarities in the way of shared goals and attitudes towards learning, expecting a certain level of student and tutorial support. The returning process is often tentative - although they might not expect success, it is important in maintaining their dispositional balance, and if they are not successful they will change courses or leave.

When adults experience dispositional and/or situational imbalance, they appear to go through a process of self-assessment during which they begin to consider who they perceive themselves to be, how they perceive others view them and what they see as the

‘evidence’ of their lives. Thus this self-assessment process may involve a consideration of public role and/or private identity. This perceived need for self-assessment appears to occur as a result of some external life event which may be expected or unexpected, gradual or sudden, or may result as a culmination of unfulfilling and unsatisfying events which lead adults to question who they are and what they are doing with their lives. In this way, adults may be acting reactively against a life transition which has occurred or is about to occur, or proactively to make a change which is perceived as desired or necessary. Examples of reactive self-assessment include people who have experienced unexpected or unplanned life transitions, such as divorce or redundancy, and those experiencing expected life transitions such as children entering full-time education. Both expected and unexpected transitions appear to create feelings of instability or uncertainty, with adults feeling the need for self-assessment in the light of their new situation. Examples of proactive self-assessment include those people who feel they are ‘stuck in a rut’ and who wish to change their identity, role or situation in some way.

When going through a process of self-assessment, there appears to be a need and/or desire for re-assessment which influences not only the reasons for returning to education, but also what an adult decides to study. This is because it appears to involve a deliberate assessment and balancing of existing experience, perceived skills and perception of self with aspirations and hopes for the future. This has an influence on institutional choice as well as subject choice. Also, adults seem to view themselves in terms of public image and/or private self, and the learning choices they make appear to depend on one or both of these influences.

For adults to consider returning to education, they must be attuned to the notion that this strategy will be effective in helping them to re-balance their lives. However, being attuned to this notion of education as an effective re-balancing strategy is not the same as being attuned to education itself. Indeed, at these early stages of the returning process, many adults with narrow dispositional parameters are not attuned to education,

perceiving themselves to be very different to students in further and higher education, with many of them having expressed feelings of alienation from the education system in the past. However, adults who consider returning are attuned to the notion that education will be an effective re-balancing strategy, otherwise they would consider other strategies instead, such as changing jobs or increasing social activities.

The perception that education can rebalance their lives leads adults into activities to widen their awareness and dispositional parameters, thus increasing their attunement with education itself, such as information gathering or trying out short courses or taster courses. For adults to become attuned to returning to education, they appear to need to experience both emotional and situational compatibility. For example, they need to feel that they will fit in with other students and with the organisation of the institution; they will not tolerate attacks on their sense of self-identity; they need their experiences recognised and valued. First impressions are very important with initial feelings of incompatibility leading to some adults changing direction or delaying their return to education. It is for these reasons that adults will try to choose courses and institutions in which they perceive they will feel comfortable, such as courses targeted specifically at adults. In this sense it is a form of self-protection under a veil of familiarity. However, adults who do not take a great deal of time information gathering have to base their decisions on a certain amount of conjecture and speculation since they have little or no experience of post-compulsory education.

Levels of attunement are influenced, in part, by previous experiences and present life-worlds. They are influenced also by adults' self-assessment, what they think they are capable of and what they think education will do for them, all of which serve to define the outer limits of their dispositional parameters. Adults are likely to experience higher levels of attunement if they have had positive experiences of education in the past and if their feelings of compatibility are enhanced by knowing other adults who have been in further and higher education, enabling them to see that these people are 'no different' to

themselves. Levels are influenced also by adults' aspirant constructs, i.e. their aspirations, how these aspirations have been constructed and what role they perceive education will play in helping them to achieve these aspirations.

It appears to be those who have experienced a dispositional imbalance over a period of time that are more attuned to returning to education, since they tend to have spent time trying other re-balancing strategies which have brought them closer to people who have been through further and higher education. This is evident in the experiences of adults who extend their social circles, talking about a perceived need to 'widen' their 'horizons'. These strategies may have been deliberate and planned at the time, or, in some cases, adults point out that these strategies have become visible only with hindsight. Although none of these re-balancing strategies have satisfied them over the long term, they have opened up the possibility of a yet untested strategy, that of returning to education. These adults are likely to be more flexible and open to change as they begin the learning process, choosing a course to help redress their present, dispositional balance rather than future situational balance, which they hope will be an added bonus, but is not a reason for choosing the course. As these adults are thinking about their present dispositional state, they want a course which will satisfy them in this way, in the present. However, as enrolling on a specific course is seen to be due to a culmination of life experiences and interests, the courses may be relevant to work the adults could consider in the future.

Thus the relationships between the themes highlighted in this study are seen to be complex and fluid. There is no chronological procession of stages leading to adults' learning choices. Instead, re-balancing can be linked to the process of self-assessment; becoming attuned can be linked to awareness-raising, and so on, until all categories are linked in some way, as depicted in figure 1 (see Chapter 9). These four aspects of adults' experience take place within a system of choice parameters which are also

complex and fluid, with some seen to be open to manipulation and others seen to be beyond individual control.

Conclusion

What, then, are the theoretical and practical conclusions which can be drawn from this thesis? A very recent report which embodies the discourse of adult learning and credentialism, and approaches to participation, provides a useful introduction to this conclusion. The report was commissioned by NIACE and looks at men who are 'missing' from education and training (McGivney, 1998). When this publication was reviewed in one of the national newspapers, the by-line stated: 'The ideal of lifelong learning has hit a small snag: most men are terrified of the classroom. [The journalist] looks at the remedies and meets three men who were lured back' (Guardian, 5th January, 1999). This by-line and the article to which it refers may seem innocuous to some. However, it is full of assumptions about the value of education, hinting that education is good, valuable and desirable and that it will benefit all men who are able to overcome their fears and return. Examples were provided of three men who were all unemployed at the time of deciding that returning to education would be an appropriate course of action for themselves, and all talk about the possibility of securing a job as a result of returning to education. The article is a good example of the discourse of adult learning and credentialism - education will lead to more qualifications and help adults to secure employment. The journalist goes on to look at ways in which men can be 'lured' back into education, pointing out that the NIACE report recommends that male development workers go out into the community to talk about men's individual needs. Also, the author of the report suggests that peer-group approaches work best and male only courses should be set up to help men overcome their fears about returning to the classroom.

The 'parameters of choice' core-category can be considered to be describing some of the issues which are the most easily expressed and articulated, such as those described in the above article. They touch upon many of the issues which have been researched before, such as barriers and deterrents to participation (Aimes, 1985; Cross, 1981; McGivney,

1994; Sargant,1990). These include restrictions imposed on choice by institutional and policy parameters, such as lack of funding, provision and entry requirements; and restrictions imposed upon choice by situational parameters, such as lack of time and the need for child-care provision. But more than this, the thesis demonstrates that the 'parameters of choice' category can describe those issues which are not so easily expressed or articulated, but which, nevertheless, frame learning choices. These include dispositional parameters, such as what adults think they are capable of; gendered parameters, such as restrictions placed on choice by expectations of an appropriate gender role; and awareness parameters, such as how much adults know about what is available in the local area.

However, all the adults indicated that there was something more to the process of making learning choices, something deeper and more complex than the initial discussion concerning parameters suggested. The sub-categories of 're-balancing', 'self-assessment', 'becoming attuned', and 'awareness-raising' were developed as a means of describing these deeper and more complex issues. It is for this reason that the research goes beyond those studies which concentrate on the easily expressed and articulated influences on choices, and in doing so, helps to provide a deep and rigorous understanding of how the transition to learning occurs.

The article reviewed above mentions the notion of 'lifelong learning', which is a concept that has gained international currency as the end of the millennium approaches. This thesis has a number of implications for this notion of lifelong learning, illustrating that there are more 'small snags' than the newspaper article reviewed above would suggest, especially regarding the issues of cultural understanding and transformation.

The National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning was established by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in 1997 to look into the issue of lifelong learning. One of the core principles for achieving lifelong learning is

that 'lifelong learning should be for the many, not the few' (Fryer, 1997: 28). A great deal has been written on ways to increase participation and encourage people back into education, (see for example, Aimes, 1985; Kennedy, 1997; McGivney, 1994; Sargant, 1990). However, these studies tend to concentrate on the possible removal of easily identifiable structural conditions which create barriers and on alleviating easily articulated individual worries and concerns with returning to learning. Whilst these studies have contributed a great deal to the debate about participation, and have, indeed, helped to inform policy which has made returning to education easier for many adults, this research suggests that this issue is, nevertheless, more complex than these studies might suggest. For example, it appears that adults will not consider returning to education unless they are experiencing some type of imbalance in their lives, which they feel they need to redress in some way. If they perceive that they have stable lives, they question why it should be changed. Again, this would suggest that no amount of 'luring' would encourage these people to enrol on a course. However, a contradictory opinion was offered by other adults in this study who suggested that people often become established into one way of life, that they do not realise that they might change in some way and that education could benefit them. These adults believed that, if others were made aware of the benefits, they might consider returning to education. Again, this reflects the socially available discourse of the time which is that education will benefit individuals and that adults are losing out by not taking advantage of available opportunities.

These contradictory views can be explained by the concept of 'attunement'. The adults who put forward the view that education would help people had already become attuned to the notion that education would be an effective re-balancing strategy for them. This illustrates that experiencing an 'imbalance' and 'becoming attuned' are very personal processes which are experienced differently from adult to adult. Adults in this study suggested that, although they may have lives which are perceived to be unstable, they will not return to education because they have not become attuned to education as a re-balancing strategy. Instead, they will try and re-balance their lives in other ways, such

as changing jobs or expanding social circles. These adults suggest that no amount of publicity, encouragement or guidance would persuade them to return to education because they are unable to believe that it would have any relevance or benefit to their lives. For some of the adults from working class backgrounds, education held little relevance, either for themselves or for their parents. They did not benefit as children and find it hard to believe that they will benefit as adults. It is for this reason that initiatives which are based on the notion that returning to education is both desirable and beneficial to all, and that everyone has the potential to return if barriers are removed, are limited in scope. Perhaps more important is to be aware that initiatives which make returning easier for those who have already become attuned, are more likely to be successful.

It has been argued that the socially available discourse of the time is a discourse of powerful cultures who impose their meanings, understandings and values on the less powerful (see Chapter 6). For the less powerful in society this creates a discrepancy between what they are told and the evidence of their lives and the lives of people around them. Whilst this discrepancy exists adults are unlikely to become attuned to education.

However, this discrepancy can be reduced as adults change their social circles and begin to alter their cultural sphere. Some adults make a deliberate decision to do this, whereas for others it happens over a period of time in a way which may be viewed only with hindsight. Thus some adults do gradually become attuned to the idea that education will help them to re-balance their lives. When considering ways in which they can re-balance they look to previous experiences, present circumstances and future considerations, seeking advice where and when they deem appropriate. In this study, one participant had returned to education as a result of advice received from staff at a drug rehabilitation centre, whereas several others had returned to education after having become divorced. This suggests that some type of 'exposure' to the possibility of returning to learning during times of instability and imbalance may enable adults to gradually become more

attuned to the idea that returning to the education might be an effective re-balancing strategy.

Should the need to instigate this change be the responsibility of individuals as it is at this present time? Would it be more successful if this push for cultural transformation permeated through the education system itself? Indeed, the Fryer report does touch upon this issue by suggesting that there is a need for cultural transformation if lifelong learning for all is to be achieved. Some of the adults pointed out that they think this transformation is beginning to take place. They believe attitudes are changing, that with higher unemployment and changes in the economy, what were seen to be traditional working class jobs are no longer available. Thus, they perceive some parents are encouraging children to stay on in school to obtain qualifications and a better, more secure job. Indeed, this research suggests that even those adults who have not become attuned to the notion that education can benefit themselves, do highlight the importance of a 'good' education for their children.

In the Fryer report, a key role is given to activities which underpin student choice, such as the increased emphasis on information, guidance and support. They suggest that this:

...will be made available nationally, regionally and locally through a national learning information service, with 'sign-posting', information centres and access to adequate professional guidance. (Fryer, 1997: 25)

This research has been undertaken, in part, in a city which already has a comprehensive advice and guidance network, yet some adults perceive that there is no provision of this nature available to them. Even if steps were taken to enhance the visibility of a comprehensive information service, the findings suggest that such a service would still fail to reach many adults. It appears that available opportunities become visible only as awareness parameters begin to widen, which happens at different times and in different ways from adult to adult. Part of this is the process of 'becoming attuned' - if the adults interviewed were not attuned to the notion that education will help them to re-balance,

opportunities were rendered invisible. In these cases, the participants seem to be suggesting that the establishment of more advice and guidance services will not convince them that returning to education is the right course of action for them.

Also, once adults in this study have become attuned to the notion that returning to education may be an appropriate re-balancing strategy, awareness-raising may be done in a non-structured, informal way in which adults do not seem to differentiate between formal and informal advice, and between what might be impartial and perhaps less impartial advice. This appears to be, in part, because adults are unfamiliar with the adult education system and tend to go towards the place or person which is the most visible or most accessible to themselves. For some this is friends or relatives, for others it might be tutors at the enrolment session at the local college. Evidence from this study indicates that this is problematic as, in following this route, adults appear to lack comprehensive information which limits their choices. Nevertheless, it is important to note that adults listen to and take note of the people they trust. Informal contact with significant others helps to act as reassurance and dispels negative perceptions about the experience of returning to education. This type of informal contact helps also to inspire adults, highlighting the fact that it is possible for people from similar backgrounds to return to education.

Thus it needs to be acknowledged that, as adults have illustrated in this study, there is a fragile period of time between enrolling on a course and going on to 'test the water'. During this time, there is a danger that adults could be lost to the institution and lose confidence in their ability to return to education. This indicates that 'choices' do not involve only the technical matter of making the choice, but also involve the issue of having choices affirmed. Systems need to be put into place which assist adults in refining choices between courses and perhaps between institutions. This will help to combat any negative effects of choices which could lead to course and/or institution rejection. One system which was seen to be especially valuable was at the local adult residential college

where adults enrolling on the diploma course were able to spend five weeks ‘tasting’ a variety of subjects before they made their decisions about which modules to study. Participants pointed out that this enabled them to discover that their perceptions of subjects, especially those they had never encountered before, did not match the actual course content, thus giving them time to change direction if they felt it to be appropriate. Also, where there is a discrepancy between perception of subject and what adults encounter in the classroom, introductory day or evening courses, videos and testimonies from previous students could help to overcome these problems. This would recognise that adults value the advice and guidance of other adults and place their trust in the judgement of significant others.

Thus, the major strength of this thesis is that it offers a student-centred, holistic approach to the issue of learning choice which can aid institutional understanding and help to inform issues surrounding cultural transformation. Whilst some of the aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 1 have been met, they could be criticised for possible implications of cause and effect, which might suggest a limited view of the purposes and method of a grounded theory study. In hindsight, for a study such as this, an overall aim would have sufficed, as specific objectives are modified and refined as further questions emerge from the data. One of the strengths of this thesis is that it has not taken an institutional or policy perspective, instead focusing on the individual, with themes emerging from adults themselves. Indeed, despite calls for cultural transformation, the recent emphasis on lifelong learning suggests a renewed focus on the individual. Several of the issues raised by the participants help to confirm some of the recent direction in Government and institutional policy, most notably the increased emphasis on peer groups, networking, inter-generational initiatives and the recognition of the importance of prior experience. Other issues raised by the participants suggest that some institutional and Government policy needs to be informed by a more complex understanding from the perspectives of adults themselves. This is especially so with those initiatives which are based on the assumption that education is desirable and

beneficial to all, and that all adults have the potential to be 'lured' back into education once barriers are removed. For those adults who do not see the relevance of education to their own lives, both educational and cultural transformation is required if Britain is indeed to take a step closer to creating a culture of lifelong learning.

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APPENDIX 1:
RECRUITMENT
LEAFLET

Adult Learners
Adult Learners
Adult Learners

Did you leave school with few or
no qualifications?

Are you thinking about returning
to education?

If you have answered yes to these two questions, would you be interested in taking part in some research?

I would like to talk to people who have not been involved in any formal education since leaving school, but who now feel that they would like to return to education.

In exchange for your help, I will try to answer any questions you might have about returning to education and what it involves. If I cannot help with your queries, I will be able to put you in touch with a person who can.

If you are interested, please fill in your name, address and telephone number and hand this slip into a member of staff or return it to:

Elaine Dawson
School of Education
Sheffield Hallam University
Collegiate Crescent Campus
Sheffield
S10 2BP

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Or, if you prefer, you can telephone me on
(0114) 253 2367.

APPENDIX 2:
RECRUITMENT
LETTER

The Editor
The Star
York Street
Sheffield
S1 1PU

15th May, 1996

Dear Editor,

Did you leave school at the earliest opportunity without obtaining many qualifications?
As an adult, have you thought about returning to education? Would you be interested in
taking part in some research?

If you have answered yes to all these questions, I would like to hear from you. I can be
contacted at the following address:

E. Dawson
School of Education
Sheffield Hallam University
Collegiate Crescent Campus
Sheffield
S10 2BP
Tel. (0114) 253 2367

Thank you very much for your help,

Yours faithfully,

Elaine Dawson.

APPENDIX 3:
PERSONAL PROFILE
FORM

Adult Returners: Personal Profile Form

- 1) Are you: Female []
 Male []

- 2) What is your age?

Under 25	[]	46 - 55	[]
25 - 35	[]	56 - 65	[]
36 - 45	[]	Over 65	[]

- 3) How old were you when you left school?

_____ years _____ months

- 4) When you left school at this age, did you obtain any qualifications?

No []

Yes []

If yes, please list the qualifications you obtained:

- 5) Since leaving school, have you ever taken part in any education or training in a formal educational institution (for example, a school or a college)?

No []

Yes []

If yes, please describe the type of course, the subject and where you studied:

6) Which of the following categories apply to you?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Unemployed | [] |
| Recently made redundant | [] |
| In full-time employment (please specify type of job) | [] |
| In part-time employment (please specify type of job) | [] |
| Housewife/husband | [] |

7) What do you consider to be your ethnic origin?
(These categories were used in the 1991 census).

