‘To TA then BA’: Recognising the importance of the ‘told’ life journeys of learners returning to formal education - An investigation into the impact of life experiences on learning.

Education Doctorate

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The told life journeys of learners returning to formal education are important to recognise in order to name the learning that occurs in the social contexts of family, community and work and, secondly, to appreciate the compelling connection between this learning and Higher Education (HE). The concept of what is viewed as important lies at the heart of this study which gives voice to the often overlooked mature, part-time student in order to recognise their assets. Despite previous research on older students in HE there is little on their brought assets, gained through past experiences. A biographical approach using semi-structured interviews based on a life-history grid allowed for the voices of the learners to be heard and their stories acknowledged. Findings indicate learning does arise from the everyday and there is a pattern to what is said about the specific intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills accrued. Past experiences are a resource for the adult learner and time spent away from the classroom is not a learning gap. The resulting affective assets are significant to academic study, enhancing and supporting the cognitive. HE needs to see the value of these assets, including motivation, resilience, independence, team work and emotional intelligence, to resurrect the social justice agenda of widening participation and lifelong learning and to seize this academic potential for the benefit of the learners and the academy alike.

Glossary of significant terms

Term	General meaning	Context of thesis
Affective	Attitudes influenced by emotions or the expression of emotions.	Attitudes and associated skills learned in life but might also guide successful study. Supportive of emotional intelligence (EI).
Attitudes	The approaches, ways of feeling and thinking learned in life. They encompass beliefs about work but also an approach to life.	Can be intra or interpersonal. Relating to emotions and acquired in social contexts. Attitudes used in this study: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence, patience, empathy.
Communication	The skill of connecting to someone else. Involves having patience in order to get the best out of others and is related to team work.	Interpersonal people skills, involving speaking and listening to others.
Community	Like-minded people and/or friends, people from the neighbourhood or similar interest groups.	People outside of work and the family who are typically part of a social group.
Confidence	Having faith in, or reliance upon, oneself. How to sustain confidence in the face of challenges relates to resilience.	Intrapersonal positive attitude which supports change and growth. Contributes to self-belief and independence. Confidence is not constant but having or not having it can drive you on and is linked to motivation.
Emotional Intelligence	The capacity to control one's emotions and to handle those of others (Oxford Dictionary).	Knowing and understanding of emotions supports personal development and relationships.

Empathy	The necessity for people to be aware of their feelings and the feelings of others. An openness to the views of others.	Interpersonal. Awareness of the feelings of others which allows a greater appreciation of people. Empathy contributes to the translation of emotions into attitudes that culminate in EI.
Family	Both close (parents, siblings, children, partners) and extended (including cousins, aunts).	In this study, family refers mostly to spouse, parent and child.
Flexibility	Ability to change when needed.	Intrapersonal. Seeing things differently and willingness to change plans.
Independence	Self-sufficiency or self-reliance. Able to think and/or act for oneself without the influence of others.	Intrapersonal. Can relate to cognition, or/ and action. Will take responsibility and relates to confidence.
Organisation	The skill of being able to plan methodically to achieve a desired result.	Intrapersonal tangible skill. Management of time and/or cognition.
Patience	Willingness to accept or tolerate delay or problems without becoming annoyed or anxious with others/oneself. It supports team work/working well in groups by using a give and take approach.	Interpersonal. Allows for working well with others but also cope with unexpected situations.
Motivation	What drives us to do something. It can be intrinsic (from within) and extrinsic (from others). Both positive and negative stimulus can drive our actions.	Intrapersonal. Relates to impact of others (both positive and negative) that drive one forward; as well as one's own desire to achieve something.
Resilience	A developed positive attitude that keeps one going. Supports confidence.	Intrapersonal. Successful adaptation in the face of trauma.
Skills	More tangible than attitude. Skills support attitudes by concrete ways to put ideas into practice.	Practical skills support thinking/ self-directed learners. Skills used in this study: organisation, communication, team work.

Teamwork	Working well with others. Connected to communication and patience.	Interpersonal. Involves the ability to share and negotiate in an open and approachable way.
Work	Occupations involving mental/ physical effort in order to achieve a purpose. Can be paid or voluntary.	Paid professional and manual, jobs experienced since leaving school, including working in education as a volunteer, TA or HLTA. Work provides opportunities for those engaged in it to learn 'on the job' rather than enrolling in a formal academic or training course.
Work ethic	A belief in the importance to work hard in all aspects of life, including learning.	Intrapersonal adherence to the responsibility to apply oneself to any situation.

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Foreword

I have taken a personal approach to writing this thesis which combines creative and critical, for reasons that are important personally and to the research focus. Firstly, as an English teacher, I make sense of experience through remembered quotations or by writing, so I apply this technique to exploring the research. Secondly, this study argues for the place of the creative and affective in academic success so it is appropriate to use them to support the understanding of researcher and reader.

The subjective must be accepted in 'told' real life events since what is chosen, the recall of the moment and the oral tradition of elaboration move accounts into story but make them no less significant for an interpretive ontology, subjective epistemology and research design that values biography (section 3.3). The word 'story', may suggest fiction but story refers to the participants' accounts as descriptions of real life events and people experienced in their life journey that necessarily include emotions. Story also supports interpretation, as vignettes and created folk tales are blended into the data analysis and discussion, respectively. I chose, in part, to use extracts from novels, poems and plays as well as my own writing to form a 'creatively academic' approach to emphasise arguments, interpretations and the value of the affective in formal education (section 1.5).

1. Introduction

This is an exploration of the 'told' journeys of learners returning to formal study. It involved travel over time gaining valuable luggage to be used on the journey and upon arrival at destination Higher Education (HE). Equally, HE has been on its own journey to respond more positively to these atypical students and to value their assets. Journey pertains to both the life and the learning journey: as we travel through the social contexts of life we learn (Rogers, 2014a; Tough, 2002) and this learning is transferable. The journeys under consideration begin with leaving formal education and end with a return to it by reading for a degree: a span of at least fifteen years spent gathering resources from experiences in the family, community and work (see glossary, p4-6). Childhood is not part of the remit, nor is time spent on the degree, as these time frames do not inform the focus on resources brought from previous adult social experiences to support formal education. The emphasis is on 'told life journeys': listening to the learners first hand to recognise what has been accrued away from the classroom.

My own life journey, as both learner and teacher, has shown the necessity to value everyone and recognise what is important cannot necessarily be seen (section 3.2.1). As a daughter of a union man, a student of literature and tutor on a part-time degree supporting a diverse range of students, I see the necessity to pay attention to the people of everyday life. Consequently, this study sets out to give voice to the often under-valued student who has learned from informal life situations because we need to recognise the value they bring to formal education. Making this value known will be beneficial for individual self-efficacy, the education system and society.

This chapter introduces mature, part-time learners as the atypical students who are the focal point of this research and explains what issues are associated with these learners as pertinent to HE (section 1.1). The local and broader contexts are provided with regard to the type of university where the research was situated and the relevant policy context of HE over the last thirty years (section 1.2); noting the need for this study in both (section 1.3). Initial research questions (section 1.4) lead to a brief resume of how the research was approached in order to give voice to the participants in section 1.5. Section1.6 concludes the chapter with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.1 Research focus

> "Never judge a book by its cover."

The focus of this study is to challenge assumptions of deficit by exploring what mature, part-time learners brought from learning in informal life situations that supported study at HE.

None of the participants were the usual eighteen year olds who make up the vast majority of first year undergraduates in the UK. The participants were seen as atypical students because they were:

- adult, in the age bracket of 30 to 60 years, with limited school qualifications and had spent considerable time away from the classroom;
- part-time, remaining in full-time work, often with family and social commitments beyond study.

Thus, the participants had no or limited prior experience of HE, often being the first in their close family to attend university (Smith, 2008). Familial experience of HE varied (Table 3.1, p80). To ensure the research was conducted in an ethical manner, they were interviewed after graduation from the part-time degree at a post-1992 university where I teach. In eliciting their views on the point of exit it allowed for participants to give them freely and honestly.

This study is not about the role of Teach Assistants (TAs) even though the participants arrived in HE via working as a TA in either an early years, primary or secondary setting. The term TA is appropriate, rather than Learning Support Assistant (LSA), as TA marks the shift, from a caring non-academic, pastoral helper (LSA) to assistant teachers (Clayton, 1993) with academic and pedagogic expectations. As TAs they have an interest in education and are seeking to improve themselves and their career prospects (Goodchild, 2019). Participants in this study were already familiar with other work settings (Table 3.1). Their experiences ranged from the manual, such as cleaner, to professional, such as midwife, thus they had knowledge of work other than education (section 3.5).

From anecdotal evidence, in my personal and professional life, I suspected the notions of deficit, often associated with these students, to be erroneous. My intention was to recognise what attitudes and skills (see glossary, p4-6) they brought from experiences in informal situations that could support academic study by naming their 'funds of knowledge' (FOK) (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992) or forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) and in doing so consider their inherent value for success in HE. In the writing of this thesis, I first conceived of these 'funds' as luggage and later I extend this image to view a student as a Tardis to capture an impression of forward thinking from the science fiction genre, travel over time and the deception of appearance: a worn veneer obscures the treasure stores of luggage inside to be used in future situations. The old adage is true: 'never judge a book by its cover' or, as reiterated in the cautionary tale, by its eponymous hero *Shrek*, 'For your information, there's a lot more to ogres than people think' (Elliot, Rossio, Stillman and Schulman, 2001). Like ogres, or a Tardis, there is a lot more to the mature, part-time student than people presume.

Mature, part-time students are different from the 'typical' full time eighteen-year-old HE traditionally caters for (Hinton-Smith, 2012) but are worthy of attention as they have been 'a great success story' (Universities UK, 2014, p1) despite having their FOK 'missed or thwarted' (Thomson and Hall, 2008, title page). In seeking a clearer understanding of what makes them successful in second chance education, it might be that other students, tutors and HE institutions benefit. The focus is, therefore, not a deficit view of the learners needing gaps filled but one that recognises what they already possess.

This study is also not about class, gender or ethnicity: it is about individuals who, for whatever reason, have been left out of an education system that sees more value in FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) acquired from school, than those acquired from other life experiences. FOK is not a financial term but refers to the positive assets people acquire from life that can fund or support their learning. Similarly, capital is not intended here in a fiscal form but to examine the status attached to capitals acquired through interactions in social contexts in HE. The issue concerns the value ascribed to the FOK or capital by some in HE: Wong and Chui (2019) talk about mature, part-time students lacking the capitals needed for success in formal education. The capital these students bring is not economic, consequently 'asset' is used to refer to *anything* useful. The affective (see glossary, p4) attitudes and skills learned in life are of value and paramount to this research. FOK and capital are explored in chapter 2 (sections 2.3.6 and 2.4) and chapter 5 (section 5.4) concluding in an appeal for those in HE to shift views to ensure students are valued and enabled to achieve (Crozier and Reay, 2011).

Therefore, the research problem is two-fold:

- Atypical adult learners are seen as in deficit; but learning occurs in everyday life (Jarvis, 2006) and what is gained can enrich formal education.
- The traditional view of valued learning is something that happens within formal educational institutions involving transmission of a body of knowledge to be banked (Freire, 1970) rather than the affective to be used.

The study seeks to counter the assumptions of deficit associated with adult learners by understanding the value of the learning that arises from non-academic settings.

1.2 Context

How HE is organised in England

Before 1992 HE consisted of universities, polytechnics and colleges: the latter two had lower status partly due to provision of vocational courses and often an acceptance of lower qualifications. Some colleges and most polytechnics were awarded university status in 1992

but are still not seen as comparable to the older universities (Boliver, 2015). There are inequalities between the latter institutions (Gamsu, 2020) with twenty-four, including University of Nottingham, making up the, self-proclaimed, academically elite Russell Group. Other groups include the University Alliance and Million Plus universities; specialist Guild HE and faith based Cathedrals. Thus an 'unequal terrain' (ibid., p17) exists in HE in England.

Many post-1992 universities, including the 2016 named 'Million Plus', are associated with offering higher education to 'atypical' students, who would normally not be associated with university due to their age and lack of formal qualifications; making provision through part-time courses with limited insistence on traditional entry requirements. This research is located in such a university that aspires to the Widening Participation (WP) and Lifelong Learning (LL) agenda encouraged by Kennedy (1997) which is explained below.

HE policy context

Relevant policy agendas affecting HE over the last thirty years can be divided into three broad ideological eras:

- Pre1997 (Faure Report, 1972; Delors' Report, 1996);
- New Labour (1997 to 2010) (Dearing Report, 1997; Green Paper, 1998; Leitch Review, 2006);
- Conservative Liberal Coalition (2010 to 2015) and Conservative (2015 to present date) (Browne Report, 2010; Augur Review, 2019).

Pre1997

Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovski, Rahnema and Ward (1972, pxxx) voiced the principle of adult education based on humanism and life experience; advocating a commitment to learning for democracy, justice and the 'complete man'; claiming the existing academic model to be 'out of date'. Instead skills learned in the family, vocational and social groups, should be seen as 'functions that are extrinsically educational' (ibid., pxxxviii) since 'various sectors of human development and social life are inseparable from each other' (ibid., pxxxix). Later the Delors' Report (Delors, Al Mufti, Amagi, Carneiro, Chung, Geremek, Gorham, Kornhauser, Manley, Padrón Quero, Savane, Singh, Stavenhagen, Myong Won Suhr and Zhou Nanzhao, 1996) called for learning throughout life to be seen as the route to a more just society and recommended formal education expand its definition of learning by raising the status of 'imagination and creativity'.

The social justice agenda (Faure et al., 1972) emphasised WP in formal education by expanding the number of students from areas of socio-economic deprivation. It was not necessarily about age nor those who had originally missed out on the opportunity to excel academically when younger. However, when taken in conjunction with the principles of LL, together they became a focus for HE to consider ways to accommodate different types, and different ages, of students (BIS, 2009) which is central to this study.

New Labour (1997 to 2010)

Labour's policy statement 'Excellence for Everyone' (1995) outlined a commitment to learning beyond compulsory education into FE and HE, especially for underrepresented groups. HE policy in the late 1990s promoted social justice and was driven by WP and LL; which are still widely accepted in HE today. LL is a broader concept than WP (Parker, 2003), originating with the idea of education as life (Lindeman, 1926) and learning all through life (Faure et al.,1972). WP aims to create fairer access to non-compulsory education: 'Participation must be widened: not simply increased' (Kennedy, 1997, p22). The Dearing Report (Dearing,1997) also recommended WP and diversity of provision at HE. Thus, WP became a commitment to address patterns of under representation in post-compulsory education (ibid.). Whilst it was aimed at mainly the young (Parker, 2003), it has been increasingly associated with LL in many post-1992 universities.

Regardless of this policy commitment to WP and LL, the Labour government saw little practical alteration to student cohorts nor movement towards a more progressive pedagogy. Despite the rhetoric of 'Education, Education, Education' (Blair, 1997) and a significant increase in public spending on HE, a tension between finance and social justice began to emerge as students were asked to contribute to fees (Teaching and Higher Education Act,1998) and student loans were handed over to the private sector (Education Act, 1998).

'The Learning Age' Green Paper (DfEE, 1998) is representative of policy agenda towards the end of the decade as it talked about second chance learning by creating opportunities and reducing barriers for any who had the capacity for HE. Offering opportunities later in life and learning for its own sake was still part of its fabric but a subtle shift to skills deemed necessary for work began to link learning and the economy as 'work, money and joy' are listed in that order (ibid, p17). Thus, policy agenda moves towards HE as in important site for workforce training, hinting at a gradual erosion of the place of the imagination, creativity and the whole person in the face of economic priorities. Lifelong learning begins to look like lifelong training.

The Leitch Review of Skills (2006, p3) continues this tension between HE as a source of personal joy and national productivity with its emphasis on the need to support 'economically

valuable' skills and for HE to foster relationship with employers. Nevertheless, its focus on adults in HE must be noted as a recognition of the importance of continued learning for mature students, even if the emphasis is economic rather than cognitive. The Leitch Review continues the move to lifelong training and job preparation.

Some expansion of degrees occurred in several of the post-1992 universities with an increasing number of part-time students being concentrated in this sector (Fazakerely, Callender, Chant and Wilkinson, 2009). However, most pre-1992 universities failed to respond to adult learners at a higher level of study (Jarvis, 2004).

In 2009 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) recommended the 'next phase of expansion in HE will hinge on providing opportunities for different types of people to study in a wider range of ways than in the past' (BIS, 2009, p5). Universities were urged to seek a new way of access to higher learning by using 'appropriate contextual data in admissions' procedures to assess the aptitude and potential to succeed of those from poor backgrounds' (ibid., p6). Whilst BIS do not cite any specific examples of what this contextual data might look like, the reference to 'aptitude and potential' is an invitation to view more than qualifications as useful indictors for success. Potential mature, part-time learners can be located as 'different types' with 'the aptitude and potential to succeed' but have not necessarily had the formal educational opportunities when young. By 2021 there is no suggestion that a new way of entering HE will be implemented.

Conservative Liberal Coalition (2010 to 2015) and Conservative (2015 to present date)

The Coalition government displayed a lack of liberal policies whilst shifting towards neoliberalism as finances and competitive markets (Dougherty and Natow, 2019) vied with the social justice agenda. Most policy agendas for HE were driven by finances, rather than pedagogy or principles for provision: the Browne Report (2010, p9), commissioned by New Labour and published under the Coalition government, whilst advocating 'no barriers' for any who had the talent to succeed in HE, including adults, second chance education, and better support for part-time students was still lead by principles of funding and finance. Although the expansion of student loans to those wishing to study part–time in 2012 did support some, the impact of increased tuition fees has been detrimental creating anxiety and reluctance (Hubble and Bolton, 2020). Value for money rather than joy and learning for its own sake meant HE has to justify its presence financially. The policy agenda became rooted in the economy rather than learning, moving HE towards students who provide greater promise of success in this area, which can be seen later in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (2017) and its graduate employment matric.

The continued emphasis on the economy and workforce, rather than learning to foster imagination and creativity (ironically the highest thinking skills in Bloom, 1956) can be seen as exclusive and short-sighted. It is important to refocus attention on pedagogy and what is valued as learning at a time when this is being eroded by the commodification of education (section 2.2). Talk of commitment to WP in HE lingered at the end of the Cameron government, and pre-Brexit, by calling for better choice and access through flexible, part-time learning (BIS, 2016). However, there was little emphasis on older age groups which would sustain LL within the context of HE.

An increased neglect of equal opportunities for HE and a movement towards the financial, regardless of any early political rhetoric about doing 'everything we can to help anybody,' (May, 2016), can be seen after 2015. The TEF (DFE, 2017) appears to be concerned with getting value for money for those who can still afford HE: 'Students invest significant amounts of time and money in higher education, and should expect a high quality academic experience' (OFS, 2020). Equally, the government has recently used the continuation and graduate employment metrics of TEF as a marker for allowing universities to admit higher student numbers, emphasising graduates as workers rather than academics. These metrics generally favour Russell Group universities whilst post-1992 institutions, which cater for a broader socio-economic demography, are penalised by not being eligible (Kernohan, 2020).

The Augur Review (2019, p5), of post-18 education and funding, noted the story of 'both care and neglect' in regards to the government position on HE, with the latter referring to the place of older students and the need for a reduction of student fees. It continued the earlier vocalisation of everyone having the opportunity to learn and second chance education. Despite it urging caution when viewing market forces alone as insufficient to improve education, its emphasis is on economic and national priorities cements the shift from learning to training and HE as work force provider rather than bastion of creativity and thought. The impact of the review has been delayed due to Covid-19 and the change in PM from May to Johnson: the former favoured all recommendations but recent autumn 2021 budget headlines indicate the government has cherry picked to maintain a focus on a suitably skilled work force.

Notably the Augur review refers to the decline in part-time students, as numbers of adults have 'fallen at all levels', (ibid., p15) as a concern. Part-time entrants have declined, especially undergraduates (including access diplomas and foundation degrees) since 2008/9 (Universities UK, 2016). 5,714 fewer applicants from the over 30 age range for university places in general happened in 2017 when compared to the previous year (UCAS, 2017). 'Narrowed Participation' (Callender, 2015, title page) for part-time students has occurred with

opportunities for new students shrinking as a consequence of foundation degrees in HE, especially part-time, decreasing (HEFCE, 2015) as their financial viability is questioned and the social justice emphasis is replaced by the needs of a 'marketised system' (Callender, 2014, p168). Numbers have fallen at the Open University (HESA, 2016/17), established in 1969 as a long-distance opportunity for second-chance HE (Bynner, 2016), because courses were reduced and face-to-face teaching opportunities removed due to budget cuts (Varghese, 2018).

The decline in part-time students attending HE in England continued between 2008/9 and 2018, from 590,000 to 270,000 (Hubble and Bolton, 2020). Even in Birkbeck University, a champion of adult learners since the nineteenth century, the number of students in the 30+ age group declined (ibid.). The reduction in numbers is not to be taken lightly since most part-time students tend to be older, more likely to be working and have family and/or community responsibilities (ibid.). Losing this potential is a concern for individuals, society and the economy. There is much to learn about the positive impact of the assets these students bring (Elfert, 2015) since personal development underpins an understanding of social inclusion and supports economic development (Aspin and Chapman, 2001, cited in Nottingham, 2019).

The Interim Conclusions for the Augur Review (DFE, 2021) note that the recommendations are still relevant and the government intends to deliver but only partially at the present time: markedly the 'Life time skills' guarantee', including adult skills by 2024/25 in the form of short courses and 'skill boot camps' (Richardson, 2021). In preparation for the 2021 autumn budget the current chancellor, Sunak, has been reported as saying the economy depends on lifelong learning for adults (ibid.). However the policy agenda has now moved the definition of the latter to lifelong training and judging the success of HE by the jobs and wages graduates acquire (TEF, 2017). The link between education and the economy which was only part of the fabric of policy in 'The Learning Age (1998) and the Leitch Review (2006) has now become established, leading to a worrying neglect of the importance of the joy and creativity of learning at HE, especially in later life.

Whether WP and LL policies have actually led to any real change in the profile of HE students is contested. There is still a need to ask who enters which university? (Waller, Ingram and Ward, 2018). Butcher (2020, p38) argues more universities need to become 'part-time student aware', regardless of a change in student profile occurring at post-1992 institutions particularly, where a growth in the numbers of part-time students had occurred. In 2019, despite a shrinking of the part-time sector across the UK, Southbank still displayed 6,300 part-time students from a whole student population of 15,000 (42%) and Greenwich

had part-time students accounting for a quarter of its population, with 26% in 2019 (Complete University guide). The post-1992 universities cater for at least 25% of their population as part-time; when compared to the Russell Group universities where the part-time student under-graduate population is approximately 7% (for example: 9% York, 7% Leeds) (Complete University Guide, 2020). It can be seen that the 'inequalities in access and participation, especially in the more selective parts of the system' still persevere (McCaig, 2020, p18).

These figures emphasise the continued necessity of WP and LL. Policy agendas since 1997 to present day has been characterised by a shift from lifelong learning to training and an ideology that lacks action:

"Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow"
(Eliot, 1925)

This quotation from Eliot's *The Hollow men* encapsulates hollow politicians who talk of values but do not make words into actions: the shadow falls between rhetoric and reality.

<u>The impact of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning on HE</u>

Prior to 1992, HE had not been intended to be available to all hence selective entry on the basis of applicants' prior qualifications (Gorard, 2008). However, in theory the HE policy of WP and LL expects potential access for all but selective entry is still in place. What it means to be academically elite still pertains to the systemically acceptable qualifications 'determined by socioeconomic status' (Hall, 2012, p1) which are 'narrow and, in themselves, inappropriate measures of value' (ibid., p26), excluding those with potential but devoid of opportunity when younger. Universities might consider access to higher learning by assessing 'the aptitude and potential to succeed' (BIS, 2009, p6) of older students regardless of past success in the school examination system and acknowledge entry qualifications are not 'fully predictive of potential' (Rainford, 2017, p47).

The view of adults having academic learning gaps (Wilans and Seary, 2011) could be tempered by recognising the affective skills that give these students the capability for success in learning at a higher level. Jackson (2004) notes the lack of recognition for what women bring with them from life experiences to support their study. This point is applicable to all 'atypical' students. She determines that by finding 'ways to be 'differently academic', universities can bring the lifelong learning agenda into HE' (ibid., pxviii). Thus HE too might be on its own journey towards transformation.

This study will offer insights into what mature, part-time students have to offer that makes them 'differently academic' (ibid.) and desirable for HE.

Teaching Assistants

In the last thirty years, education policy changes have impacted on other sectors of education in addition to HE, such as schools. Since the participants were TAs the changed expectations of the role over time is significant. In England, there has been an increase in the number, and the expansion of the role, of TAs since the 1981 Education Act's emphasis on responsibility for pupils with special needs. The importance of TAs further increased due to the drive towards inclusive education; the focus on literacy and numeracy in the primary curriculum and work force remodelling (DfES, 2003). By 2003 the role of support staff had developed and their contribution to pupil progress cemented.

According to Blatchford, Webster and Russell (2012/13), whose work is significant in the area of TAs, by 2010 TAs made up almost one quarter of the school work force (DfE, 2010, cited in Blatchford et al, 2012/13) and by 2014 a 4.7% increase from 2013 had occurred (DfE, 2015). However, TA positions have been under threat since 2010 due to a change in government policy to austerity and the move towards the academisation of schools: 'support staff are frequently the first group of school staff to have their jobs…threatened' (Brown, 2013, paragraph 7). DFE (2019) figures show year on year trends indicate that after steady increases in the numbers of primary TAs since 2003 this plateaued between 2015 and 2018.

1.3 The need for this research

It is important the university where this study took place evaluates current pedagogy in light of this research. Consideration of what students bring with them can be built on in recruitment, induction and teaching in order to strengthen the success of the students and the courses on offer. Foregrounding the excellence in learning residing in these institutions is also significant for the reputation of post-1992 universities. One should 'celebrate and value' post-1992 universities because of this commitment to a wider student body (Gamsu, 2020, p17). By showing the value of these learners and what their inclusion can add to scholarly study the WP and LL agenda may be embraced by more Russell Group universities.

This thesis aims to show the value of mature, part-time students to HE and the need to reverse the decline in numbers and courses. I argue that regardless of an early vocal commitment to equal opportunities in HE, mature, part-time students have been forgotten over the last ten years. I know the importance of second chance learning (section 3.2.1) as I gained an MA despite not achieving the requisite qualification. Now I tutor students on the degree that is the focus of this study, who also have few formal qualifications as endorsement for their recruitment. I know of the academic talent that could be lost if these

learners are not encouraged into, and nurtured within, the system: I argue not only for the importance of HE to these learners but for the importance of these learners to HE.

There is little research on what mature, part-time students bring with them to HE: taking a biographical approach allowed me to focus on the role of life experiences and name the specifics of what was learned. In doing so, I add to the existing conversations on learning outside formal settings by providing empirical evidence to extend the work of Moll, Amanti, Nef and Gonzalez (1992) and Thomson (2002) on the importance of what is learned in the family and community for children into the adult sphere (section 2.4.1). This study will also contribute to a growing body of research on adult learning, including the work of Reay (2002), Merrill (2012) Lavender (2015) and Bovill, Harrison, Smith, Bennett and McKenzie, (2021), focussed mostly on the narratives of mature students attending university.

There are gaps in the theoretical work on adult learning, identified in chapter 2, such as qualitative evidence to justify ideas regarding what is acquired from informal life situations (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014a) and the role of accrued experiences as resources for adults (Knowles, 1980). A study is needed to look into the learning that happens in the many different informal learning spaces of family, community and work to ascertain what is learned, how it is learned and the value of it.

Learning and HE

This study is needed not just to recognise the learning mature, part-time students bring but also for HE to travel its own journey to acknowledge the value of this learning. The definitions of learning pertinent to this research are driven by a holistic view of education that is not solely for economic profit but the development of the whole person mind, body and emotions (Jarvis, 1987). Learning and 'knowledges' (Thomson, 2002) are various and multifaceted including creative, critical and reflective, involving the affective and are acquired in social contexts. Knowledge acquisition is synonymous with learning in this study as knowledge is perceived as more than facts and can be acquired from experience.

This study speaks to the ideas of Jarvis (2004) and Illeris (2002) on adult learning and the impact of experience on the whole person, as well as the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) rather than more typical expressions of aptitude such as intelligence quotient (IQ) (Goleman, 1996). Learning is situated in the everyday and underpinned by the affective (Jarvis, 2004; Illeris, 2009) (section 2.3.5). Learning consists of both content and process (Jarvis 2006). Content, or what is learned, is more than factual knowledge (ibid.) but involves skills that further our thinking. Equally learning involves knowledge acquisition beyond the factual. We learn, among other things, attitudes (Illeris, 2007; Jarvis, 2010) (see glossary, p4) which pertains to the affective aspects of learning, but mostly the learning

which relates to building EI (see glossary, p4). Assets gained by accumulation, accommodation, addition, imitation or assimilation (Illeris, 2007) on a life journey allow us to work with others (interpersonal) or on one's own (intrapersonal).Thus learning in this study looks at the affective as potential FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu, 1986) for use in HE (sections 2.3.5 and 2.4).

The contribution of the subjective and affective to scholarly study should be a significant part of the debate concerning what constitutes valid education. There is some tension concerning learning in HE: as neoliberalists view 'education as a market necessity' (Hall, 2012, p27) the 'wider' learning goals (Bynner, 2016) of creation have been lost as what earns money has led to a favouring of the commercial and economic. The situation is 'problematic, when people study…for the university brand, rather than actually to learn' (Hall, 2012, p24); instead HE should be celebrated as the site of imagining and thinking critically (Giroux, 2011). The affective domain is significant to learning (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000) and creativity is the highest order skill for us to pursue (Bloom, 1956). The development of human creativity is related to experiences in life thus non-institutionalised learning should impact on best practice in education (Hondzel and Hansen, 2015).

A 'different approach to education' (ibid., p24) that returns to issues of equality and creativity is needed for the benefit of the academy as well as the mature, part-time student. HE should be a place to use EI, imagination and thought (Kleiman, 2019). Contemporary social issues as a consequence of Covid-19 also provide the opportunity to reassess what is of value to education. It is important to reclaim the social justice ideology of Faure et al. (1972) whilst 'recognising that today, learning is so intimately entwined in every aspect of life, throughout life; for everyone;' (Hannon, 2015, p16).

This research generated empirical data to illustrate how life experiences positively contribute to academic study by naming assets learned in social contexts. This will benefit students by promoting social justice but also formal education by securing a vibrant future for HE as a place of thinking, feeling and creating, populated by autonomous learners.

1.4 Research aims and questions

The main aim of this study is to recognise what mature, part-time students have brought from their life journey to provide evidence to replace the deficit view of what these students lack with their named assets (section 2.3.6). This will contribute to a growing body of knowledge on the place of accumulated life experiences in adult learning.

This study uses qualitative data to contribute to, and extend, the existing body of evidence on the role of experience in adult learning; using interviews to focus on situations involving

the family, community and work to uncover what learning happened, as well as how it happened. Questioning draws out what had been learned from events or people to ascertain named assets. Learning is categorised as affective, focussing on intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills (section 1.3). This research furthers ideas on the compatibility of these named assets to study at HE, and therefore their value; thereby recognising the importance of the FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991) acquired in life in order to support a shift in paradigm and pedagogy from gap filling to building on what is brought. As a part of this process, theories of adult learning pertaining to the role of life experience as resources might be evidenced qualitatively.

The research questions were developed in the light of the literature reviewed in chapter 2, where I consider the conversations I intend to join.

- What do mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies?
- What has been learned from life experiences in family, the community and work?
- What specific affective aspects of learning have been gained through learning in informal life situations?

1.5 How I approached the study

Since I intended to foreground the importance of life journeys to understand the strengths of these students, I must listen to the participants. The theory of social constructivism (section 2.3.1) is central to a study that views learning as situated in social contexts arising from interaction with people and was a vital part of the choice of methodology (section 3.3). A focus on lives lived by individuals required a qualitative approach to hear their voices and by doing so empower them. A biographical methodology used life history grids (LHG) and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) to recognise assets acquired through informal life learning as described directly by the participants. This was congruent with my interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology (section 3.2.2) and was supported by an asset based conceptual framework arising from existing ideas considered in chapter 2 (section 2.5). LHGs (covering two periods: leaving school to becoming a TA and from becoming a TA to starting the degree) and SSIs elucidated what experiences had contributed to where individuals found themselves at the time of the research, naming any resources accrued along the way.

I established at the start of this chapter, my intention to be 'creatively academic' as it has a place in biography. Incorporating creative outlets into the academic world is not new, but it is still uncommon (Ward, 2017). Quotations from the writing of others, and from my field journal, in the form of poems and stories, were included as befits a study that elevates the

affective/creative and questions what is seen as valued learning. Thomson (2019) warns that any creative writing in a thesis had better be good but it is the reader who defines 'good'. From one critical perspective *Ulysses* (Joyce, 1922) is trash and *Emma* (Austen, 1815) is treasure while another may view the reverse.

As a graduate of English literature, creative expression is important in how I process my learning journey. It is about sense making and emotional response, allowing me to explore meanings which embrace the abundance of human experience (Yoo, 2016). The combination of literary genres help articulate personal meaning and provide inspiration (Ward, 2017). Quotations from the writing of others support emphasis, whilst poetry from my field journal expresses emotions to shape my understanding of the person's journey (section 3.3.3). Some data has been presented in the form of vignettes (chapter 4) to give an illustration of an asset. This method also clarifies my analysis as writing becomes a tool for thinking (Menary, 2007): the folk tales (chapter 5) offer learning points for the reader in the custom of cautionary tales. Traditional and modern stories show us the dangers of assumptions or prejudice: the scarecrow, who wished to have a brain, turned out to be most intellectual (Baum, 1999) and Shrek, allegedly obnoxious, the kindest of ogres (Elliot et al., 2001). Look to see what the mature, part-time student has to offer, and assumptions will be challenged here also. This relationship between the creative work and the critical context (Kroll and Harper, 2012) will also offer another dimension to the original contribution of my doctorate.

1.6 Thesis structure

The literature review in chapter 2 looks at the existing conversations I intend to join concerning the place of mature, part-time students within HE since the introduction of WP and LL policies. I present ideas on adult learning as social, involving the affective, and an examination of how the education system values this learning (Bourdieu, 1986; Moll et al., 1992; Thomson 2002; Thomson and Hall, 2008), before ending by summarising this thinking in the form of an asset based conceptual framework which will guide the thesis.

Chapter 3 locates the study in the methodology and methods of listening to others. A qualitative approach using biography as well as my positionality, ontology and epistemology is identified. The tools of LHG, SSI and field journal are considered in more detail prior to context and sample of the study. The translation of the conceptual framework into an analytical framework to code data and analyse thematically is explained. The chapter concludes by situating the ethical considerations necessary for such a personal piece of research (for both researcher and participants) alongside issues related to trustworthiness. There is a reflection on the limitations of the research design.

Chapter 4 presents data arising from the participants, using an analytical framework as an organising principle to present what was said about attitudes and skills related to the intra and interpersonal (section 4.3).

Chapter 5 reflects on what the participants said to form arguments to address the research questions. Arguments on the value to HE of the named specifics accrued on the mature, part-time learners' life journey allow me to join conversations on the learning of adults in informal situations. Viewpoint is considered to show how we think about value is significant. As *Hamlet* noted:

> "for there is nothing either good or
> bad, but thinking makes it so." (II, ii, Shakespeare, 1599-1601)

Chapter 6 sums up what has been found by the study and any possible limitations it may have. It also offers implications and recommendations to take the conversations into the future.

2. Literature Review: The conversations I intend to join

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will locate a space for the contribution of my research in producing knowledge by showing where I can build on the work of others or fill gaps. The conversations I intend to join relate to learning as a social activity, the role of life experience in adult learning and questions concerning the value ascribed to both in Higher Education (HE). To address these issues academic literature will be reviewed both theoretical and empirical. This is supplemented by texts aimed at the general public: it is appropriate to include sources beyond the academy in research that questions what constitutes acceptable knowledge, and hopes to establish a warrant for the informal. It is also fitting for a 'creatively academic' approach (Foreword and section 3.3.3) to use a variety of genres to aid the understanding of researcher and reader.

I begin by looking at the place of mature-part-time learners in the field of HE since the policies of Widening Participation (WP) and Lifelong Learning (LL) (section 1.2) and the associated social justice agenda of second chance education which are so pertinent to my sample. Ideas related to the adult learner, learning in adulthood and the role of experience will be traced by focussing on four perspectives: learning from informal situations (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014a); experience in relation to adult learning and Knowles' (1984) conceptualisation of andragogy; the affective aspects of learning as an essential part of whole person learning (Jarvis, 1987, and Illeris, 2017, Goleman, 1996); the role of existing 'funds of knowledge' (FOK) (Moll et al., 1992) as assets to support formal learning. It will include theory and research concerning adult learners, particularly what assets mature, part-time students bring from learning beyond the academy to support their studies (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014a; Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2007).

The polemic surrounding values and knowledge assumptions is also examined: primarily the status ascribed by HE to learning gained in informal contexts. A FOK approach (Moll et al., 1992) will be used with some acknowledgement of Bourdieu's (1986; 1991) theoretical framework regarding field, habitus and capital to scrutinise the equity of knowledge assumptions on access to academic courses that still rely on 'selection based on achievement which is highly determined by socioeconomic status' (Hall, 2012, p1).

The review of literature will culminate in the construction of an asset based conceptual framework that will guide the development of this project, inform the choice of methodology and research design, analysis of data and discussion thereof.

2.2. Mature, part-time students in HE

"the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." (Beckett 1971, p89)

I have included this extract from Becket's *Waiting for Godot* because it captures the frustration of waiting for something to happen alongside the realisation that it may never do so. I apply it to the brevity of commitment to action by successive governments to WP and LL for mature, part-time students and argue for the need to reignite the light of duty in regards to it. The following section considers the importance of second chance part-time students and courses, implications for their learning and the need to question pedagogy, replacing any deficit concepts with an asset based model.

Chapter 1 introduced the changing context of HE after 1997 due to the policies of WP and LL (section 1.2) and the associated social justice agenda, which is still generally acknowledged in HE today and so relevant to my study. Issues related to the demand for part-time study at HE within a changing economic and policy context include 'Part-time provision offers opportunities for higher-level study for some people who would not otherwise have the opportunity. Further expansion of provision would increase choice and, potentially, access.' (Pollard, Newton and Hillage, 2012, p20). Part-time students are more likely to be mature, female and have other commitments such as family and/or work that they have to plan study around (Goodchild, 2019). Thus, part-time study opportunities are essential to second chance education (Callender and Thompson, 2018) for those adults who have missed earlier formal provision (Tuckett, 2017) or been failed by their initial schooling (Kennedy, 1997). Unlike McFadden (1995) who argued for HE providing a second chance to improve life conditions, here I am arguing that it is important to be given a second chance at formal education.

Second chance education is defined as education associated with disruptions, and consequently bound up with notions of equal opportunities (McFadden, 1998). There is still the possibility of HE in the UK (Bovill, 2013) but it is most successful when supported by a pedagogy using shared experiences (McFaddden, 1996). Whilst mature students are a diverse group with a complex 'reality of their experiences' (Waller, 2006, p115) it is possible to see the desire to fulfil their earlier wasted potential (Waller, 2004) by looking for second chance education: life experiences have motivated them to reengage (Graham, 2019) and prove themselves (Wong, 2018).

The different responsibilities of adults have implications for their learning (Merriam and Bierema, 2014) and their recruitment has been accompanied by a shift in pedagogy in some post-1992 universities, where student-centred and creative approaches have been adopted (Kleiman, 2011). Pedagogy must 'embrace their creativity and curiosity...they are active

learners and problem solvers who demand new ways of learning' (Lingo and Tepper, 2010, p.3 cited in Kleiman, 2011). Nonetheless, these student-centred**,** work-based routes into HE, including applied degrees, are still seen by many pre-1992 universities as beyond their scope (Robinson and Walker, 2013) since they fail to see the academic potential of the mature, part-time student and their ways of learning. There is a place for establishing the value of learning from the informal that these students offer, and for valuing post-1992 universities that embrace learning praxis through courses such as the applied degree.

HE needs to be more part-time aware (Butcher, 2020) as these students are still referred to as the 'unheard voices' (ibid., title page) or even the 'forgotten' (Million Plus, 2018, title page). A gap can be identified here as currently there is little research to be found on adult, part-time students on applied degrees or similar, associated with vocational areas such as education. One study that does explore the experiences of students on a vocational course is Chen (2014). Ten HE students in work and on a course analogous to an applied degree in psychology, with a mean age of 45.4 years but with prior post-secondary experience, were interviewed. Interpretive phenomenological analysis focussed on the understanding and meaning making of experiences. He concludes that mature students are not 'blank slates' (ibid., p407) but offer helpful diverse life experiences, affecting the contextual nature of knowledge acquisition.

More recently in the UK, Nottingham's (2019, p29) research into degree apprenticeships, where the principles are similar to an applied degree, aimed to elicit the views of arts'-based professionals who were graduates of a part-time work-based degree on the value of a holistic process of learning. The interpretive study involved interviews about what these life-situated, or work-based, experiences gave to the course rather than what the students brought with them from life that supported success. Nevertheless, findings concerning the usefulness of embedding personal and social dimensions into formal study indicate the worth of learning from experiences outside of the academy as well as their significant place within learning.

The change in student profile due to WP and LL (section 1.2) should have led to questions about teaching and learning, concerning students from 'atypical' backgrounds (Lyons, 2006) in order to better support their progress by using what they bring. Nevertheless, there has been little specific research on this and the mature student (Swain and Hammond, 2011) on part-time, university based level 6 courses. Despite an increasing focus of research on adult students there are very few thoroughly evaluated studies on mature learners (Gongadze, Styrnol and Hume, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a growing body of work on adult learning, using the narratives of mature students attending university (for example: Reay, 2001, 2002;

Waller, 2006; Merrill, 2012; Lavender, 2015; Merrill and Finnegan, 2017; Tuckett, 2017; Wong and Chui, 2019; Goodchild, 2019), which variously conceive of mature learners using a deficit or asset based model.

The increase in mature learners entering HE during the early 1990s lead to the questioning of whether they would be a 'burden or a boon?' (Richardson and King, 1998, title page). The deficit model adheres to the former, seeing adult students as negative risks (Crozier and Reay, 2011). Assumptions and stereotypes prevail by foregrounding an emphasis on student need (Dunn, 2019) while failing to see skills they may already possess. Mature learners are conceived as inferior and under-prepared (Carlan, 2001, cited in Keith, Byerly, Floerchinger, Pence and Thornberg, 2006) as the discourse of deficit is a model of lack (Tett, 2007), emphasising barriers and weaknesses.

Rather than blame institutions, academics and structures and their failure to see links between social learning and formal education (Reay, 2001; Tett, 2007), the backgrounds of non-traditional students are often seen as undesirable baggage instead of sources of learning. Any problems are ascribed to individuals who do not try hard enough or lack what is needed to succeed in HE (Wong and Chui, 2019). Barriers are imagined resulting from their life style (Richardson and King, 1998) and often disproportionally accentuate study skills (Hockings 2010, cited in Dunn, 2019). A deficit view places the emphasis on the need for lecturers to understand the hardships life experiences may entail (Merrill, 2012) and thus develop a pedagogy of compensation. This often results in individuals bombarded by study skills and a reinforcement of academic gaps (Wilans and Seary, 2011). Thus, emphasis resides in what educators think is required, rather than what adults can do and the strengths they bring (Dunn, 2019). There will be some gaps (ibid.) in academic skills but this deficit approach gives greater weight to the negative than should be. There is a need to develop a different discourse (Tett, 2007) for mature learners to emphasise what they can do.

Recently, final-year students from mature backgrounds in a post-1992 university were acknowledged for their 'can-do approach' as vital for their academic success (Wong and Chui, 2019, p6). Despite focussing on the negatives of how self-esteem, pride or fear can hold these students back, the researchers conclude that a change of approach from course to student–centred by the faculty could have potentially addressed any student reluctance to seek support. I suggest that focussing on what positives adults bring with them, rather than 'pride and fear', would also help in removing these barriers whilst sustaining the confidence that makes one more likely to succeed (Goleman, 1996). Research must challenge HE to see these students as successful (Bensimon, 2007), resilient and committed (Reay et al., 2002) and 'to place the lack somewhere else such as the systems and academics that

refuse to recognise the connections between education and wider social contexts' (Reay, 2001, p41).

What mature students offer (such as motivation and commitment) needs to be accommodated in the experiences of formal education and used as assets (Avis, 1997). Many often possess desired government skills and competences already (Lavender, 2020); particularly TAs who are equipped with many resources (Bovill et al., 2021). Thus pedagogy should be creative and innovative, drawing 'on lived experiences', of the relational, emotional and empathetic (Avis, 2016, p12).

Work based students with lower qualifications are a good deal to universities (Bovill, 2013) illustrating that test scores of mature students may be a poor predictor of success but life experience may provide motivation for success (Millward, Wardman and Rubie-Davies, 2016). Resources accumulated through a range of life experiences from family and work, specific to age may be drawn on by mature students and make a difference in supporting learning in the classroom (Lavender, 2015). Lavender (ibid., p95) terms these as 'life experience capital' and sees them as including flexibility, empathy and resilience; but she notes that not all types of learning are seen as equal. Millward et al. (2016) also cite resilience, growth mind-set, work ethic and self-efficacy as characteristics of a talented undergraduate, pointing to the importance of tutors being aware of these strengths. This links to the asset model of adult learners involving the affective aspects of learning which will be explored in sections 2.3.5 and 2.3.6.

This section has shown the importance of part-time study for second chance learning and the subsequent need for student-centred, applied learning where personal and social assets are used. There is a place for researching mature, part-time students in a wider variety of disciplines as there is still a shortage of empirical data from the UK (University of Leicester, 2012 and 2013) on these students studying at level 6 and little on applied degrees or similar. Consequently, the aim of my research is to address this potential gap by considering what assets are brought to HE study by those who have had significant learning experiences in life situations. Section 2.3 considers the role of experience as a resource for adult learning.

2.3 Adult Learning

"Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge, and the longer you are on earth the more experience you are sure to get." (Baum, 1999, p132)

As mentioned in section 1.5 the scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz* was the most intellectual of beings regardless of his appearance. This quotation summarises the role of experience in learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, which can be seen as more than factual

knowledge (Jarvis 2006). We learn lots of things, including attitudes (Illeris, 2007; Jarvis, 2010) as we travel through life. This concept of knowledge as a broader acquisition of attitudes and skills making learning holistic and whole person will be considered throughout section 2.3.

As stated in the opening of this chapter, four key related discourses with regards to adult learning are appropriate to this study and will be reviewed below: the social nature of learning; learning from experiences in informal life situations; whole person learning, including the significance of the affective and the role of existing knowledge and skills as assets for adult learners. A brief discussion of the social nature of learning as supported by the theory of social constructivism (section 2.3.1) will provide a perspective to view what follows and reinforce the asset based conceptual framework (section 2.5). Section 2.3.2 reviews beliefs associated with learning in informal situation; 2.3.3 considers the role of experience in adult learning and 2.3.4 offers thoughts on andragogy (Knowles, 1970). An exploration of the place of whole person learning, with the affective and creative as integral to individual development, follows (section 2.3.5). Section 2.3 of the literature review concludes with a more detailed examination of the role of existing knowledge and skills as assets for adult learners (section 2.3.6).

2.3.1 Learning as a social activity

Social constructivism is the theoretical driving force behind the conceptual framework that shapes this study (section 2.5). A brief discussion of social constructivism here relates to the construction of knowledge and learning in its different forms. Social constructivism supposes meaning is constructed through human activity (Kim, 2001): individuals learn through interactions with people and events. A social constructivist understanding of knowledge acquisition recognises that learning takes place because of social interactions, involving talk and activity in groups (Vygtosky, 1978). Observing others is seen as significant to learning as what is seen can be imitated (Illeris, 2007) and internalised (Bandura, 1977). It is concerned with how we make sense of our experience and build on existing knowledge and understanding (Grey and MacBlain, 2015). Thus, social constructivism foregrounds what is already known and understood by individuals, making it fundamental to a focus on what the life journey gives to the returning student. A brief consideration of learning through social interactions, observing others and sense making follows.

The social nature of learning

Theories of child development have shown that learning is fundamentally a social activity – interactions with other people affect the learner and learning begins before the child has entered any formal educational setting (Vygotsky, 1978). These interactions, whether with

peers or adults, point to the effectiveness of learning from a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO), a term created by Vygotsky (ibid.). The importance of interactions with others can be applied to adults too as learning is rooted in the social. It is interesting to note that Kozulin (1986), in his editor's notes on *Thought and Language,* refers to Vygotsky's neglected idea of spontaneous learning. Spontaneous learning happens outside the formal education system, originating in everyday life and from direct experience of the world (Welling, 2003). However, Vygotsky's theories have been critiqued for being neglectful of experience and based on little empirical evidence (Grey and MacBlain, 2015).

Learning by observing others

Attitudes and behaviours are acquired within a social context and we learn through direct experience as well as scrutinising the examples offered by others (Bandura, 1977). The role of observing others in social situations is key with observed models acting as either inhibitors or dis-inhibitors to illustrate or guide future behaviours (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007). Whilst Bandura's (1977) theory can be seen as part of the social cognitivist school of thought that focuses on learning by observation, his ideas on social learning can be related to Vygotsky's social learning theory due to its emphasis on learning from others.

Sense making

Knowledge is acquired and modified through experience of social situations in different ways, so it is essential to embrace prior learning as well as 'how people make sense of their experience' (Caffarella and Merriam, 1999, p9). As an educational theory social constructivism 'considers what students know and how to put their knowledge into practice' (Muududu and Theil-Burgess, 2002, cited in Amineh and Asl, 2015, p9). Educators must respond to the diverse perspectives of their learners who 'create, interpret and reorganise knowledge in individual ways' (Crotty, 2012, p737). These ideas, although often lacking empirical evidence, are echoed by a number of academics over time. Cullen, Hadjouassilov, Hamilton, Kelleher, Sommerlad and Stern (2002) conclude that a new pedagogy for adults is needed that draws on theory and practice, including learning from social interactions. Likewise, Merriam and Bierema (2014) point to learning as social and about creating meaning from experience. The next section considers the contribution of informal contexts to learning before moving on to the role of experience in adult learning (section 2.3.3).

2.3.2 Learning from informal contexts

Social constructivism supposes all knowledge is context bound (Kim, 2001). Learning occurs every day in informal situations so context is placed at the heart of learning (Grey and

MacBlain, 2015). As learning is situated in social contexts 'everyone learns informally during the course of their everyday lives' (Rogers, 2014a, p12).The value of learning arising from life events needs recognition since HE has traditionally prized the academic above the practical, hence the deficit model referred to in section 2.2. Moll et al. (1992, p133) researched the lives of working-class families on the USA/Mexico border to uncover the 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge' termed 'funds of knowledge' that underpin families or communities (section 2.4.1). The knowledge argued for here is in contrast to the prevailing view of some households as deficient (Reay, 2001) as it upholds the richness of ideas resulting from informal interactions with others. Likewise, Tough's (1971; 2002) iceberg of informal adult learning illustrates that at least 80% of learning is from the informal arising out of social interactions: individuals learn personal skills, knowledge and motivation from everyday human activity, but is not taken into account by educators. Quantitative research in Malaysia (Salleh, Khalidb and Sulaimana, 2014) involving undergraduate adult learners applied the iceberg model (Tough, 1977; 2002) of informal learning to students. Findings indicate adult learners are highly competent in 'attitude' and 'value' but the research was not specific about which attitudes or values.

Much is learned through the everyday and practical, with significant contributions made by experiences in the family, community and workplace (Colley et al., 2003). Education should recognise that 'learning is all around' (Rogers, 2014a, p37) and individuals acquire banks of skills, akin to FOK, including the affective (Illeris, 2002) (section 2.3.5).