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| White | [] | Pakistani | [] |
| Black - Caribbean | [] | Bangladeshi | [] |
| Black - African | [] | Chinese | [] |
| Black - Other | [] | Other Ethnic Group | [] |
| Indian | [] | | |

8) Do you have a physical disability?

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| No | [] |
| Yes | [] |

If yes, please describe the type of physical disability:

9) Do you feel that you have any problems with learning?

No []

Yes []

If yes, please describe the type of problems you have experienced.

10) Are you wanting to return to education to gain some qualifications?

No []

Yes []

If yes, which of these qualifications are you interested in?

(Please tick as many as you want to and don't worry if you don't know what some of these qualifications are).

GCSE [] BTEC []

A level [] RSA []

GNVQ/NVQ [] City & Guilds []

Diploma [] Degree []

Professional Qualification (please specify) _____ []

Other (please specify) _____ []

11) Which of the following subject areas are you interested in?
(Please tick as many as you want to).

Business/Finance	[]	Languages	[]
Hotel/Catering	[]	Law	[]
Health/Nursing	[]	Teaching	[]
Media/Journalism	[]	Childcare	[]
Building/Engineering	[]	Art & Design	[]
Environment	[]	Sciences	[]
Secretarial/Admin.	[]	Computing/IT	[]
Social Sciences (eg. Sociology and Psychology)	[]	Humanities (eg. History and Geography)	[]
Other (please specify)	_____		[]

Thank you very much for your help. Can you please give a contact name, address and telephone number. When I have received as many replies as possible, I will get in touch with you and let you know whether I would like to arrange an interview.

If required, I can arrange to have someone present to conduct the interview in a community language such as Punjabi or Arabic.

In the meantime, don't forget, if there is any further information you would like, please do not hesitate to contact me on Sheffield 2532367.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

The Participants

In the following description, all names have been changed to protect anonymity.

David

Two interviews were conducted with David, the first in July, 1996 and the second in September, 1997. At the time of the first interview, David was married with a young son of pre-school age, but by the time of the second interview his wife had left him and he had received custody of his child. David was a white male in the 25 - 35 age group and was employed as a 'handyman' for a local bus company. Having left school at sixteen, he obtained CSE qualifications in maths, English language, history and woodwork, before moving on to college for his apprenticeship in brick-laying, when he obtained a City and Guilds qualification. On the personal profile form he indicated that he was interested in returning to education to obtain GNVQ/NVQ and BTEC qualifications and was interested in the subject areas of health/nursing, media/journalism and social sciences.

David rented a terraced house on a post-war council estate situated to the south-east of a large village. At the time of the first interview the ground floor of the house was in the process of being decorated, and David's wife apologised for the mess, suggesting that the interview took place in her office upstairs, whilst she looked after their young son. The decorating had been finished by the time of the second interview which was conducted in the lounge whilst David's son watched television. This meant that the first interview was completed without interruptions, whereas the second was open to more interruptions and distraction. However, David was very willing to help with the research at both stages, suggesting other people who might be willing to be interviewed.

Dawn

Two interviews were conducted with Dawn, one in July, 1996 and the other in October, 1997. The first interview took place in the kitchen of her house which she rented with her husband and two pre-school age children. It was a 1960s flat-roofed house on a council estate located to the south of a large village. Between interviews Dawn and her family had moved house to an older council property located nearer to her children's school. Over this time Dawn had changed her status from 'housewife' to part-time employee.

Dawn was white and in the 25 - 35 age band. Although she had left school with some qualifications, she was unable to remember what they were. At the time of the first interview she had enrolled on a GCSE psychology course at the local college. Having obtained an unexpected 'A' grade, she had, by the time of the second interview, begun an A level psychology course. Over this time she had changed her initial idea of studying an NNEB course, becoming more interested in the area of criminal psychology.

Julie

One interview was conducted with Julie in July, 1996 in the lounge of her flat in the suburbs of a large city. Julie was a white female in the 46 - 55 year age group and was not in paid employment. She left school at fifteen and had not taken part in any education or training within a formal educational institution since leaving school. On the personal profile form she indicated that she was interested in obtaining GCSE, A level, diploma and degree qualifications, specifying the subject areas of media/journalism, environment, social sciences, languages, law and humanities as being of interest.

Julie felt that her age was a barrier to her learning, in terms of physical ability as she had osteoporosis, and in terms of mental ability, as she felt it would take her longer to assimilate information at her age. She was late for the interview as she had been delayed at the doctor's surgery. However, she said that she had enjoyed the interview as she rarely got chance to talk about herself in this way.

Charlie

One interview was conducted with Charlie in July, 1996. It took place in the lounge of his home which was a terraced property situated to the north west of a small village in a neighbouring county. Charlie owned his home and was in the process of carrying out extensive building work to the garage and out-buildings. Charlie was an unemployed, white male in the 36 - 45 age band. Having left school at fifteen years of age, he had not obtained any qualifications.

Charlie described himself as having 'spelling difficulties' which had meant that most types of formal education had been difficult for him. It was for this reason that he found it difficult to fill in the personal profile form which was sent to him prior to the interview. However, on the form, Charlie indicated that he was interested in obtaining GNVQ/NVQ and City and Guilds qualifications within the subject area of computing/IT. Charlie had been married but his wife had left him. Although he had three daughters he now lived on his own.

Louise

One interview was conducted with Louise in July, 1996, in the lounge of her home which was a terraced property on a large council estate to the north of a town in a neighbouring county. Her husband had been shopping in town, arriving back half way through the interview and disturbing us a couple of times. Louise was a white female in the 46 - 55 age band, describing herself as a part-time cleaner and a housewife. She pointed out that she had to work part-time to supplement the benefits received by her husband who had suffered a couple of heart attacks and would probably be unable to work again.

Although she had not obtained any qualifications at school, Louise had returned to college to study basic maths and English. On the personal profile form she indicated that she was interested in obtaining GCSE, A level, GNVQ/NVQ, BTEC, RSA and City and Guilds qualifications. Also, she was interested in obtaining a health and hygiene certificate. Subject areas which interested her included hotel/catering, health/nursing,

environment, secretarial/administration, child-care, art and design (needlework in particular), computing/IT and humanities.

Louise was the only participant who did not want the interview to be tape-recorded, pointing out that she had a fear of machines. Written notes were taken during the interview, and then recorded in the car, straight after the interview.

Pat

One interview was conducted with Pat in July, 1996. It took place in the lounge of her home which was a bungalow situated on a tree-lined avenue of bungalows and detached houses on the outskirts of a large city. She owned the bungalow with her husband who worked at one of the local universities. Pat was a white female in the 36 - 45 age band and worked as a nurse in one of the local hospitals which was about to close. She did not have any children. Although she had not obtained any qualifications at school, she had studied later for her REN level 2 qualifications at a local school of nursing. On the personal profile form she indicated that she was interested in studying for GSCE qualifications, possibly in the subject areas of environment, social sciences, computing/IT and humanities.

Pat was very nervous about taking part in the interview and was unable to relax which meant that answers were kept short and to the point, although the interview lasted for a duration of forty minutes. When the interview had finished she pointed out that she had been nervous, but hoped that she had provided the necessary information.

Karen

One interview took place with Karen in July, 1996. It was conducted in the evening as Karen worked full-time as a clerical officer in the civil service. Karen was a white, married female in the 25 - 35 age band. She did not have children. Karen and her husband had owned their semi-detached house, which was situated on a small road of similar houses near the centre of a village, for three years. They had spent this time decorating the house themselves and a tour of the property was provided after the interview had been completed.

Unlike other participants in this study, Karen had obtained ten O levels and had gone on to sixth form, but had left before taking her A levels due to poor experiences in her sixth form. Since leaving school she had gone on to study A level psychology at a local college. Karen was interested in returning to education to obtain more A levels and to go on to degree study. She was interested in the social sciences and humanities.

Anne

One interview was conducted with Anne in July, 1996. It took place in the lounge of an end terraced property which she owned with her partner, located to the south of a large city. Anne had three sons, two of which were making loud noises in the next room during the interview which affected the quality of the recording. It also interrupted the

flow of the interview with Anne commenting how horrible boys were. Anne described herself as a housewife and her partner as a self-employed builder.

Anne was a white female in the 25 - 35 age band. Although she had officially left school at age fifteen, Anne believed that she had really left at the age of thirteen when she had encountered a very different education system in England to that she had experienced in Scotland. She had not taken part in any formal education or training since leaving school and was interested in returning to education to gain some GCSE qualifications, moving on to A levels if successful. She was interested in the subject areas of business/finance, secretarial/administration and computing/IT.

Ellen

One interview was conducted with Ellen in July, 1996. It took place in the lounge of her house which was a semi-detached property on a hill of similar houses on the outskirts of a large city. Ellen had two young daughters, both of whom were pre-school age, although one was about to start school on a part-time basis. Her daughters were present for the first part of the interview but then went upstairs to play.

Ellen was a white female in the 25 - 35 age band, and, at the time of the interview, described herself as a 'housewife'. She left school at the age of sixteen, having obtained four O levels and three CSEs. Ellen went on to study for a City and Guilds qualification in hairdressing at a local college. She was interested in obtaining more qualifications, but did not tick specific categories on the personal profile form as she was unclear about the different types of qualifications listed. However, she wanted to update her hairdressing skills, and indicated an interest also in health/nursing, environment, social sciences, child-care and computing/IT.

Bill

One interview took place with Bill in July, 1996. It was conducted in the lounge of his home which he owned with his wife. It was a bungalow situated on a new estate of similar owner-occupied bungalows and houses on the southern edge of a small village to the north of a town located in a neighbouring county. Bill was a white male in the 56 - 65 age band. He had worked for most of his life as a draftsman but had recently had to retire through ill-health. On the personal profile form he ticked the 'house-husband' category. Although Bill had left school at age fifteen without any qualifications, he had attended a local college for his engineering apprenticeship.

Bill was interested in returning to education to obtain some GCSEs, indicating an interest in the subject areas of secretarial/administration, languages, computing/IT and humanities. Bill was relaxed throughout the interview, speaking freely, but it was sometimes difficult to move him away from anecdotes about his working life back to the issue of returning to education.

Joan

One interview took place with Joan at the end of July, 1996. It was conducted in the lounge of her house in which she lived with her husband and three children. Her youngest daughter was present during the interview, but sat very quietly drawing in a book. The house was a semi-detached, 1970s property situated in a cul-de-sac of similar properties to the south of a large city. Joan was a white female in the 36 - 45 age band. On the personal profile form she ticked both categories of 'unemployed' and 'housewife'.

Joan had stayed on longer at school than other participants in this study, studying O levels which she had failed. However, the opportunity of working abroad meant that she had left her studies at the age of seventeen before she was able to take her examinations. From school she obtained three O levels and one CSE. Later, after returning from abroad, she returned to college and obtained five more O levels and A level sociology.

Unfortunately, the purpose of the interview had not been explained well enough to Joan who thought that she was being interviewed to take part in a course. Understandably, she was not very happy about this, so the structure of the interview was changed so that she was offered information about opportunities available to her. She found this useful and gradually showed a willingness to answer questions about the research. This interview highlighted the need to be as clear as possible about the purpose and topic of the research.

Kirsty

One interview was conducted with Kirsty in July, 1996. The interview took place on a Wednesday morning in the lounge of her house, which she owned and which was situated towards the north of a town in a neighbouring county. Kirsty was a white female in the 25 - 35 age band. Having left school without any qualifications, Kirsty had returned to college in her local town to study computing for beginners, assertiveness and confidence building and NVQ maths and English.

Although Kirsty had a part-time job working for her parents' company, she wanted to return to education to increase her chances of securing a more fulfilling and better paid job. On her personal profile form she indicated that she was interested in studying for NVQ/GNVQ, RSA and City & Guilds qualifications. The subject areas in which she expressed an interest included business/finance, secretarial/administration, languages, law, social sciences and computing/IT.

Dorothy

One interview took place with Dorothy at the end of July, 1996, in the lounge of her terraced house to the south of a large city. Her two grandsons were with her at the time, but occupied themselves in the kitchen and garden throughout most of the interview, only interrupting a couple of times. Dorothy was late for the interview as she had had to pick up her grandsons, arriving a little flustered, but soon settling down.

Dorothy was a white female in the 46 - 55 age group. She worked in two part-time jobs, one as a housekeeper at a local university, and the other as a waitress for a local computer firm. Having left school at the age of fifteen without any qualifications, Dorothy felt that it was time to return to education to gain GNVQ/NVQ and diploma qualifications so that she could attempt to get a better job with more security. However, she felt that returning to education might be difficult for someone her age as she suffered from arthritis and felt that she found it difficult to concentrate and retain information, especially if she thought that courses were 'not relevant' to her life. Also, Dorothy perceived her learning options to be restricted by family circumstances, which meant that she often had to set aside her own needs and desires for those of family members. On the personal profile form, Dorothy indicated that she was interested in business/finance, hotel/catering, languages, law, secretarial/administration, social sciences, art and design, computing/IT and humanities.

Harsheem

One interview took place with Harsheem in August, 1996 in the lounge of her parents house to the east of a large city. Harsheem was a British Asian woman in the under 25 age band. She worked part-time as a bilingual medical receptionist at a local doctors' surgery. Having left school at the age of fourteen after a bad accident, she had returned to education to study for a CPVE in Caring, GCSE in English and City & Guilds in maths.

At the time of the interview, Harsheem was interested in finding out more about professional qualifications in counselling, in addition to obtaining more GCSEs which she felt she had missed out on at school. However, a back injury and problems with spelling, she felt, might make returning to education difficult for her personally. The other subject areas in which Harsheem expressed an interest were health/nursing, social sciences and computing/IT as she perceived that these would all be relevant to her role as a medical receptionist and help her to achieve her ambition of becoming a counsellor. She felt that she would be especially suited to this career as she had been through counselling in the past and felt that she could provide a better service than she had received, especially to Asian women as much of the counselling they received was not suited to their cultural needs.

Linda

Two interviews were conducted with Linda, one in August, 1996, and a follow-up interview by telephone in November, 1997. The first interview took place in the lounge of her home which she owned and which was located in a small village to the south of the county. At the time of the first interview, Linda wanted to return to education to study for a law degree as she thought it would improve her chances of getting a good job. However, she indicated also that she was interested in three other subject areas - business and finance, health and nursing and secretarial/administration.

Linda was a white female in the 36 - 45 age band, divorced with a young daughter who attended junior school. She had left school without any qualifications, but had returned back to a local college at the age of eighteen to study for some O levels. Although on

the personal profile form she ticked the 'housewife' category, during the interview she mentioned that she also undertook part-time book-keeping for a friend.

During the time of the follow-up interview, Linda had enrolled on the first year of a full-time business degree at a local university, saying that she was enjoying her studies and doing well. She was keeping open the option of moving into law at a later stage of her studies. Her mother was helping her with child-care arrangements during her studies.

Tracy

Two interviews were conducted with Tracy, one in August 1996 and a follow up interview by telephone in November, 1997. The first interview took place in the lounge of her house which was situated on a council estate to the south of a large city. She lived with her husband, who was at work at the time of the interview, and her son, who sat quietly playing on a computer in the corner of the room. Tracy was a white female in the 25 - 35 age band who worked part-time as a freelance market research interviewer.

Tracy had left school without any qualifications and had not attended a formal educational institution since the age of fifteen. At the time of the first interview, she was interested in studying for a social work qualification and had attended a guidance interview. When she was telephoned the following year she had enrolled on a social sciences access course with the intention of still continuing for a social work qualification.

Enid

One interview was conducted with Enid in August, 1996. It took place in her house in which she lived with five children and her husband. Some of the children were playing upstairs during the interview. The house was semi-detached and situated on a large council estate to the north of a sprawling village in a neighbouring county. Enid was a white female in the 36-45 age band, describing herself as both unemployed and as a housewife. Having left school at the age of sixteen without any qualifications, she had returned to education to undertake various short courses in computing and was interested in obtaining GNVQ/NVQ, RSA and City & Guilds qualifications in secretarial/administration and computing/IT.

Steve

Two interviews were conducted with Steve, one in August, 1996 and a second by telephone in May, 1997. Steve was a white, divorced male in the 36-45 age band and was employed as a full-time sales representative for a local car company. The first interview took place at the local university as Steve worked close by and was interested to use the opportunity to visit the university. Having left school at the age of sixteen without any qualifications, Steve had returned to a local college for a course which he described as 'work-related'.

At the time of the first interview Steve was interested in returning to education to study for a diploma and degree in the area of either business/finance, in particular accounting, or law. However, when he was contacted nine months later, he had not enrolled on a course, but was still 'thinking about it'. Also, at the time of the first interview, Steve had suggested that he might be moving jobs and moving away from the area, but nine months later he was still employed in the same job, although the company had been taken over so that he was working for different employers and had more responsibility.

Val

One interview took place with Val in September, 1996. Val was the sister of Tracy and lived with her husband and two children in a recently built house on a new estate in a village to the south of a large city. The interview took place in the afternoon in the lounge of her home. Val was a white female in the 36-45 age group and had left school at the age of fifteen with an English Language O level and a General Science CSE. Also, soon after having left school, Val had undertaken various typing and shorthand courses.

Val described herself as a 'housewife' and pointed out that she wasn't interested in returning to education to gain more qualifications. Instead, she wanted to find out how to use computers as her family had just purchased one and she found it frustrating not knowing how to use the computer. However, she felt that at a later date, when her children were older and if she had enjoyed the computing course, she might return to education to study in the social sciences subject area.

Geoff

Two interviews took place with Geoff, one in October, 1996, and the second by telephone in March, 1997. However, this second interview had not been formally arranged, but took place after Geoff, taking up the offer of help in the future, contacted the researcher about some advice for a research project he was undertaking. Having received the appropriate advice, he was willing to provide an update on what was happening to him regarding returning to education.