The status of informal learning needs to be developed (Rogers 2014a). What has been learned in the informal is not always drawn on by education as the 'full implications of all this informal learning is very rarely taken into account' (ibid., p66) but it can strengthen the classroom. In researching TAs, Roffey-Barentsen and Watt (2014, p14) observe that 'previous skills and experiences were not drawn upon or utilised by schools' and although TAs saw experience in private life as significant in their contributions, the institutions did not recognise their merits. Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse's earlier research (2008) also note that schools were in denial of the wealth of experience the TA brought from their own family life. Equally, Kleiman (2019) asserts that some institutions in HE need a paradigm shift to embrace student-centred, active, real learning from life. We must consider how we can find out more about learning in informal life situations as a way to recognise its value (Rogers, 2014a).

Whilst Rogers' work is based in the adult learning classroom, it does not provide an empirical study nor the specifics of what is actually learned in terms of attitudes and skills. Instead, he states the need for more research:

> ‘since informal learning is the basis of all formal learning, how can we find out what kinds of learning our student-learners are already engaged in,’ (Rogers, 2014b, p28)

It is possible to conceive of a continuum of learning involving the formal or institutional, the non-formal or extracurricular and the informal from daily activities (Rogers, 2014a). Colley, Hodkinson and Malcom (2003) advise it is more accurate to see ‘formality’ and ‘informality’ as attributes present in all circumstances of learning and that future research is needed to address major gaps in empirical knowledge of learning in diverse settings.

2.3.3 The Role of experience in adult learning

As individuals learn in social situations, they acquire a range of experiences which play a central role in adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Experience can be viewed from the personal and subjective (Kolb, 1984) as an occurrence which leaves an impression on someone. These ideas are useful to consider for adult learning as individuals bring attitudes and skills created by complex interactions in social settings (Jarvis,1987; Illeris, 2007) which impact on learning behaviour. However, teachers do not always recognise the value of experiences ‘atypical’ students bring (Jackson, 2004).

The distinction between learning from experience, as used by Thomson and Hall (2008) and experiential learning should be noted: the former recognises what can be acquired through the everyday and the latter relates to the use of experience as a learning tool in the curriculum. Whilst Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory can be seen in the context of the latter it is helpful in its similarity to Knowles’ (1970) observations that individuals learn from experience on an everyday basis. Kolb’s thinking is important to my thesis in its emphasis that life can be a valuable source of learning. However, Kolb’s cycle does not do justice to the complexity of human learning (Jarvis, 2004), including the constructivist reflection and the situative doing (Merriam et al., 2007). The focus of my study is not about experience being used in the classroom but using what learners have already acquired by being involved in life experiences.

Past experiences are ‘the resource of highest value in adult education’ (Lindeman, 1926, p 9/10). According to Lindeman, and analogous of Vygotsky, adult education must value what has been learned from outside formal settings. Adults can learn from their experiences spontaneously (Kozulin,1986) and by assimilation and addition (Illeris, 2007) so what has been learned from experiences must be drawn on in the classroom (Rogers, 2014a). In this context, experience amassed over a number of years is crucial to learning (Boud, Cohen and Walker,1994).

The accumulation of life experiences will be diverse within any adult and greater in number than for child learners (Brookfield 1998; Merriam and Bierema, 2014). On an ideological and conceptual level, scholars and teachers have been persuaded of the need to approach the learning of adults differently (Knowles, Holton,and Swanson, 1998) since the development stages of adults rely upon their various and changing experiences arising from social roles (Merriam and Bierema, 2014). The contribution of Knowles to adult learning will be considered in section 2.3.4 but here I note his claims that adults may be more likely to modify, transform, and reintegrate knowledge due to their partially formed self-concept and desire to be self-directed and autonomous, whilst children's formation and accumulation of knowledge may be restricted due to their immature biological and social development. Nevertheless, even Knowles (1984) questions the distinction between adults and children stating that the latter might learn better if teaching in school was approached differently. This echoes Hook (1972, cited in MacKeracher, 2004), that learning is learning and the only things that make a difference are social, emotional, developmental and situational variables. However, none of these sources cite research evidence to back their assertions.

There is limited research to substantiate claims concerning the impact of experiences on adult learning or, as Brookfield (1998, p32) states, the ideas are 'empirically naïve'. Academics are in agreement with a number of ideas on adult learning but the theories or concepts are not rigorously rooted in research. Generally the debates tend to be normative, or at best lack evidence, as Cullen et al. (2002, p10) summarise from their literature search there is little 'evidence based culture in teaching and learning' and often theory and practice fail to meet.

However, there are a growing number of recent projects focused on adult learning that look at present experience rather than what adults bring from the past to support their learning. Maguire (2013), demonstrates the need for further empirical work on this area. Hers is an analysis of the features of UK part-time students, their motivations and the barriers they face as well as the impact of contemporary funding developments. Three brief descriptive case studies are included: Birkbeck at the University of London, the Open University and the University of Greenwich each with a significant number of part-time adult learners. It draws on a wide range of literature and information from these institutions, but no qualitative research was involved. The investigation was commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute 'to examine the status and significance of part-time students in UK higher education' (ibid., p1) and concludes that to place students at the heart of HE it needs to 'fully accommodate the differing and changing needs and requirements' of part-time students. Not knowing how they are 'driven by previous education, socio-economic and other circumstances' (ibid., p23) reinforces the necessity for more research in this area. The

consideration of three institutions and thorough review of the literature in Maguire's study make it an extensive one but qualitative data from the students themselves would enhance it further.

The lack of new qualitative research can also be seen in MacLinden's (2013, p26) report on student courses in terms of 'appropriateness to their needs' which involved a critique of literature and a selection of institutional case studies. The focus on present, at the expense of the effect of past experiences upon learning, also leaves a gap in terms of the possible contributions of past events to current study.

Some qualitative studies have involved atypical university students. Merrill's (2015, p25) case study interviewing fifteen students on full or part time degrees emphasised listening to the student voice, because 'in telling their story the individual gives meaning to their life experience'. The research showed the significance of adults being 'shaped by their experiences at school, in the family and workplace' (ibid., p23). This biographical emphasis as well as the inclusion of some part time and local students is relevant to my research but signals a potential gap in the lack of exclusive focus on mature, part time students undertaking applied degrees and what life experiences give the students in relation to study in HE. A similar picture to Merrill (2015) can be seen in Butcher's (2015) extensive survey and limited interview exploration of the experiences and challenges of part-time students in HE, studying at a further education institution. Butcher (2015, p9) notes that individuals 'may bring more to the learning experience in terms of 'professional capital' than is currently recognised'. This acknowledges the assets acquired from learning in informal, work situations.

Over time scholars have revisited similar notions that learning is grounded in experience and individuals need to value aspects of oneself gained from experience, not just provided by significant others (Knowles et al.,1998; Rogers,1964) pointing to the 'intimate and necessary relationship between the process of actual experience and education' (Dewey, 1938, p20). The influence of life events when studying an applied course can be seen in some vocational areas. Jordal and Heggen (2015) believe the life experiences of the nursing students they studied in Norway informed nursing knowledge or theory. They deduce that experiences are essential in the students' meaning making processes. This research is relevant as it is an applied course, relating theory and practice, and points to the need to locate similar study in the UK.

A cautionary word must be offered that not all experiences are educative but could distort (Dewey, 1938; Rogers, 1964). Academics are clear that adults bring experiences, both good and bad with them (Brookfield, 1998; MacKeracher, 2004; Merill, 2012) or as Zipin (2009)

terms it, dark funds of knowledge as well as light. Knowledge can be constructed from the more challenging experiences in life that should be recognised. Past experience can provide valuable learning resources for students which can enhance study but also may be problematic with the potential to create anxiety and interfere with their self-belief as a learner (Simpson, 1980, cited by Brookfield, 1998). Experiences as a template for learning in adults could create bias as well as positives, as people filter learning through the past and it affects memory selection (Knowles, 1980). Rogers (2014a) notes the problems of reinforcing negatives from life. A limited qualitative study by Merriam, Mott and Ming-yeh (1996) on the impact of experience on learning found that whilst learning from life can be fundamentally growth enhancing, negative experiences can also be inhibiting. Nevertheless, they claim that the negative might be reversed and moved towards growth orientated approaches through reducing any threat to the self. MacKeracher (2004) agrees with the concept of past experiences playing an essential part in learning as either a base or an obstacle. This is clearly an area for more study but Rogers (2014a) points out the difficulty of researching everyday experience.

The ideological persistence across the years, with regards to the central role of experience in learning, especially in adult learning (Kolb,1984) will be elaborated on by a consideration of andragogy (Knowles, 1981).

2.3.4 Andragogy

Andragogy concerns ways to help adults learn and is based on a set of six assumptions, one being adults have a considerable selection of experiences to draw on (Knowles, 1970; 1980). Andragogy is a section of this review on adult learning rather than a main heading as it is only one component of the adult learning theory pertinent to this study and mainly the role of past experiences within it. Nevertheless, andragogy (Knowles, 1980) is useful as it offers concepts of adult learners and learning that many practitioners continue to find helpful (Merriam et al., 2007). Andragogy proposes six assumptions that adults:

- are self-directing, autonomous individuals
- can 'access a growing reservoir of experience' (Knowles, 1970, p39) to use as a learning resource
- hold readiness to learn as important
- want to problem solve and apply now
- have internal motivation
- need to know why they are learning.

As stated, it is the second assumption concerning adult learners having acquired a variety of experiences that can become a resource for learning (Knowles et al., 1984) that is helpful to

this study. Andragogy suggests these experiences are accumulated in greater volume to children and of different quality due to the wider variety of adult roles adopted such as worker, spouse and parent (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1970, p44) asserted that, to adults, experience is who they are: 'an adult is what he (sic) has done'. This theory recognises how the influence of an accumulation of life experiences might affect the approach one takes to adult learners (Knowles et al., 1998). It claims that adults transform and reintegrate knowledge whilst having a desire to be self-directed due to their mature biological and social development (ibid.). Knowles (1970) saw learning as engaging the whole being (intellect, emotions and the physical) which will be extended in section 2.3.5 where discussions on whole person and affective learning will be taken up. Even though Knowles (1980) questioned the distinction between adults and children at a later stage in his writing, the focus on accumulated experiences and their contributions is significant to my study.

The six assumptions of andragogy have been questioned by some academics who do not see andragogy as a theory but rather just good practice. Apart from the assumption of experience, Brookfield (1986; 1998) sees them all as problematic because there is little empirical evidence to move them beyond the status of assumptions, nor do they apply solely to adults. Similarly, McClusky (cited in Merriam et al., 2007) queries the quality of experiences and urges one to be cautious over the belief that adults may in some way have wider and more useful experiences than children. Equally some academics see the six assumptions as unsubstantiated, reductive or too privileged (Hartree, 1984 cited in Brookfield, 1998; MacKeracher, 2004; Lee, 2003 cited in Merriam and Bierema, 2014). Even Knowles (1980, p 43) admitted that his ideas could be used for all ages, adjusting to an andragogy-pedagogy continuum, and concluding it was 'simply another model of assumptions about learners' with no empirical data.

Past experience as a resource for current learning is the most useful assumption for this study. All knowledge is context bound so experience has an important impact on learning (Knowles et al., 1998). However, there is little empirical work to test the validity of this assumption. In one such study, the key assumptions of andragogy were adapted into criteria against which to evaluate lessons to assess the usefulness of fiscal management classes offered to adults in Texas (Roberts, 2007). The main element of andragogy valued by the participants was past experience, especially from work. Experience in this context can be seen as the interaction between adults and their environment over time. Thus, adults have a deep investment in the value of experience which should be recognised as an increasingly rich resource providing mental models for learning (Knowles, 1980). My study will add to the existing empirical research on the role of experience in adult learning.

Despite criticism, andragogy's focus on experience is useful and requires more research to ascertain if the assumption can be seen in practice. Still, andragogy does not provide a whole picture of adult learning, just one piece to be used alongside other models (Merriam et al., 2007) so the next part of this literature review will consider ideas concerning adult learning related to the whole person, intimately bound to the affective.

2.3.5 The whole person and affective aspects of learning

The importance of past experiences for adults is that they encapsulate the whole person (intellect, emotions and the physical) in learning (Knowles, 1970). Adults can use accrued experiences as learning resources (Knowles,1980; Jarvis, 1987, 2006, 2007; Illeris, 2007, 2009) since learning happens in informal situations throughout the life course, involving the physical, social and emotional (Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2007). Goleman (1999), interested in the brain and behaviour, postulates a learning theory that involves the emotional as well as the cognitive. He sees emotions and motivation as related: sharing the same Latin root 'movere', meaning to move us, emotions move us by driving actions. If one is able to process emotions it can also be used to guide thinking (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008). Jarvis argues for the power of emotions in the learning process and that not all emotions are negative as 'magic moments' (Jarvis, 2007, p3) can be influential.

It is possible to use Jarvis' ideas on the whole person as learner, including body/knowledge and mind/skills, attitudes and values alongside Illeris' (2002) three dimensions of learning (content, incentive, interaction) to complement each other (Illeris, 2017). The inclusive nature of opportunities to learn in life is encapsulated by Illeris (2007, p3) who conceives learning as 'any process which leads to permanent capacity change'. We could understand 'any process' to include those involving the mind, body or emotions. Here Illeris is referring to the power to do or understand, rather than the acquisition of objective knowledge. Illeris (ibid.) is in agreement with Jarvis (2006; 2010) that learning is broader than the acquisition of objective knowledge, and occurs in the social context of the everyday. This is a development of Lindeman (1926) and Knowles' (1980) assumptions on the status of life learning. Learning arises where 'conscious living occurs' but there is also unconscious learning that can be recalled at a later time for adults to apply to current learning (Jarvis (2007, p1). This is reminiscent of Vygotsky's (1986) notion of spontaneous learning (section 2.3.1). I question Jarvis' (2006) notion that all learning comes from 'disjuncture', which he defines as a gap between one's own biography and the present experience. It is the emphasis on 'all' that I query as, in my experience, much can be learned through harmony: where current learning can be assimilated (Illeris, 2007) into past learning or past learning can be used to enhance present.

The importance of the role of the whole person in learning is confirmed by Wilans and Seary (2011) who offer case study research on mature age learners, situated in Australia. The focus is on how a group of adults, on a pre-university course, perceive themselves as learners and what can be done to support them. The researchers indicate the need to look to the whole person and the many factors that have a bearing on the success of the learner (ibid.), including challenges related to their personal and professional roles as well as their own sense of power and self-worth. The study provides some limited, situated empirical evidence that relates to the significance of the affective to learning, especially resilience, and the importance of recognising the whole person. Thus, the wealth of resources inherent in the culture of the learner's life world (Jarvis, 2006) must be valued. This corresponds with Knowles' (1980) assumption about the contribution of experiences to learning and a developing concept of 'funds' (Moll et al., 1992) involving the whole person, where attitudes and skills accrued through life experiences, including the negative, can be used positively in current learning situations (section 2.3.6).

Whole person learning, particularly the affective, is key to adult learning. Krathwohl, Bloom and Massia (1964) delineate three domains of learning as crucial to effective learning: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. The latter, related to attitudes and emotions, was recognised during the New Labour era, in the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) programme (DFE, 2005), aimed at using the intra and interpersonal to improve learning in schools. This included self-awareness, feeling management, motivation, empathy and social skills. The QCA (2006) targeted work in these areas at secondary school, also during the New Labour era, in the form of PLTS (Personal Learning and Thinking Skills) consisting of: teamwork, self-management, independent enquiry, reflective learners, effective participants and creative thinkers. All are significant for achievement in life, work and learning, supporting individuals to 'become more effective learners' (National Skills' Academy, 2011, 2.1, p6). The SEAL and PLTS agendas, mostly discarded since 2010 but potentially seeing a resurgence since Covid-19 and a focus on wellbeing (DfE, 2020), affords status to the 'whole person' and the affective by recognising attitudes and emotional intelligence (EI) as central to effective learning. It is incongruous to recognise the importance of this for supporting learning in schools and then abandon it and not apply it to adult learners in tertiary level education.

Consideration of the intra and interpersonal is seen in EI, a complex and contested notion. Goleman's (1996) popularised EI, mixing the original definition from psychology concerning a set of mental abilities with other personality traits, has been criticised for being too broad (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008). However, EI as managing one's emotions as well as recognising emotions in others to successfully handle relationships (Goleman,1996) is useful

in this study. Being able to reason about the emotions enhances meaning (Brackett and Salovey, 2013). These skills can be learned throughout life as essential tools to guide us to further develop self-esteem, self-efficacy and success (Goleman, 1996). There is a need to appreciate how the intrapersonal (confidence, independence, flexibility, resilience) and interpersonal (empathy, patience, teamwork, communication) are more important to success than IQ (Goleman, 1996). The impact of 'soft skills' (emotional and social intelligence) on achievement has been recognised by Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan and Majeski's (2004) research involving 372 full time first year university students in Canada which showed the role of social and emotional competency in success. Similarly, Sanchez-Ruiz, Mavroveli and Poullis' (2013) later study of 323 students across a number of subjects at a Cypriot university concluded EI can predict academic progress and occupies a relevant role in education. EI has been shown to predict student engagement and make key learning contributions (Zhoc, King, Chung and Chen, 2020). Students who brought higher EI, gravitated more towards subjects such as social science (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2013), while those with lower EI, science and engineering (Zhoc et al., 2020) which is relevant to my research situated in the social science discipline of education.

Emotional and social competence often overlap as in the case of empathy: the necessity for people to be aware of their feelings is important to life, work and learning (Goleman, 1996, 1999; Parker et al., 2004). There is intellectual importance in working well with others as 'socialising shapes the brain' developing one's social, emotional and cognitive intelligence (Goleman, 1999, p200). Related to this is the value of acquiring self-control or emotional self-regulation, including the patience to work well in groups by using a give and take approach and open communication (Goleman, 1996). Group work is a skill needed at university (Lewis, 2017) so teachers should use existing self-awareness and management skills arising from EI or social intelligence to support students (Billings, Kowalski and Pisanos, 2011). EI provides a location for my research which seeks to name the affective attitudes and skills brought by adult learners to aid study at HE.

Since emotions 'enhance our ability to think and plan' (Goleman, 1996, p80), determination to succeed by looking for ways to remedy and solve (Dweck, 2000) is significant to accomplishment. A positive attitude and an inquiring mind are essential for academic study (Lewis, 2017). Goleman (1996) discovered that school pupils who worked hard succeeded more than those with a higher IQ since the 'most powerful motivators are internal' (Goleman, 1999, p106) and support self-efficacy (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2013); there is also some evidence for the importance of work ethic in academic settings (Meriac, 2014). Likewise, a belief in a changing self and the potential for growth facilitates the determination to move forward (Dweck, 2000): one's beliefs have an effect on abilities and one can change beliefs

throughout life. Confidence (see glossary, p4) is a significant contributor to self-sufficiency and is one of the qualities children need to succeed in education (Goleman 1996) as well as an understanding of how to sustain this confidence in the face of challenges (Dweck, 2000). Thus, confidence in ones' ability to change and grow leads to achievement and contributes to a positive attitude where one is able to think and work independently (Lewis, 2017).

Adaptability or flexibility are consequently central to teaching and learning (Collie and Martin, 2016) since active regulation leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Martin, 2012). An ability to modify cognitive, emotional and behavioural routines helps one deal with new situations and is related to resilience or successful adaptation in the face of trauma (Collie and Martin, 2016). Parker et al.'s (2004, p170) research suggests 'quite strongly' that adaptability or the ability to identify potential problems and formulate a realistic coping strategy is key to success for students. This aligns with persistence supporting growth (Dweck, 2000) and an association of resilience with hope and endeavour (Day and Gu, 2014). Resilience is acquired by life events 'through interactions' (Day et al., 2011, p03) and needs love and support to be built (Day and Gu, 2014): resilience can be nurtured (Day et al., 2011) and character is not static (Dweck, 2000). Equally, EI can be learned and determines success in business, life (Coleman and Argue, 2015) and education (Zhoc et al., 2020); whilst determination and perseverance can be seen as part of self-directed adult learning (Tough, 1971).

The teacher must be aware of, and use, what individuals have already acquired from prior learning in different learning spaces (Illeris, 2007). Motivation and engagement, which Illeris (2002) terms 'incentive', have impact on learning as mentioned previously in terms of the influence of emotions on motivation (Goleman, 1996). This relates to Krathwohl et al.'s (1964) affective domain of learning and the importance of the manner in which we deal emotionally with events and our learning. Emotional aspects such as attitudes and motivations are inseparable from thinking. Emotions shape mental and social selves as well as our discriminating responses to what is of value; so we should 'think of emotions as essential elements of human intelligence' (Nussbaum, 2003, p3). Thus the role of the affective is at the centre of learning (Knowles, 1980; Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2002).

Individual learning is complex, involving perception as well as actions, according to Illeris, (2016) who focusses on the psychological, foregrounding the mental and emotional aspects of learning. He sees Jarvis as coming closest to the perspective he is trying to reach (ibid.) when considering learning theory but highlights a difference between his idea of learning in a social context and Jarvis' concept of social learning from the individual's perspective. Jarvis' whole person's inclusion of emotions is an important element of learning and motivation thus

making Illeris and Jarvis' approaches to adults similar in terms of the importance of the affective aspects of learning (ibid.).

The whole person adult learning theory (Jarvis', 1987; Illeris, 2002, 2007) further supports the development of an asset based model and is fitting for an interpretive ontology (section 3.2.2.1) that life experience is a text to be interpreted (Usher, cited in Illeris, 2009). The asset based model focuses on how attitudes and skills acquired in informal life situations are assets or resources (Knowles, 1984) and how these can be used to enrich current learning. The ideas of Jarvis and Illeris inform my approach as they reach similar conclusions concerning the importance of learning beyond the formal. Thus, their relevance to my study relates to the essentially social nature of learning (Holford, 2017), the importance of the affective context of everyday experiences for the learner as well as the recognition that valid learning happens in the informal.

2.3.6 The role of existing knowledge and understandings – An asset based model of adult learning

As stated in chapter 1, what is learned in life, is more than factual knowledge (Jarvis 2006) involving skills that further thinking. Ways of knowing encompass knowledge as skill building (Crimmins, 2020). The body of information from this literature review reveals that the knowledge acquired is not just cognitive but emotional and social (Jarvis, 1987). This requires the recognition of the place of the affective in successful adult learning based on the richness of what has been learned in life.

The affective FOK or capitals are the positive assets acquired from life (section 2.4.1) that provide a variety of advantages for the mature, part-time student to counter a discourse of 'deficit' that assumes adults 'often lack the dispositions and capitals needed to excel in HE' (Wong and Chui, 2019, p13). The potential to make a positive contribution to others by drawing on life experiences (Reay et al., 2002) requires more consideration. Adults already possess an abundance of what is needed for learning (Rogers,1983) entering with attitudes and skills which enable them to be effective, self-directed learners (Walsh, 2009; Knowles, 1980). An asset based model of education foregrounding known strengths or FOK (Moll et al., 1992) acquired from learning in life rather than limited teacher assumptions is needed (Magro, 2009). The following section will explore the value of the learning from informal social contexts in greater depth alongside the need for its recognition.

2.4 Knowledge assumption: valorising mature, part-time learners and learning from informal life situations in the field of HE

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1945, p90).

This quotation from Orwell's political allegory questions government but it is applicable to issues of power and democracy in relation to different kinds of 'knowings' that are given status in formal education. 'Knowings' indicates knowledge as multi-faceted and various (see below). It is, therefore, relevant to a literature review section on knowledge assumptions and the need to valorise forms of learning in HE beyond the traditionally accepted, tested, formal. Later in this section, I note that informal and formal learning need to be viewed as equal (Todd, Boivin, Ramírez, Surian, Markauskaite, Billett, Kaye, Hofmann, Felix, Tomasik, Martin, van Campen, Koh, Gegenfurtner, Newell, Wijnia, Muukkonen and Detienne, 2019). In this part of the literature review I present arguments related to the value and status of the affective brought by mature, part-time students to formal study in HE with the aim of highlighting their usefulness in the academic classroom. A consideration of FOK complemented by some elements of forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1991; Yosso, 2005), will allow knowledge assumptions in the field of HE to be examined by considering how interpretations of what is brought from different backgrounds can affect their value.

The recent approach to WP has led to an increasingly diverse profile of students in some HE institutions: to fully embrace these new groups a recognition of the connections between learning and wider social contexts must occur (Reay, 2001). However, HE is not a homogenous collection of institutions (section 1.2). For example, data suggests that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russell Group of universities had not changed to meet the needs of the atypical student (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017) or embrace new ways of learning; although there are some indications that a move online and greater flexibility in teaching styles has occurred because of the pandemic (Li and Lalani, 2020). The pedagogic processes, tutor expectations and structures in different universities can constrain or enable students (Crozier and Reay, 2011). In order to help mature, part-time students be valued in HE, it is important to recognise the richness of the learning they bring from outside of university (Tazewell 2020).

Academic forms of learning can sustain 'a range of acceptable knowings and exclude unacceptable ones' (Brew, 1994 in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1994, p 90) (section 2.3.2). Learning from the informal is often seen as unacceptable eventhough useful learning begins long before the classroom, not just in childhood (Vygotsky, 1978) but also in adulthood, especially in the work environment. More traditionally valued and academically 'powerful' knowledge has 'side-lined' skills and experiences or refused to acknowledge their value (Tazewell 2020; Zipin, 2009). Formal learning has been privileged (Priesnitz 2008, cited in Hondzel and Hansen, 2015) in all areas of education with institutions, according to Hondzel and Hansen (2015), being incapable or unwilling to take into account emotional and community variables. Learning from the life world has uses (Zipin, Hattan and Sellars, 2012)

and when embraced in the classroom, might shift what type of knowledge is valued (Zipin, 2009) from the traditionally tested to the applied and useable. An expansion of what is seen as valuable knowledge or learning should recognise 'The submerged and neglected' (Coffield, 2000, p1) learning from informal life situations as a source of useful attitudes and skills.

A widening of the concepts of intelligences is called for (Magro, 2009) to include intra and interpersonal dimensions of intelligences as advocated by Goleman (1995) (section 2.3.5). Equally, Todd et al. (2019) in a LL position paper appeals for a shift from education to learning to make all learning equal as it can occur anywhere and the informal and formal are not mutually exclusive. Todd et al. (2019) cite the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) to give value and visibility to all learning, including creativity, empathy and communication.

A recognition of what adult learners bring to formal study might acknowledge that what has been learned in informal situations is compatible with what is required of successful HE learners. For example, South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer (SEEC), a body committed to widening learning, provides credit descriptors to 'define the level of challenge, complexity, and autonomy expected of a learner on completion' (SEEC, 2016, p1). For example at Level 6, the end of a BA, a student:

- Shows autonomy and responsibility for actions
- Demonstrates confidence and flexibility in identifying and defining complex problems
- Works effectively within a team, supports or is proactive in leadership,
- Takes responsibility for own learning
- Is effective in interpersonal communication in a wide range of situations.

Likewise, qualities such as group work, being independent, having a positive attitude and enquiring mind are included in the recognised attitudes and skills necessary at university (Lewis, 2017). It appears inconsistent that these attitudes and skills, which might already be well developed in the FOK of mature, part-time students could be seen as low worth (Tazewell, 2020) when according to SEEC (2016) they are of high usefulness and valued.

The status of life learning is an epistemological issue related to what people see as constituting valid knowledge and learning (Crimmins, 2020). Epistemological equality needs consideration in order to bridge life worlds and the academic (Tazewell, 2020) and shift associated value. A diverse student body brings different cultures not lesser ones (Crimmins, 2020) requiring universities to better adapt to meet their needs (Lathouras cited

in Crimmins, 2020). This can be supported by a FOK approach (Tazewell 2020) with elements of forms of capital which will be reviewed in 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 respectively before using both to examine the value that should be accorded to informal learning in education (section 2.4.3).

2.4.1 Funds of Knowledge (FOK)

The social contexts people experience provide resources to mediate thinking (Vygosky,1978; Gonzalez et al., 2005, cited in Zipin et al., 2012). This literature review will now look at FOK (Moll et al., 1992) as a helpful way to view the existing knowledge and skills of the mature and often marginalised student. FOK is the term used to describe the 'culturally situated' knowledge and skills accumulated through family, household and the community but not traditionally valued in educational situations even though they hold much potential for classroom use (ibid.). FOK originates in a 1990s US study of Hispanic pupils revealing 'cultural and intellectual resources' (ibid., p132) and 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills' (ibid., p133). The study concludes there is a need to know the whole person as 'life experiences have given them that knowledge' (Moll and Gonzalez, 2002, p625), recognising the educational usefulness of what is brought from the everyday.

Definitions and applications of FOK have adjusted over time. Moje et al. (2002, cited in Hogg, 2011) expanded thinking on the social sources of FOK beyond family and community to popular culture and peer groups. Zipin (2009, p317) determines that even the negative, emotionally different and challenging or 'dark FOK' can be learning assets. Thomson (2002, p2) talks about a 'virtual school bag' of unrecognised cultural knowledge, experiences and dispositions in her study of pupils from a socio-economically deprived area of Australia. She later applied this to classrooms in the UK to uncover how existing knowledge could be used to support learning even though the national curriculum thwarts it (Thomson and Hall, 2008). All are in agreement that the richness of the life world can usefully inform teacher practice (Hogg, 2011). The assets, ranging from attitudes to skills (Tough, 2002 and Rogers, 2014a) need to be used to enhance current learning by embracing their value. However these studies are related to children rather than adults. There is a place for a focus on the latter.

The use of FOK to honour identity and lived experiences (Folk, 2018) has a short history of application to post-secondary education but much more is needed (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018). FOK provides a way to recognise the abundance of attitudes and skills acquired from the family, community and work that mature learners possess which will then support formal learning. The intellectual and emotional resources acquired from work and community have more recently been applied to some adult learning spheres. (Llopart and

Esteban-Guitart, 2018). A lack of understanding of the knowledge, beliefs and experiences of learners at HE was first presented by Bensimon (2007) but has been addressed in research involving Spanish speaking parents in the US (Larrotta and Serrano, 2011). This study recognised adults bringing life experiences, learning habits and skills to be used in the classroom when their tutor knew the student as a whole person. A US study of adult-literacy classes also revealed lived experiences as a resource for learning for mature students providing 'tools that come from within' and reinforcing the holistic nature of learning (Moseley and Zoch, 2011, p60).

Much of the research using FOK can be ascribed to studies of marginalised ethnic minority groups, as illustrated by the two examples above concerning Spanish speaking parents and adult literacy classes. There is a place for looking at the marginalised adult (Busher, James, Pielab and Palmer, 2014), part-time learner regardless of class, gender or ethnicity since their age and associated missed educational opportunities have placed them in a disadvantaged situation with regards to the deficit assumptions made by some HE institutions. FOK can help an understanding of these students in the field of HE by recognising the wealth of resources they bring and locates the need for research from a non-deficit view (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018). This study aims to reduce some of the incorrect assumptions about informal learning (Hondzel and Hansen, 2015) such as its incompatibility to formal study by naming specific FOK so they can be used and valued.

2.4.2 Forms of capital, especially cultural

The interpretation of what is brought from different cultures and subsequent valuing of them can also be looked at through a forms of capital perspective (Bourdieu,1986; Yosso, 2005). Capitals constitute one part of Bourdieu's tripartite thinking tool of field, habitus and capitals (Bourdieu, 1991). They are useful to open enquiry (Thomson, 2017) and challenge practice (Bathmaker, 2015) when looking at assumptions about learning and status ascribed to what is brought by mature, part-time students to study at HE. They can help us to think about the wealth of different 'knowings' (Brew, 1994 in Boud et el., 1994) or 'knowledges' (Thomson, 2002) by shifting the values accorded to different capitals in a given field.

Bourdieu (1991) uses field as structured spaces organised with their own set of beliefs (Thomson, 2017) and there are many fields that we travel through either concurrently or sequentially, including ones pertaining to family, community and work. These can be subdivided into other fields, for example: class, neighbourhood, special interest, professions, education institutions. The main focus of this research is the field of education, in particular university, and the way it views the cultural capital of learners.

Related to field is habitus or the embodied values, practices and beliefs people develop as a result of their lived cultural experiences (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus is complex and sometimes contradictory but Bourdieu (ibid.) mostly views habitus as durable dispositions from family consisting of attitudes and perceptions based in early childhood, such as morality and self-worth. However, there is some inconsistency as he acknowledges that we may occupy more than one field at one time and throughout life and that habitus can be transformed by circumstances in different fields (ibid.), for example, career expectations. Bourdieu (1998) is not overly deterministic as he recognises cleft habitus (cited in Thomson, 2017) arises as one moves across fields (like neighbourhoods, interests, professions) and becomes modified by encounters in the world (Burnell, 2015). Nevertheless, Bourdieu pessimistically envisions a divided (1991) or cleft habitus will lead to tension between established beliefs and the new ways of looking at things; but habitus can be multi-layered, assimilating and accommodating (Illeris, 2007) changes as it is added to through life (Thomson, 2017); thus new aspects of habitus can be emancipatory and instructive. There is also possibility for agency as one may transfer habitus from one field to another (Bathmaker, 2015) or use the new to enhance the pre-existing; therefore, one's concept of habitus and the value of associated capital should adjust to consider the concept of adaptation.

Bourdieu (1986; 1991) conceives of inter-connected capitals: economic (money, other material possessions) and symbolic (qualities and values); with the latter being sub-divided into social (networks of people) and cultural (education, style of speech). Cultural capital is pertinent to this study. Ideas on social capital supporting the acquisition of cultural capital, correlate to the influential nature of the social, at both familial and communal level, with regards to the creation of habitus from home and family (Bourdieu, 1991). Cultural capital can be embodied (personal attributes), objectified (property, possessions) and institutionalised (qualifications). Some social and cultural capital can be converted into economic; however significant to this study are the embodied values one holds as a result of the cultural created by the social.

Cultural capital can be congruent with other fields (for example, HE) but all are not equal in status (Thomson, 2017). Bourdieu (1986) suggests that there is a hierarchy of cultural capital or 'knowledges' valued, with school knowledge being at the top while others from informal learning are seen as less valuable (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Cultural capital can offer power in certain fields, depending on perceived compatibility and value ascribed to it. The traditionally academic elite discourse of the academy inevitably has precedence in HE, whilst cultural capitals from certain communities are customarily undervalued as they are not assumed to match the requirements of curriculum. There is still much to be done

before the formal education system harnesses the power of learning from life but there is the potential to change the knowledges that are valued (ibid.).

It is possible Bourdieu's ideas might illustrate the need to see a variety of cultural capitals as useful in contemporary HE. Thomson (2017) notes the tendency to blame individuals for not having capitals that fit (Bourdieu, 1991) but this can be rectified by expanding what is seen as accepted. There are new capitals that can be brought from home/neighbourhoods into the classroom that are often unrecognised, for-instance, emotional capital (Reay, 2004b). The latter is a feminist extension to Bourdieu, conceiving of a gendered capital focussed on mothers and their children's schooling. The definition of emotional capital here is associated with nurturing such as affection, care, concern, patience and support (Allatt, 1993, cited in Reay, 2004b).

Yosso (2005) broadens what cultural capital means in different communities by applying her 'community cultural wealth' lens. She makes cultural capital more inclusive and expands the concept to six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. The six cover a variety of attitudes and skills that Yosso identified students of colour bring with them to formal education. Aspirational capital refers to an adherence to hopes and dreams, even in the face of real and perceived barriers, creating a 'culture of possibility' (ibid., p78). Navigational capital includes being able to manoeuvre through social institutions created for others, such as universities. The evolution of the concept of cultural capital to include the kinds of attitudes listed above adopts an asset perspective that recognises the various forms of 'wealth' that children of colour from marginalised communities command from their lived experiences. Her work provides a new voice to be heard and different cultural capitals recognised supporting the need for a contemporary revalorising of diverse capitals.

My study suggests a new capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) of the accumulation of affective behaviours that mature, part-time students bring to HE that have value in their usefulness (Zipin et al., 2012) to academic study. The field of HE bases acceptance for academic study on forms of capital derived from a particular habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) in the shape of culturally biased, arbitrary tests where the cultural capital of the compatible can be turned into, or exchanged for, objects such as qualifications (Hall, 2012). This capital reflects and reinforces the norms associated with the dominant groups in society (Rodriguez, 2013). It is not traditional to test emotional intelligence yet it can be more indicative of academic success than IQ (Zhoc et al., 2020).

There is a need to see a variety of cultural capitals as useful (Rodriguez, 2013) in, and compatible with, HE to move beyond inaccurate assumptions about recognising and valuing

(Thomson, 2002). Morrin (2019) uses Bourdieu to show the mistaken idea of working-class culture as deficient with, according to the then prime minster David Cameron, 'toxic' low aspirations; as her research uncovers a habitus of aspirations with parents wanting better for their children. This concurs with Harrison and Waller (2018) who cite recent large-scale studies as demonstrating that aspirations are not generally low for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller (2013) point out that the families of working-class graduates in their study valued education and held high aspirations. Moreover, they speculate that capital can be generated through extra-curricular, or non-formal, activities involving nurturing, socialising and working. This latter point emphasises the need for a modern reinterpretation of cultural capital and what constitutes value in different fields. Wallace (2019) uses Bourdieu in his study of black cultural capital in the local field of London communities to illustrate the need for an epistemological shift in how we view value. He argues that inaccuracies and assumptions held by the dominant discourse need to be replaced by more culturally flexible and democratic decisions concerning the significance of different cultural capitals (ibid.). Considering and valuing knowledges or capitals that are traditionally excluded from and silenced by academic research may support this and connect real life with the academy (Yosso, 2005).

2.4.3 FOK and forms of capital valorise learning from social contexts

Using FOK with some elements of forms of capital provides focus on recognising the assets accrued in the social situations of family, community and work, as well as their worth in formal education. FOK emphasises what can be gained by using what pupils bring from outside formal education in the classroom; whereas capitals' theory concerns the values ascribed. Whilst coming from different perspectives (the former anthropology, the latter sociology) they have similar underlying characteristics concerning practices from family and community (Cho and Yi, 2020) and together they allow for an examination of knowledge assumptions and values in HE. FOK and capitals are often seen as complementary (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018) because they focus on inequities in education, providing a lens to challenge the injustices of a system that fails to recognise the compatibility of the resources learners bring from informal learning. Using FOK and capitals together provides a way to explore and value the usefulness of the whole person learning acquired by mature, part-time learners while questioning how these FOK as capitals are viewed in education.

FOK (section 2.4.1) allows one to see beyond stereotypes (Moll et al., 1992) and modify prejudices, (Templeton, 2013, cited in Llopart and Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Consequently, a FOK approach can support teachers to rethink what is useful knowledge (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt and. Moll, 2011) and build on the local by recognising and using them in the classroom (Thomson, 2002); thus revealing their true meaning for people

outside that group. FOK are about opening up the possibilities of how tutors could better understand students (Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama, 2012) to counter the dominant narrative of being unprepared (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018). This may reframe how the faculty thinks (Delima, 2019) by helping it consider students' backgrounds as sources of valuable knowledge (ibid.) and legitimise cultural practices (Llopart and Esteban-Guitart, 2018). By viewing FOK as different not deficit (Connell, 1982, cited in Thomson, 2002) their usefulness or use value (Zipin et al., 2012) might be seen (section 2.4.1) and a theory of student success (Bensimon, 2007) established. To embrace different ways of knowing (Gonzalez, 2015, cited in Llopart and Esteban-Guitart, 2018) and epistemologies that operate outside the academic, such as the affective, a shift in definitions of success might be possible (Crimmins, 2020) from gaining qualifications to creativity where the mind, body and emotions are used. Thus FOK counters the deficit views of marginalised groups held by the dominant discourse in HE by challenging ways of thinking and thereby informing practice and enhancing learning (Rodriguez, 2013).

FOK operate as a way to recognise what is learned informally in order to integrate it into the classroom; however, it does not directly address issues of power or value (Cho and Yi, 2020). On its own, there is a risk of underestimating power structures in education (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Bourdieu's theory of capitals allows one to explore the power or value given by different fields to what individuals bring with them. As a social theory it views 'knowledges' through a critical lens to interpret how not all are appreciated nor treated equally (Cho and Yi, 2020). Capitals theory foregrounds the reproductive properties of cultural capital but fails to explore diverse capitals as ever-changing useful resources (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Thus on its own there is a danger of capitals theory perpetuating deficit views, whereas the value of FOK is in the conceptualisation of an asset-based approach. I use FOK and cultural capital together to link the former to issues of power (ibid., 2011) and support an exploration of the parity of diverse knowledges (Cho and Yi 2020). Both aid an exploration of the value of learning as something creative and communal, worthy as a pursuit in its own right, rather than a commodity to be bought and sold.

In making a case for a FOK approach to mature, part-time students in HE it should be recognised that they are marginalised (Busher et al., 2014) by their age and lost past formal learning opportunities. They are apt subjects to apply FOK to in order to recognise their resources gained in everyday contexts. FOK seeks to see, value and use community knowledge (Thomson, 2002) that social reproduction has traditionally silenced (Rodriguez, 2003). This study does not use Bourdieu to look at social reproduction but rather as a way to think about values ascribed to different kinds of funds or capitals diverse students bring to the field of HE and thereby acknowledge and use them. In this study the affective capital of

the mature, part-time learner needs valuing in HE (which in Bourdeusian terminology is regarded here as a 'field': see p48). Adult learners can capitalise on their learning by shifting the value associated with them. Currently formal education sees little value in the affective attitudes and skills accrued in life as they have not been exchanged for qualifications: instead a recognition of the usefulness of what has been learned in family, community and work as pedagogical assets is required (section 2.4.1). WP and LL has given HE the opportunity to disrupt the cycle of reproduction (Burnell, 2015) and recognise diverse FOK as capitals, rather than misrecognise (Valenzuela, 1992 cited in Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011), through assumptions,. There is compatibility between mature, part-time students' FOK as capital and HE that can be seen in the attitudes and skills both SEEC (2016) and Lewis (2017) refer to as necessary for university. Research is needed to inform a counter discourse for those working in HE to see mature, part-time learners as successful by developing 'a different set of eyes' (English and Bolton, 2016, p23) to view and value different kinds of learning rather than accept assumptions of deficit.

2.5 The asset based model of adult learning

Adults acquire a wealth of learning after leaving formal education and this can be recognised by moving to a non-deficit view (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018) of mature, part-time learners in the field of HE by adopting a student success model (Bensimon, 2007). Figure 2.1 expresses the interrelatedness of learning from informal situations in the family, community and work with regards to what can be gained outside formal education. There are rich learning experiences in life that produce strengths that teachers need to acknowledge by looking to the whole person (Magro, 2009). Figure 2.1 shows the co-dependency of social contexts in the asset based model, whilst beginning with informal learning to foreground its principal place in my conceptual framework and its relationship to formal education. Learning from informal situations and formal are mutually supportive, rather than incompatible opposites (section 2.3.2). The arrow in Figure 2.1 indicates affective assets acquired in these informal situations can be useful for study in formal settings (Moll et al., 1992; Thomson, 2002). What has been acquired in the former social situations has use value (Zipin et al., 2012) as it is transferable to the classroom (section 2.4).

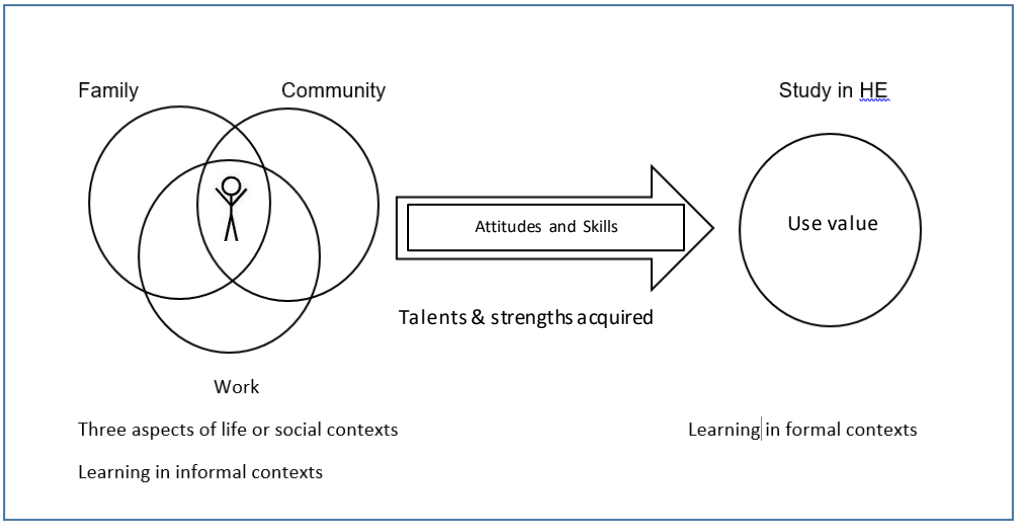

Figure 2.1 Inter-relatedness of informal and formal learning

These ideas align with my ontological and epistemological positions of interpretivism and subjectivism respectively (section 3.2), by supporting a view of the world and knowledge acquisition that is socially constructed through life experiences with meaning dependent on individuals in social contexts.

This has led me to construct a conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) which delineates the FOK or capitals as assets the adult learner has to offer to their studies. The framework has been shaped by using concepts from three different perspectives:

- Social - Rich learning occurs in informal life situations
- Adult learners - Experiences support the whole person learning of affective assets
- Value - These FOK/capitals are useful in formal education at HE.

These perspectives operate as a useful lens to examine the importance of experience to mature, part-time learners, so I form this conceptual framework by firstly lining the base of the framework with social constructivism and then drawing on all to shape my research. The three compartments in Figure 2.2 correspond to the three areas of recognition above (social, adult learners and value) needed to contemplate a research question on recognising the importance of the told life journeys of learners returning to formal education. It is presented as a suitcase to show how travel over time might lead to treasure stores of luggage filled with assets to be used in future situations and destinations.

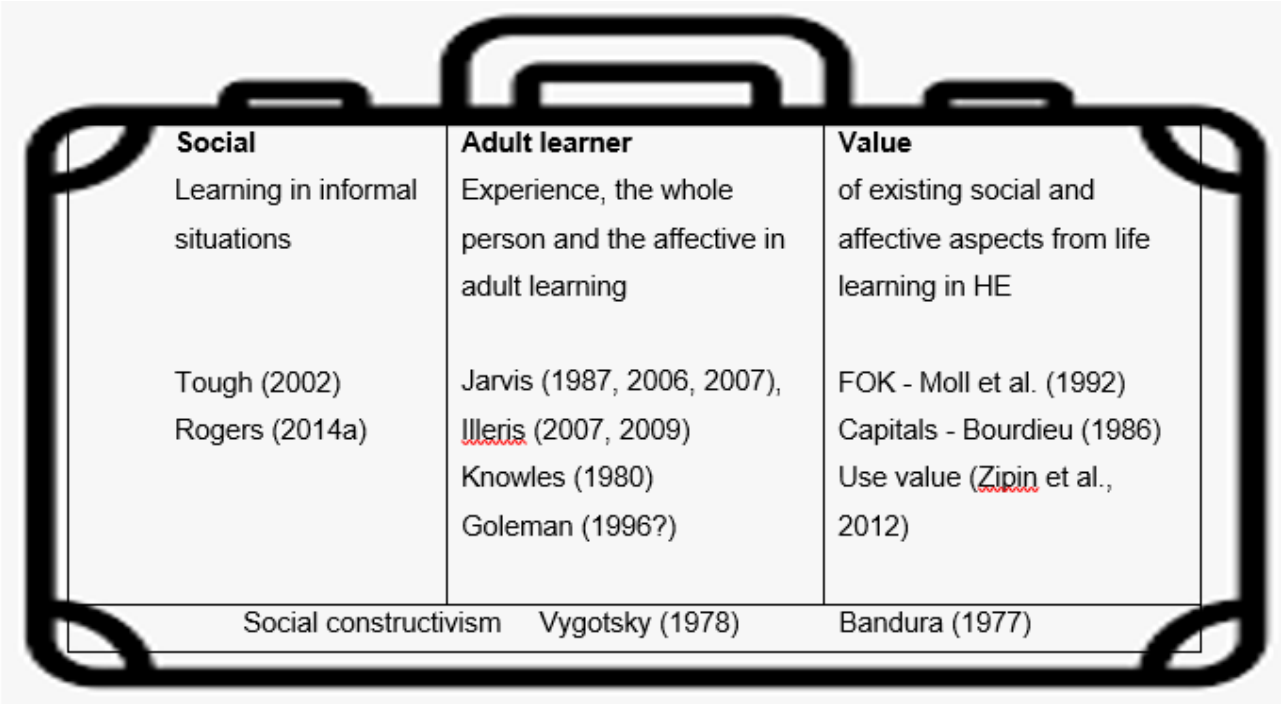

Figure 2.2 Conceptual framework, showing contributing theories to the asset based model of adult learners

I am building a case for the need to recognise learning from informal situations and the value of it to study at HE, rather than assume mature, part-time students are lacking. This embraces FOK's intention to see beyond stereotypes (Moll et al., 1992) to recognise assets and addresses issues of value as referred to in section 2.4. Affective aspects of learning are important, where attitudes drive the academic (Goleman, 1996) and various sorts of capital have value in the classroom.

The ideas in Figure 2.2 have been discussed in depth in this literature review but I briefly revisit each to explain my conceptual framework. Social constructivism provides a foundation theory which establishes the importance of social context and the concept that knowledge is socially constructed through real world learning (Vygotsky, 1978: Bandura, 1977) (section 2.3.1). The social constructivist paradigm situates learning as constructed from and modified by, experience; providing a useful theoretical basis for looking at learning in contexts outside the formal and how individuals interpret these situations to generate attitudes and skills (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014a) (section 2.3.2). This relates to 'social' in Figure 2.2 and an examination of the learning acquired in life situations involving family, community and work. The next part focuses on adult learning and the significant role of accrued experience (Knowles, 1980), learning theories that expound whole person learning (Jarvis, 1987) and the influence of the affective (Illeris, 2007) in the learning process (sections 2.3.3 to 2.3.5). It is interconnected with social constructivism through the importance of social context and emphasises life experience as a resource for learning, with students bringing attitudes and skills to support a return to formal education (Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2007). These ideas

explicitly frame my research perspective and help explore the value of the life learning journey since leaving formal education.

The asset based model provides a useful lens to look at my research through and is appropriate since it offers a counter to the deficit model of mature, part-time learners and assumptions concerning valued knowledge. The conceptual framework that sees life experiences as an asset to the adult learner guides my research design and questions through data generation, analysis and discussion to dissemination. The research questions guided by my reading reached thus far are:

- What do mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies?
- What has been learned from life experiences in family, the community and work?
- What specific affective aspects of learning have been gained through learning in informal life situations?

2.6 Chapter summary

Chapter 2 has presented arguments in relation to HE, adult learning and the valorisation of different kinds of learning. It has outlined the current tensions in the field of HE between political rhetoric concerning WP and LL and the practical structures and pedagogies mature, part-time learners face. Ideas regarding the role of experience in adult learning have shown time spent away from the classroom not as a gap but filled with an abundance of resources (Jarvis, 1987), including the affective, that are FOK, capitals or assets for study at a higher level. Finally, it has been delineated that HE and its mature, part-time students would benefit from an adjustment of how certain FOK/capitals are valued and used as well as questioning what is seen as constituting capital in HE and beyond.

A number of areas have been located as places for my study, including: the mature, part-time learner; a naming of specific assets brought to study; the role of the affective in learning; empirical data to add to the body of knowledge on life experiences as a resource for adult learning; and a readjustment of what is seen as valued in academic study. I now briefly summarise the areas arising from the literature reviewed that my research intends to go some way towards redressing.