Geoff was a white, divorced male in the 36-45 age band. Having left school at the age of sixteen, Geoff obtained various CSE qualifications which he described as 'middle to poor results'. As an adult, he had returned to a local college to study marbling and wood-graining. At the time of the first interview he had enrolled on a business studies access course, which he had almost completed at the time of the second interview. Geoff intended to go on to the local university the following October.

Roy

One interview took place with Roy in October, 1996. Roy lived in sheltered accommodation situated about a mile from the city centre. Before the interview took place, he said that he had a 'mental health problem' and hoped that it would not affect the interview. Although his answers were slightly shorter than other people had

provided, it was not evident that the interview had been influenced by the problems he had mentioned.

Roy was a white, single male in the 25 - 35 age group. He left school at the age of seventeen having obtained biology and English O levels, returning to college a couple of years later to study for a chemistry O level. On the personal profile form he indicated that he was interested in returning to education to study for A level, diploma and degree qualifications, perhaps in the areas of sciences, social sciences and computing/IT. During the interview, however, he expressed a personal interest in continuing with sciences.

Andrew

One interview took place with Andrew in October, 1996. It was conducted in the researcher's office at the local university as Andrew did not want the interview to take place at his father's house because of interruptions. He felt, also, that he would be happy visiting the university as he had friends who were in halls of residence on that campus, with whom he would be able to meet.

Andrew was a single, white male in the under 25 age band. He left school without any qualifications and went to work in the steelworks, returning to college to study a City and Guilds in Foundry Competence. However, he had recently been made redundant, which, he pointed out, had not upset him too much as he had come to hate working in the steel industry. At the time of the interview, Andrew was studying on an A level alternative access course in sciences. His intention was to move on to a local university after the course and study for an environmental degree.

Vicky

One interview was conducted with Vicky in October, 1996. The interview took place in the dining room of Vicky's house in which she lived with her three children. She was separated from her husband. The house was a terraced property located to the northwest of the city. Vicky was a white female in the 25 - 35 age group and described herself as a housewife.

Having left school at the age of sixteen with one O level in art, Vicky returned to college at the age of eighteen to obtain four O levels, RSA in Counselling and City and Guilds in Communication. She then trained to become a registered psychiatric nurse. At the time of the interview Vicky was studying on a business studies access course. She intended to move on to university the following year if she found that she was able to cope with the work and fit it into her family schedule. On the personal profile form she indicated that she was interested in the subjects areas of business/finance, secretarial/administration, languages and computing/IT.

Sandra

One interview took place with Sandra at the end of October, 1996. It was conducted in the lounge of a flat located on the tenth floor of a tower block in a large village situated

to the north of the city. Sandra didn't appear to be ready for the interview, having just stepped out the bath. However, she was happy to sit and answer questions as she felt that she would be in a similar situation herself, having to undertake research when she went to university. Sandra was a white female in the under 25 age group. Having experienced major problems with her family prior to taking her GCSEs, she had left home, eventually obtaining two GCSEs because the teachers had submitted her work in her absence. Once she had begun to sort her problems out, she returned to college to obtain more GCSEs.

Sandra described herself as unemployed, wanting to return to education to study for a degree in the subject areas of business/finance and computing/IT. At the time of the interview, she was studying on a business studies access course. She had enrolled on the same course the previous year, but had left due to ill health. She felt that she would succeed in obtaining a place at university the following October.

Simon

One interview took place with Simon at the end of October, 1996. The interview was conducted in the lounge of a flat in which Simon had been housed when he first moved to the city. He said that he hated the area, that it was very rough and that he was trying to move away as soon as possible. The interview took place in the evening as Simon was undertaking a business studies access course during the day. Simon was a white, divorced male in the 25 - 35 age band. He had two children who lived with his ex-wife in the town from which he had moved. He had a hearing impairment, but felt that this would not affect his studies.

Simon left school at the age of sixteen with a grade 'D' O level in French and three CSEs. When he had been unemployed previously, he had been sent to college to study for an NVQ in Business Administration. At the time of the interview, he described himself as unemployed, believing that returning to education would improve his employment prospects. He wanted to go on to the local university to study for a degree and was interested in the subject areas of business/finance, media/journalism, teaching, computing/IT.

Ben

One interview was conducted with Ben in November, 1996. It took place in a flat on the top floor of a block of flats situated near to the city centre. The flats had recently been pronounced 'uninhabitable' due to the high levels of pollution, but Ben said that he enjoyed living in his flat as he knew a lot of the neighbours. One of his neighbours called around during the interview and joined in the discussion as she herself had returned to education as an adult.

Ben was a divorced male in the 36 - 45 age band. On the personal profile form he ticked 'other ethnic group', describing himself as a Romany gypsy. Ben believed that many of his negative experiences with education had stemmed from inappropriate Government policy which had meant that he had been prevented from travelling with his family, but instead placed in a children's home so that he could attend school. He ran away from the

home at the age of fourteen, and had not attended any type of formal education since returning to college two years before the interview had taken place.

At the time of the interview, Ben was studying at a local college on an A level alternative access course which included sociology, history, politics, maths, English and IT. He was interested in moving on to degree level study in sociology, wanting, in particular, to undertake some research into the plight of Romany gypsies.

Vera

One interview took place with Vera in November, 1996. It was conducted in the lounge of her house which was a terraced property located to the northeast of the city. Vera was married with two children. This was a very short interview as, after about five minutes, her husband entered the room and perched himself on the arm of a chair, making it quite clear through body language and facial expression, that he was not happy with what was being said. Vera's answers became much shorter and there was obvious tension between the two about Vera having returned to education. Her husband commented at one point that he thought she was taking on too much and that he was worried about what might happen at his work place where people were being made redundant. It was obvious that the interview was difficult for Vera, and it was for this reason that it was cut short.

Vera was a white female in the 25 - 35 age band. She had obtained five O levels at school and had not taken part in any formal education since she returned to college in the year prior to the interview, when she had enrolled on a springboard business course at the local college. At the time of the interview she was studying on a business studies access course, worked part-time in a petrol station and described herself as a housewife.

Sally

One interview took place with Sally in November, 1996. It was conducted in the coffee bar at the local university because Sally lived in a hostel and felt that it would be inappropriate for the interview to take place at that venue. Also, she felt it would be a good opportunity to visit the university at which she intended to study the following year. Sally had spent all her childhood in children's homes, moving from school to school and, she perceived, was treated as an 'outcast' as a result of this. Her educational experiences had been extremely negative, which had meant that she had run away from both school and the children's home at the age of twelve.

Having experienced life as a drug addict and a prostitute, Sally had come to perceive that returning to education and gaining some qualifications could help her to become a social worker so that she could be of use to people who found themselves in a similar position to herself. Sally was a white, single female in the 25 - 35 age group, and, at the time of the interview, was studying on an A level alternative access social science course.

Colin

One interview took place with Colin in May, 1997. It was conducted in the detached house owned by his parents, located to the south of a large village on the edge of the county. Colin was a single, white male in the 25 - 35 age group. Having left school at the age of sixteen without any qualifications, Colin had returned to a local college to study GCSE English when he was unemployed. At the time of the interview, he was still unemployed and was interested in studying for more GCSEs and GNVQ/NVQ qualifications. The subject area in which he was interested was recreation and leisure studies.

Matt

One interview was conducted with Matt in June, 1997. It took place in the lounge of a council house in which he lived with his wife and young daughter. Both were present during the interview, although they did not disturb the discussion. Matt was a white male, in the 36- 45 age band. Having left school at the age of sixteen without qualifications, Matt had spent most of his time working in manual jobs. However, he had obtained a job working with young offenders, but found that people with qualifications were given priority, even for the job he was actually doing, so he left in anger, saying that he would obtain the relevant qualifications and return to the job.

At the time of the interview, Matt had completed a one year diploma course and the first year of a degree course at a local adult residential college. He was moving to the local university in September to complete the final two years of a combined studies degree. Matt felt that he had problems with learning in terms of his own self-discipline and time management.

Don and James

One interview took place with Don and James in June, 1997. The two men wanted to be interviewed together as James had suffered from agoraphobia and felt that he had problems socialising, and that the interview would be easier for him if Don was present. Certainly throughout the interview there were occasions where James found it difficult to answer and appeared to be uncomfortable, asking, instead that Don answered the question.

Both men were white, unmarried and in the 25 - 35 age band. They had become friends during their time at the local adult residential college where they had studied on the diploma course and the first year of their degree course. Don intended to specialise in social policy in the final two years of his degree at the local university, whereas James intended to continue with applied social studies.

Roger

One interview took place with Roger in October, 1997. It was conducted in the lounge of his house which was located in a small village in a neighbouring county. At the time

of the interview Roger was just beginning the second year of a historical studies degree at the local university. Roger was a white, married male in the 56 - 65 age group.

Having left school at the age of fifteen, Roger had spent most of his working life as a joiner, working on building sites. However, this work had stopped when he had an accident at work, damaging his spine and hip. His wife had returned to education later in life, and Roger felt that he might also benefit, although he did not expect to gain paid employment at the end of his studies due to his age. Roger suffered from arthritis but felt that it was not affecting his studies.

Ian

One interview took place with Ian in October, 1997. It was conducted in a flat located to the south of the city which he rented with other students. Ian had moved from Ipswich to the city to study on a communications study degree at the local university. At the time of the interview he had spent four weeks at the university and was enjoying himself. Prior to enrolling on the degree course, Ian had studied on a one year humanities access course in Ipswich.

Ian was a divorced, white male in the 36 - 45 age band. Having left school at the age of sixteen without qualifications, he had spent many years moving between jobs, working in shops, factories and on building sites. He had moved abroad with his Hungarian wife and taught English, until he separated from his wife and moved back to England. He had decided to return to education at the age of thirty-six after his experience abroad when he had spent most of the time socialising with people who were graduates.

Joe

One interview took place with Joe in October, 1997. It was conducted in the evening in the lounge of the terraced house which Joe owned with his wife, located a couple of miles from the city centre. Joe had two children, was a white male and in the 46 - 55 age band. Joe's wife was a tutor at the local college and many of his friends worked in academia.

Having left school at the age of fifteen without any qualifications, Joe had spent most of his working life working 'on the railways'. However, imminent privatisation had meant that he had begun to think about this work and how it would change in the future, so, at the age of forty-four, Joe had decided to return to education. At the time of the interview, Joe had completed three weeks of the second year of a psychology degree at the local university.

Peter

One interview was conducted with Peter in October, 1997. Peter was approached because he represented what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term an 'extreme case'. For the purposes of this research, Peter was someone who had experienced redundancy but had

decided not to return to education, and it was felt that he might provide further insight into the developing theory.

Peter was a white, married male in the 56 - 65 age group. He had two grown-up children, both of whom had attended university. Peter spent most of his time working at the rugby club, gardening and following rugby with his friends. He felt that returning to education would not benefit him in anyway, discussing how he had reached a 'comfort zone' which meant that he felt he did not have to change too many things in his life. However, he wanted to obtain a small business of some type as he knew his redundancy money would not last for ever. He had spent most of his working life in the catering industry and felt that it would be appropriate to try and obtain some type of catering outlet, such as a sandwich shop or fish and chip shop.

Annabelle

One interview was conducted with Annabelle in November, 1997. It took place in the researcher's office at the local university as Annabelle was coming to the university for her course. At the time of the interview she was studying for a postgraduate diploma/MA in health promotion. It was felt that Annabelle would be an interesting person to interview at this stage of the research as she had completed her degree and would be able to provide an insight into adults' experiences after graduation. Also, at this stage of the work, the focus groups had been abandoned in favour of speaking to individuals about the emerging theory, and it was felt that Annabelle would have some useful comments to make.

Annabelle was a white, single female in the 36 - 45 age band. Having left school at the age of sixteen without any qualifications, Annabelle had returned to education at the age of twenty-six to study for an English Literature O level. Finding that she enjoyed the studies, she went on to obtain more O levels, A levels and a degree, before moving to the area with her job as a health promoter, which had led to her registering as a postgraduate student at the local university.

Jerry

One interview was conducted with Jerry in February, 1998. Jerry was a white, married male in the 36 - 45 age group. At the time of the interview he worked part-time in the library at the local university, having recently completed a MSc in computer studies at the same university. Again, it was felt that Jerry would be able to provide further insight into adults' experiences after graduation and offer some useful comments on the emerging theory.

Jerry had left school at the age of eighteen with seven O levels and 2 A levels. He left home to attend the local university, but dropped out of his studies after the first term. However, Jerry stayed in the local area, obtaining a job with British Coal, and it was not until he reached the age of thirty-one that he considered returning to education. This was a time when many people working for British Coal were being made redundant and were offered packages to return to education. Jerry took advantage of these offers and felt that he has never looked back since.

The Interviews

Interview 1

This was the first interview for the research and took place on 2nd July, 1996 (see Appendix 6). An interview schedule had been developed, but, in line with the grounded theory approach, the structure and content of the interview remained flexible, enabling the participant to raise themes and issues which were important to himself. It was felt that, at this stage of the research, the interview should not be too structured, and it was for this reason that the participant was free to digress from the topic if he felt it to be important. Also, the researcher considered this interview to be a pilot interview which would enable her to practice her interview technique and get a feel for the issues which were important to adults. (The first transcript in Appendix 6 illustrates that there were some areas in which the interview technique could be improved).

A full transcript was produced from the interview which appears in Appendix 6. A process of thematic analysis took place on the transcript soon after the interview had taken place. Themes which appeared to be important from this interview included the issues of frustration in the workplace; lack of personal finance and the constraints this imposed; issues of alienation, both in the workplace and when the participant was growing up; personal goals and ambitions - how they might be realised, but also how they are, and have been, thwarted; issues of time, both in terms of availability of time and time moving on.

From this interview, the researcher was made aware of two important preconceptions which she had held about adult returners. The first stemmed from the literature and personal experience which suggested that adults are unconfident about their personal abilities. However, this participant illustrated that this was not the case, that he knew he was capable of returning to education, but that he was being prevented by circumstances beyond his control. Secondly, it was clear that the researcher had approached the topic of the research in rather a simplistic way, believing that it would be possible for adults to describe why they were interested in some subjects and not with others. This participant illustrated that the research could not be approached in this way, that subject choice was not straightforward and easily explained. It was for this reason that 'learning choices' came to be viewed in much wider terms - it became clear that it would be impossible to separate choice of subject, course and institution, with reasons for returning to education. This caused concern at this stage of the research because there had been a large number of studies which had considered issues of adult motivation and participation. Care had to be taken to ensure that this study provided a new insight into the area under investigation.

In addition to the thematic analysis of the transcript, it was reviewed also in terms of interview technique, so that this could be refined and improved in subsequent interviews. Leading questions were noted and altered; places in the interview which should have been probed for further information were highlighted and probing questions practised and developed; digressions were noted and ways of dealing with these were rehearsed, until it was felt that the researcher was ready to undertake the second interview.

As this participant had been friendly and helpful, and it was felt that further insight into some of the themes could be gained from him, a repeat interview was arranged for the following year (see Interview 34).

Interview 2

This interview took place on 5th July, 1996, and was considered, also, to be a pilot interview. This was useful because this participant had a different style to the person previously, answering questions succinctly and not digressing from the topic. However, this meant that the researcher had to ask many more questions and was unprepared for this. This highlighted the importance of being prepared for different styles and it was for this reason that two interview schedules were developed for the next interview. One contained a list of topic areas and could be used for people who discussed their answers freely with little prompting. The other contained a list of specific questions which could be asked if participants were less talkative and needed more probing. Both these schedules were revised from interview to interview as new themes and questions emerged.

The main themes to emerge from this transcript concerned the issue of life transitions and how these enable adults to think about returning to education; issues of gender, expected roles and barriers to participation due to gender expectations; how interests stem from previous experience and from perceptions about personal capabilities and personal characteristics.

It was felt that, before these themes could be explored in more depth, it was important to conduct one more pilot interview, again to practice interview technique and to enable a comparative analysis between interviews.

Again, this participant had been friendly and helpful, saying that she would be happy to be interviewed at a later date. A repeat interview was conducted with her the following year (see Interview 36).

Interview 3

This interview took place on 8th July, 1996. Again, it provided good practice for refining interview technique as it was quite different to the previous two interviews. This was because the participant was extremely talkative and the interviewer had to ask only a few questions. The participant was not interrupted during her digressions because this was a pilot interview and, at this stage of the work, the researcher still did not want to have too much of an influence over the direction of the interview. However, with hindsight, many of the issues discussed by the participant were not relevant to the research and it would have been useful to steer her gently back onto the topic. This highlighted the importance of being able to return the discussion back to the topic without influencing the participant or antagonising them in any way.

Themes which were important from this interview included issues of age and perceived problems with learning; the limited amount of time available in terms of a person's life and the type of course they could fit into this time; how personal interest in subjects

stems from personal experience. When a comparative analysis was undertaken between the three pilot interviews, both similarities and differences were noted. Also, themes which had arisen in one of the interviews were reviewed and the other two transcripts returned to ensure that similar issues had not been missed. The main themes which appeared to be significant at this stage of the research were issues of 'time', 'experience', 'employment', 'interest', 'barriers', 'alienation' and 'transitions'. Questions which could explore these issues in more depth were developed and the next three interviews were arranged.

Interview 4

This interview took place on 19th July, 1996 and was conducted with a participant who had returned to basic skills education. This raised many more issues which had not arisen in the previous interviews, but enabled a useful comparison between those who were returning to education to improve their basic skills and those who were returning for other reasons. As this comparison had been so useful, two further interviews were arranged at a later date with adults who had returned to basic skills education (see Interviews 10 and 12).

Issues which appeared to be important from this interview included problems with poor schooling and bad teachers; the constraints imposed by social class; the restrictions placed on people claiming benefits and how this had a detrimental influence on learning choices. Thus, this interview reiterated the difficulty in separating actual learning choices with reasons for returning to education - this participant described what had happened in his life which, he perceived, had led to him having difficulty with reading and writing. His learning choices had stemmed from this need to improve his basic skills, which in turn had been influenced by his desire to obtain a job.

Interview 5

This interview took place on 23rd July, 1996. The participant was very nervous and gave short responses to the questions. Again, the themes of 'life transitions' and 'the time is right' appeared to be especially significant in this interview. However, when these themes were explored in more depth, it became clear that they contained different dimensions and properties. In this interview, the life transition which the participant was about to experience was not of her own making, but was due to external circumstances which were beyond her personal control. However, this was viewed in a positive light and was seen, by the participant, as an indication that the time was right for her to return to education. Time had become available in her life, whereas previously she had worked irregular hours which meant that attending a course had been difficult.

Previous transcripts were returned to in light of this new insight, and it became evident that some life transitions, although inevitable and beyond personal control, were expected and could be planned for. This enabled participants to think about how the transitions would affect their lives and consider what they could do with their lives as a consequence. Also, at this stage of the research, there was a suggestion that some life transitions were desirable, whereas others were not, and, in addition to this, some adults desired life transitions, but were unable to instigate them.

Interview 6

This interview had been arranged for the same day, 23rd July, 1996. With hindsight, this was not a sensible decision as it meant that the previous interview could not be analysed prior to this interview taking place. Indeed, in the early stages of the research, it was felt to be important to interview people before the start of the academic year, especially if they were intending to enrol on new courses. This was because, initially, it was felt that it would be important to interview people who had not returned to any type of formal education since leaving school as their learning choices might be influenced in some way by this experience. This idea was soon abandoned as it became evident that people had attended courses, even though they might not have indicated this on their personal profile form, but that these courses had not influenced their choices in the way which had been envisaged. However, this perceived need to conduct the interviews before the start of the academic term meant that interviews 6 - 18 were conducted too close together and that not enough time could be spent analysing the data between interviews. Once this problem had been realised, subsequent interviews were arranged with a greater amount of time between them.

This interview was not taped as the participant said that she had a fear of machines. Notes were taken and recorded into the tape recorder straight after the interview. The main themes to arise from this interview included issues of identity and how this changed as a result of returning to education; the importance of 'convenience', especially in terms of travel and timing of courses; the importance of good teaching methods and sympathetic tutors. In this interview it became clear that although the participant had not indicated on her personal profile form that she had taken part in formal education since leaving school, she had actually attended some adult education classes. It was for this reason that the interview was extended to include the issue of how learning choices might change as adults return to education. These questions were added to the interview schedule so that the researcher was prepared for this to happen in future interviews.

Interview 7

This interview took place on 24th July, 1996. This participant was chosen because of issues which had arisen in previous interviews. For example, the issue of lack of personal finance seemed to be acting as both a deterrent to participation and as a way of limiting learning options. This participant's postal code suggested that she lived in a wealthier area of a village, and it was felt that, if she had more disposable income, an alternative perspective on the issue of personal finance might be gained. Also, she was a married woman without children, and as such would not have her learning choices restricted by practical considerations concerning childcare.

Several new themes were raised in this interview, including issues surrounding guidance from staff in colleges; perceptions of different subjects, what they entail and how they fit with perceptions of personal interests; the relevance of learning choices to current employment. This highlighted the importance of speaking to people who were happy with their present work, as well as those who were unhappy with their work or not in paid employment.

Interview 8

This interview took place on 25th July, 1996. This participant was chosen because she was intending to enrol on a course the following September and because she was another woman who had several young children. This meant that the theme of expected life transitions, that is, her youngest child about to attend school, could be explored in more depth. Also, it was felt that this interview could help to explore further the themes of personal identity as 'mother' and the role expectations which accompany this identity. These issues had been hinted at previously, but had not been followed up. It was during this interview that the importance of these themes became evident, especially as this participant pointed out that she felt she was not contributing to the family in any way, that her husband was doing all the work, and that she needed to help him. Her learning choices, however, had to be framed within her existing family work commitments. Also, she had to think about the type of paid employment which would fit in with these existing commitments.

At this stage of the research, the issue of 'primary' and 'secondary' influences on choice appeared to be important. For example, adults discussed subjects in which they were interested, although they were often unable to follow this interest because of external factors which were perceived to be beyond their individual control. Also, this interview helped to develop the idea that adults, especially women, were constrained by a number of factors which limited the amount of choice available to them. Previous transcripts were returned to in light of this, and a list of these factors was developed so that they could be searched for in subsequent interviews.

Interview 9

This interview took place on 26th July, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a mother with two young children who were about to start school. However, this participant was just starting to think about returning to education and had no specific idea about what she wanted to do. This provided a useful comparison with the previous interviewee who had more of an idea about what she intended to study in the following September. In this interview, the themes of gender and role expectations were explored in more depth, with the participant illustrating how her education had been influenced by the fact that she was female. Her brothers had both gone on to university, whereas she had been encouraged into hairdressing.

Another important theme to arise from this interview concerned the issue of the availability of information and advice and guidance. This participant was happy to be interviewed because of the promise of further information. She personally felt that there was very little information available in the city and did not know where to go for advice. This was felt to be significant and, as a consequence, was explored in more depth in subsequent interviews.

Interview 10

This interview took place on 30th July, 1996. This participant had been chosen, initially, for two reasons. Firstly, he had returned to education to improve his basic skills, and

secondly, he was retired and was not returning to education to improve his employment prospects. Several of the other participants had mentioned that they had returned to education for employment purposes, so it was felt that further insight could be gained into this by speaking to someone who was not interested in paid employment. However, this participant had retired through ill-health which had occurred suddenly and unexpectedly. This helped to provide further insight into the themes of unexpected and undesired life transitions. As this was felt to be a productive interview it was considered to be important to speak to someone else who had been prevented from working through ill-health (see Interview 34).

Interview 11

This interview took place on 30th July, 1996, which was the same day as the previous interview. Again, with hindsight, this was not a sensible decision as there was no time to analyse the previous transcript and there was some confusion over which questions had been asked in which interview. Also, there were problems with the interview because of the expectations the participant held about its purpose (see Appendix 4).

This interview was useful, in particular, because it provided further insight into the factors which restrict choices. Again, this woman was being constrained by her work in the home and by finance, but also, she felt, by lack of qualifications. This alerted the researcher to the whole issue of institutional factors and how these serve to restrict individual choice. Previous transcripts were returned to in light of this, and it was found that there were several ways in which choices were restricted by institutional rules and regulations. It was at this stage of the research that the term 'parameters' became significant because people appeared to go on to try and make alternative choices within the parameters imposed upon them. At this point of the research, the implication appeared to be that the narrower the parameters, the less choice was available. Again, this appeared to be important and was added to the interview schedule for the next few interviews.

Interview 12

This interview took place on 31st July, 1996. This was the final interview to be conducted with a person who had returned to education to improve their basic skills. Also, this interview was arranged because the participant was a single woman and the researcher was interested to look more closely at the 'parameter' theme and find out whether less family commitment led to conditions of wider parameters and hence more choice.

Certainly, in terms of perception of choice, this participant felt that there were many options open to her when she had finished her current studies. However, as she had returned to education to improve her basic skills, she felt that she would be unable to follow other options until she had reached the required standard. Nevertheless, she did not view this in terms of a restriction on her personal choice, but instead perceived that it would take her longer to complete her studies. This was not a problem to her as she worked for her parents and could continue to do this until she had finished her courses and look for a better job. This began to raise questions about actual and perceived

parameters, especially in terms of personal disposition and awareness about personal capabilities.

This interview was significant, also, in that it alerted the researcher to issues of stability and instability. Again, these had been evident in previous transcripts, but had not been noted as significant. However, as the interviews progressed, these issues became more prominent and were added to the interview schedule so that they could be discussed in more depth.

Interview 13

This interview was conducted on the same day as the previous interview, 31st July, 1996. Again, with hindsight this was a mistake as it meant that the previous interview could not be analysed and transcribed before this interview had taken place. This participant had been chosen because she was an older woman who lived on her own. Her children were adults and had left home several years ago. It was felt that this participant would provide further insight into the 'parameter' theme as it was perceived that, initially, she would have less family commitments because her children were adults and lived in their own homes. However, this proved not to be the case, with the participant pointing out that her learning choices were restricted by family problems which meant that her own wishes and desires became secondary to those of her children and grandchildren. Also, this participant felt that her learning choices were restricted by lack of finance and the need to work in two part time jobs.

This interview was significant as it alerted the researcher to the importance of how the invisible becomes visible once a person becomes attuned to the idea of returning to education. For example, one of the part-time jobs held by the participant was as a housekeeper for one of the local universities. In this position, the participant had been sent information about courses for many years, but she had never looked at this information because she had felt that it was not relevant to her life. However, once she had begun to think about returning to education, she read the information and found that it was very relevant, as the courses were in the local adult education department. The participant had expressed surprise that she found the information relevant, pointing out that she wished that she had considered it at an earlier stage.

Interview 14

This interview took place on 6th August, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a single Asian woman who lived with her parents. It was felt that the participant would be able to provide an alternative cultural perspective and help the researcher to explore further the 'parameter' theme and the issue of stability and instability.

In terms of cultural perspective, the interview was important as it raised issues of course provision and cultural relevance, with the participant discussing issues of 'ego-based' counselling not being relevant to her Asian culture. It was felt that it would be important to follow up this theme in more depth with people of other cultural and ethnic origins, so it was at this stage of the work that a variety of community groups were contacted and

sent recruitment leaflets. However, there were no responses and with hindsight it was felt that this was not an appropriate way to try and recruit participants. Instead, a personal visit and individual, face-to face contact might have proved to be more successful.

Interview 15

This interview took place on 8th August, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a single woman with a child who was about to move to secondary school. The main theme to be discussed in this interview concerned lack of personal finance and the restrictions this placed on learning choices. Again, this helped the researcher to explore further the theme of convenience parameters and how these served to constrain choices. At the time of this interview, the participant could see no way around these restrictions, although she was determined to continue trying to find a suitable course. It was for this reason that it was felt to be appropriate to return to this participant at a later stage of the research to ascertain whether she had succeeded in finding a possible route back into education (see Interview 40).

Another theme which appeared to be significant at this stage of the research concerned the issue of previous experience and how learning choices might be influenced by this experience. In interviews 2 and 9, the two women had discussed their learning choices which involved courses that were concerned in some way with child-care. Both of these women had children who were about to start school and both had been full-time mothers since their children were born. However, the participant in Interview 15 and the participant in Interview 8, although they were mothers, were not considering courses which involved child-care. It appeared that the difference might stem from age of children and the type of work which the women had been involved in prior to, or during, the time of raising their children. Again, the theme of identity appeared to be significant, with some women suggesting that they identified themselves as 'mother', whereas others saw themselves not only as 'mother', but as something else, such as 'book-keeper' or 'accountant'. As this theme appeared to be so significant, it was considered important to continue this line of questioning with the next two participants.

Interview 16

This interview took place on 9th August, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a married woman with a young son at school. However, on the personal profile form, the participant had ticked the 'part-time employment' category, describing herself as a freelance market research interviewer. It was for this reason that it was felt that further insight could be gained into the emerging theme of identity, especially concerning women who were mothers.

This participant, when considering her learning choices, looked primarily to her previous experience as a market research interviewer. Also, she appeared to take notice of what others thought she would be capable of, especially her mother and sister. However, instead of thinking about her actual job and what it entailed, this participant considered skills she had developed from the job, thinking about what type of career would most suit these skills. For example, she found that one of the most rewarding aspects of the

job was going out to meet people in the community and she felt that she was able to build up a rapport with these people and that they were able to trust her. This experience and the skills she had developed from it had enabled her to consider social work as an appropriate career. Thus, her learning choices involved a consideration of the best route back into education which would enable her to become a social worker at the end of her studies. This raised also the issue of the personal time adults were prepared to invest in returning to education.

It was felt that this would be a useful participant with whom to conduct a repeat interview at a later stage of the research as she appeared to be quite sure about her learning choices (see Interview 41).

Interview 17

This interview took place on 12th August. The participant had been chosen mainly because she was a married woman with five children, all of whom were a little older than those in the previous interviews. As the participant's children had been at school for a longer period of time, it was felt that further insight could be gained into this theme of women identifying themselves as 'mother'. Also, on the personal profile form, this participant had ticked both the 'unemployed' category and the 'housewife/husband' category. This was significant as it raised further questions about the value of women's work in the home and perceptions about employment and unemployment.

This participant had been looking for paid employment for a number of years since her youngest child had started school. However, she had been unable to obtain any work and, initially, she had started on various government training schemes in the hope of finding a job. She had found herself enjoying the courses and wanted to continue with more classes, especially as it helped her to get out of her home. She was interested in setting up some type of community group which would provide activities for other people on the estate, who, she perceived, found it difficult to leave the house. Also, she was engaged in voluntary work at the local Job Club, helping others to fill in job applications. This participant appeared to be suggesting that she was engaged in a process of self-assessment, thinking about who she was and what she wanted to do with her life. For example, she had no specific courses in mind, but would consider what was on offer if she perceived that the courses would help her to secure paid employment, enable her to help the children with their homework, or enable her to set up some type of community group. Again, all of these issues were framed within the overall theme of 're-balance' - if she could get a job or set up a community group she felt that her life would be more fulfilling and stable, especially emotionally, as she was so 'fed-up' of being 'stuck' in the home.

Interview 18

At this stage of the research, it was felt that there had been an over-emphasis on female participants, so special effort was taken to try and recruit and interview more males. This interview took place on 15th August, 1996. The participant was chosen because he was a single male, without children, who was employed in a full-time and probably well-paid job. It was felt that he would be able to provide further insight into the theme

of 'imbalance' as, at first glance, his life appeared to be relatively stable in terms of employment. However, during the interview he indicated that this was not the case, that there were other salespeople who were coming into his line of work who were keener and more competitive than him. Also, he felt that he did not want to spend the rest of his life being a sales person, indicating that he was beginning to re-asses himself and that he no longer identified himself with the role of 'salesman'.

During his time at work, he had come across many professional people, and his ex-wife had been an accountant. He felt that he would be capable of succeeding in that profession and that it would mean he would get more money for working fewer hours in a less competitive environment. Again, he felt that 'the time was right' for him to consider returning to education, but his choices were constrained by the need to earn money and pay his bills. He had to choose a course which would fit around his job and which would help him to achieve his ambition of becoming an accountant in the shortest possible time.

This participant appeared to be suggesting that feelings of instability can arise from situational circumstances, especially to do with employment, but also from emotional, or dispositional, imbalance. Other transcripts were returned to in light of this emerging theme and it became clear that some people appeared to have relatively stable lives, but were discontent with these lives, whereas others seemed to have unstable lives which led to differing levels of discontentment. Each participant was entered into a matrix which contained the headings of 'higher discontent', 'lower discontent', 'higher instability' and 'lower instability'. However, once this exercise had been completed, it was felt that there were some cases which did not fit and that the theme had to be explored in greater depth. Also, what, exactly, was meant by 'discontent' and 'instability'? How did the participants explain these feelings? What was meant by the terms 'higher' and 'lower'? Was it possible to locate feelings and perceptions such as this on a continuum in this way? It was felt, at this stage of the research, that time had to be taken to understand some of these issues before the next few interviews took place.

This had been a useful and productive interview and it was felt that this participant should be returned to at a later date to see if he had returned to education (see Interview 30).

Interview 19

It was for this reason that Interview 19 was conducted almost a month after the previous interview, on 12th September, 1996. The participant was chosen because, based on the above analysis, she appeared to have what could be termed both 'lower instability' and 'lower discontent', and it was felt that this interview would offer further insight into the theme of imbalance. The participant said that she was happy with her life and her role as mother. The only reason for her returning to education, she pointed out, was that her family had acquired a computer recently and she had found it frustrating that she was unable to use it properly. Nevertheless, 'frustration' had appeared earlier as one of the ways in which an emotional imbalance was described, and this participant, also, appeared to be suggesting that she expected to redress this imbalance by returning to education. It was at this stage of the research that 'education as a re-balancing strategy' was noted as a significant theme which needed to be developed in subsequent interviews.

Interview 20

At this stage of the research it was considered important to interview more people who had enrolled on a course and who were studying at the time of the interview. In this way it would be possible to explore further the issues of whether expectations were being met; if and how perceptions had influenced choice and how these perceptions may have altered as they progressed through their chosen entry route; how learning choices might alter as a result of undertaking a course. Also, the theme of 'education as a re-balancing strategy' could be pursued by finding out whether returning to education had helped adults to re-balance their lives.

This interview took place on 8th October, 1996. The participant was chosen because he was a male studying on an access course at a local college. Themes which appeared to be of significance in this interview included issues of the time being 'right' to return to education both in terms of an adult's life situation and in terms of their personal disposition. For example, this participant had obtained a divorce recently which meant that he felt he had less commitments, both in terms of time and finance. Also, he felt that what was happening with 'the economy' was not conducive to him continuing with his present trade, and that, if he was to continue in well-paid, secure employment, he needed to change direction. He had tried to return to education previously, but had left the course because the 'time had not been right'.

From this interview, the themes of 'proactive' and 'reactive' re-balancing appeared to be significant, in addition to issues of internal and external stimuli. Also, this participant seemed to be suggesting that his parameters of choice had widened as a result of life transitions and changes in his personal attitude, illustrating the fact that parameters of choices were malleable and elastic.

This participant contacted the researcher towards the end of his course to ask advice about research methods. This contact was used to conduct a follow-up interview over the telephone (see Interview 29).

Interview 21

This interview was conducted on 17th October, 1996. Again, this participant was chosen in order to obtain a deeper insight into the male perspective, especially from a man who had ticked the 'unemployed' category on the personal profile form. This was interesting as the participant was enrolled on a course and could have described himself as 'student'. However, this could be explained by the fact that the researcher neglected to include this category on the personal profile form, which, with hindsight, was a serious omission. Also, this participant had indicated that he 'suffered from mental health problems' and, as many of the themes to emerge from previous interviews involved issues of personal disposition, it was felt that this participant might offer further insight into these themes.