Mature, part-time students are a marginalised group (Busher et al., 2014) with FOK /capital but it is not gender nor ethnicity that my research focuses on, rather age and lost opportunities. There is a dearth of empirical data specifically on this section of the student body in the UK and particularly qualitative research involving listening to adults. Previous studies (MacLinden, 2013; Butcher, 2015) provide no or limited new qualitative evidence.

Existing qualitative research (Merrill, 2012; Goodchild, 2019) either do not focus exclusively on the mature, part-time student or their past experiences.

The literature review highlights the need to offer more evidence to demonstrate the social nature of learning and redress some of the incorrect assumptions about learning in informal situations (Hondzel and Hansen, 2015). Assertions concerning the role of life experiences in adult learning (Knowles, 1970, Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2007) require empirical verification. This study aims to contribute to a growing body of research on the FOK/new capitals, brought by mature, part-time learners to formal study by recognising the specific assets that result from the social contexts of family, community and work. In doing so, HE may see the affective as worthy of value and demanding of high expectations of the students who possess them.

A conceptual framework of the asset based model of mature, part-time learners has been drawn together to guide my research design and analysis. This leads to chapter 3, a discussion of my chosen methodology, research design, methods and analytical tools.

3. Research Methodology and Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the research approach and a justification of processes undertaken as appropriate to addressing the research questions coming out of the literature review:

- What do mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies?
- What has been learned from life experiences in family, the community and work?
- What specific affective aspects of learning have been gained through learning in informal life situations?

I begin this chapter by providing the rationale for approaches chosen including who I am, my positionality and the philosophical underpinnings of the project; comprising ontology and epistemology (3.2). Section 3.3 justifies biographical and creative methodology; while reasons for using the qualitative tools of life history grid (LHG) and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) to generate apposite data are explored in 3.4. 'Generation' refers to data that is constructed by, and from, human participants (Gavin, 2008), by choosing tools that allow for its articulation. The pilot study and plans made prior to the research are described. In particular, I reflect on the evolution of the process as decisions were made to ensure a fitting method was used. A reflexive and creative field journal as a data generation tool is also explored. Section 3.5 defines the context, sampling procedure and sample suitable to this study. There follows a discussion of the ethical considerations entailed in taking such a personal approach (3.6) before explaining the choices behind the processing and analysis of the data produced (3.7). Issues associated with trustworthiness (3.8) including dependability and confirmability; credibility and transferability are explored before the chapter concludes with thoughts on possible limitations of the research design (3.9) and a summary of the chapter (3.10).

3.2 Positionality and the philosophical underpinning of my project

In order to afford the reader information to better evaluate my research accounts (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) I provide pertinent points from my story in the form of a brief autobiography before going on to explain how this shapes my positionality; including my belief in an interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology.

3.2.1 Who I am

The power of life experiences is central to my study so it is apt that I offer some of my life experiences to help the reader understand what has shaped my world view. This brief autobiography has been elaborated from a LHG composed prior to this thesis and one I offered as an example to my participants at the start of the research (section 3.4.1).

As a child I lived in a council house in a quiet North Derbyshire mining village. Days were spent walking in the woods with granddad, a retired miner, who convinced me sweets grew on trees; and sitting on Mum's knee as she read *The Faraway Tree.* Nights were spent making sure a tired Dad returning from the pit was not disturbed.

All in all**,** things were pretty quiet until I started the local comprehensive and the wider world crept in. I was an unassuming teenager learning that some people really do judge a book by its cover. One of my friends lived in a very nice area of the village as her parents were rich. She was highly intelligent and born British and Catholic. I was surprised when a neighbour labelled her 'half-caste'. She ever will be R, not a reductive label that failed to see everything that she was. This has stayed with me since as a promise to see people as whole and has become my mantra to 'treat others as I wish to be treated myself.'

At sixteen I found out my father had secured a job in the NACODS' (National Association of Colliery Overmen and Deputies) union and we were moving to Nottingham – might as well have been to the ends of the earth. I cried and cried and bounced back: there was no other choice. Dad's union background profoundly affected me: I believed in the worth of others, but I also believed in myself. I was always told to work hard and even though no one in our family had gone to university I was expected to do A Levels, like my sister. I need to talk about my sister, K: she's five years older than me and after work experience in a library decided to work in the libraries at the age of eighteen. She would bring me copious amounts of books home. I never read many, but I loved the fact she brought them. She's been miles away from me since I was sixteen but always there if I needed her and always proud of anything I achieved: without her I doubt I would have learned the power of persistence. I must also mention Mum; always a housewife and only a worker to earn extra money for the family. She made me believe that anyone, including a woman, could be independent, not because she was, but because she told me so repeatedly: I had to take the opportunities given to me by education that she never had.

So, my friends from Sixth form college and I went to university. B went to Royal Holloway, London, A to Warwick, K to LSE and me to Lancaster: all a first for our families. B was and still is one of the best friends I have ever had: her dad was a gardener and her mum worked at a frozen food shop so money wasn't easy to come by, but we found ways to go to the local theatre. If you got twenty students together you could go to the Playhouse for fifty pence each. Needless to say, our powers of persuasion were finely tuned as even though my family now had more money Dad believed in knowing the value of it, so I had to find my own way.

After three years studying Literature at degree level, I completed a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education and became a secondary English teacher at a comprehensive school on the edge of the Fens before moving to a multicultural comprehensive with many students on the SEN (Special Education Needs) register. My love for stories told in many forms really grew as a teacher when I

realised their power. One of my pupils gave me a message when he left which read: 'Thank you 4 teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* so beautifully, it changed my life.'

I went straight into teaching as it never occurred to me to do a MA but with a Bachelor's degree of II:ii the academy would not have accepted me back in 1986. I wanted to give back to the system I believed had given to me so I deliberately chose the state sector. My old mantra of treat others how you want to be treated yourself was put to good use as some of the 'characters' in the school came to my classroom for escape. Recently I found a card from my dad, who died when I was 28, which reminded me to treat others well, so I was determined to do this and still am. I was naïve as everything I did was for the pupils whilst others expanded their CV for promotion, I just wanted to help those around to learn because, not in spite, of me.

An influential figure during this period illustrates the nonsense of assumptions and the importance of second chance HE. One of the most brilliant minds and kindest hearts I have ever known looked like a throwback to the summer of love. He spoke with a broad northern accent and said things one would not expect of a senior member of staff in a school. His life started very differently, in a northern mining town, and his destiny could have been very different if not for library staff caring enough to support his journey to university. He was inspirational and, there's no other word for it, brilliant: without him so many pupils would not have succeeded.

By accident, after sixteen years in the classroom teaching English, I became a local authority consultant in the New Labour 'Education, Education, Education' drive of the early twenty-first century. I cried when Labour won the election thinking learning would get back on track; I cry now as I see this was the political turning point that moved holistic learning off the agenda. During my time as a consultant I began working more with TAs and realised what they had to offer. I also noted how important the affective aspects of learning were for all students.

A distant relative, by marriage, had a young daughter who she proudly exclaimed was studying for an MA. This got me thinking I might like to return to formal study after 20 years immersed in life. At the same time my partner, who had only gained a few CSEs at school, but went onto pass his printing apprenticeship, began to study to be an electrician which showed a return to formal learning as an adult was possible for anyone. At this time, by chance, a leaflet fell out of a National Association for Teaching English magazine advertising 'MA in Literacy and Language' at the University of Sheffield so I signed up: I could afford the fees and I could always visit mum or my sister when I was there. This was such a valuable experience in showing me that even though I did not have a top-class degree I still had what was needed for success in HE: my 20 years since leaving formal education had taught me so many things.

They say one thing leads to another and the fact I did my MA just because I wanted to, not for any other reason than self-fulfilment, by a strange path led to my present job as tutor of education at a local university. Here I teach part-time atypical students, many are mature, returning to formal education after years away. This job speaks to my soul as it truly has given me the chance to support access to learning for all, and these students love learning. It gives me the opportunity to practice a pedagogy of sharing and valuing experience and, above all, the importance of enjoying learning.

So somehow a little girl called Sue, from a mining village near Sheffield, found her way to university, both as student and tutor, and vowed to value all forms of learning.

I end this section with a poem I wrote in 2012 when I found a broken plate at the back of a drawer: it was a commemorative piece aimed at celebrating the history of North Derbyshire pits, now closed, including the one my father had worked at. On this particular occasion, I decided to mend it: in the process of holding it together it occurred to me that it represented my life. The poem captures a moment of recognition that in piecing the plate back together, I knew I had the power to forge my own future but would never lose my coal community roots.

'The hard, guttural sounds of mother tongue ('nowt, 'tpit, alreet')
echo through my head.
Northern roots grip, bramble-like.
Black coal oozes through my veins.

I have come so far:
through classrooms and southern lilts;
journeyed through different lives.

And yet
still
I sit
one sunny, southern afternoon
desperate:
gripping pit plate in gluey hands,
tears in my eyes,
wishing it to be whole again.'

3.2.2 Positionality

Reflecting on one's self and views with regards to the research is essential prior to, as well as during, the study, to support the articulation of positionality (Holmes, 2014). The previous autobiography and poem are offered for the reader to better understand what has shaped my identity and influenced what I do, including research. It should alert one to the chance of bias in approaches and interpretations (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Positionality pertains to my world view and how that influences the position adopted in relation to this given research (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013):

> "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (Malterud, 2001, p483-484).

As shown in my autobiography, I know the obstacles and joys of being an 'atypical' student returning to formal education. I spent twenty years working before beginning my part-time, long distance MA and then a further six years prior to this doctorate. I reject assumptions and labels, instead believing in the whole person and their potential for success in second

chance education. Time in education has reinforced my conviction that learning is holistic and creative with affective skills playing a vital role in academic achievement.

I believe in democracy and social justice. There is much that is mistakenly undervalued by the dominant discourse on formal education which has grown to see education as a commodity, valuing the cultural capital of qualifications and 'the politics of employability,' (Clegg, 2010, p359). Learning takes many forms and learning from life experiences could be a helpful HE strategy (Kleiman, 2019) if the potential of those who have not been able to take advantage of university earlier in their lives is recognised. As stated in chapter 2, the lens used to view my research is the conceptual framework of an asset based model of the adult learner, giving legitimacy to lived experience as a source of learning. The conceptual framework is underpinned by an ontology of interpretivism and epistemology of subjectivism (see below). The perspective I have taken foregrounds the importance of social contexts beyond the formal, viewing experience as a resource for learning (Figure 2.1) and considers how individuals (including the researcher) interpret these situations. This stance influenced my research design and provided substance for my analytical framework.

3.2.2.1 Ontology

Ontology relates to how we comprehend existence and I adopt the stance of interpretivism, as stated previously. Interpretivism, concerned with what we think about the world (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), is interested in the subjective interpretation by individuals of the world they live in. The researcher must look through the eyes of the participants whilst acknowledging their own subjective interpretation of the ideas of the participants (Counsell, cited in Wilson, 2013). The interpretivist's view of the world, as made of experiences interpreted subjectively, suits this project as it offers an approach that accepts I can only aim to understand other people's views of their life experiences since reality is relative. Accordingly, I searched for the respondents' interpretation of what they learned through informal life situations. Thus interpretivism has led me to look for a construction of life journeys through the first-hand experiences of individuals (Merriam, 1998 cited in Tuli, 2010). It is appropriate to explore what others have to say about the research topic and recognise how the participants feel about their experiences. My role as a researcher in interpreting what was said is also significant in this thesis which values the power of telling.

In adopting the stance of interpretivism, I embrace the premise that knowledge is socially constructed as social experiences provide opportunities for meaning making in groups and by individuals (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The different life situations involving family, the community and work provide the contexts of social actions (Collins, 2010). My interpretivist stance rejects the objective view that 'meaning resides within the world independently of

consciousness' (Collins, 2010, p.38) and has led me to consider research methods which would allow for the voices of participants to be prioritised.

3.2.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology lies at the heart of this study, concerned with the way we know things, what constitutes valid knowledge (Raddon, 2010) and questioning what the field of HE values as learning and learning spaces. My epistemological stance of subjectivism is linked to my ontological perspective in seeing the nature of reality as dependent upon individual perceptions: one can only aim to understand people's views (Cohen et al., 2007).

I adopt the social constructivist paradigm that knowledge is socially constructed (Morgan and Smircich, 1980) through interaction with others and interpreted individually. My philosophical stance sees social context and life experience as inseparable from learning. Consequently, knowledge is dependent on how we interpret the world we live in and there is potential to value learning that occurs in various informal life situations as useful to formal study. Any research that is underpinned by the philosophical stances of an interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology requires one to hear the voices of their participants.

3.3 Methodology

This section aims to justify the chosen methodology as suitably congruent to research questions concerning the importance of the told life journey of mature, part-time learners; my conceptual asset based framework; and interpretivist ontology and subjective epistemology.

As stated in section 1.4 the main aim of this research was to recognise what mature, part-time students bring from their life experiences that supports academic study to add to a body of knowledge on the role of accumulated life experiences in adult learning. The intention was to further ideas on named assets or 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) and their value to study at HE. A qualitative biographical approach was chosen to discuss social contexts involving the family, community and work to uncover what learning happened (see 3.3.1) in order to address the research questions (section 3.1).

Qualitative methodology was seen as fitting for this study to provide a way to 'focus on individual meaning' (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p4) and see things from the participants' point of view. A biographical approach required me to explore the individuals' accounts of their everyday lives, generating personal interpretations of their experiences to try to understand what they saw as important (Roberts, 2002).

This section continues with a justification for the choice of biography (3.3.1) before moving on to an explanation of why narrative inquiry and life history research were not fully

appropriate for this research (3.3.2). Ideas on methodology come to a close with an exploration of creative writing (3.3.3)

3.3.1 Biography

Biography relates to a detailed description of a person's life: 'bio' refers to the period of a person's life and 'graphy' is descriptive of it. A biography contains more than facts, portraying a person's experience of these life events. This lends itself to a study that focuses on the told life journeys of returning learners inviting them to share experiences from family, community and work, within a given time-frame, and to name what they learned.

My positionality led to an approach that would use talk to get close to the lives of the previously unheard to recognise the taken for granted practices in their lives (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). Rogers (2014b) warns that getting close to the everyday world is hard but biography engages with the real world (Merrill and West, 2009) and consequently gave access to the experiences of another's life (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). It necessitated narrative (Holloway and Jefferson, 2003) as it involved personal stories where individuals focussed on aspects important to them (Roberts, 2002) as 'we voice moments that matter' (Mackinlay, 2016, cited by Burnard, 2018). Thus biography was an appropriate choice of methodology for an exploration of the research questions. My conceptual framework, ontological and epistemological position also needed the assembly of told data from individuals (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), and involved an interpretative system (Gee, 2000).

Biography incorporated a naturalistic approach exploring what was said to uncover first-hand accounts of experiences and 'the meanings that underpin people's lives' (Arksey and Knight, 1992, p32 cited in Elliot 2005 p19). The narratives people told gave insights by recognising life is not compartmentalised into home, work, study and so on and that what happened in one area impacted in another. They provided discussion of how understanding was constructed from life events, generating personal interpretations of experiences and offered greater insight to the researcher when trying to understand what the participants saw as important (Roberts, 2002).

Social constructivism is favoured in biographical methodology and this is vital to my conceptual framework and epistemology: learning occurs in the social world which is constantly 'in the making' (Elliot, 2005, p18) and the 'social world is an interpreted world' (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p489). Biography was preferred when exploring the subjective over the objective due to its placing of the participant at the heart of the research (Merrill, 2015) and offered a focus on individuals seen through their own eyes. This methodology allowed the subjective to be honoured as a 'legitimate and necessary aspect of the research

process' (Merrill and West, 2009, p176). As a research approach it involved the generation and understanding of subjective views and embraced a range of possible methods including a LHG and SSIs (section 3.5).

Biography necessarily involved telling of the social events in one's life journey as experiences are expressed in lived and told stories (Cohen et al., 2011). Narrative, or 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p1), supports the sense making process thus biography is a means of understanding life journeys. Story telling can also restore individual agency (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010) by giving power to those who recount the narrative. Stories are a means to understand people better (Holloway and Jefferson, 2003) both individually and collectively. It is possible to trace common elements (Polkinghorne, 1995) across a number of accounts in the same context: listening to twenty-one participants allowed patterns to arise. One criticism of biography is that it can be seen as too subjective and individualistic but biographical accounts can go beyond the individual to illuminate life in a social context (Merrill, 2015) as well as provide a 'thick description' of life experiences (Kaplan, 2014, p46). They offer connections that help the personal and public to be understood (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). Subjective personal accounts can also contain objective information (Bertaux,1981) and can be moved beyond pure description by theory (Merrill and West, 2009).

3.3.2 Narrative Inquiry and Life History Research

Narrative inquiry and life history research contribute to this study which focuses on ways to uncover life experiences as sources of learning useful in formal study. Narrative inquiry starts with and offers story-telling as a means of revealing the significance of the individuals' experiences (Caine, Steeves and Clandenin, 2018). However, it was important to pause and refocus on told life incidents to ascertain what was learned: a narrative alone did not allow for such a structured focus on the specific themes raised by the research questions. Whilst the presentation of the data includes vignettes, I do not present a narrative or retold story (ibid.): instead patterns arising from the life experiences were summarised to recognise what was learned. A LHG, directing participants to specific time frames and life areas, structured the discussions but were not viewed within the macro-history nor intended to cover the whole life time or to be turned into life stories (Abbas, Ashwin and McLean, 2013). Concepts behind narrative enquiry and life history research, therefore, support a way of listening to unheard voices focussing on life events and being directed to explain what was learned. The parameters of this research required a more focussed approach to enable the research questions to be addressed and patterns across lives to emerge.

The suitability of the tools and data analysis methods to the research question and sample size is paramount. Whilst biographical life history interviews focus on the stories of the everyday (Bron and Thunborg, 2015) they were not chosen as they are more appropriate for small numbers of participants when the focus is on (Oakley, 2010) telling in depth and open stories without interruption, (Gomensoro and Burgos Paredes, 2017). This openness and faithfulness to the narrative genre, including its final presentation as a story (Atkinson, 1998), makes it difficult to concentrate on the narrower themes as specified by these research questions (in this case aimed at recognising what mature adults bring to their formal learning from life experiences) (Newby, 2010). SSI were appropriate for the one meeting between researcher and participant (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) whilst still giving the participants the opportunity to share their stories and the interviewer the option to prompt and probe to direct elaborations (Newby, 2010).

Thematic rather than narrative analysis also pertains to the need to clarify my commitment (McAllum, Fox, Simpson and Unson, 2019) to the research question. Narrative analysis emphasises the 'why?' and 'how?' of the story/plot and character/roles (Langley, 1999) in detailed sustained texts as a whole rather than segmenting the data (McAllum et al., 2019) to address a specific theme. Both analysis methods can lead to very different outcomes with thematic being most appropriate in this instance since it allows the exploration of the 'what?' through the coding of *a priori* themes, relevant to the research and arising from the literature review, to show patterns and prevalence (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.3.3 Creative Writing

As stated in the foreword and chapter 1, I make sense of experience by using the creative: either remembering quotations from other works of literature or by writing my own stories or poetry as I did in my field journal (section 3.4.3). The creatively academic approach (section 1.5) has a place in biography which seeks to vocalise real life events. As an account or story-based approach (Roberts, 2002) biography involves creative elements due to the oral traditions of embellishment. It is inseparable from experience as 'Experience…is the stories people live' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p415).

Creative methods can be used at each stage of the research process (Kara, 2018). Quotations from works of literature have been used throughout the thesis to clarify thoughts on certain topics. Storytelling and poetry can be found across the data generation, data presentation and analysis chapters.

Creative writing was appropriate to a biographical methodology as it gave scope for emotional intelligence, not just cognitive (ibid.). My field journal entries cover thoughts and feelings, often in poetry, at each part of the data generation process to capture my reactions

to the participants' accounts. As an ex English teacher, awareness of myself in the research process (Elliot, 2005) was expressed through my autobiography (section 3.2.1), poetry (section 3.4.3) and original folk tales (chapter 5): This is suitable for a study which questions the value of different kinds of learning in the academy and is underpinned by an interpretive and subjective philosophy. Articulating the relationship between the creative work and the critical context (Kroll and Harper, 2012) will also offer another dimension to the original contribution of my doctorate.

3.4 Research tools

This section justifies the choice of life history grid (LHG), semi-structured interviews (SSI) and creative field journal to generate appropriate data. Research tools have been shaped by an asset based conceptual framework and to address research questions (section 3.1) on recognising the importance of life journeys and what has been learned from experiences.

An interpretivist stance demanded data generation tools to access thoughts from the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Despite the dangers of bias, semi-structured one-to-one interviews based on a LHG allowed participants to voice their ideas on learning from experience and attained individual perspectives in as truthful a manner as possible (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

Lee's (1963, p35) *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an influential novel in my life. The madness of all types of prejudices and assumptions, not just those associated with race, are presented from the perspective of a young girl living in the deep south of America in the1930s. One of the marginalised characters, Boo Radley, disrupts appearance and reality expectations as he moves from figure of fear to hero. Scout's father counsels: 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view … Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.' This is something I have tried to do in my life, making it logical to apply to research and the choice of tools that help the researcher to climb into a person's skin.

I have chosen the qualitative methods of SSIs based on a LHG as most suitable since they permit personal description, allowing for the stories of the 'lived everyday world' (Kvale, 2011, p2). This supports my research by hearing multifaceted accounts about an individual's life experiences alongside their interpretations of what they learned from them. Qualitative tools place the participant and their views at the centre and thus value their ideas and interpretations of their experiences. LHGs formed the basis of SSIs to facilitate hearing authentic voices sharing everyday experiences and being directed to what they learned through them.

3.4.1 Life History Grid (LHG)

Biography requires a tool to focus on time-referenced episodes of a person's life; while an asset based conceptual framework demands the opportunity to tease out what has been gained during these episodes. I used my own LHG to support the early part of my autobiography (section 3.2). The process revealed the feelings and recollections such a simple organising tool could stimulate. It provided prompts to evoke memories and thoughts for the participants without being overly constraining or directed (Abbas, Ashwin and McLean, 2013).

The LHG was intended to encourage dialogue about significant events (Archer, 2007) that had influenced the individual in two specific phases of their lives relevant to the research question: between leaving school and becoming a TA and between becoming a TA and starting the degree. Life history involves trying to make sense of life as lived (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It allowed me to 'examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p1). Since my sample had the characteristics of being mature graduates from the same part-time degree, comparing the stories generated by the LHGs revealed shared patterns of experience or interpretation across individuals (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994)

The grid was a flexible approach, allowing the participant to recall incidents by using cues to aid memory. These cues took the form of a temporal reference system as outlined in the paragraph above. It is common that LHGs do this, ranging from a timeline including 'flash bulb moments' such as 9/11 to external events from family or work (Berney and Blane, 2003) to organise and prompt memories. There is no one way of doing a LHG: it is personal (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Ashwin, Abbas, Filippakou and McLean (2010) adapted the LHG for their educational purposes to four broad life periods: pre-school, primary, secondary and post compulsory; whereas I used two life phases to reflect the journey to TA and then to BA with experiences from three life areas: family, community and work (see glossary, p4-6) (Appendix A). I chose these everyday life spaces as they arose from my literature review as being significant to adult learning (Illeris, 2009).

It was an appropriate tool to use prior to, and during, interviews as it offered 'insights into the complexity of factors influencing decisions' (Smith, 2011, p8) and helped in the mutual understanding of personal interpretations of events (Wellington, 2000). Six filled it in, one brought notes and fourteen used it as a visual thinking frame before and during the discussions aiding their recall of episodes and people significant to their life journey. The selective nature of memory was appropriate to this study as chosen episodes became indicative of the 'significant aspects of their social reality' (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002 cited

in Robson, 2002, p374). In using life-history I welcomed people telling the story they wanted to tell for their own reasons (Sikes et al., 1996, cited in Goodson and Sikes, 2001) and acknowledged that what was revealed would be the interpretations of participant and researcher (Zinn, 2004).

Accounts from twenty-one individuals could be taken together to tell a particular tale. Several stories from similar sociocultural backgrounds and the same educational context would support each other (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) and may go some way towards identifying aspects of shared culture (Fairweather and Rinne, 2012) that could be transferable to similar situations.

Pilot

To gain thoughts on filling in the LHG I completed a second grid covering the years between leaving teaching in a secondary school and gaining an MA and then between gaining an MA and starting the doctorate (Appendix B). It was offered as a model for individuals who had never seen a LHG and provided more information to use in the second part of my autobiography (section 3.2)

The three volunteers for the pilot said they found this useful, but I also discovered it did not matter if they had filled in the grid prior to the interview. Time was an issue for these individuals so one had filled it in, one had thought about it extensively and one turned up with no grid having had a cursory look at it. The conversation flowed for all three: just the presence of the grid and questions prompted memories. I did fill in a grid for one individual during the interview: the participant found this a helpful reminder, but I felt I was missing too many ideas by writing.

Main study

As a result of the pilot I made no changes to the grid itself but reconsidered how I used it: I took a more flexible approach and in the main research took a note-book to jot down any areas to return to. That worked well. There were fewer distractions for me and the participant. It established some kind of balance between life stories and teasing out what was learned from them. I typed up the grid afterwards and sent it for checking to any who had not filled it in.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews (SSIs)

Interviews allowed the individuals to be heard and to speak freely (Cohen et al., 2007), to draw out and elaborate on past experiences within a LHG. LHGs shaped the face-to-face SSIs by aiding the focus on noteworthy events and experiences. A SSI based on a LHG meant I could ask open questions about life journeys but with some structure to allow

comparability across participants (Figure 3.1), providing the best possibility of gathering the personal (Henwood, 1996 cited in Hewstone, Stroebe and Jonas, 2012). My conceptual framework concerning assets learned from the social required a tool to support the premise a person's life history is linked to learning (Alheit and Dausien, 2002). SSIs were chosen as a way of allowing individuals to tell their stories with a minimum amount of constraint by drawing out past experiences shaped by the LHG and to capture the individual's interpretations of them (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The whole person might be better revealed by creating opportunities for discussion: 'If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?' (Kvale, 1996, p1). This was honoured by SSIs.

SSIs are a useful tool when there is only one opportunity to interview the participant (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) which was the case in this study. They provided the opportunity for openness but also to follow a schedule and use questions reflecting the research focus (Newby, 2014). Follow up, probing and clarification was possible, unlike structured interviews which follow a pre-set script with the same closed questions being used for all (ibid.). Whilst structured interviews make it easier to replicate the study, they restrict explanation of issues which was vital for this research. Unstructured interviews would have empowered the participants more but were rejected due to their open nature making it difficult to keep focussed on the research issues and the resulting data being hard to compare (ibid.).

As interviewer I led the respondents into a dialogue where they told 'their own stories of their lived world' (Kvale, 1996, p4). There was empowerment of participants but I also needed to provide some questions for the data to be relevant. As stated in section 3.3.2 using narrative enquiry alone would not allow for a focus on the research questions. A semi-structured approach, rather than open interviews, was preferred as it gave flexibility to probe for detail and clarify whilst having a framework to consider comparability across interviews.

The key benefit afforded by the use of SSIs was they provided first-hand accounts of experience giving individuals agency (Bathmaker and Harnet, 2010) but were also relevant to the research focus. They provided valid data in a relatively relaxed manner as, whilst they were interviews, they had many features of conversation and of the everyday (Cohen et al., 2011) thus putting the participant at ease.

Pilot study

I asked the same three volunteers to pilot the SSIs at the same time as the LHG. The pilot showed me the need to foreground being a parent more in my questions.

All three participants in the pilot-study reported they had enjoyed the experience and one used the word 'cathartic'. It was emotional for me and I realised how affecting honest revelations about the past could be. I had taken information on local counselling services for them but now understood how it could affect the interviewer.

Main study

Interview questions were edited through the project (Denscombe, 2014). Even though my aim, to tease out significant points from the LHG, stayed the same, the interview questions I used were modified slightly. Having initially intended to ask about experiences seen as contributing positively to a learning trajectory and why? I realised this was too restrictive and could shut down possibilities. The first two interviews invited talk about what past experiences had contributed to them as a student considering family, community and work. These interviews were paradoxically both restraining and too free. Firstly, the participants were restrained by trying to select experiences that they deemed sufficiently worthy of contributing to student life but also diverted into stories without expressing what had been learned.

The issue arose of whether to allow stories to dominate or to impose the research focus. Accordingly, a little more structure was introduced to the following interviews: the aim was to balance participant freedom and control by choosing and telling stories of their experiences and having a follow-up opportunity to revisit previously mentioned points to focus on the research questions. Figure 3.1 illustrates the adjusted interview schedule used for the remaining nineteen participants, to ensure I did not rush past what was important to the participants whilst gauging when to interrupt to refocus on the research: I found this hard.

1. What do you think you brought from past experiences to university learning?
For each time frame and each life aspect: 2. Tell me about people, places or events that contributed positively to your development?
Follow up prompts, if required: 3. What did you learn from them?
4. What do you think you brought from past experiences to university learning?
5. What do you think as a mature student you brought to the degree that made you successful?

Figure 3.1 Interview schedule

There were other issues I had to be aware of when using SSIs related to encroaching on people's time; my position as a researcher who knew the participants; my positionality and my skills as an interviewer.

A concern was intruding too much on time as the interviews could take up to one hour or over. Ultimately the whole process from interview, recording, transcription to analysis, should be collaborative with 'respondent validation' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p36). This was sought at each stage but in reality I was aware of how busy these people were. Many seemed to be happy to give up the time for the interview but no more; with 7/21 and 7/12 respectively checking transcripts then vignettes.

A reflexive role was required to consider the complexity of my relationship to the study as an outsider researcher with an insider position as well as the potential effect my presence might have on the interviews. It was not always easy to draw the line between the two perspectives of insider and outsider (Merriam et al., 2000) as I know all the participants but in choosing graduates, I hoped to reduce power relations that might have adverse effects. The relationship and presence of the interviewer will be considered further in section 3.6 on ethics. The power given to me in such personal situations and the problems of privacy (Bell, 2010) required thought. I needed to recognise 'the many ways that attitudes can shape an interview' (Anderson with Arsenault, 1998, p194) to ensure the participants did not try to please me. Occasionally, I did have to remind participants to just tell me anything and not worry if it was useful for me.

A disadvantage of using interviews can relate to the skills of the interviewer and their impact on the data collected (Powney and Watts, 1987). I was careful to be sensitive, listen 'beyond', ask questions in a non-threatening manner and show reciprocity (Goodson and Sikes, 2001 p20). The participants were reminded of the nature of relationships and what was expected from participation at the start of each interview.

The venue for the interview was also a potential challenge for my interview skills. Each participant was invited to suggest a location to meet which occasionally lead to interruptions but mostly these were overcome by humour and patience on the part of interviewer and participant. To safeguard nothing being missed, a device was used to record each interview. There were ethical concerns conducting interviews in public or private places which will be considered in section 3.6

Towards the end of the interviews it occurred to me that I should have defined what I meant by 'learning' as there were many interpretations of it but, to retain consistency, I did not change anything. On hindsight I am pleased I did not as it allowed the participants to talk about what it meant to them.

3.4.3 Reflexive and creative field journal

A field journal was kept during the period of data generation to its discussion. This supported 'a reflexive approach' by exploring how my ideals might affect my reactions to the research (Greenbank, 2003 p791). Entries developed my awareness of the relationship with participants and aided analysis of the impact of my 'position, perspective and presence' (Finlay, 2002, p225). I chose to explore my reactions in creative writing, returning to poetry and stories to help me understand what was happening and use myself as a resource (Denscombe, 2014). Poetry written as part of the research process is considered below; a summary story and vignettes for twelve participants support the data presentation (chapter 4) and four original folk tales became part of the analysis and discussion (chapter 5). This allowed for ideas to be expressed by using creativity and emotions to support interpretation.

Poetry

All 'research is creative' (Kara, 2016) and my positionality led me to foreground an arts-based approach. I saw poetry as a way of capturing reactions to the more traumatic stories. The creative has the power to open up ideas and writing a poem at each stage of the research can assist the process of showing and understanding (Burnard, 2018). I chose to make sense of my thoughts and feelings after interviews in five poems. I now offer a brief outline of each to help the reader understand their purpose and the researcher experience (Collins, 2010).

My poetry expressed emotional responses to some of the interviews and helped clarify my reactions to them but also issues related to the participants' motivation; attitudes and emotional intelligence (EI); intra and interpersonal skills; and learning as everyday.

'Everything that I am' (Appendix C) captured thoughts on how the past and present blend and that even negatives can forge a positive way ahead.

'Everything that I am
has led me to this moment.'

Everything that I was
and could be
walks by my side
whispering, 'Go on.'

The extract emphasises what has been learned from past experiences is essential to the present. The line breaks are intended to foreground the ideas of how the past is ever present

but even when opportunities are lost it can be a positive motivator. The motivation of some adult learners (*'I have the will to succeed)* (section 4.3.1) aligns with an asset based model of adult learning by recognising persistence.

Reactions to attitudes and EI referred to during the interviews were captured in three poems. *'I did not know*' (Appendix D),

'To realise the trauma from

which you rebuilt yourself –'

expressed my surprise and admiration at the resilience of some participants. While *'& so here I am again'* (Appendix E) was written towards the end of the interview schedule. It too emphasises resilience:

'full of wonder
at your
resilience.'

but notes a growing awareness of patterns across stories with the use of '*I am here once again'*. *'Sadness weighed me down'* (Appendix F) summarised my reactions to the courage that the everyday floats on. It recognises that inspiration and talent had been shaped by adversity.

'*You are an oxymoron wrapped up in a paradox'* (Appendix G) was my final retrospective celebration of the multi-talented nature of the participants.

'independently self-sufficient working well with others

– a giver and taker'

It tries to capture the range of seemingly contradictory talents the participants possess on both an interpersonal level:

'accepts everyone,

is kind to all.'

and intrapersonal:
'a rigorously organised, flexible juggler'.

Finally, a lone passing comment in my field journal caught my reflections on the everyday nature of the learning being referred to: '*Do what needs to be done'.*

Lack of space prohibits an explanation of every part of each poem but they follow the principle of accentuating points from the data.

Creative stories – Vignettes and folk tales

Stories convey meaning and enable thinking about understanding differently (Caine, Steeves and Clandinin, 2018). As a researcher who is an educator, I recognise the power of learning from stories: teaching literature at secondary level has shown me the capacity of the creative to captivate and clarify. Jackson's 'Differently Academic' (2004), on the position of women in education, fascinates me. Her thoughts on what is valued as learning are pertinent as she asks whether HE only values something as academic if written by men, and seen as objective, abstract and theoretical. Her method of writing reinforces this point as she includes a story ending:

> 'But the Ivory, so dazzling and full of promises was just the bones of something long dead, and the Word was ours all the time, waiting to be freed' (Jackson, 2004, p101).

To see creative writing that reinterprets the academic showed me the possibility of combining both to magnify the message so now I use it in my thesis by offering a brief summary tale, twelve vignettes (chapter 4) and four contemporary folk tales (chapter 5) to support the data and discussion.

I wrote the brief tale *'Once upon a time a little figure who seemed to be bowed by the burdens of life…*' for the start of chapter 4 to foreground the concept of appearance and reality. I begin with this little tale to summarise the assumptions people may hold of the participants compared to the assets the data shows they bring. I want this to inspire the reader to reflect and open their mind to possibilities. Extracts from this tale were repeated at the end of most findings as reminders of this and to emphasise what each section had shown. Also as part of data presentation (chapter 4), I include twelve vignettes to reinforce messages about an asset the participants possess.

I have also written four contemporary learning tales (*The constant soul and the three motivators; Three TAs; Maven and the diverse but finally understood small people; and Adaptable Alice in Wonderland*) as responses to my findings and added these to my journal. They have become part of the analysis and discussion in chapter 5 with one tale to illustrate points about motivation, resilience, flexibility and the interpersonal. The writing was a way of using imagination and emotions to consider what these different findings were telling me about the participants. It activated a dialogue between my 'inner and outer experience' (Collard- Stokes, 2018) to make me interpret by re-storying data, making the known unfamiliar (Kara, 2018). 'Defamiliarisation' can be used as another word for 'originality'

(Lodge, 1992/2011, p55, referred to in Thomson, 2015). More recently, Thomson (2017) elaborated that researchers need to practice seeing things differently so I planned the use of creative writing to contribute to the originality of my thesis.

The four tales are based loosely on more traditional ones (possibly recognisable) but their narrative and message have been up-dated based on the thematic analysis of the data. The stories represent the people and ideas. For example, in the section on motivation, *The constant soul and the three motivators* offers the options of three mysterious looking jars which arose out of the data that indicated three motivators for the participants, including the most powerful driver of intrinsic motivation. *The three TAs* illustrates themes of resilience and determination. *Maven and the diverse but finally understood small people* shows what can be achieved by communication and empathy. Finally, organisation, flexibility and independence are accentuated in *Adaptable Alice in Wonderland*.

I also used quotations from literature in places that were synonymous with the topics being explored. In chapter 4, a quotation from *Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare, 1590-2) indicates people do not see value because of the expectations of society.

I offer this brief explanation of the presence and purpose of my poetry and stories to show the relationship between the creative work and the critical context (Kroll and Harper, 2012). As stated previously, I intend it to provide another dimension to the original contribution of my doctorate.

3.5 Context, Sampling and Sample

3.5.1 Context

The participants of this study were twenty-one adult learners who had graduated from a four year part-time applied degree in education at a local hub of a post-1992 university in East Anglia. The degree in question regularly recruits a total of up to 70 students per cohort, across multiple sites, and has been in operation for a number of years. It is a successful course with over 75% achieving an upper second class degree or higher in the last two years. It fits into the broader context of adult learning by offering second chances (McFadden, 1995) to mature students and those who might not traditionally attend HE.

Thus this research is located in a university that aspires to the Widening Participation (WP) and Lifelong Learning (LL) agenda (sections 1.2 and 2.2). The university has approximately 14,000 students, spread across three main, geographically separate, campuses with three satellite hubs reaching across a 70 mile radius. 17% of the student body is part-time with 31.11% of those recruited to all courses aged 30 and over (University Guide, 2020). As a 'Million Plus' university it offers higher education for 'atypical' students, who would normally

not be associated with university due to their age and lack of formal qualifications. It makes provision through part-time courses, such as the applied degree that the sample is taken from, with limited insistence on traditional entry requirements. A number of courses, the applied included, are grounded in a creative approach to teaching which blends theory with practice.

I have occupied the role of tutor at this university for over seven years, working on the part-time applied degree but also on the full time BA in Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). From anecdotal evidence, I know the QTS degree recruits approximately 16% (about 5 out of a cohort of 30) of its students who are also mature and have family commitments. Even the remaining younger students often have to work to finance the degree, while a few are also single parents.

3.5.2 Sampling

Since the sample needed to be directly relevant to the research question, concerning what lived experiences were seen as significant and what had been learned by them, purposive non-probability sampling was used as a purposive sample allowed for the recognition of a particular group as appropriate for the study (Sharp, 2012). The specific purpose (Wellington, 2000) relevant to the research included having occupied the role of mature, part-time students with no, or limited, history of post-secondary education and returned to study an applied degree after at least fifteen years away from formal education. For the specific criteria see section 1.2 but a key descriptor was being a member of the marginalised mature, part-time HE learning community.

The population of interest to me comprised Teaching Assistants (TAs) who had recently graduated from the part time degree. I use the term TA broadly as one was not in paid employment while a small number (approximately three in every fifteen) had progressed to HLTA or unqualified teacher during the course of the degree. My sample was taken from about 200 TAs who had completed the course (2016 to 2018). Approximately 25% were in their early twenties or below, having chosen this as a local study site, so did not fulfil my criteria of being away from formal education for at least fifteen years. The remaining 75% were in their late twenties and above.

As stated previously, graduates of the applied degree were chosen out of ethical consideration to remove complications arising from power dynamics associated with tutor-learner relationships. It was intended that, having completed their course, power differences may be reduced and disclosure and authenticity between researchers and participants encouraged (Karnieli-Miller, Streir and Pessach, 2009). Convenience sampling was used as the participants were drawn from those geographically near. Students on the applied degree were distributed across four locations across the East Anglian region. I had easier access to

two sites so a practicable and permitted (Cohen et al., 2007) sample was taken, where I gained permission from the university to contact the graduates that were in my vicinity. This proved difficult for those who had left a few years previously as although as a tutor I had email addresses, the university had to make contact for me as a researcher, in line with the European Union General Data Regulation (Data Protection Act, 2018), and this took more time than I had hoped. Further detail about access to participants will be considered in section 3.6 on ethics.

Twenty-one was deemed as sufficient for a lone qualitative researcher considering the resources and time available (Mason, 2012 in Baker and Edwards, 2012) as too large a sample would be impracticable for one person to do justice to the data. However, the option to recruit more was left open until the saturation point (Bertaux, 1981) was reached; that is the point at which no new information was being uncovered. I was reliant on the 'good will and availability' of the participants (Bell, 2010, p149), who replied to the initial invitation: twenty-one emerged through this process. It was a relief not to have to absorb drop out or lack of interest by having to consider alternative plans (Newby, 2010) and a greater number would support the trustworthiness of my data by providing some increased confidence in findings (Sharp, 2009). By rooting the findings in systematic evidence and constant comparison across as many of the twenty-one interviews as possible some judgements ought to be transferable to similar contexts.

3.5.3 Sample

Pilot study

As stated previously, a pilot involving three current students was selected. I trialled the LHG on the volunteers from a second-year class I had just finished teaching and whom I would not teach again for a year. Trying things out on a smaller sample allows for the removal of any potential confusion (Wellington, 2000) and to ascertain the suitability of the tool in generating appropriate data. Reassurance that nothing would be gained or lost from taking part in the interview was given, it would last no longer than twenty minutes and the research tools were being trialled: not their responses.

Choosing individuals I would not be teaching again for a year allowed for knowledge of disclosures to fade as I was careful not to use their data in any form. I was clear that they would be speaking to me in a researcher role and that anything shared was confidential (BERA, 2018). What I learned from the pilot and how it influenced the design of the main study was discussed in section 3.4.

Main study

As stated in section 3.5.2, twenty-one mature graduates, who met the criteria, volunteered. The sample size had to be adequate to allow for shared patterns to arise (Morse, 1994): it was hoped the data would confirm or reveal named assets (Jarvis 1987; Illeris, 2007; Goleman, 1996). A smaller number would not have provided as convincing a picture of recurring patterns of themes across all transcripts and analytical frameworks with regards to the specific attitudes and skills they brought with them from learning in informal life situations.

All of the students arrived at the degree via a TA role in either early years, primary or secondary schools, but some were volunteers or progressed to become unqualified teachers. As TAs they had an interest in education and were seeking to improve their education and the education of others. The fact they all worked, in some capacity, in a classroom gave them practical educational knowledge to apply theories to but they also had familiarity with other jobs outside of education ranging from manual (such as cleaner) to professional (such as midwife) as well as roles within the family and their social community or neighbourhood that gave them many more skills useful to study (Table 3.1). The terms 'manual' and 'professional' are preferred descriptors as they distinguish between blue-collar, physical, practical work and higher status professional positions seen as possessing a specialised set of skills or qualifications. Whilst the former is often viewed as low status it is often not the case (Rose, 2005) as all involve different kinds of thinking needed to work well (ibid.). Rose questions the definition of intelligence in a democracy, concluding our appreciation lacks depth and richness (ibid.). It is vital to consider all forms of work as requiring significant skills if we are to value all forms of learning.

Six participants did not know anyone who had attended university. Most of those who did, knew relatives from the extended family, mainly cousins or aunties, but there were some with siblings, partners or their own children who had undertaken study at HE (Table 3.1). No one mentioned either parent as attending though one had a father graduate from teacher training college.

Table 3.1 summarises a number of characteristics of the sample including age range and qualifications. The age range covered a wide span with five in the 30s, eleven in the 40s and five in the 50s. Only one had no previous qualifications from formal education while fourteen had the equivalent to GCSE and six had taken 'A' levels. Out of this latter six, one had started university but left due to personal circumstances and three had places in FE but did not attend due to low graded qualifications or life events.

Age range	Qualification on leaving school	Past jobs [manual/ professional]	Family attended university				
			Yes No	Extended	Partner	Sibling	Child
30s	GCSE	Prof	Y	x			
30s	GCSE	Both	Y			x	
30s	GCSE	Both	Y	x			
30s	A level	Both	Y			x	
30s	GCSE	Both	Y	x			
40s	A level	Both	Y		x		
40s	O level	Prof	Y	x			
40s	GCSE	Both	N				
40s	A level	Both	N				
40s	GCSE	Both	Y			x	
40s	GCSE	Both	N				
40s	A level	Prof	Y			x	
40s	GCSE	Prof	N				
40s	CSE	Prof	N				
40s	O level	Prof	Y	x			
40s	A level	Prof	Y	x			
50s	None	Prof	Y	x			
50s	O level	Prof	N				
50s	O level	Prof	Y		x	x	x
50s	A level	Prof	Y	x			
50s	O level	Prof	Y				x

Table 3.1 Information on the sample of twenty-one at the time of the research

Other information about the sample includes:

- Twenty females
- Twenty with children
- Eighteen white British
- Three white European (English as second language speakers)
- Fifteen married plus four who had been but were separated and one co-habiting
- Two had attended private school
- Six working class, eight newly moved to middle class, five middle class, one armed forces

Each participant chose their own pseudonym, to assist anonymity but these have not been included in Table 3.1 for ethical reasons related to potential identification.

As stated in chapter 1, this study was not designed to specifically cover gender, ethnicity or class, it is about individuals who, for whatever reason, have been left out of an education system that fails to recognise what they have to offer.

3.6 Ethics and Sensitivities

As stated at the start of chapter 3, the account of my positionality (section 3.2) demonstrates I value getting close to the lives of my participants to recognise the taken for granted practices in their lives (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). This involves personal discussions and disclosures which would make the research high risk so I had to plan carefully to ensure my project could be 'carried out in an ethically proper manner from start to finish' (Sharp, 2009, p22). LHGs and SSIs required an examination of ethics to secure sensitivity and respect in the research process 'through to the write-up' (Wellington, 2000, p3). My duty was to behave with integrity and do no harm whilst being impartial (ESRC, 2015). I identified risks, considered what would be done to minimise them and adhered to the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (2016) as well as The British Educational Research Association's (BERA) (2018) guidelines, including giving attention to: voluntary informed consent, openness and disclosure, the right to withdraw and privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. I did not commence research until full ethical approval had been attained from the university; whereupon I received the Chair's letter noting the 'Reviewers appreciated the thoroughness of this submission'.

Permission to access and approach the individuals as a researcher was sought via my line manager. Even though I had access as a tutor, I had to follow ethical procedures as a researcher, so my line manager became the gate keeper to contact potential participants where individuals had not given me permission to use personal email addresses. I had a professional relationship of at least four years with all the students as I had taught them for between one and four ten-week modules, over an eight-module degree, and I had supervised ten for their research project. We had a mutually respectful relationship because of this. In order to minimise ethical concerns created by the dual role of tutor and researcher, former students were chosen. As an ex-tutor of the graduates I had to distinguish between my dual roles of researcher and former teacher for the participants, as well as remind myself to make clear the aims of the study, what was required of participants and intrusion on time would be kept to a minimum. Emails were sent to invite people to take part outlining the participants' rights, involving reassurances such as: voluntary participation would not affect future study or references and anonymity would be assured as far as possible with use of pseudonyms and no identifiable markers assigned to responses (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996, cited in Bell, 2010). Information in the life history letter (Appendix H) was clear to point out: 'Only fill in what you feel happy disclosing.'

A 'Participant Information sheet' (Appendix I) was shared to make sure all knew that participation in the study required 'sharing key events and relationships from family, community and work that have contributed to your learning journey'. A 'Participant consent

form' (Appendix J) was sent to make sure that all involved understood information gained during the study may be published but personal results would remain confidential. Once read, the individual signed the consent form for my records.

Biographical methodology and tools are very personal, so I had to consider the potential risks, especially emotional, to individuals including myself. I communicated that I did not expect discussion of anything they did not want to share and that, for some, this process may stir emotions or cause anxiety. Consequently, I left an information sheet about local counselling services with each participant and talked it through at the start whilst reinforcing they should not disclose anything that made them feel uneasy. If participants showed any distress during the interview, they were given the opportunity to stop and turn the recording device off. All chose to continue as they felt the process cathartic. I used poetry in my field journal (section 3.3.3) as well as the support of my supervisors to explore and ease my feelings.

During interviews I had to be aware of the influence of interviewer (Newby, 2014) not only due to my presence but also my relationships. As a researcher and ex-tutor, I potentially had power and since an interview is a social situation (Cohen et al., 2007) I needed to acknowledge that the stories told would inevitably be shaped by the relationship with the researcher. I had to be alert to the possible distorting effects of power (ibid.) so I was careful to ensure the participant was at ease and avoid any leading behaviour. As the participants were all graduates there was no undue pressure with regards to effect on grades and since they all knew me and we had a good working relationship we were quick to establish a rapport. Likewise, transparency of process and respect for the participant was paramount (Savin-Baden and Major-Howell, 2013).

I selected measures to make sure my research did no harm and did not manipulate (Bridges, 2001) by endeavouring to hear their voices by using 'openness, sensitivity, honesty, accuracy' (Cohen et al., 2007, p57). I intended that these measures demonstrated my commitment to 'sensitive and reflexive understanding' (Bridges, 2001, p384). All participants were offered the opportunity, whilst being alerted to possible time implications, to check the transcripts and make changes as they saw fit and reassured that after they had read the transcripts it was acceptable to withdraw from the study. If they choose to withdraw data would not be used. I also offered to provide a summary of the main findings by request so as not to encroach on their time too much. The twelve vignettes (chapter 4) were sent to the relevant participants and seven made comments or slight alterations.

During the data collection process, I had to be aware of interview location and that it was a potential invasion of privacy to go to the interviewees' homes but being in a public place may

jeopardise confidentiality and a feeling of well-being. The comfort, and convenience of the participants was paramount when sharing lived experience (Bashir, 2018) so it was important to allow the choice of venue to be, within reason, what the participants wanted. When the interviews were conducted at home a quiet, private room was selected: on one occasion family members interrupted, and the interview was paused. I was aware of the guidance for lone working (University of Nottingham, 2012) and took measures to minimise the risks as far as was reasonably practicable. The participants were all known to me, working in schools and Criminal Record Bureau checked. They were not deemed to be socially vulnerable, living in areas I was well acquainted with. I considered whether somebody should accompany me but believed it unnecessary, instead someone always knew where I was going and was contacted on arrival and departure. A fully charged mobile phone was with me at all times.

What was meant by confidentiality, including access to the data, was made clear and any limitations to anonymity since there can be no complete guarantee as far as life studies using small numbers are concerned (Cohen et al., 2007). Dissemination and how the research would be used in future was communicated to the participants. The Data Protection Act (2018) was adhered to and an up-date sent to all, in June 2018, in the form of a 'Research participant privacy notice' supplemental to the participant information letter, reiterating measures taken to safeguard stored data.

A key ethical consideration whilst writing up was how I could include relevant contextual detail without compromising confidentiality and anonymity (Wellington, 2000). Pseudonyms, chosen by the participants, were used at all times and while presenting the findings I strove to remove any potential identifiers by revisiting the chapter constantly over time to check. I was careful not to relate anything that would hurt or harm the participants while being true to the honesty of their disclosures.

Throughout the whole process I endeavoured to be faithful to the principle that my first responsibility was to the participants: not my research (BERA, 2018).

3.7 Data Analysis Methods

This section outlines the methods chosen to analyse data since it is important to be transparent over these matters (Silverman, 2000). Data arising from qualitative methods are not easy to analyse or interpret. I used Merrill and West's (2009) sequence of recording, transcribing, listening, reading and rereading individual cases and noticing prior to comparing across cases to identify common themes. Inductive analysis looking for emerging themes was used as well deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) directed by

existing concepts from the literature review and my own beliefs, since 'data is not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (ibid., p84).