An interesting point arose from this interview which concerned perception of course difficulty and how this did or did not match with perception of personal ability, and the influence of this on learning choices. For example, this participant felt that an access course would be 'easier' than A levels and that he would be able to cope better with the

study as a result of this. Again, this seemed to be suggesting that his choices had been framed within a series of parameters. Firstly, there were 'institutional parameters' which included the level and scope of provision available, and the type of qualifications available. Secondly, and closely connected to this, were 'dispositional parameters' which included what a person thought they were capable of, both in terms of amount and difficulty of study.

Interview 22

This interview was conducted on 17th October, 1996. The participant was chosen because he was a young male who was studying on an access course. He lived with his parents and, therefore, it was felt that his 'convenience parameters' might be different to those people who had greater family commitments. On the personal profile form he had indicated that he had been made redundant recently and it was felt that this would provide deeper insight into the theme of 'education as a re-balancing strategy'.

This interview alerted the researcher to issues of 'push' and 'pull'. When the participant talked about his work experiences, he did so in terms of dissatisfaction and disinterest. This appeared to have the affect of pushing him away from any courses which could lead to similar types of employment. Instead, he talked about work which, he perceived, would interest him and which he would find attractive. He considered experiences which he had enjoyed and attempted to incorporate these experiences into some type of further employment. His learning choices involved courses which, he perceived, would help him to secure this type of work, thus having a type of 'pull' effect.

Another important theme to be developed from this interview, which had arisen also in previous interviews, involved the issue of attunement to education and the importance of significant others and their experiences. In Interview 18, the participant had illustrated that he believed that he came into contact with accountants through his work and that he was 'no different' to them. Similarly, this participant pointed out that, all of a sudden, it appeared that many people who he knew had returned to education. He had seen that they were capable, and as a consequence perceived that he was capable of succeeding also. The importance of 'significant others' was to be explored in subsequent interviews.

Interview 23

This interview was conducted on 29th October, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a woman who lived on her own with her children and was enrolled on an access course. It was felt that this interview would provide further insight into the 'convenience parameter' theme, helping to explore how these might influence learning choices once an adult had enrolled on, and progressed through, their chosen entry route.

One of the most significant themes to arise from this interview concerned the issue of women trying out courses to ascertain whether they could fit both the course and the amount of work into their existing family and life commitments. This appeared to be suggesting that, for many women, there were many commitments which they were unable, or unwilling, to alter or change in order to accommodate them returning to education. Again, questions were raised about whether this meant that 'gendered'

parameters were different for women and for men. To help answer emerging questions, feminist literature concerning adult education was consulted, along with a further drive to recruit more men for the interviews.

Interview 24

This interview was conducted on 29th October, 1996, which was the same day as the previous interview. Again, this meant that adequate time had not been taken between the interviews to analyse the data. This woman had been chosen because she was younger than many of the other adults and because she did not have any children. This helped to explain further the issue of convenience parameters, illustrating that, when these were wider, more choices were available.

Of particular significance in this interview were issues of 'goals' and 'ambitions', and how learning choices were influenced by these. This participant was able to define clearly her long-term goals, discussing her learning choices in relation to these goals. She had considered only those courses which, she perceived, would help her to realise her ambitions and which would offer her the quickest route to do this. This raised questions about how long-term goals and short-term goals might have different influences on learning choices. At this stage of the work, it appeared to be that people who discussed long-term goals were able to back-up their learning choices with reasons for their choices, whereas those with short-term goals talked more about returning to education rather than their actual learning choice as being the most significant decision. However, as the interviews progressed, this pattern did not continue and the theme was dropped in favour of more significant themes.

Interview 25

This interview was conducted on 31st October, 1996. The participant had been chosen because it was felt that, as a young, divorced man without dependants, more insight could be gained into the theme of short-term and long-term goals and into the theme of convenience parameters. However, an important point to arise from this interview concerned the issue of personal confidence, especially in a person's ability to succeed on a course. During the initial stages of the research, the literature review had suggested that adults might not be confident in their personal ability, but this participant appeared to be contradicting this line of thought. However, he did seem to indicate that although he was confident in his ability to cope with the work, he was less confident about his ability to 'fit' into what he perceived to be a very different environment to that which he was used to. Again, this raised questions about 'alienation' and 'difference', alerting the researcher to the subject of social and cultural distance which had to be travelled when adults returned to education.

The other important theme which appeared especially significant from this interview involved the issue of self-assessment and how adults look to their previous experiences and future hopes and desires in order to help them think about their learning choices. This had been touched upon, but not explored in any great depth in previous interviews. At this stage of the research, however, it was not realised how important this theme

would be. Instead, a memo was jotted down to search for other ways in which adults might go through a process of self-assessment.

Interview 26

This interview was conducted on 1st November, 1996. The participant was chosen because he was a middle-aged, unemployed man who had ticked the 'other ethnic group' category on the personal profile form, describing himself as a 'Romany Gypsy' during the interview. It was felt that this participant might be able to provide further insight into the issues of social and cultural distance. Indeed, this did appear to be the case, with the participant describing at length the problems that he had encountered during his schooling when he was forced to leave his family and live in a children's home. He seemed to be suggesting that the cultural and social distance he had to travel was great, and that it was because of this that he felt he was having so many problems with education as a mature student.

Also important in this interview was the theme of 'alienation' and how adults' sense of difference influences their educational experiences, usually negatively.

Interview 27

This interview was conducted on 1st November, 1996. The participant had been chosen because she was a married woman with children who were already at school and because she also worked part-time in paid employment. Again, at this stage of the research, the issue of short-term educational goals seemed to be significant as this participant appeared to be suggesting that she had identified a need to return to education, but did not mind too much what she studied. She talked about obtaining a list and looking through the subjects, choosing what she thought sounded 'interesting'. However, her first choice was unavailable as the course was full, so she made another choice. This touched upon the theme of 'institutional parameters', illustrating that course provision could affect choices not by creating barriers which could not be overcome, but by steering adults in alternative directions.

Interview 28

This interview was conducted on 8th November, 1996. It followed on well from Interview 26 as this participant, also, had spent her childhood in children's homes. In addition to helping the researcher to explore further the issue of social and cultural distance, this interview expanded on the theme of long-term career aims and how these influence learning choices. This participant had looked to her past experiences as a drug addict and prostitute, thinking about the inappropriate advice she had been offered by social workers at the time. These experiences, she reported, had enabled her to think about becoming a social worker herself as she thought she would be able to provide a better service than she had received precisely because she had been through the experiences.

This participant also talked about the differences between people she encountered at college and her friends, illustrating how she was experiencing a 'push/pull' effect which created tensions in her everyday life. At the time of the interview, she reported finding herself being pulled towards the college people although she still kept in contact with her friends.

Also of significance in this interview was the issue of gradually becoming attuned to education as this participant pointed out that she had been told to go on courses previously, but for her, personally, the time had not been right in terms of her own attitude. Previous transcripts were returned to in light of this finding and 'becoming attuned' was noted as a possible theme to follow up in subsequent interviews, although again, at the time the significance of this theme was not realised.

At this stage of the research, it was felt that time needed to be taken to go back through all the transcripts and look again at the issues which appeared to be significant. Also, at this time the transfer report had to be completed. It was for these reason that the next interview did not take place until the following March.

Interview 29

This was a repeat interview with the participant from Interview 20 and was conducted on 18th March, 1997. The interview had not been arranged by the researcher, but was conducted briefly by telephone when the participant had telephoned the researcher for advice on a research project he was undertaking. At this time the participant was about to complete an access course and was expecting to move on to university the following September. He said that his learning choices had not changed in any significant way since the first interview, but that he was doing well on the course, better than he had initially expected.

Interview 30

This was a repeat interview which was conducted on 5th May, 1997 by telephone with the participant from Interview 18. With hindsight, telephone interviewing was not the best method to use as it was difficult to take comprehensive notes and people seem less willing to elaborate on their answers. However, the wishes of the participants were respected and this participant pointed out that nothing had really changed since the last interview and that therefore, in his opinion, it would not be worth meeting in person. At the time of the second interview this participant was still thinking about returning to education, but that he had not done anything more about it since the previous interview.

Interview 31

This interview was conducted on 7th May, 1997. At the time of the interview the participant was not enrolled on a course, despite this being the second stage of the research which involved interviewing people on courses. This was because the researcher felt that this interview would enable her to question the participant about the themes which had already been raised, thus helping to verify the analysis so far. This

interview helped to confirm the significance of the themes of 'parameters of choice', especially concerning institutional and geographical parameters. Also, it helped to further establish the importance of 'education as a re-balancing strategy', illustrating, in particular, that this participant would consider other re-balancing strategies, such as getting a job, if he considered them to be more effective than returning to education.

Interview 32

This interview was conducted on 24th June, 1997 which allowed enough time to return to previous transcripts and analyse them again in light of the emerging themes. This participant had been chosen because his entry route appeared to have involved an institutional choice rather than a course or subject choice. It was felt that this would shed further light on the themes of 'education as a re-balancing strategy' and 'parameters of choice'. Also, the course on which he had enrolled enabled him to study a variety of 'taster' courses before he made a decision about which subjects to study further. The researcher felt that this would provide further insight into the ways in which learning choices were made as adults progressed through their chosen entry route.

This participant talked, in particular, about subjects and what he liked, and disliked, about them. This was interesting as it seemed to reflect what other adults had said about subjects from school - subjects they liked were described in terms of what they were successful at and what they were interested in, whereas subjects they disliked were discussed in terms of what they found boring and in which they had little success. Also, this participant talked about the problems he had encountered with imposition of choice and with what he perceived to be outside influence on choice. As an adult, however, he was trying to resist this and continue studying subjects that he, personally, was able to choose.

Interview 33

This interview was conducted with two participants on 30th June, 1997. These participants had also made an institutional choice and it was felt that some of the themes raised in the previous interview could be followed up in more depth. The previous participant had talked about returning to education in order to gain qualifications which would help him to obtain a job in which he had already been working on a temporary contract. These two participants also talked about vocational motivation, discussing their learning choices in terms of qualifications and how these would lead to a 'better' job. 'Better' was described in terms of more pay, more security, more freedom. They hoped to move away from what were seen to be 'bad' jobs which were described in terms of poor pay, being of a temporary, uncertain nature and with a chance of redundancy hanging over them. However, unlike other participants who appeared to have long-term, specific career goals, these participants did not know what they wanted to do in terms of paid employment after their studies. They appeared to be suggesting that it was the qualification and the perceived control over the stability of their working lives which was important to them. Also, they appeared to be suggesting that they would continue in education until their objective, that of getting a 'better' job, was reached.

Interview 34

This was a repeat interview with the participant from Interview 1, taking place on 24th September, 1997. This was an important interview as it alerted the researcher to the issue of unplanned life transitions and the need to re-balance in ways other than returning to education. For example, this participant pointed out that between interviews his wife had left him and that he had received custody of his child. This had meant that although he had enrolled on a psychology course and was doing well, he had to leave because of his child-care responsibilities. Although he hated his work, he had taken action to make it more bearable by reducing his working hours and altering his breaks so that he did not have to mix with work colleagues. This highlighted the importance of the need for 'reactive re-balancing' after unexpected life transitions.

The transcript from this interview has been included in Appendix 6 as it helps to illustrate how both the focus of the research, and the interview technique, has developed from the first interview in the research.

Interview 35

This interview was conducted on 2nd October, 1997. The participant had been chosen because he was an older man who was studying in the second year of a history degree. It was felt that this participant would be able to provide further insight into the 'education as a re-balancing strategy' theme, because, unlike the previous three participants, he had not returned to education for vocational reasons. Also, it was felt that he would be able to provide further insight into the 'parameters of choice' theme as it was presumed that this participant would probably have wider parameters of choice than other people in this study. However, one of the main reasons for returning to education, according to this participant, was that his wife had returned previously, and he felt that he did not want to be 'bettered' by his wife. This raised further issues about becoming attuned to education because of significant others who have been through a similar experience.

Interview 36

This was a repeat interview with the participant from Interview 2. It was conducted on 9th October, 1997. This was an important interview as it helped to illustrate how unexpected success on a course can influence subsequent learning choices, opening up options which were once perceived to be unavailable. This illustrated that both 'dispositional' and 'awareness' parameters could widen considerably as people enrolled on, and progressed through, their course.

Also, at this stage of the research, it was felt that it was an appropriate time to start to verify some of the emerging categories by discussing them with the participants. This participant appeared to be especially interested in the theme of 'education as a re-balancing strategy', pointing out that it had helped her to become more content with her life. One reason for this, she felt, was that people at college did not know that she was a mother and a wife, but that she was able to 'play a different role' and that this had enabled her to expand her horizons.

Interview 37

This interview was conducted on 10th October, 1997. One reason this participant had been chosen was that, during the initial telephone conversation, he pointed out that he was not from the local area but had moved up to the city from Ipswich. It was felt that this might give further insight into all the developing themes, especially as his learning choices had also involved a consideration of location, indicating that his convenience parameters were much wider than those of other adults in this study.

Again, it was felt that it was time to start verifying some of the emerging categories by discussing them with participants. This participant was especially helpful in this as he was able to engage in quite a complex theoretical discussion, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses in the theoretical development. Also, this interview was of particular significance as it alerted the researcher to the issue of the time needing to be right to return to education in terms of emotional and psychological development. For example, this participant pointed out that he had attempted to return to education on several occasions, but that he had not been 'ready' for study, especially in terms of what was happening at the time in his private life.

Finally, this interview was important as the themes of 'becoming attuned' and 'awareness-raising' were discussed in considerable depth. Again, this participant seemed to be suggesting that he had become attuned to the idea of returning to education over many of years of working and socialising with graduates and through his wife returning to education. Also, his awareness parameters were widened opportunistically by a chance encounter with a friend who had recently completed an access course. This helped to develop further the category of 'awareness raising', which again had been hinted at in many other transcripts, but needed to be returned to and explored in more depth.

Interview 38

This interview was conducted on 24th October, 1997. Again, this interview was used to help to verify and develop further the emerging theory, with considerable insight given into the 'education as a re-balancing strategy' theme. For example, this participant discussed the fact that he had spent much of his life attempting to maintain a balance in some way, especially because he found that he was almost experiencing a 'tug-of-war' between his working life and social life. He had become attuned to education over a long period of time because his wife worked in further education and most of the people with whom he socialised had studied for a degree. However, at work no one had been to university and the participant felt that this created 'tensions' in his life.

Also, this interview was of particular significance as it alerted the researcher to the issue of the time being right to return to education in terms of what is happening within specific academic disciplines. For example, the participant pointed out that he felt he had returned to education at the right time in terms of what was happening within the field of psychology as he would not have wanted to have been 'stuffed full of behaviourism back then'.

Interview 39

This interview took place on 28th October, 1997. This participant had been chosen as what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term an 'extreme case'. At this stage of the work, it was felt that the category of 'education as a re-balancing strategy' had almost been saturated, that is, no new data was emerging. However, it was felt that to completely saturate this category, it was necessary to consider someone who had been through a similar situation to other participants, but who had not chosen to re-balance their lives through returning to education. This helped to finally saturate the category by illustrating the importance of 'becoming attuned' and the relationship of this category to 'education as a re-balancing strategy'.

Interview 40

This was a repeat interview by telephone with the participant from Interview 15. Again, this was not the best method to adopt, but the participant felt that she was too busy to meet and that she could give the required information over the telephone. She reported that she had succeeded in returning to education and that she had sorted out her child-care responsibilities by receiving help from her mother. The interview took place on 14th November, 1997.

Interview 41

This was a repeat interview by telephone with the participant from Interview 16. It took place on 18th November, 1997. Again, this participant said that nothing had changed since the last interview, that she was studying on an access course and still intended to go into social work after her studies.

Interview 42

At this stage of the research it was felt that most of the categories had been saturated, and that it was important to attempt to clarify further some of the theoretical development. Also, the researcher felt that further insight into all the categories could be gained by speaking to people who had completed their studies as they could discuss whether their goals and ambitions had been achieved, especially in terms of whether returning to education had helped them to rebalance their lives. This participant had completed her degree and was enrolled on a postgraduate course and it was for this reason that she was chosen, as it was felt that she might be able to offer further insight into the emerging theory. The interview took place on 26th November, 1997.

Interview 43

This was the final interview which took place on 18th February, 1998. It was felt that the analysis was almost complete at this stage, but that it would be useful to speak to one more person who had completed their studies in order to look once again at the developing theory. This participant was chosen because he had completed his studies

and, as a university employee and adult returner, it was felt that he might be able to offer a valuable critique of the emerging theory.

APPENDIX 6:
EXAMPLES OF
TRANSCRIPTS

Appendix 6

Due to the large amount of paper involved, it has not been possible to include in this appendix the transcripts from each interview. However, it is useful for the reader to understand the interviewing method used for this research, and it is for this reason that two example transcripts have been included. These two transcripts have been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Transcript 1 is from the first interview undertaken for this research and helps to illustrate how this interview was unstructured, with the researcher picking up on points raised by the participant. However, this was a pilot interview, and as can be seen clearly, there were several aspects of the interview technique which needed modifying and improving upon in subsequent interviews. Secondly, this participant helped alert the researcher to several important themes, especially concerning how learning choices might change over a period of time. It is for this reason that the second transcript has been included, as it helps to illustrate these changes. Thirdly, this participant was very helpful in the research, having no objections to the full transcripts being reproduced. Other participants had disclosed some very personal information during the interviews, and it would not have been appropriate to include their transcripts in this document.

In the following transcripts all questions and comments made by the researcher are typed in bold.

Transcript: Interview 1

I began by explaining what the research was about, thanking him for taking part and ensuring confidentiality. He immediately began to talk about his situation and I asked if I could put the recorder on because what he was saying was important. The recording begins with:

That should be all right.

I've gone all shy now.