I originally considered a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis package but instead choose manual analysis as I wanted to get to know my participants and their data. I personally transcribed twenty-one interviews as a way to become familiar with the data; however I was vigilant about ways to locate data in such a large data set (Welsh, 2002). Whilst I did not fear losing a relationship with my data (ibid.) I preferred being absorbed in it to do justice to my participants, the themes and the relationships across themes. Since being in touch with the emotions of the data was essential to my study, I choose to spend more time personally organising and reflecting on each individual as well as possible inter-relationships across the data.

3.7.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was an appropriate way of making sense of the data as it is theoretically flexible (Braun and Clarke, 2006) allowing translation of my conceptual framework (Figure 2.2, p55) into an analytical framework (discussed later in this section). It allowed the identification of themes as 'something important about the data in relation to the research question and some level of 'patterned response' associated with issues of prevalence' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p82). This suited my study because of the required focus on my topic both individually and across participants.

Thematic analysis required familiarisation with the data and codes as well as the development of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process is not linear (Denscombe, 2014) and requires the data to be revisited through every stage. Overview *a priori* themes arising from the literature review and my conceptual framework were used while letting the specifics of each theme emerge.

I began noticing and comparing early on during interviews but once all were completed I engaged in a general 'eyeballing' of the data. This provided tallies with regards to common themes and substance for word clusters on them (Appendix K). This was far from robust but gave initial thinking points around affective aspects of learning such as confidence, perseverance and so on.

Coding reorganised the data to support a more rigorous analysis (Newby, 2010). Straightforward coding (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014) was used to label data chunks of varying size to sort and build connections (Robson, 2002) to aid interpretation. The 'labels for assigning symbolic units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information' (Miles et al., 2014, p71) supported the identification of *a priori* and emerging themes that could be

grouped together leading to possible conclusions focussed on my research questions (Robson, 2002). My conceptual framework supported an analytical framework but did not dominate. Codes used arose from the literature review: family, community and work and then other *a priori* codes (coloured to reflect which of these areas of life they could be found in), motivation, attitudes, emotions/EI, intra and interpersonal skills and the skills as 'everyday' (section 2.3.2) Emerging sub-themes, from repetition, could be grouped around the main codes above and this led to naming of the specific affective aspects of learning. Thus the coding began by using *a priori* overview themes on transcripts transferred to analytical framework grids and moved onto grids created for overviews of each of the six *a priori* codes and for each life area (family, community, work) covering all twenty-one participants but also led to emerging specifics. Data analysis could therefore look for *a priori* themes framed by my research questions but also new ideas arising from comparative analysis of data across the twenty-one accounts (Roberts, 2002).

An analytical framework helped move analysis from the descriptive to analytical (Merrill and West, 2009) as recommended by Gillham (2010) and Goodson and Sikes (2001). The latter note how categories and concepts are especially useful when working with life-history, so this made it suitable for work using SSIs based on LHGs.

The overview codes reflected reading (Table 3.2) linked to my conceptual framework. Each aspect of life (family, community and work) (Illeris, 2007, 2009) was approached separately during the interview which aided the coding of transcripts prior to transfer to the analytical framework (for an example of a completed analytical framework see Appendix L).

Overview Codes	Specific Codes	Key Literature Sources
Motivation	Motivation from positive influence of others	Knowles, 1980; Illeris 2007; Rogers 2014
	Motivation from negative influence of others	
	Negatives that drive	
Attitudes & emotions/ EI	Attitudes	Goleman, 1996; Jarvis, 1987, 2006; Illeris, 2007
	EI	
	Work ethic	
	Love of learning	
Social & Personal/Life skills	Social skills interpersonal	Vygotsky, 1984; Goleman, 1996; Jarvis, 1987, 2006; Rogers, 2014
	Personal skills Intrapersonal	
	Everyday	Vygotsky, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986; Tough, 2002; Illeris, 1987,2007; Jarvis, 2007

Table 3.2 Analytical framework based on key sources of literature / conceptual framework

Important aspects, as identified in the literature, for adult learners were whole person learning, especially the affective and social (Jarvis, 1987, 2006; Illeris, 2007) which became the general categories for my analytical framework (Table 3.2). The affective and attitudinal became the focus due to what was said in the interviews. Life skills was split into the two areas of personal or intrapersonal and social, interpersonal, (Goleman, 1996) (section 2.3.5). The everyday relates to learning in informal life contexts (section 2.3.2).

Data for each participant were placed in a grid developed from an analytical framework for each interviewee (Appendix L). Subsequently, a separate summary was written for each participant to provide an alternative way of viewing the ideas relevant to the research questions. This supported familiarisation with the findings. Individual summary sheets (no longer than one side of A4) were colour coded according to motivation, attitudes and emotions/EI, intra/inter personal skills and everyday occurrences to provide a visual comparison across individual summaries. Direct quotations were used to support trustworthiness and contribute to the substance of the research (Gillham, 2010) but interpretation when using extracts out of context (Denscombe, 2014) had to be considered.

Ideas from each of the twenty-one individual analytical frameworks were looked at independently but commonalities were also noted in terms of the specific affective elements

of adult learning mentioned in a number. This was accomplished by transferring individual data to an over-view sheet for all twenty-one participants to look for patterns across each theme in each aspect of life (Appendix M). For example, all statements made by each of the participants on attitudes (family) were put together in one sheet. If an individual did not mention the theme it was left blank. This allowed for the number of individuals mentioning it in this life aspect to be seen, as well as the specifics being mentioned. Subthemes/codes such as the attitudes of confidence, resilience, patience, emerged due to their prevalence across a number of participants when counted. This process was repeated for every aspect of life (family, community and work) in a theme and then for every aspect of life for the remaining themes; resulting in overview sheets that provided data on the frequency of themes and pattern, on the premise that visual displays and groupings support comparisons within and across the data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). This data was turned into quantitative tallies (Appendix N) representing the number of individuals who mentioned the subtheme. 'Counting' does have its place in qualitative research as it can verify one's emerging thoughts or remind the researcher to be honest and avoid personal bias if numbers are small (Miles et al., 2014).

Although I aimed to catch my data according to the analytical framework codes, the themes and sub-themes were often closely related. The table below (3.3) attempts to show some of the inter-relationships that occurred across the sample. It is an extract from data presented in chapter 4.

General codes/themes from the analytical framework	**Interrelationships of themes**
Motivation	*These link to attitudes and EI*
Attitudes and emotions/EI	*These link to motivation and personal / social skills e.g. resilience*
Life skills –personal or social skills Intra and interpersonal	*These link to attitudes and EI*

Table 3.3. Summary of the interrelationships that occurred most frequently across the analytical framework

It was a little counter-intuitive to compartmentalise (section 3.3.1, p64) into family, community and work as each impacts on the other in the development of the individual since aspects of life are inseparable (Faure et al., 1972). However, since the research questions had been organised using these categories it was easy to ascribe what the participants said to each life area. Codes and the ideas within codes are related to each other and it is important to acknowledge this when considering thematic analysis. For the purpose of this research, I began with *a priori* coding (Savin-Baden and Howell- Major, 2013, p421) from my conceptual framework (Motivation, Attitudes and emotions/EI, Intra and Interpersonal skills,

the Everyday) as an initial method to condense data but then moved onto inductive coding to capture the specifics of each *a priori* code. In deciding what data to place in the *a priori* coding I had to go for 'best fit' whilst acknowledging that the emerging patterns and labels, such as resilience, would show fluidity between the initial codes due to the integrated nature of lived experiences. The decision making process which enabled me to locate attitudes such as resilience was initially looking for the word or synonyms and then reflecting on whether they best fit earlier definitions of attitude or skill. It was important to be aware of the interrelationship of the data as it can support, rather than blur, the development of argument (Miles et al., 2014) by recognising patterns and relationships.

3. 8 Trustworthiness

The generalisability of findings from a biographical approach could be an issue for an interpretive researcher but inferences from the particular are possible in 'moderatum' generalisation (Williams, 2000). The latter is a kind of generalisability particularly associated with interpretivism, where aspects can be seen to be instances of a broader recognisable set of features. Moreover, transferability of findings to those in similar situations to the sample (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) can be offered (section 3.8.3).

Trustworthiness refers to the measure of faith one has in the methodology, tools, data and interpretations used in research (Pilot and Beck 2014, referred to in Connelly, 2016). In any qualitative investigation the concept of trustworthiness can be problematic and especially in one that is located in socially constructed situations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017) and adheres to a subjective epistemology and interpretive ontology. However, trustworthiness can be supported (Shenton, 2004) with an initial focus on transparency (Newby, 2014) and maintained by reflection and reflexivity (Wellington, 200). As a qualitative piece, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) areas of dependability and confirmability (being similar to reliability) credibility and transferability (or external validity), were the most suitable to use. An outline of some of the decisions made to support making the research trustworthy now follows.

3.8.1 Dependability and Confirmability

The many variables involved in studying the social world make it hard to achieve 'total reliability' (Le Compte and Preissle, 1984, p332, cited in Wellington, 2000, p31) but a researcher can be clear about what they have carried out and why, including data generation and analysis methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Malterud, 2001). Firstly, I chose a research approach and tools that were appropriate to my research questions, ensuring the tools were relatively well established (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I used LHG and SSIs with all

twenty-one graduates for consistency and after the first two interviews in the main study used the same pattern of questioning (section 3.4.2).

Increased confidence in findings should arise from a rigorous and relevant thematic analysis which provides clarity and detail of each stage sufficient for a reader to decide if the procedures have been dependable (Nowel, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). I used coding choices rooted in my conceptual framework to provide a consistent structure across each individual analytical framework as well as offering some relation to existing academic debates. Relating findings to an existing body of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating qualitative research (Silverman, 2000). Comparisons across all twenty-one interviews allowed triangulation to support confirmability of analysis. I also noted earlier in this chapter how the participant's own voice adds to dependability, but that choice of substantive extracts needed to be acknowledged as out of context and potentially biased by the researcher.

The research is inevitably biased due to the choice of research questions and positionality but I have been open and honest about this as well as the fact that the relationship between researcher and participants may affect outcomes (Newby, 2014) as stories told are inevitably shaped by the relationship with the researcher (Biott et al., 2001 cited in Berry, 2016) (section 3.6). I hold beliefs about my research focus, which are implicit in my autobiography (section 3.2.1), but I did not impose them on the interview process. I aimed to 'adopt a reflexive approach and attempt to be honest and open about how values influence' (Greenbank, 2003, p791). However, as the participants knew me, they would have been aware of the value I place on those returning to education. I tried to reduce bias by choosing my sample from graduates rather than existing students (section 3.5) and invited them to check transcripts, any mutually composed LHGs and drafted vignettes.

Self-analysis, or reflexivity, was an important part of the research design and I built in prompts to my field journal to be cautious of relying purely on my own perceptions (Wellington, 2000), and to remind myself, as stated previously, how values influence one's approach (Greenbank, 2003). These consisted of notes such as:

- Reassure each participant everything is useful
- Prompt and listen: do not lead
- Do not share my personal beliefs
- Do not presume
- Do not put words in their mouths
- Invite them to add anything else they would like to say.

Reflexivity required me to be mindful of my 'position, perspective and presence' (Finlay, 2002, p225) and the effect they might have on every stage of research. A field journal helped in reminding me of the possible associated dangers latent in the (co)-construction of knowledge (Banister et al., 1994, cited in Finlay, 2002), becoming a vehicle for the reflection essential for recognising the possible impact of my positionality on the research process (Holmes, 2014).

3.8.2 Credibility

The credibility of my research was enhanced by choice of an appropriate approach, sample and research techniques (Newby, 2014) as relevant to the research questions. I reiterate that the sample was purposive and an oral method was chosen as true to real life (Cohen et al., 2017). The latter allowed the voice of the participants to be heard and this was sustained in analysis by using 'representative quotes' (Collins, 2010 p170). Opportunity to check transcripts was offered to participants and I used my supervisors to review data and findings.

A transparent approach to data analysis and an analytical framework based on a conceptual framework confirm findings emerge from the data and not merely from my own predisposition (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.3 Transferability

As a relatively small sample of twenty-one and a qualitative, interpretive study it could be seen as difficult to relate the findings beyond the context of the study. However, the choice of sample using a set of characteristics (section 1.2) allows for some discussion of typicality or similarity (Lincoln and Guba,1985) involving the population of mature, part-time learners across similar contexts. It is not my intention to relate my findings to the wider field of HE but to be of value for those in similar circumstances to the sample (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Appropriate data from this sample should make it possible for others to generate a judgement of transferability to similar sites (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). 'Moderatum' generalisation (Williams, 2000) has been mentioned already in section 3.8, outlining how findings could be illustrations of a broader recognisable set of features. A sample from similar contexts with similar characteristics, and looking at several life stories to support each other, permitted moderate claims to be made about aspects of the everyday as instances of a broader recognisable set of culturally consistent ideas.

By placing my research in the context of past studies, as provided in chapter 2, and using these ideas in conceptual and analytical frameworks I intend to show how my findings contribute to ideas of other similar studies over time (Bassey, 1981). An examination of

previous research findings can support transferability by considering the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of the past (Shenton, 2004).

3.9 Limitations of the research design

Some would argue that qualitative and subjective research is limited; however an interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology must hear the voices of people involved. Assumptions need to be replaced with knowing the whole person and their FOK and this can be best achieved by talking to them (Kvale, 1996).

However, in hindsight, there are areas that I would approach differently to strengthen the research design; mainly I would consider what the meaning of 'learning' may be to all involved and tease out the significance of activities associated with community/leisure. Firstly, it became obvious that 'learning' meant different things to my participants: I did not endeavour to rectify this when it became apparent as I felt it would be inconsistent to change my approach so late into the interview schedule. If I repeated or extended this research, I would consider whether my definition should be offered or if it might be more appropriate, for a research question looking at what learning is, to see what it means to each individual.

The choice of questions for the SSI would focus more on how I approached and questioned participants about community activities. This came to light when my supervisor asked if I was interested in what the participants had learned from neglected activities, such as going to the pub, and I reflected that I should be. I tended to follow up questions about hobbies and overlooked having coffee or socialising. In retrospect, this was a serious omission for research on learning in informal life situations and indicates the reflexive potential of a greater focus on interview questions (Henderson, 2018).

3.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explained the rationale for my chosen research approaches. The chapter began by rooting research design and tools in my positionality, including my interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology. Biographical and creative methodology has been justified as congruent with the research question and my positionality. The reasons behind using the qualitative tools of LHGs and SSIs to generate data have been provided. The former was significant to structuring life experiences and the latter gave opportunity for those involved to voice their accounts. The purposive nature of my sample, focussing on individuals relevant to the criteria of mature, part-time and returning to formal education after at least fifteen years has been explained. Ethical considerations were imperative for such a personal, high risk, study; particularly the need for anonymity and confidentiality, using pseudonyms and removing any potential identifiers. Thematic analysis of data involving an

analytical framework based on reading supported coding and consistency within and across individuals, allowing the relationships of themes to be explored. Trustworthiness was achieved by transparency about choices, reflection on the research process and my part in it and relevance to the research question. Finally, I conceived the key limitation to my research design as a need for greater emphasis on certain aspects in the life area of community.

This leads me to a presentation of the findings arising out of the data analysis which is the focus of chapter 4.

4. Findings

Once upon a time a little figure who seemed bowed by the burdens of life but with a burning curiosity sparkling in their eyes, wandered into the halls of the academy.

'I am not worthy,' s/he said, 'but I honour your worth and desire to dine at your table.'

So, s/he knelt at the altar of elitism and whispered softly, 'Lo, I bring great treasures to lay at your feet.

I bring motivation – the drive to never give up.

I bring resilience and determination – the desire to always do my best.

I bring the skills of communication, negotiation and seeing different views.

Above all, I bring a true and deep love of learning.

*Please see the worth of all that **I** have to offer.'*

This story was written in my field journal (section 3.4.3) towards the end of the analysis of participant transcripts. It provided a way of making sense of the data holistically and is placed as a preface to chapter 4 as a reflection on the findings about what mature, part-time learners bring to study in Higher Education (HE). As stated in section 3.4.3, the tension between appearance and reality is encapsulated in the story. The word 'seemed' refers to the assumptions people may hold of these learners burdened, rather than sustained, by what the data indicates they bring to formal education from family, community and work. The story ends with an appeal to the reader to 'see' these assets, which will be further examined in chapter 5. Extracts from this tale are located at the end of most sections that present the findings as a reminder of these assets.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the evidence from semi-structured interviews based on a life history grid with twenty-one participants. The participants were all graduates from a part-time degree in education, aged over thirty who had not been in formal education for at least fifteen years prior to the degree (chapter 3). They had filled time away from formal study on a journey with family, travelling, taking part in pastimes and working in a variety of settings, including education. I conceive of this as a learning life journey as attitudes and skills were acquired on the way.

In this study learning refers to the impact of experiences in family, community and work on the whole person (Jarvis, 2004; Illeris, 2002), including the development and use of

emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1996) (section 1.3). Learning consists of content, or what is learned, which comprises skills that further thinking (Jarvis 2006) and attitudes (Illeris, 2007; Jarvis, 2010) which shape our approach to life, for example being resilient or confident. Many aspects of learning relate to attitudes or a way of feeling and thinking as well as building EI: the capacity to control one's emotions and to handle those of others (Goleman, 1996).

The findings relate to the research aim to recognise what mature, part-time students have brought from their life journey to provide evidence to replace the deficit view of what these students lack with their abundance of assets (section 2.3.6). The evidence arises from their 'told' life journeys in relation to the research questions, identified by number below:

1. What has been learned from life experiences in family, the community and work?
2. What specific affective aspects of learning have been gained through learning in informal life situations?
3. What do mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies?

Firstly, the data looks at what the participants recounted concerning the everyday character of their learning situated in life experiences. Next I address specific affective aspects of learning gained in these situations. The five categories of affective aspects of learning, namely motivation, attitudes, emotions/EI, intra and interpersonal skills, were formed from the literature review (Jarvis, 1987: Illeris 2007; Goleman, 1996) and transferred to an analytical framework. Findings consider these *a priori* themes as well as specific named assets emerging from the data. The data have been regrouped to allow for clarity:

- Intrapersonal attitudes and skills– including motivation
- Interpersonal attitudes and skills
- Skills associated with EI.

To better capture the voice of those involved, some sections start with vignettes of particular participants' life experiences showing attitudes or skills and their comments on them, including direct quotations (section 3.4.3). I then move onto capturing a group perspective, gained by quantifying the data to identify patterns with regards to attitudes and skills mentioned across all twenty-one participants. Data to directly address what mature, part-time learners say they brought from previous life experiences to their studies will then be offered.

The chapter will conclude with a summary of what these findings have shown before moving onto chapter 5: a discussion of the findings related to what this group of mature, part-time learners said they brought to their successful study at HE.

4.2 Learning in life contexts: family, community and work

Responses relevant to research question one (section 4.1) relate to what participants felt they had learned from 'everyday' (Loki), 'life experience as such' (Gail) in family, the community and work (see glossary, p4-6). Different individuals chose their own definitions of community as befitted their life journey: for example for Clarissa it was her church and children's school, while for Cousin It participation in a charitable institution. Section 4.2 presents data as both vignettes and from a group perspective by summarising patterns related to learning in informal life situations as an overview while further detail on family, community and work is presented throughout subsequent sections (4.3 and 4.4).

> Jessica
>
> The influence of work and the family on attitudes and actions can be seen in Jessica's life history. She began her career as a barber but eventually found her way into supporting pupils at a special school. Her own time spent as a parent to a child with a special need contributed to having 'hands-on' knowledge as well as developing a steadfast and realistically sympathetic emotional approach to working with others that she felt she had got over time: 'when you have got time to do things and learn naturally it's stays with you'. On summing up what she had brought to her successful study at degree level she stated 'I knew I had acquired the skills…. I knew that over time that I could do it.'

The use of 'naturally', here is interpreted as part of the everyday, as an element that is built in to the day-to-day journey through life.

The vignette above illustrates a generalised importance of life experiences to learning. The patterns arising from twenty-one interviews on this theme will now be considered. As the life history grid was designed to explore the three areas of daily life (family, the community and work) the everyday dominated all responses. However, participants explicitly referred to the 'everyday' when trying to explain the learning they had acquired (n=18). As parents, neighbours, friends, community or club members and workers 'every little thing I've learned' (BB) in these identities built on to the next episode of learning. Affective attitudes and skills, such as flexibility and communication, respectively, were presented as being 'just things I've always done' (Lisa) that stay with you because of their genuineness and everyday character. They were part of their learned behaviours. Charbob pointed out 'I never had those skills except for what I'd learned through life.' Over the course of the interviews, participants referred to drawing on resources acquired from previous experiences in order to be successful in HE (section 4.4).

The category of family was significant for learning from the everyday, with parents or being a parent (n=8) mentioned as areas where 'it's obviously been instilled in me' (Donna) as they learned by observing and imitating others, and taking part in social spaces. The role of parent was crucial to Hope who mused 'It just kind of happened naturally, it was things that had been done with myself and things that I'd experienced'. Time spent supporting an elderly relative and neighbour was also significant for learning organisation skills and empathy. T remarked 'as a mum, how many different roles' were needed' requiring versatility and stamina. The family as a site of gathering affective attitudes and skills needed for life and learning was mentioned specifically (n=8) but family underpins chapter 4 as an influence on all of the participants (n=21), inter-related with community and work.

Community was only mentioned by two: sharing baking with neighbours was 'natural' for Gemma and Petal remarked how organising hobbies and travel 'does need skill'. However, data presented in sections 4.3 and 4.4 relate to what was acquired in this social area.

Work was noted as a place where approaches were developed by getting on with the job in hand (n=5): 'that wasn't taught at college that was something I developed independently' (Lisa) or it 'just comes natural' (Gail). Loki spoke about working with children in the role of TA as being 'natural'. As stated previously, the use of 'natural', is interpreted as being part of the everyday journey through life and the adult sense making processes. Learning from the everyday pervades each section on affective attitudes and skills (section 4.3) as well as what participants said they brought to support study in HE (section 4.4)

4.3 Affective attitudes and skills learned in informal life situations.

Research question two (section 4.1) aimed to recognise what the mature graduates of a part-time course said about specific affective aspects of learning gained through informal life situations. Affective aspects of learning refers to how the participants coped with the feelings that arose during learning and used them to build attitudes and skills to apply in future situations. Since affectivity pertains to emotions the resulting attitudes could affect the progression of a learning process positively, neutrally or negatively. Examples include motivating oneself and 'getting blocking emotions under control' (Vermunt, 1996 p26). In this study, attitudes are the beliefs and approaches formed in the social spaces of life's learning journey and are akin to skills (see glossary, p4).

The *a priori* themes of motivation, attitudes, EI, intra and interpersonal skills have been reorganised into:

- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal

- EI.

Motivation takes its place in the intrapersonal and attitudes are examined across the three categories above. This affords a clearer approach to the emerging themes by grouping named assets into the three broad connecting categories. Many of the affective assets connect across categories but grouping them this way provides for a clearer examination of both *a priori* and emerging themes. The named specific assets form contributions to knowledge when applying them overtly to adult learning and assets brought from informal life situations.

Firstly, data on motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence will be presented in the section on intrapersonal attitudes (4.3.1) before the more concrete skill of organisation (4.3.2). Next, patience and empathy plus communication and team work compose the interpersonal attitudes and skills respectively (sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4). The intra and interpersonal have been interpreted as culminating in EI: findings on this can be seen in section 4.3.5.

4.3.1 Intrapersonal attitudes

The most commonly referred to intrapersonal attitudes were: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence. Whilst these exact words were not always used synonyms or phrases have been interpreted as sufficiently close in meaning. Findings build a picture of motivated, hard-working individuals who acquired confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence as attitudes developed from experience. Participants had faced adversity (including disappointing parents, abusive partners, suspected infertility and parenting wayward children) (Imogen, Flo, Hope, Jessica) and learned to 'manage your emotions' (Cousin It), 'Anything is possible' (Loki) and 'Don't give a stuff sometimes' (Donna). Often they had turned negatives into positive attitudes to spur them on (p101)

Participants mentioned attitudes arising from family (n=18), in relation to community (n=16), and work in both professional and non-professional fields: not just education (n=21). These experiences taught people to 'never be afraid to speak' (Gail), 'be brave enough to challenge misconceptions' (Ginger) and 'helped me grow' (Bella). Family was a source of learning resilience or perseverance (n=13), 'That you can just keep going' (Ginger); and 'Believe in yourself' (Charbob). Time spent solving problems and handling what had been thrown at them was depicted with humour and grit. Imogen resolved 'life is not easy – it doesn't just get handed to you' and Charbob noted 'it isn't you, it's life but it takes years to learn that one'. These learned stoic attitudes equipped them with ways of approaching life and ultimately study at HE (section 4.4). Loki commented 'my mind set changed', Cousin It talked about a 'different mind-set' and Gemma noted her awareness of the learning process

when commenting on the contributions made by 'The experience of seeing how it works, what needs to be done, having been through it all.'

I now consider stories told about the six most frequently referred to intrapersonal attitudes of: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence.

Motivation

Clarissa

> Clarissa, an intelligent, thoughtful and caring individual burned with the desire to do her best and 'improve myself'. She was an active part of the community both at Church and in her children's schools and had been successful in a number of differing jobs. Despite this she had been 'scoffed at a bit' by work colleagues who refused to see her worth. This did not hold her back but instead fired her on: 'her saying that to me got me thinking, I'm doing it'. The frustration of being over looked fuelled her continued actions in a bid to show others, and herself, what she was truly capable of: 'Look at me, I can do it, let me do it'. She has lived her life with energy and commitment and the belief that 'really when it comes down to it, it's you'. This spirit of entrenched personal motivation helped Clarissa achieve a first-class degree.

Imogen

> Imogen, a hardworking and dedicated parent and professional, had sought to support those with the greatest need. She was driven by 'That desire to prove to myself' and to others. She was a cheerful, composed and successful individual, capable of perceptively exploring lingering questions that she 'didn't ever make anything of myself – not in the way my parents thought'. However, she refused to behave like a victim, used this to motivate her adult life and concluded: 'Experience is a funny thing… – huge incentive'.