That always happens when that comes on...[laughter]

So well the only reason I can't go back to college full-time is I can't give up my job because I won't get money like dole. I won't get dole because I give it up voluntary. Like the government make a big thing about adults going back to education but they don't do anything to help you. Like even if you sign on the dole, like I know a couple of people and they've got to tell the dole office about it. They're only allowed to do so many hours and sometimes they throw them off the course because they're not looking for work. So the Government go on about all this yet they do nothing to help you...[long pause]

Yes I mean that's what I've found, erm, it's quite good when I read about the...[local college]...thing because some of the people there, you can get grants but they're very very small aren't they, and if you've got commitments...[this refers to a conversation before the tape was put on when David talked about a local college and said that his wife had just come back from there and that there were full-time students who had got grants but they were "up to their necks in debt"].

Well that's it, you try finding out about what would I get because Jane will get a grant now but with me working it won't be much...[pause]...er, we asked 'em if I could give up work and go back to college full-time, not sign on the dole, just sign on for my stamp, National Insurance stamp, but you only get, she would be able to claim more for me, it's only something like seven hundred pound a year more so there's going to be three of us living on what two thousand quid so I'm stuck, stuck in a rut, a dead end job, you know, I work with brain dead people...[laughter]...it's just getting to me and I want to go back but I can't go back full time.

So what is this you've decided to do, you're going to do evening classes?

Psychology yes.

Right.

It's only a GCSE Psychology because Jane had to do it for the year when she went to college and it just sounds very interesting...[pause]

Right, what is it about it that...

It's just why we act the way we do and, you know, why some people are violent and like Fitz of Cracker a criminal Psychologist...[laughter]...it's just interesting...[pause]...I'm just so fed up in work, working for..[a local company]...is getting to me. I moved to...[the city]...it will be four years this September, I'm a bricklayer by trade.

Yes I saw that on the form.

And, er, came up here looking for bricklaying work but nothing about, the recession was still at the peak then four years ago. I couldn't, we moved up on Saturday and Jane started work on the following Wednesday, she found a job and 'cos she was working I couldn't claim anything 'cos we were living together, I mean we were just married so we were man and wife and she was only earning ooh, she was bringing home about ninety-five quid so that was for two of us and, my son wasn't born and that was for two of us and we had to pay rent, water rates, well water metre it was on so that was like, it was the first job I was offered, like one of Jane's friends worked for...[a local company]...and she got me the job, got me the interview, so the first job that came along because I couldn't manage, you know? I signed a temporary contract for about three months and then they offered me a full-time job.

How long ago was that?

Four years, I only went there for three months four years ago...[laughter]...the only reason I've stayed with them for so long is the free bus pass like I get one, Jane gets one and you can use them on any bus company in...[the area]...because we haven't got a car now so that saves us a hell of a lot of money.

Yes. Yes.

But that's the only reason I've stayed there. But I want to do something, it's like the people I'm working with they've been there for twenty, thirty years. Like what I do is...[description of work within the local company]... It just gets to you just doing that all day everyday.

Yes.

I was working nights and afternoons, I came off them shifts, it's less money now, a hell of a lot less on mornings, but I came off them shifts, I weren't seeing my son, weren't seeing Jane, he was just born so I just kept on and on at me boss I'm going to leave, don't leave, we were short of people then so I said well I want to go on mornings then so it took me a couple of years to get onto mornings. I've only, last September I was on to mornings. I'm a bit happier now but I still want to get out of it. The people are just like ooh...[strange sound...pause].

So what made you think about, you say you want to get out of that job, erm, what sort of options did you think about?

Erm, I don't know. I done an access course in journalism when I was on afternoons but I was working, like you only got one weekend off a month, you get Monday/Tuesday one week and then Tuesday/Wednesday, the following you have to work seven and then get two off sort of thing and then you get a long weekend off like you get Friday, Saturday,

Sunday and Monday and I seen this, I mean we were living near...[a local college]...then, it was only a ten minute walk, and like Jane was in college then and she used to take Tom to the crèche so I would come home at two in the morning and Jane didn't come home 'till half three in the afternoon with Tom, I'd be leaving for work at half four so I'd only see her for an hour and I'd be stuck in the house on my own, I was just bored, so I was looking through a "Choices" and I just seen them and I just went down and signed up, found it, that was really good but it started at nine in the morning and I came home at two, have a shower, by the time you get into bed and fall asleep it's three o'clock. I would be up at what, seven and I'd be knackered, you know. A couple of weeks I missed going there because I was just too tired to get out of bed. So now I'm on mornings I want to look for something. You know, I don't want to be stuck in dead end jobs for the rest of my life so I want to do something before it's too late.

Right so how long did you do that access course for?

It was only for six months and that was one day a week, I must have missed about three days, I was just too tired.

Yes.

I found myself falling asleep, you know, in college. You didn't get anything at the end of it no certificate or anything it's just like you could have gone on to like there was a girl, she used to come from...[a local town]...everyday to go there, she's gone on to a proper journalism course now.

So was that in journalism, the access course?

Yes, I just found it interesting like, wrote a few short stories and stuff all on the disc there. It's just something to do with writing.

Have you sent any off?

I've been to the library in town and erm, Jane said you know these women's magazines, "Take A Break" and I send them to them, I got some addresses to send them off to, I show them to people and they say they are good, it's just the type of thing that the stories are.

Yes, oh well, keep, persevere with it.

Yes, I've been looking through "Choices" for creative writing they used to do at...[the local college]...and they don't anymore, or if they do it's in the day. Like most of the courses I would like to go on are in the day. Obviously there are ones at night, but you haven't got much choice. So I just want to win the lottery and go to college.

Yes. What was it particularly about journalism then and about the writing that you enjoy?

Well because I wrote short courses, like...[pause]...what's his name, Gerry Wybeck I think he's a retired journalist, he's an old fellow he used to work for the Sun and The Daily Mail and he just showed you how to write, like he was saying people used to make

fun of him when he was working for the Sun, seven years olds can read that, you know, it's not like the Observer, but he was saying it's very hard, he said the journalists on the Sun are better than the ones on the so called posh papers because he said to get a story like a political story and write it, you know get it printed in paper so a ten year old can understand it it's very hard to do and people don't realise that like, and he just showed you how to write things.

So is it, I notice on your questionnaire that you actually ticked media and journalism, is that something that you still want to carry on doing?

Yes, but it's in the day and that's why I'm stuck in a rut I just can't give up work but me and Jane have talked about it and she is going to be four years in university and if I can't do anything now like in four years time I will be thirty and I will be able to go, she'll get a job after. Tom will be in school, he will have been in school a couple of years, and then I can go back full-time so hopefully if I can't do anything now. I'd like to do something now but four years is always a long time when you're stuck in a job.

How do you feel about Jane going and doing that?

I think it's great. She's been a bit worried because she said some of the women in college with their husbands have been a bit funny, ooh what the bloody hell are you doing that for, stay home and wash the dishes and you know. I'm not like that and I think it's great, because she went to college after she left school. She done music A level and she got up to Grade 7 on the piano, she teaches, you know people come here and she gives a few lessons, but you just don't want to be stuck in crap jobs both of us. So I think it's great that she's doing it. But women in college say oh my husband and they try to stop them going to university and she's been worried that when she starts university I'm going to be funny which I'm not, but she said oh I need a lot of time to work, but it doesn't bother me. Here he comes. Hello...[Tom comes up to the toilet and Jane shuts the door to the office].

Erm, right, what else. Thinking back then looking at, erm, your education at school what are your memories about school in general?

Er, bored. I went to a Catholic school in Merthyr Tydfil, we had nuns teaching there, it's not that I'm thick I just didn't try. It was twelve miles away the school from a little village called ...[name of village]... in south Wales.

I'll never be able to spell that...[laughter].

...[spells the name]...

Thank you.

All my friends, it was a small village, I grew up with them I'd known them since I was a baby, grew up with them, they went to a school about three or four miles away, a secondary school but because I was a Catholic my bloody mother sent me to this Catholic school, my sister went and there was only five, six people from my village and the next two villages that went to that school and when you get to eleven it was like there was one boy I knew in that class, in the whole school apart from my sister. Oh god

I just hated it there, you know, for the first year I didn't know anyone. I was just bored, like my reports and stuff up until, I don't know what you call them, but the fourth year, fourteen, fifteen, I don't know what...

Yes, I'd say fourth year, yes.

Year whatever now. Great in the eighties and the nineties and then in the last year I just got bored and I knew, because my uncle is a builder, and I knew I had got a job with him as soon as I left school so I just didn't bother and I left school on the Wednesday and I started work for him on the Thursday for cash because I had to go to college in September to do my apprenticeship, I did three months in college and three months on building sites, so I knew I would get a trade at the end of it and it was like get yourself a trade boy, you know, you'll be OK everyone needs bricklayers and so I just didn't bother. Boredom.

Were there any, do you remember any particular subjects at school that you really liked?

English, it's writing again, I've always liked writing and reading, Jane has a go at me because I read so much, it's like when you pick up a book that's good you don't want to put it down, so English again, I've always like English.

What do you reckon it is about that then? Because that's something my research is interested in is why people go for particular subjects, what it is about them that interests them, but it is a difficult thing to...

Yes, I don't know, I've always liked it, you know, I've got my son now, he loves books, he'll be three at the end of August, he's always, since he's a few months old he's always had a book in front of him and he would be pointing at the words and the pictures. Like when we settle him down at night we go through, they're only small kids books, you have to read about eight, nine books, he just loves books. Jane can't understand why because she's never been one for reading or, you know, anything. I don't know, I just like reading and writing.

Right and that's for as long as you can remember?

Yes I don't think there's a particular reason why it's just like other people, like I'm from Wales everyone likes rugby apart from me, I just take no interest at all in it like me and a couple of friends at school we used to fake letters for games teacher and go bunking off. I've just no interest in sport, I don't know why but I'm classed as a leper, you're Welsh, you must like rugby, but I don't know, I would rather read than play rugby or play any sport, I've got no interest in sport at all, I like swimming but you know, it's not a competitive sport is it as such.

Was there anything else, any other subjects you can remember that you enjoyed?

Woodwork, metalwork, typical boys stuff, I couldn't get the hang of chemistry, I hated that. Biology was OK I liked that. Maths I was OK at, it was boredom again, not listening. Music but she was a crap music teacher, I couldn't get over it when we first moved up here and Jane was saying like kids at school they're learning to play

instruments and down there it's like you had to take it until you were twelve and then you get options, everyone dropped out after that because it was just Mrs. Price, her husband was our woodwork teacher. About four rings on each finger, you know, big chunky horrible disgusting ones and she just sat at the piano and played like you listen to me this is music. I remember this song from when I was eleven and I'm twenty-six now, fifteen years about the Titanic, she just drummed it into us. It weren't like this is how you play the instruments, it was just like the lesson was an hour long and you would go in there and she was just ear banging away there at the piano and you're just like oh god, what time does it finish. So it was a crap school. I think that had a lot to do with it, they didn't push you for anything, you know, if they saw you were good at something it was so what, it was a terrible school I think.

So do you think that effected your idea of what education...

Yes, like Jane's been telling me about what she did in school and her school sounded great but my school was terrible. Because it was a Catholic school they made us, well I didn't go but practically the whole school went and the Pope was on this world tour, you know, eighty-two, eighty-three, whenever. He was at Cardiff Arms Park, practically the whole school had to go, there must have been about twelve of us out of the whole school didn't go. Why didn't you want to go, you're a Catholic, you should pray, you know, they just forced you into religion like I was forced. I don't go to church now since I've been about thirteen, I was forced into it, like I was born in Wales but all my family's Irish, Irish Catholics and they've always gone to church. My father and his brothers, he's got seven brothers and a sister, a proper Irish family, and it was just forced into because they went, her mother my grandmother, she would go about four times a week and she would take them after school. Father used to take us on a Sunday and it would be oh god no, I used to hate it, let me go and play I'm a kid, don't make me go to church, so I wouldn't force it on Tom. So I was forced into that and I was forced to go to a Catholic school. It was a terrible school, nuns of all people teaching.

So you think, basically your memories are around that one school and what it was like?

Terrible, yes.

Going back then to the subjects, which subjects, you said you didn't like music...

No I would have liked to have done if it was what Jane has been saying like they teach you because she plays guitar as well and she's been trying to teach me and she just says like you're crap, you know, tone deaf, everything. But I've always loved music and I would have loved to have been able to play an instrument. Another reason, my mother, I don't know, it's always been my sister, you know, I've been like the black sheep of the family, it's always been my sister, everything. She's a couple of years older, I don't know if it's because she was a prem baby, she was three and a half months premature. She will be twenty-eight now, twenty-nine, something like that, and er she had to have the last rites and the priest came because they thought they were going to lose her. So I don't know if they've molycoddled her and just said you've been OK when you were born. It's always been my sister for everything. She was pushed into stuff but they just ignored me.

Is it you and your sister in your family or have you got any more bothers or sisters?

No that's it, just me and my sister and now it's my sister and her husband who are great. Now him, he was brought up, his mother and father, you know these travellers, this has upset Jane. He never went to, he was brought up until he was about fifteen just travelling around the country living in caravans, hardly ever went to school. He joined the army for a couple of years, he went in for a couple of years, and he came out and he was working as a pot washer in a hotel, he lies. Jane used to work with him because we all worked, my sister lived in the Scilly Isles off Cornwall for seven, eight years, Jane went, Jane seen an advert in the job centre in ...[the local village]... for waitressing out there so she went out for two years and I went to see my sister on my twenty-first birthday she paid for me to go out, that's where I met Jane and my sister met Jim her husband...[pause]...first time I saw him it's like oh god what's she doing with him she can get better. Like all his hair was matted and he was dirty and he smelled, it was terrible and she was too embarrassed to tell people she was going out with him yet she ends up marrying him...[pause]...like I can see through people if they're telling lies you know they're lying and he's always lied. He's never been to school like he's told me this before and suddenly now, and this has got to Jane, he has applied through UCAS to go to university, as an accountant to start at Swansea University next September yet he's got no qualifications, he's lied on his forms. Like Jane has worked hard for two years in college and he's just lied and they haven't found him out and she's on about, you've got a Welsh accent, if I phone them up they will think it's funny, grass on him because like he's told my mother that he's got all these qualifications. Best thing since sliced bread, it's like why don't you do something? I say well I'm trying, I'm doing it the proper way, he's got no qualifications yet she has because he's married to my sister, great, bees knees, you know. I still a black sheep so.

So did you say, does your mum try and push you into doing something then?

No she never has it's just like my sister all the time. Like I moved up here, found myself a job and you know, it was hard for me when I first moved up here. I didn't know anyone, only Jane and her mother and father and then my sister moved back to the village that I'm from, and she came up to visit us. And she hasn't said oh you've done well going out and finding yourself a job, getting yourself a flat. We lived in a flat then, you know, buying all this because we didn't have a fridge, we had nothing when we came up here. You see the house we rented in Wales it was furnished so we had to buy everything from scratch. She just looked round the house, oh when are you going to get it decorated, you know, I don't know, give me the money like. Like my father, I don't want their money but my father like he's got a good job, he's a foreman for Wimpey open cast mining and he brings home about four hundred and seventy quid a week, am I waffling on, is the tape running out?

No, I was just checking, it's fine.

And I've never had a penny of it, you know, I don't want his money, like but he's never offered us anything. Like we moved into here and we've been decorating the rooms, like the living room is scruffy because we just haven't got the money yet 'cos we're doing a room at a time and that's the only room left to do, but they haven't offered to help. My grandmother came over last year from Ireland because we went the year before, Tom was only one then 'cos she's eighty-three we didn't think she would be alive to see him,

you know, but she came over last year to see me and see Tom and she told me that erm...[pause]...like they've never offered us anything but my sister had got the house that me and Jane were living in, it's all furnished yet she's pleading poverty, my sister, and er they're always giving her money like they bought her a rug to go in front of the fire. Sixty quid, my grandmother told me this so I asked my mother about it, she's lying, she's lying, you know. It's just barmy, it's always my sister so she's pushed into things and it's just like knock me down, you know, so I just didn't bother trying. But I know I'm not thick and it's just through lack of, boredom, couldn't be bothered, I knew I would get a trade, you know, after I left school I would be all right in a trade for life sort of thing, everyone needs builders. It's not like that anymore so I want to go back and do something with my life, just to prove it to myself, just to get a decent job 'cos people I work with, oh god, I hate going, they're just thick.

Are there any other reasons then, you said about wanting to improve yourself and do it for yourself, are there any other reasons that you want to go...

What to go back full time or this course I'm doing now?

Well both.

It's to get me out of the house now this course and to get me back into learning sort of thing.

Right.

'cos Jane will be busy in September in college, er university I mean, and it's like oh what am I going to do? I'm going to get up go to work come home go to bed get up. I just want to do something and I don't like sports, I couldn't go out and play sports and I'm not one for going out boozing, you know, so I may as well get an education, doing something, it just gets you back into the learning system sort of thing because I'm twenty-six, left school ten years ago well, apart from going to college doing my apprenticeship because you had to learn all the theory about different buildings so that's the only education I've had since.

So you're going to do psychology?

Yes.

You also talked about, erm, counselling, what is it about counselling?

Well Jane is, she got post-natal depression when Tom, she's on Prozac and stuff and she went to this one counsellor up, oh god...[pause]...[a local area]... way and he was just like er, 'cos some doctors just like oh it don't exist, you know, there's nothing wrong with you 'cos they haven't been through it, you know. She's getting better now, she's on Prozac as well so. But she's been having counselling like at doctors up here they've just took on a counsellor, he's only there on a Saturday, and er, she had to go for I think it was eight weeks, seven or eight weeks every Saturday for an hour, two hours to see him. Now that helped her a lot but her father died a couple of months ago of cancer and that knocked her back a bit, but he said to her any time you want to come and see me, you know, come, it's just helped her, counselling. Like the other one she went to he was

just like oh pull yourself together woman, it don't exist, but the doctors have been very good and she went to post-natal depression classes, midwives run that at is it ..[a local hospital]...?

Yes.

They were running that then a couple of midwives that were like counselling her had had it themselves so they knew what they were talking about. And I just think it would be helpful to her, if I, like I would sit and talk and listened to her but I think there's something more I could do so that would be helpful but she hasn't been in touch yet, the tutor.

Where is that, which tutor's that?

Oh it says in here...[picks up a copy of Choices]...it's for ...[a local school]... down here, it's part of ...[a local college]... it'll be there but, I'll show you now in Choices. I know you can't see this on the tape, I left it out, I was looking at it in the garden the other day and I left it out and it started raining, it only rained for weeks...[pause as David looks through Choices]...that's the psychology...[pause]...counselling you get South Yorkshire Open College Federation and where was it, basic, it was on a Tuesday seven 'til nine and I went when I signed up for that and they said they're not doing basic any more, it's basic two which is the next level. So I don't know if they didn't have enough interest or what for that so she said the tutor wants people who's already done the basic to join in the other class so they said they would have a word with her to see if I couldn't come in because I explained why and they said alright we'll get her to phone you. I enrolled last Wednesday, Thursday.

Right, so you're hoping to do that this year?

Hopefully yes. It's just interesting like media and journalism is in the day, all day and I can't get time off work and stuck in a rut again, the Government should get their act together.

I'm just thinking you ticked one other one didn't you, something about...[gets out personal profile sheet]...oh yes there was health and nursing wasn't there?

Yes because I went through a phase only last year, er...[pause]...ambulance driver, now I applied, you apply through ...[a local town]... but I had points on my licence then and they said write back when your licence is clear and all that. But I've seen jobs advertised that before you become a proper ambulance driver you've got to do a year, have you seen these little buses they take old people to and from...

Yes, yes.

You know, they don't use proper ambulances, they take them there in the morning and they bring them home in the afternoon, you start off with that. I don't know, it's just helping people, I would like to do something like that, I just want to help people.

So what sort of courses would you want to do in that sort of area?

Well they wrote back and told me you get more chance with doing first aid, you know, stuff like that, get a few certificates in that...[unable to make out two words]...I don't know if they still do it. I haven't looked in here for it, I don't know if they still do them at ...[unable to make out some words]... they used to do it there but they stopped a load of classes there. It's something to do.

Jumping on a bit then you say that when Jane finishes her four years then you will think about going back full time. Do you have anything specific in mind that you want to do?

Yes, journalism or psychology.

Right, a degree or...

Yes I have to go to college for a couple of years first then and get the qualifications to get in to university. When she finishes and gets a good job I can pack work up and away we go. I just want to be, like a couple of my friends work with steel. Oh I don't know, they're getting brain dead as well. Like they might be earning shit-hot money but I think there's more to life. You've got to be happy in your work, to go to work in the morning and it's oh God, another day, five days a week of this.

What sort of work do you hope to be doing then, what's the ultimate aim of this?

I don't know, I haven't thought that far ahead, I would like to be a professional writer but it's getting work published...[laughter]...I've started a book, I've got a chapter done, it's about erm, it's based on ...[a local university...[laughter]...if I get it printed and it becomes a best seller I'll let you have a copy.

Thanks...[laughter]

Like some of the students are getting like disfigured by somebody, I'll tell you no more yet.

That's one of the questions actually I was going to ask you was erm, what sort of perceptions do you have of students and [the local university]... I mean have you been there?

No, a big population, I mean how many is it, fifty thousand I read somewhere?

I haven't got a clue.

I read somewhere it's one in ten of the population of ...[the city]... is students, something like fifty thousand...[pause]...I don't know, I'm more open minded than some people. Some people are saying well they complain they've got no money and their grant cheque they go pissing it up against the wall and out buying pizzas and you know. A couple of my friends have been at at the end of the year they're like three thousand in debt so, you know, that's up to them. Like my friend was complaining when I was bricklaying, in the summer he used to come and labour for us for cash, and he said oh I've got another letter off my bank manager. He said I owe three thousand pounds and I said well you shouldn't go out every night. I don't, I don't, I said you do you're a bloody student, he

says I don't I need to buy pencils and pens, you know, he's out every night and going to concerts. People just see 'em, I think, not me, good luck to 'em, you know, it's up to them what they want to do, you know, you're only young once so you may as well enjoy it and get into debt, it's the banks money for a few years anyway...[laughter]...I think older people who are stuck in jobs, they don't like students. They say oh bloody hell they're out, you know, I'm working hard I can't afford to go out every night and yet, you know, they're supposed to be skint...[pause]...it don't bother me...[long pause]

I'm just trying to think if there's anything else I need to ask...[pause]

Am I doing OK?

Yes, I've hardly asked you anything, you've just been saying everything I've got down on my list.

Jane tells me to shut up, waffle on too much...[pause]

When you decided, erm, about doing some sort of course did you know where to go for information?

You get people coming into work and putting stickers on buses, advert, you know, inside buses. A few years ago I've seen, like they're advertising now about 'Choices' magazine. It was really last year I've seen it advertised. In like the ...[local paper]... they advertise about it. It's all over the buses now, loads of buses have got them now. Do a lot of people take up on it now?

Sorry?

Do a lot of people join up for courses?

Where?

Just in the colleges, you know, adults that's working?

I haven't got a clue, I don't know what the college enrolment is at all.

Because it says if there's not enough people on the course then they just drop it.

Yes they have to have a certain amount, their funding means that they have to have a certain amount on the course. I don't know how many it is now it's gone up since I remember, but yes, they can't run them if they don't have enough.

Jane was saying the other day that's not fair, you know, education should be free whatever your age, she's got a point. That psychology is eighty-six pounds but I got it free because we get family credit so, we only just get family credit it's only a few quid but because I got it it's free so...

So you say it's going to be at ...[a local school]... was that because it's local, was that your reason?

Yes because I get home at half three, it starts at six, half six and it's only five minutes away by bus so like if it's the other end of town I would come home, have a shower, have my tea and rush out. Like now I can come home and relax for an hour and dawdle on down there. Some of the good courses are like miles away and like ...[a local college]... is closing I think next year is it?

Is it, I don't know?

Yes and they're building a new one in ...[a local residential area]... so that will be like near I suppose. I don't know if they keep these little sectors open but I don't know, I just don't think the Government should penalise you if you want to give up work and show that you've gone into education full time, because in the long run it's better because you earn more money, so you pay more taxes, so it's better for the Government in the long run that way. But you give up work, no dole, you know, you give up voluntary, so like Jane was saying well you know, hit your boss or something and get the sack. You get the sack, you don't get no dole, the only way is to lay you off so there's no chance of that.

So when you're thinking about going after Jane's finished hers have you got a particular place in mind that you would go to?

I would go to the other end of ...[the local city]... if the course was there if there wasn't anything over here 'cos I wouldn't be working so...

So it's the course you would look at rather than the place?

Yes but the night time ones, the place has got a lot to do with it because you don't finish 'til nine and if it's the other end of town it's getting back, you know. I'm up for five in the morning so, you know, it's going to be hard. So that's a lot to do with it now, and you know when I sent that back to you, one of those red leaflets?

Yes.

...[name of a friend]... when I went to enrol there was only two names on the enrolment form, two women and she put mine on so there was only three of us then but they only started enrolling last Monday.

Yes, and you often find, I know when I did a course at the college I enrolled right at the beginning of the course so that was September and there was a mad rush, loads of people went and enrolled, so they will hold off until, I mean psychology is popular, I wouldn't have thought you would have too much of a problem.

She's going ...[name of friend]... she's doing psychology, did you send her a questionnaire?

Yes.

She was saying she wants to do childcare and nursery nursing and what not and she said psychology because I phoned her up and told her, oh you're going to school with me. And I asked her why she picked psychology. Because I work with her husband, but I

didn't have a clue she was, well he's a bus driver now he used to work in the garage but he's gone now. And I asked her why and she said the nursery nursing she can't get on, it's such a big, it's full up already, she can't get on 'till next year. You've got to apply this December for next September for nursery nursing and part of the course is child development so she thought that would help, I'm getting off the track a bit, she will probably tell you all this.

No that's relevant as I say. How are we doing? Is there anything else that you want to add because I've actually, I mean I've covered all the areas that, as I say, yours is the first one so I don't really no exactly what I want to cover...

Come back again if you want.

I tell you what, I'd like to find out how you do after your psychology because I'm doing this for three years so one of the things I'm interested in is how people's choices change as they progress through...

Yes, no problem, yes.

I'm wondering after a year of psychology will you have changed what you want to do.

Yep, come back.

Here we go then.

Right, in the last interview you were going to do a psychology course. Have you done that?

Yes, but I stopped in March, erm, I was getting really good grades, I was getting ninety sixes, ninety seven percent, you know, with the homework he was setting and I really enjoyed it. But me and my wife spilt up and I got custody so I had to stop, I couldn't get baby-sitters and all that so. He was upset as well, the lecturer, he kept 'phoning up as well, I'd been out with him for a drink, he asked me if I could get a baby-sitter to go back to it because, you know, he said you were good at it, you would have done well. So I would have stuck with it if it weren't for him.

Has Tom started school yet?

He's starting nursery tomorrow at the school nursery. He's been going to a private nursery when I've been in work and all that and he's starting the school nursery Thursday, tomorrow and he's going to the actual school Easter term. It's just hard going to night school because I've got him. But I would go again, but because of this.

So you say you started it last September and you carried on 'til March?

Yes.

And you said you were getting very good grades for it?

Yes, do you want to see them? I've still got all the books.

No, you're OK, don't worry. And you say if you could sort something with Tom you would go back?

Yes, I definitely would, yes.

Right, I remember in the last interview you said your main motivations were because of work, you thought you were stuck in a rut. Has anything changed from that?

Work, no, I've gone part-time since all this has happened so they've been very good about that. I start work at nine, I take him down to Jane's mother in the morning, she like takes him to nursery and that and I pick him up, I get home about half two, I work nine 'til two shift. It's just I know I hated it but if I weren't working I'd just go mad, it's something to do, so there we are. I'm a bit happier now.

What, happier at work?

Yes, 'cos I'm only there five hours now...[laughter]...fifteen hours less, but, you know.

Did you do anything else, because I know in the last interview you talked about journalism?

I started an English course as well, but I had to give that up as well. English Language and Literature, but, you know, I'm stuck.

What course was that?

It's just O level, well GCSE it was, at ...[a local college]...

How did you find that?

Great, I loved it, really good, but one of them things, I wouldn't have given them up if it wasn't for all this, so, you know, there we are, I've gone all shy now.

OK, don't worry. Something I've been working on in this research is that people use education as a way of improving their chances for the future. I mean, what do you think about that?

Yes, well, but, mostly like that, but something to do at night as well. It's like the people I know they go to the pub, you know, all the time, that would be their night out going to the pub. And it weren't for me, you just want to keep your brain active, but it was mostly to improve my job prospects but I'm a bit knackered with that now, he's got to come first.

Are you intending staying in that job then?

I am for the time being because the hours suit me. I don't like the work but it's the hours, it's got to fit in with school and nursery, you know. My bosses are happy enough for me to do it so I can't complain, I'm not pushing my luck with 'em, so, you know.

That's something I'm thinking about is that people who have got stable jobs, secure jobs, even though they might not like them...

Yes, it's habit isn't it, I think they're too scared to branch out into something new, try something new, a new job.

Do you think it's harder?

In what way?

I mean if you do have a stable job, something that's quite secure, do you think it's harder...

To give that up?

Yes.

If I didn't have a son and stuff it wouldn't be for me. But it's like a secure job, it's money coming in each week. If I was single, because like when I was brick-laying I was

subcontracting as a brick-layer, we would go and work for big firms. We might work for four months for seven days a week, you only get paid for what you do, then we'd be out of work for a month but it wouldn't bother me because we'd been earning such good money, it wouldn't bother me. I had no commitments, as long as I could pay the rent, you know. But it wouldn't bother me not working for that month, I couldn't sign on because we were like subcontracting, you were like self-employed so you couldn't sign on. So I wasn't on the dole that month, you'd just be living off the money you earned, so that wouldn't bother. But I don't know, as I've got older I don't know if I could do that again, even if I didn't have Tom, I don't think I could do that not knowing if the money is coming in all the time. But with this job the money is there every week so, work's boring and crap and brain dead but it's safe. I would find it hard to give that up now 'cos I mean I would have to find another part-time job with them hours. But they're OK about it at work so I'm not going to push it. You should talk to me in another year, I might tell you different.

Yes, I wish I could, but hopefully I'll nearly be finished by then. Something else I've been thinking about is what do people think is a good job and what isn't. I know last time you said it's really boring, the people you work with are brain dead.

Yes, that hasn't changed.

This is interesting then, because your job hasn't changed but your life has changed which has made the job more...

Bearable, yes. Well, I don't know if it's more bearable, if I was still doing forty hours a week I would be going mad there. Because it's like I get there at ten to nine, by the time I start work, well it's gone. Five hours have gone so I just keep myself busy, out of everyone's way, do my five hours. But if it was eight hours, oh God. It's like because I'm doing five hours my break has changed, you know, the time, because I'm starting late and finishing early and that. So the people that are a bit brain-dead, I'm not having a break with them, so it's like I'm normally on my own. I have a break on my own which don't bother me. I grab a newspaper and sit down for twenty minutes. I'm not with them listening to them talk about bloody football all the time.

So you're not mixing with the same people as much?

Not as much, no.

And your hours are shortened which has made it easier?

A hell of a lot better, yes.

Is there anything else then that has made the work easier?

Yes, my boss, he's leaving Friday so he doesn't give a shit about anything. But we've got a new boss Monday so I don't know if it's all going to change. So over the last couple of months he just hasn't cared about anything. He's taking early retirement so it's just like oh I'm not bothered, do what you want. It's been easier the past couple of months because he's been in a really good mood which has been good because he's a

bastard basically so, but that's going to change next week, I know it is with our new boss so.

Have you no idea what the new boss is going to be like?

I've seen him, he works in a different garage, but, I take people as I find them, I mean like some people say oh he's terrible, he's a tyrant, you know, others have said he's the best bloke they've got, so I'll have to see. 'Phone me up next week and I'll tell you...[laughter]...

Oh, I hope he's all right for you...[laughter]...so, if you had a choice of any sort of job, what would your ideal job be?

Writing, that hasn't changed at all, something to do with writing. I actually, did I tell you last time I was writing short stories?

Yes, what's happened there?

People have been on at me to send them off and I sent one off to 'Chat' and I had my first rejection letter, I'm not bothered, people I've shown them to, they think they're good so, I don't know, it's like someone gets killed in them so it's not the type of thing they might print, I mean it's a good story, even if I do say so myself.

Have you ever considered correspondence courses?

Like writing?

Yes.

I wrote off to Writers Bureau, you see 'em in papers and stuff but it was something like three hundred and forty-two quid which they want up front, you know. They started sending me letters saying you could pay it in ten easy instalments, but I can't because I'm part-time and stuff and I haven't got any spare money. But it's really interesting, the stuff they send you, and if you don't, by the time, you can do the course at your own pace and if you haven't got the fee back by the time you finish the course with stuff you send into magazines or whatever, you get all your course fee back. If you haven't earned that by the time you finish the course they give you your money back.

Right, so it's just that money up front?

Yes. If it was like a pound a week I would do it. But it is really interesting, all the leaflets they sent me. If I had the money I would write off to them.

Have you read any books on this, at the library or anything?

No, well, I actually went a few years ago to the library in town, you can't take this book out, it tells you what publishers want and how to go about sending it to them and how to get it printed properly, you know, how they like it set out, it was helpful, I took notes from it.

So when you say you would like to do writing, are you talking about being a freelance writer or working for someone?

Novels, books, you know.

Yes, didn't you say you were starting a novel last time?

Yes, well there's been a lot going on so I've done about two chapters, it's finding the time and stuff now, it's always there at the back of my mind that I should start up again doing it. By the time he goes down I'm knackered so I go to bed, you know, it's just time, I've got to get into a routine.

Going back to your course then, was the course what you expected it to be?

I don't know what I was expecting because I finished school what ten years ago so, eleven years ago. So when I was brick-laying I had to go to college and learn all the theory and all that but it's not the same is it because I was doing the actual brick-laying job and I was just going to college to learn the theory about that job, it wasn't something different. I wasn't expecting anything really, I was nervous, I was the only bloke in the class. My friend did it, she's doing the A level now. We were getting the same marks and we weren't cheating, we weren't copying, but er, she's done really well at it. I think it's Mondays, Monday nights she goes, she's really enjoying it, she got an A in the exam, I still see all the others, you know.

So were you OK being the only bloke in it?

I was a bit put out the first time. There was one woman called Jeanne. Nice woman, but once she gets going on a subject, on anything, she just sees one thing and she's right. She packed it in because Rob, the lecturer, criticised her one day. He weren't really having a go, just saying, she handed in some course work and he said, you know, it weren't very good and she started mouthing off to him and stormed out and never came back. We started off, I think there was thirteen in the class, well I left, I would have stayed if it wasn't for all this, and it got down to four.

Went down to four?

Went down to four, people started dropping off each week. There's one Lisa, she was ill, she had to leave, she was only young but she was ill. There was one about seventeen, Rachel, she would come and go, you know, you wouldn't see her for about two months, she was out with her boyfriend in his car. You could tell from the first night she weren't really interested, she's very timid as well, shy.

What did you think about the teaching methods?

Great, he was really good, he explained a lot of things. Some of the people there, early on he would talk about stuff and you would have to take notes, but we'd have to tell him, shut up, slow down, because he teaches every day so he's used to, you know. We haven't done it for ten, there's a woman there in her fifties and she done this and is not used to taking notes and stuff, so she had to tell him to shut up and slow down, but he didn't take offence or anything. That was all, he would ramble on for a bit and he would

go on to a different thing, Spice Girls he was always getting onto the Spice Girls, he'd bring the Spice Girls into it, what was the one, Scary Spice, he had a thing about her...[laughter]...We'd be there two and a half hours and he could talk each week half hour about the Spice Girls, which one he finds the sexist. And then we were behind, you know, with the agenda he'd set out, but it was his fault, and he was always like let's go quarter of an hour earlier and go to the pub. But he's a great bloke. And all them that done the exams, my friend got an A anyway, I think all of them did, I mean there was only four of them, but he was really interesting and I would have stuck with it if it weren't for all this bother.

Do you think going on that course changed you, as a person, in anyway?

Personality or...?

Anything.

Not personality. I would wind them up in work about it, it's like they would say something and I would go aah, I know why you're saying that, I know what you mean. You know, they got a bit fed up of it over the months, they would say oh don't say anything, bloody...[name of participant]...will analyse you, he'll have you on the couch, all good humoured like, but it made a change because I hate football, any sport and that's all they talk about. And it's like God, it's doing my head in, but when they were asking how the course was going I was telling them and like some of them were interested and they started talking about things like that which was good.

Yes, I was going to ask you what the reaction of your work mates was.

Some were "what the bloody hell do you want to do that for" and you know, because I don't want to end up like you that's why...[laughter]...quite a few of them were interested in it but they said, "oh I don't think I'll be able to go".

This is something I'm really interested in, why do some people decide they want to return and some people don't?

Yes, me it's a couple of reasons, better job prospects, I don't want to be working with buses or brick-laying all my life, and it's something to do, like an hobby. I mean I was enjoying it. If I hated it I wouldn't have stuck with it, I mean like some people who dropped out, I see them and it's like oh I didn't like going but they wanted to get better qualifications so they stuck it as best they could. I really enjoyed it, I've always been interested in something like that.

Can you say which of those is more important to you, whether it's interesting or going to be of use to the future?

Interesting. I think if you're interested in it you're going to take more notice. Yes, interesting, it's got to be.

So you were saying that some of those that did the course for the qualification...

Well yes, that Jeanne that dropped out, she were doing three I think for that year, she wants to be a nurse and she needs five O levels, GCSEs, so she was just picking courses so she could get like an O level out of it so she'll be able to go into nursing and that was the only reason she were doing it, or so she told me anyway.

So you think people are more likely to stick with it if it's interesting?

Oh yes. In the class next to us it was German and they were saying the teacher was monotonous and they were just like falling asleep, so they weren't enjoying it and that class went down, you know the numbers dwindled.

So if it's interest then, what is it that makes it interesting?

What psychology you mean, or courses in general?

Well, I suppose there's two things here isn't there? There's one that you thought you would be interested in it before you started and that's one reason why you went for it, but also that you were interested in it while you were doing it.

Yes, I don't know, perhaps it was the way he was, he wasn't like you know when you're in school and like a teacher, it wasn't like him and us sort of thing. He was down to earth and, you know, he was really good and he wanted to go for a drink and, you know, you wouldn't just talk about, you know when we had a break he wouldn't talk about psychology if you didn't want to, if you asked him he would, but he would talk about other things, Spice Girls normally.

So why was it initially then before you started the course...

Why psychology? I don't know, I just want to know what makes people tick, the way they behave, why they do it, why some people are like, like we were doing this when I packed it in, violence, why people at football crowds we were doing, how a little gang starts fighting can turn into ten thousand start fighting, how that escalates, you know, like crowd mentality. You know, how you act different on your own or with a group of people you've known all your life compared to somebody. You're more likely to act yourself with people you know than with strangers, you'll be a bit more reserved, you'll be worrying what they think, or most people will anyway. You know, if you just mess around with your mates they know you, so they wouldn't criticise you, well, up to a point I suppose. It's just stuff like that, why we act the way we do.

Where do you think that interest came from?

Haven't a clue. I don't know. It's always been there, it's like I always read, I like reading lots of books about anything, I don't know, perhaps I just read something about it.

Was psychology something that was offered at your school as a subject?

No, not at all.

Right, well can you remember when you first heard of psychology as a subject, or when you first thought about it?

I don't know, I think I'd seen something on telly, a documentary, you know, Panorama or something. Oh, I read a book about Charles Manson, you know, and he co-wrote it with the psychologist from his cell, it was written in the seventies, I read that and it was really good...[interruption as son talks to us]...so I don't know. So I can't like put a time or date on when it started, but I've always seemed to be interested in things like that because I've never been sporty or, I'd rather read a book. When you're growing up as a kid, football, well rugby in Wales and I'd say no, I'm reading, and they'd say what's up with you, are you a puff? I don't know, but that book was really good. I actually felt sorry for him. I don't know if it was all lies, it probably was, but you know, I ended up feeling sorry for Charles Manson, because of his upbringing, how he was abused. Most abuses, not just sexually, child abusers, I mean beat them and that, that happened to them as a kid and they're just carrying on because they think it's normal, you know, it's just stuff like that. Like Jane, my wife, because we're still married, one of her friends in university, her husband is a psychiatric nurse and he treats child sex offenders and he was saying they don't see anything wrong. He says you've got to sit down with them for an hour a day as a group and ask them why, and he said the stories, he wouldn't really go into much depth about, you know, what they did. He said you just want to punch their bloody lights out, they're bragging about it because they just don't see anything wrong with it. Like some would only go for blonde blue-eyed bonnies, others find that repulsive, you know, just brown-haired boys or girls or whatever. Like they say a child molester wouldn't molest a child for the sake of it, they would have to be his type, who he fancied sort of thing, you know. It's just stuff like that, you know, why people are like that, why some people are more likely to turn into criminals. By the age of five apparently, Freud said, your character is fully developed, the type of person you're going to be when you grow up. It's determined by the age of five, the upbringing, if you've had a crap upbringing by the age of five you're knackered for life basically.

Oh, I didn't know that, do you think that might have any relevance when I'm looking at attitudes towards education?

I don't know, I didn't like school because of the teachers, they weren't interesting, they were just reeling figures off and statistics and that, they weren't like encouraging you to learn, it was just like here they are, here are the facts and they'd just reel it off and I was bored. But I've heard a lot of people say about night school and stuff, it's nothing like school which it isn't. But I don't know, I knew I would have a job when I left school, I left school on a Wednesday and I started work on Thursday, that was in July, but I actually went to college in September when I started my apprenticeship properly. I was working for cash then, cash in hand, I wasn't on the books, but I knew I had a job like since I was fourteen because my uncle was a big building contractor so I knew I would have a job with him.

That's interesting, I mean I remember you saying that you stopped the brick-laying because of the recession and everything and the work just wasn't available, but at the time you left school you saw that as, I mean was it something you wanted to do or...

Looking back, no. Probably at the time, yes, because I just wanted to leave school and get out and earn money. Like some of my friends stayed on and went to college full-time, I would go for three months and then work on a building site for three months and then go back, it was like block release they called it. They were there like full time and some of them went onto university, but they haven't got jobs now, but when they do get the jobs they're going to be better than mine, probably, hopefully. But I just wanted to get out and earn money, it's like because at that age they were skint and I had all this money.

So do you think there were any other driving forces at the time then?

I don't know, erm, people were saying get yourself a trade, you've got a job for life sort of thing. You're sixteen years of age, you don't know any better do you? If I was leaving school now I wouldn't leave school, you know, if I was sixteen now and I knew what I know now, no I wouldn't, I would stay on. But you knew everything at that age, or you think you do.

So what's important in a job now for you then?

That I enjoy it. Jane's brother, he's always collected records, he's got thousands, and he's played in bands, played guitar, sang in 'em, he's actually managing a band now, in Chesterfield, they're recording their second album now. But he's always worked on, you know, gardening for the council and he hated it, but one of his friends who was also a record collector started up a mail order business selling their records. That took off. Now he's got two record shops and a record label, and he 'phoned John up three years ago, John was selling insurance then and he'd got into a lot of debt and, you know, door-to-door. And he 'phoned him up, this friend and said I'm starting this shop will you come and work for me because he know he knows all about rare records. And he jumped at the chance, and now he goes out and signs bands up for the record label, and he loves it and I don't blame him. That would be an ideal job for me as well. He goes out at night, his boss pays him to go out at night, to go to a pub or club and just listen to bands, he gets paid for doing that, just listening to music, it's always been his hobby and he's getting paid for it, happy as Larry he is. Because when he was doing insurance his hair started falling out because of the stress he was under, but now it's like down to his arse again, but he's really enjoying that. I would want a job I would be happy in, I would enjoy, which would be writing, but I wouldn't really class it as a job then, if you know what I mean. It's more like a hobby that I would get paid for...[interruption as son talks to us]...

So when you left school it was the fact that people told you to get a trade and the fact that you wanted to earn money. Now it's interest and enjoyment. Is there anything else that's important?

God...[interruption from son]...something that's not nine 'till five, set hours, you know, that would be great, just whenever you want and get well-paid for it but that's not realistic is it? There's not many jobs like that, work when you want. No, it's got to be interesting, fun, which most jobs are not, I mean you work at the university don't you, as well?

Well, I'm classed as a full-time student doing a PhD, but I'm going to do some part-time teaching.

And do you enjoy that?

Well I've not started it yet.

Do you think you will?

I might do, yes.

I think that would be great that, having somebody listen to you, you've got all that, not a power thing, but you're telling them things, listen to me I'm right.

I might find it nerve-racking though.

Yes, I would, speaking in front of people because I'm very shy, that's where he gets it from. So interesting and fun, that's it.

So would you prefer to work for somebody or for yourself?

Ideal job? For myself. Well, my ideal job is writing so, but not like a journalist or something, books if I could, you know, not like working for other people like a newspaper or magazine because that would seem like a job. I want something that doesn't feel like a job.

So how would you see yourself in ten years time, if you could do anything you wanted?

Rich.

So the money aspect still comes into it?

No, no, I'd be happy enough not to have to, because part-time I'm really struggling, not to struggle, not earn an obscene amount because I would feel guilty about that, you know, just enough to have a comfortable life, not worry about bills or, you know, a bit left over. So I'd be happy with earning something like that, not thousands a week, you know, that's just greed I think, but then again, if it came down to it, I wouldn't turn it down, sort of thing, nobody would. But I think the richer you get, my uncle, the building contractor, he's loaded and he's horrible. Because of his money he thinks he's better than people because of the cash thing, it's a big power thing, a big ego. It's all bollocks, I know he's my family, but. Just enough to get on.

Right, another thing I've been thinking about involves justifying your learning choices...

To other people?

Yes, I mean did you have to do that?

They asked why, like when I said because I didn't want to end up like you I weren't kidding when I told him that. They probably thought I was, but I can't see myself in twenty years time being like them, it just does my head in thinking about it. But I went through a bad phase working there, they're nice enough people but the stuff they talk about, it's like they've got no opinions about anything but football or sex, you know, it's like oh God, shut up, talk about something interesting, you know. It's like I would talk, and I still find that now, I get on with women better, apart from my wife...[laughter]... 'cos they don't talk about sport all the time and you can sit down and talk to a woman just about anything. Because women I know and stuff, they say they find it strange they can talk to me, not as a, they don't mean it in like a demeaning way or anything, they don't see me as a bloke because I don't get back to football and whatever blokes talk about. I've never ever been like that, so I don't know, I find it much easier to get on with women, but I mean mostly I work with men, there's only a few women work there so I'm stuck with that. I'd rather have a good gossip with a woman, well not gossip, but you can get onto some interesting things. It's like I can sit up 'til the early hours of the morning talking to somebody, just talking because it's interesting, and if they've got strong opinions I can argue with them, not nasty arguments, you know, just getting my point across. I could be a politician, but I'm too honest, I tell people what I think so I couldn't be. But I think that's why it got to me at work, I would try and talk to them about something else and they would for two minutes...[interruption from son]...but I've always got on better with women than men...[interruption]...so.

If somebody said to you that person is well-educated, how would you describe that person?

Without seeing them I would think they were a bit stand-offish...[interruption]...a bit stand-offish, snooty, something like that. But they're not really are they, you get good and bad people whatever their education level, I mean I know stuck up people who are thick.

Did you encounter anybody like that in college?

No, not in my class, in some of the other classes you could tell they were a bit hoity-toity sort of thing. If somebody said they were like that I wouldn't really judge 'em because I don't know 'em, you know. Say somebody new starting work, some might say oh he's a bit of a twat or something. Like some of the others might agree with that and not talk to him, you know, they've got an opinion without finding out what that person's like. I won't make an opinion of somebody until I've actually talked to them.. I think you can tell, or I can anyway, good judge of character, first time I see somebody I can suss them out, apart from my wife...[laughter]...it took me a long time. But a bit stand-offish.

Something which seems to have come out of this research is that if people are discontent with some part of their lives, education can be seen as a way of rectifying that problem.

Yes, yes, could be. Because like I don't know whether it was so much with me, well I was, yes, because of my work and stuff like that. Yes, I think that's true. Like my friend, her husband is twenty-four, but he's one of these I think, women should be in the kitchen. She's got a job now, she's started to learn to drive and all this seems to have

come about since she's like standing up for herself to him, since she started it. He never wanted her to work, you know, you should be at home looking after, because they've got two kids, you should be at home looking after the kids, you know, I'm the man, I earn the money. I used to pick her up because she's moved now. She's still got my psychology book...[laughter]...she can keep it. He got a bit, she didn't actually say it to me, I heard her telling another women in the class, even though I worked with him and he knows me, he thought, I was always picking her up, you know, every Tuesday, he didn't like that, me picking her up, and he ended up taking her and picking her up. And I was like it's on the way home and I'm taking a car anyway, I may as well take her, you know, and she would have to ask him, say we went to the pub after, only for one like, finish at nine, go and have one or two, and she would go like, oh I don't know Frank's expecting me at home like. Now she's started doing this she's got much more confidence. She's changed her hairstyle, the way she dresses, everything, she's learning to drive, got a job, part-time, but...[interruption]...

I've heard of some research which seems to suggest that returning to education can be damaging for relationships. What's your opinion on that?

I don't know, my wife's in university. She changed a hell of a lot and it weren't all the problems why we split up, but she got more cocky. I met some of her friends and they're all like in their thirties and one of them, Kath, Jane like looks up to Kath and tries to be her. Kath's husband is a very very rich man, he's an accountant for a computer firm, they've got a big house with no mortgage, it's paid for, and Kath's a snob, very stuck up and Jane's turned out like that. Or she tries to, even her mother and brother have said to me about the way she's changed. It's not all the reason we split up but I think she has changed. I think some people, if, I don't think I would, but she obviously wanted to change something in her life and if it weren't through education it probably would have been through something else. So yes, she's changed a hell of a lot, very cocky she's got. She thinks she's better than people because of it, she's been to university.

Do you think, if education changes you in that sort of way it's...

Worth doing it? It depends what type of person you were before, like it's changed my friend in a good way. Like she's changed because she was very meek and put upon sort of thing. She's much more confident now. But like some people, no names, have gone more cocky, and you know, stuff like that. I think it depends on your character beforehand. I don't think it would change me because, I don't know, it sounds as if I'm bragging or something, but I'm a nice person and I wouldn't want to change my attitude towards people or, you know, because I'm very fair minded and I don't judge people, you know, until I know them anyway. I don't think I would.

Going back then, if someone is feeling discontent with some part of their lives, do you think it follows then, that if people are happy with their lives...

They wouldn't go back?

Yes.

God, that's hard. I can tell you're doing a PhD...[laughter]...erm, I don't think I could answer that because I done it because I weren't happy in work. You see my brother-in-law in Wales, he's doing Accountancy at Swansea University and that's because he weren't happy doing' his job. God, that's hard. I need to sleep on that.

Would you say you know anybody who's completely happy with their lives?

No. No...[interruption]...What do you mean with their life? With their working life or the whole thing?

Just generally I suppose. Would they describe themselves as content, I suppose, content is better than happy?

There's some people in work seem to be, but I think it's more they're stuck in a rut and they don't want to change because they don't know what it's going to bring. I don't think everyone is truly happy, or it's very rare, nobody I know anyway. I don't know about you, but.

So if you got to be a novelist, if you were writing your books, are you saying that that would make you happy doing?

Yes, I don't know if I'd be totally happy with my life, but I would be close...[interruption as I am asked to go and look at a fire station]...

It's coming back to this thing about why some people return to education and others don't.

I don't know, I think the older you get, you'd be more, I don't know if it's scared of going back, I mean I thought at twenty-seven I would be one of the oldest there, but I was one of the youngest, I think there was only two younger than me. But I was up to walking into the class really worried, bloody hell, an old man doing it. But when I got there, like I say, that Rachel, she was only seventeen but I could tell she was really put out by everyone being older, because most of them were like thirties and forties and she was out of place, I felt sorry for her because I know how I would have felt if I was the oldest, sort of thing. It's a hard question that, I don't know if I can answer it, because I went back because I weren't happy, my friend did, but she's changed her life around a lot...[interruption]...

Well, I think I've covered everything, unless there's anything else you want to say?

I would go back but for this...[interruption and interview finished because his son was hungry and wanted feeding].

massive population shift from largely rural areas to urban areas; the traditional domestic means of production was being replaced by mass production with workers located within mills, factories and workshops rather than in the home, which meant that family relationships were beginning to alter. With these changes came declining living and working conditions, the development of slum housing, over-crowding, disease and an increase in industrial accidents.

As a consequence of these changes, it became clear towards the end of the nineteenth century that classical liberalism had not produced the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Also, at this time, the *élite* began to notice that the working classes were attributing their position to politics, and they were worried about what had happened in France during the revolution. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Government had introduced a variety of Acts which had restricted individual freedom and it became increasingly clear that the liberal concept of freedom and the liberal theory of the state had to be reviewed (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 51).

One of the people to undertake this task was the philosopher T.H. Green and the emergence of the 'New Liberalism' provided the intellectual basis for many education and social reforms in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Liberalism now came to be defined positively, as individuals having the power and freedom to act as they please, but, for all individuals to be able to do this, some state intervention and restriction was necessary. At this time there was a rapid increase in the development of Sunday Schools, church schools, Mechanics Institutes and scientific societies for the working classes, and in 1870 education became compulsory for children with the passing of the Forster Education Act (Jarvis, 1985: 21). Although this Act has often been viewed as a historic turning point in the education of children, Kumar (1978: 24) believes that the effect of this Act was exaggerated, that ten out of eleven children, at this point, were already being educated. The Forster Education Act merely reflected what was already happening in society. Green was able to justify such impositions on personal