The importance of motivation is illustrated by Clarissa and Imogen above and will now be explored across the twenty-one participants. All participants referred to motivation, incentive (Illeris, 2002) or 'the thirst' (Hope) for learning as acquired in life spaces. They outlined different catalysts for change rooted in informal situations (family, community and work) which became powerful, intrinsic drivers for them to want to learn and move their life forward. Findings indicate a group of people who had acquired 'that drive – from previous life' (Cousin It) as the 'older you get, the more you want' (T). This underpinned their *raison d'être* in life, including the decision to reengage with, and succeed in, formal education. Cousin It talked about 'the value of it, it was something I really wanted to do' and Bob 'was doing it 'cos I wanted to do it'. Motivation was mentioned by every participant (n=21) in at

least one aspect of life. When asked about their experiences in each social setting, and what they felt they had learned from them, motivation was mentioned when discussing family (n=16), the community or friends (n=5) and work (n=17).

Three themes arose from further analysis of factors which led to the acquisition of motivation as a learning/life attitude: the constructive influences of others, including children; the centrality of 'me' and negativity as a positive driver. Participants outlined the constructive, sometimes inspirational, influences of family (n=19) or talked about the importance of becoming a parent (n= 10) and how that had shaped their actions and thought processes by being 'an example (Imogen) or 'role model' (T) for their children. Wanting more for oneself or to be proud of oneself was also significant (n=18): 'I just wanted to be more' (BB). Finally, even negative experiences and emotions were turned into positive drivers (n=15): 'You can spend your life feeling like a bit of a victim, a bit of a failure or you can get on and prove something to yourself' (Imogen). Negative impact of others in the family, such as unforgiving parents and abusive partners was discussed (n=14); along with negativity experienced in work (n=10) and potentially destructive emotions (n=11) of regret, disappointment and frustration but how they 'kind of spurred me on' (Hope).

There is an emerging picture of a group of graduates who, through various experiences in life, gained the will to apply themselves either as a means to reaffirm their sense of self-worth; show others the value of such actions and make those around them proud; or to defy any who had doubted them. All contributed to an attitude of 'you need to put into life to get out' (MM) that has seen them apply themselves to various situations in order to bring about success. This is supported by the acquisition of attitudes such as work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence, to be discussed shortly.

In the sections that follow, what was 'told' about the three themes of the 'constructive influences of others': the 'centrality of me' and 'negativity as a positive driver' are explored.

The constructive influence of others

The motivation and responsibility that came from being a parent must be acknowledged: 'I wanted to show my child…Inspire him' (Tina). Pilot work had foregrounded the significance of parenthood for this study as changing participants' outlook since they wanted more for their children. This theme also arose in the main research. Imogen felt the confusion of leaving university after one year but the joy of having a child: 'Becoming a parent – I wanted to make a difference' and be 'an example'. Tina, upon having a family, 'wanted to show my child' the importance of application. This was also true of two parents who had fallen pregnant at an age which prevented further study: both Bella and BB 'wanted the children to see I was hard working' and 'I thought I should show the children that learning is important'.

They were driven either by being a 'role model' (T) or to move their lifestyle forward so the children would have a better life quality: 'I want to be better for them' (Flo). Clarissa did not consciously 'choose to be a role model' but family reinforced some of her actions: 'I want to be able to help my children'. This powerful intrinsic motivator developed by family experiences kept those who were parents, both male and female, focussed and resolute.

Additional influences of family were mentioned (n=14), ranging from others as a role model to aspire to, including close and extended family members, to the need to 'make them proud' (T). The positive influence of friends in the community was noted (n=5) whilst work colleagues were also central to supporting the return to formal study (n=10). However, it is the area of family and the importance of others that is the most powerful influence behind their application.

Firstly, Gail had come over to the UK as a young student unable to afford the expense of university study in her home, European, country. She had grown up surrounded by intellectual people but due to family circumstances had not been in a position to go to HE and had felt this as something lacking in her life: 'in my culture you have to finish university'. By 'culture' I interpret family background and country of origin. She has now achieved an upper second-class degree which is testimony to how the need to satisfy her cultural identity became a powerful stimulus to her continued diligence whilst studying.

Others told of family and the need to please them: T had not achieved the grades to go to college at eighteen and even though her parents never expressed any disappointment it was important for her to honour the support she had been given. Similarly, Hope had not taken up further study after school: 'I didn't know which way to turn so I deferred and never went back'. Despite never having anything said, Hope felt 'grandad always expected great things of me,...so I kind of wanted to honour that in some way as I got older.' Again, Clarissa was not pressured by her father to study but felt that she 'wanted to make him proud'. Thus, they had acquired the need to show others, by their commitment, the value of keeping going: 'If I'd have dropped out – what message would that have sent to them?' (Petal).

The centrality of 'me'

The participants referred to their acquired personal drive and the need to 'prove to yourself' (Donna) or 'make myself proud' (Clarissa) as well as wanting more out of life or work with consistency (n=18). This was a powerful expression of their locus of control and that they had learned to be agentic. This group of graduates were self-motivated, having experienced things in life that had frustrated or bored them and in doing so motivated them to move on: 'aiming for your...ultimate dream as such' (Gail). Participants expressed this as a direct

consequence of what they had experienced so far in life (n=16): many were adamant about this aspect. This is illustrated by Flo's almost poetic insistence of 'By me, for me' but equally in Jessica's simple statement 'I've done it for myself', MM's 'something for me' and Gemma's passion that it's 'up to me'. Gemma had learned to make her 'own mind up' and found ways to move forward by thinking for herself.

Equally, 'that want' (Hope) to move on or the 'desire to succeed' (Louise) was paramount to this group: they were 'hungrier for it' (Flo). T noted how she 'wanted more' and to 'better myself' whilst BB stated how she had learned that 'I just wanted to be more'. This was also linked with working life where participants mentioned their desire to advance in a professional capacity (n=9+). They realised that 'my brain needs more' (Ginger) or 'this isn't enough for me' (Hope) and they could do something about it. The confidence to drive them forward will be considered later.

Negativity as a positive driver

Negative people, often parents but also one friend (n=15) were mentioned; with negative emotions that could have held them back but instead pushed them on as positive drivers (n=11). Imogen captured this determination to make the best out of adversity: 'Even negative experiences can be turned into real positives' when her parents did not disguise their dissatisfaction. A negative parental role model was a positive for BB who decided 'I don't want to be like my mum' which pushed her to succeed. Others, (Bella, Imogen, Petal) felt they were a disappointment or had let their parents down in some way (T) and this influenced their drive: 'So, I don't know if I was trying to prove myself, maybe I was' (Petal). Petal had been ascribed little value by her parents in their complicated relationship, being compared to an older sibling, it was made clear that little was expected of her and she would not achieve. Petal concluded that despite being told repeatedly 'I was not as good as…Yes I am'. Her decision not to be held back was a powerful driver: 'I don't see it as a negative – it's a positive because it's made me the person that I am'.

Relationships with ex-partners as a destructive but ultimately constructive force featured in the family lives of three participants (Bob, Flo, MM). Bob noted how in a past marriage being told she was 'stupid every day' made her realise she was more than capable. Similarly, on leaving a difficult marriage, Flo 'found myself' and resolved 'I don't need anyone else to do it'.

In the community, BB recalled being labelled 'thicko' by a supposed friend and reflected with satisfaction on her success 'I think part of that was to tell her I could actually do it'.

The potentially damaging, but in the end reaffirming, influence of others was also present in the working environment (n=10). Bob's reaction to being labelled 'too old' by a senior colleague was 'I'm going to show you'. Work colleagues had low expectations of BB, who resolved 'you're not going to be right – I can do it'. Ginger realised she never wanted to work in a factory again and 'that pushed me forwards'.

The examples above show disappointment, regret, frustration (Imogen, Hope, Bob) and other negative influences fuelled these individuals, gave them incentive and formed the necessary attitudes of confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence (see later). As Louise noted 'it's attitude' (not age).

These motivation forming aspects of learning are inextricably linked to the next sections on the intrapersonal attitudes of work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence; as well as their attitude to learning.

Work ethic

Work ethic (see glossary, p6) 'always work hard and strive to be the best you can' (Clarissa), is 'a set of beliefs and attitudes reflecting the fundamental value of work' (Meriac, Woehr and Banister, 2010, p316) learned in different social spaces. Work ethic was something acquired in various life experiences (n=17); arising for participants when talking about the family (n=8), during discourse on the community (n=3) and in work (n=4).

The need to work hard as acquired through family (mostly parents) or for family (mostly one's children) was seen as an attitude that kept them aiming high (n=8). This group had the determination to succeed, to be and do better: the need to work hard, was central to their attitudes and approach to life, embedded in family. Others acquired the need to work hard through the community (Clarissa) or work (BB). They had 'always worked hard for what I've got' (BB), and believed if something was undertaken it should be done well. A passion for doing one's best, ensuring others see them work hard and teaching oneself how to improve was seen in MM's recognition 'you need to put into life to get out' and T's you 'reap what you sow'. Commitment was important (n=17) and to 'give it your best whatever you do' (Donna), 'work to the 'best of your ability' (Cousin It), as 'the older you get the more you want to do it' (Bella).

The influence of family members was outlined by Bob in her tale of strong hard-working women, especially her Nan who survived the London blitz during World War Two and escaped poverty by cleaning for others. Bob's realisation, based on her memory of one day accidentally hearing her Nan play the piano, that 'these hidden talents which could have been put to so much use' must not be ignored. Coming from a working-class background,

Charbob recounted stories of her dad encouraging her to 'achieve your potential' as 'You can always advance'. Listening to, and observing, her father taught her the value of hard work as something to be proud of. Bella talked of her need to be a role model to 'show the children you've worked hard' and pass on the work ethic to them.

For some, the desire to work hard had developed during community activities. Church responsibilities reinforced Clarissa's resolve to 'always work hard and strive to be the best you can'; whilst being in a band showed Loki the need to 'give it your best'.

Work ethic as gained through work was referred to by fewer numbers (n=4). Tina, Gail and Charbob had the need to work hard reinforced and MM had recognised that 'if you work hard you get where you want to be'. Similarly, Cousin It had learned as an independent business person that 'If you undertake something you undertake it well; do it to the best of your ability'. This is a valuable attitude when applied to any area of life, including HE (section 4.4).

Confidence

Acquiring confidence or 'building your own self-belief' (Charbob) was supported by this application and through social interactions (n=21) in the family (n=10), community (n=10) and work (n=15). Building self-belief through life was a contributing factor to applying for the degree course (n=19). Not all the stories were positive with regards to confidence. Two participants described lack of confidence but these emotions were accompanied by a need that formed itself into attitudes of commitment and resilience.

Petal and BB talked about the role of the past in suppressing confidence. The latter had failure reinforced by friends whilst parental figures prizing a sibling over Petal had left negative emotions to be dealt with. This reminds me of Larkin's (1974) declaration 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad.' I place this quotation here as part of my sense making process and to reinforce the point. BB experienced episodes of panic when re-entering formal education but being a young mum and home owner had taught her that she should listen to herself and that 'When you put your mind to it, you really do achieve it' (BB). She used her confidence gained through life in order to reject her fears. Things were not so easy for Petal whose confidence ebbed and flowed despite never letting it show. Some of Petal's comments support the deficit view of mature students with negative baggage (Crozier and Reay, 2011) but she did acknowledge that a successful career at a very early age 'developed my confidence so much.' The one thing that made Petal believe in herself was the role she had played in bringing up her family: 'My children are the world' and consequently the need to keep going for them was paramount.

Confidence is not constant but having or not having it can drive you on and is inextricably linked to motivation. At one point, a lack of confidence drove Clarissa to work harder:

‘determined because I was not confident’ and Imogen questioned her own ability: ‘a lot of doubt but….’ This approach helped both move forward.

Through experiencing life these participants had acquired a ‘different mind-set’ (Cousin it) specifically linked to confidence that supported their success in formal study (section 4.4). Donna learned ‘there's not a right and wrong way, it’s just your own way’ and Flo spoke of finding herself: ‘I can do this, no one is going to do it for me’.

Situations involving the family developed confidence, particularly where parents and children were involved; including negative experiences bringing up children. Jessica struggled raising a child with special needs who required the boundaries she was setting but was undermined by her own parents. She emerged a stronger individual who learned ‘I wasn’t useless’. Gail feared she had got parenting wrong but concluded ‘it doesn’t matter what others think’ and you have to do it your own way.

The influence of activities outside of the family or work were contributors to confidence (n=10). Donna, a keen member of a group with similar vehicle related interests, felt her experiences had taught her to ‘not give a stuff sometimes’ and ‘believe in yourself’. Nine participants mentioned learning to be self-sufficient (including Lisa, Gemma, Tina and Gail). Three had their confidence supported by solo international and national travel. Gail had become quietly self-assured noting ‘whatever I’ve done intuitively turned out to be the right thing’ and calmly observing ‘I finally felt it doesn’t matter what your background is’. Similarly, Hope had acquired the belief that there was ‘no reason why I can’t aspire to something else’.

Previous and current work consisted of manual and/or professional (Table 3.1, p80) ranging from cleaner to midwife. Donna summed up the recurring theme that every job added a little more confidence ‘from everything’. All of the participants had worked as a TA, unqualified teacher or volunteer in school and working with pupils provided most with confidence (MM).

These findings strengthen the claim that learning in informal life situations occurred and provided, for most, the ‘confidence you get with age’ (Cousin It). Confidence accompanied an acquired resilience for most which will be presented next.

Resilience

Ginger

> Ginger’s early struggles with mental health made her determined to help others as well as adopt an open and honest approach with her family about the issue. Her love of DIY also fostered a keen determination to succeed and a realisation that ‘I’ve

learned I'm more capable than I give myself credit for' - indeed she gained a first-class degree.

Flo

Flo had her creativity worn away by an early marriage: 'I got married and life just stopped'. After this marriage had ended she regained herself and went back to 'feeling a little bit like me'. She reconstructed her relationship with herself and whilst she did not see she had acquired skills 'just by using your experiences and saying it's not that bad, it could be worse', she resolved 'you've got to be positive about this'. As a member of the class she was always positive and never let any previous difficulty hold her back.

MM

MM had her sense of self diminished by marriage. Momentarily she lost herself and sat in the dark, literally and metaphorically, but she knew she was a good TA and wanted to show her daughter her drive for personal achievement so she still carried on: 'I can do it'. It is MM's vision of herself as a caged animal, let loose by degree study that speaks volumes of the power of her emotional resolve and ability to succeed. She had acquired resilience: 'I still carried on'.

Resilience was an attitude that leant itself to three vignettes due to its commonality (n=19) and its centrality. Resilience refers to the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and in doing so develop an attitude of 'positive adaptation' (Herman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson and Yuen, 2011, p259) that keeps one going. Resilience was either directly named or referred to by using a synonym such as 'thick skinned' (Jessica) or 'big shoulders' (Charbob) (n=19). This attitude was seen in stories about family (n=13), the community (n=6) and work (n=8). The task of writing an essay was understood as relatively benign compared to the challenges faced in their non-academic lives. Eight recounted stories of trauma which framed writing a literature review as surmountable in comparison. Resilience is an accompanying attitude to confidence with different individuals stating: 'you can just keep going' (Ginger); 'I wasn't going to give up' (Clarissa) and 'I've got to be brave' (Charbob). Resilience or perseverance links to courage and the strength gained through overcoming obstacles in life. On reading a vignette, as part of the research process, Charbob added "there is no such word as can't, it's I can, I shall and I will"

Nearly half of the participants, including MM, Flo, Ginger, learned this resilience through negative experiences ranging from disparaging husbands to post-natal depression. Four commented on supporting a child with a special need (Charbob, Imogen, Gail, Jessica)

which ‘strengthened me’ (Gail). Charbob told of her fight for her son’s education developing perseverance as well as a greater understanding of the education system. Jessica learned to become ‘hardened’ through supporting her daughter and Imogen never gave up on helping her son with learning needs. Parenthood, in general, led to the acquisition of resilience and determination (n=20). Only one was not a parent but an au pair and teaching assistant. As Petal noted, being with others requires ‘guts.’ Family relationships developed resilience from pushy (Imogen) or neglectful (Petal) parents to controlling, now ex-, husbands (Bob, Flo). In response participants developed a resolve ‘not to give up’, and to foster ‘pig-headedness’ and ‘determination’ (Bob). Ginger observed she had developed ‘An inner resilience, that I can keep going, that I can ask for help when I need it and it's okay some days to have a bad day’. Participants confirmed ‘I don’t give up’ (BB) and ‘I always find a positive in every situation’ (Gail) (n=11).

Hobbies were discussed in terms of developing resilience with Cousin It’s involvement in a charitable society and Ginger’s passion for DIY where she learned to ‘achieve all sorts of things if you just stick at it’ and ‘the ability to keep going.’ Travel for holidays was also mentioned as contributing to resilience, with Loki seeing her experiences in a very different culture teaching her to be strong and see things from different perspectives.

A change in career led to the acquisition of fortitude for Cousin It, including the need not to ‘dwell on things’ (Gemma) or to develop a ‘tough skin’ (Bella). The desire to succeed required the growth of perseverance, a positive attitude and a bit of fearlessness: ‘this is not going to beat me, you know you can do it’ (Louise). This points to a stoic approach developed in life that could be used in study (section 4.4) and links to the attitudes of flexibility and willingness to change when needed.

Flexibility

Gemma

> Gemma and her siblings were encouraged by her mother to ask questions and ‘to think for ourselves’. Self-taught in many ways, Gemma came up with her own strategies for success as none had been given during her time at school. Later in life, she ‘had to adapt quite quickly, learn the language as well to say what I wanted to say’. She improved her juggling skills and flexibility to care for a toddler but also her independent thinking skills ‘I tried and tested from what I knew about’.

The vignette typifies thoughts about flexibility seen in a number of interviews. The skill of quick thinking was linked to the attitude of flexibility (T). I have grouped learning how to juggle, balance, solve problems, look beyond and adapt under flexibility because they all

pertain to this attitude. Being able to see things differently 'there's more than one way of looking at things' (Jessica) also links to empathy (section 4.4.3). Flexibility was a valuable attitude to support a successful life (n=15).

Being open to anything (Bob), balancing and juggling (Charbob) and the ability to 'think about everything' (Tina) were mentioned in relation to the family (n=8) as it was central to 'give and take' (Donna) when interacting with children and older relatives. Three (Charbob, Ginger, MM) named situations in leisure time; particularly Charbob who spoke about her woodwork and adapting through 'trial and error'. Her love for DIY was obvious as she told stories of how 'you could turn your hand to anything…but I learned you can achieve even if you've never been formally qualified. You can build from a snippet'.

Work was the life area that most (n=13) saw as significant to the acquisition of flexibility; particularly, but not exclusive to, work as a volunteer, a TA or unqualified teacher in schools. Tina 'learned some things in each different one (jobs) – you watch and then you adapt'. Louise learned 'to give it a go' during her years in nursing. Bob's early working life as a consultant was demanding and taught her not to be rigid and 'go with the flow'. Later, as a TA, Bob learned that 'no two minutes are the same' and you need to 'be prepared to do everything...you never know what will be thrown at you'. This last point was echoed by Tina, Donna and Flo who acknowledged the role of TA can include lots of different jobs from planning, preparation and assessment cover (Tina) to supporting across a number of year groups (Donna) and even across primary and secondary phases (Flo).

Being flexible relied on acknowledging there were 'different ways of looking at things' (Jessica) and these individuals had learned to be adaptable as life 'changes how you look at things' (T) as well as how you approach them.

Independence

All of the stated attitudes contributed to learning independence, self-sufficiency or self-reliance (n=17): Flo had learned this by escaping her marriage whereas others had travelled to a new country, learned a new language, befriended strangers and embraced a new way of life. 'I think because I've lost so many people, I try not to cling on to anyone' (Gail).

Independence was linked to an increasing awareness of cognition (n=6) or 'To think for oneself' (Gemma) due to life experiences. Family had been influential (n=4) with Petal mentioning a growing sense of being 'responsible' for her children while BB considered her ability to think, Donna to decide and Flo to prioritise as a result of family life. Community (n=5) was also a site for gaining accountability and thinking for oneself. Thus independence was connected with responsibility and perception.

Learning to be independent was further strengthened in work (n=16). Bob learned to 'not worry about the small stuff' and Clarissa commented 'it's learning to bite the bullet'. Gail described 'the most amazing experience' of flower picking one summer. She had to 'really quickly learn' to be efficient so whilst everyone else was running around the field looking for similar blooms, as 'flower picking it had to be certain height - I would put fingers in the ground to make it taller and then hide the smaller ones inside'. Here Gail displays initiative in making the flowers look uniform through adopting a self-chosen strategy to get things done efficiently. Thinking quickly was also discussed by Lisa when setting up a business and Petal talked about how 'very resourceful' she had to be when an instructor, running her own diary and resolving issues speedily.

As a TA Clarissa actively sought 'opportunities to gain experience' and Bob took on a specific style of teaching including undertaking the associated required research. Gail who, on being made redundant, 'had seen this post (TA) in the paper but it was out of date...I rung them and said, 'I'm looking for a job and wonder if it is still possible to apply?' It was and she got the job. Using her initiative all the way through her life had strengthened her resolve and 'all the life skills that are just necessary to be independent' such as 'believing in your-self'.

4.3.2 Intrapersonal skills

As stated in section 4.3 skills such as organisation are linked to attitudes but can be more tangible supporting the ability to think and do (see glossary, p5). Learned attitudes of confidence, independence and so on are supported by the learned skill to put ideas into practice: 'I tried and tested from what I knew about' (Gemma). Here Gemma shows she acquired an understanding of the learning process that she consciously put into action. Practical skills associated with thinking and doing are often known as 'life' skills but as the QCA (2008) points out they are important for learning.

The years spent in bringing up a family, mixing socially and working had impacted on these individuals in positive ways by giving them valuable skill which they could use in various situations to their advantage. These intrapersonal practical skills offered ways of coping with situations, on one's own if needed, and helped them develop personally, professionally and, ultimately, in the academic sphere (Clarissa, Cousin It).

Due to frequency of discussion (n=20), organisation will be looked at next: it was learned in the family and community (n=10) but mostly in work (n=16).

Organisation

Hope

> Hope left home after studying for a BTEC National Diploma as she was unsure which career or study route to take. Instead she travelled around the UK making money at craft markets and lived on her 'lonesome' for eighteen months. She had gained valuable advice from her grandparents on how to 'make do and mend' and this experience gave her the opportunity to apply this.
>
> 'I learned how to solve problems if something arose, I learned how to manage my money very well. As you can imagine working from town to town doesn't pay very well. I was very thrifty - charity shops I love, they're fantastic…I had to become very self-sufficient, very self-reliant ....'
>
> Through her time away, she learned to live on her own, expect the unexpected and manage her money and time by rigorous planning and organisation.
>
> Upon her return she took over the care of an elderly neighbour and continued to fine tune her fastidious approach by 'making lists again - lists keep popping up a lot so I would write everything down, what was, when everything was going to happen ...'
>
> As a TA, Hope suggested and implemented screening for a lesser known syndrome, which she had to investigate herself, based on her own school experience, to discover 'why I found school difficult'. Organising her time to share this knowledge was important for her to support others: It also built up valuable researcher skills that she applied to her degree.

Hope's vignette epitomises ideas on organisation which can be tracked across all interviews. The majority of participants explored their growth of organisation or time-management skills over the years, 'your everyday management' (Loki) with the life area of work as the most prominent. Learning organisation was not always easy for them as Gail recalls being regularly late or absent from work. However after securing, a team leader job at the factory she learned to manage thirty people and had 'better strategies' for operating the fork lift truck as she invented her own memory system for collecting the products.

The family was a useful site for building organisation skills. Some directly discussed the need to be organised and plan when running a home and coordinating children (Cousin It, Lisa, Petal, T, Tina) alongside managing time. Jessica remarked that with children you have to 'find a different way around it' and use 'time management….to look outside the box': this was a skill not effortlessly acquired but she mused 'I plan more now'. Tina learned how 'I can connect the things' in order to move forward. Cousin It talked about learning to organise

one's thinking: 'to pick problems apart- to pick the big overall scheme apart and just chip away at it…one little hurdle and over the next little hurdle'. Thus organisation refers to both time and cognition.

The community, pastimes and friendships were significant. Bob used to host dinner parties where she learned to 'be organised – plan'. Others talked about arranging trips and travel in general. Clarissa honed 'my organising skills' by focussing on 'big events' as part of getting involved with things for her children and the church: 'the positions I held within my church and the things I was asked to do at church allowed me to use my organisation skills, to use my brain'.

Work was most prevalent including the influence of other jobs as well as being in a school. Learning to organise oneself and others occurred through working with customers and colleagues: Petal noted the need to be 'efficient', T 'methodical and MM insisted 'to be totally unfocussed wouldn't get a result'. Working in an education setting was seen as a source for organisation skills. MM saw the need to be a positive model for the pupils she supported. Clarissa continued to work on her organisation as a TA as she set up a newsletter, improved the library and arranged a 50th anniversary celebration. On a larger scale, Louise was invited to reopen her school's kindergarten: 'I had to take on the early years' curriculum...I had to source all the equipment: pencils, mark making for all the several areas of learning, budget, order it and then sort the classroom out, decorate it as it was in a bit of a state. It was like reopening: opening up my own little nursery really.' The organisation skills acquired through this large job, now complete, cannot be underestimated.

Summary

For all participants their adult lives provided the opportunities to lay the sturdy foundations for approaching any of the emotional pitfalls the learning journey may have presented to them. As Donna explained, there are advantages to having the 'time to just grow and develop and know myself better'. The experiences of having a family, working with children or in other jobs as well as mixing with a variety of people over a number of years led to the acquisition of intrapersonal attitudes and skills. An independence of mind, motivation, work ethic, confidence, flexibility and organisation have been assets in family, the community and work and seen as transferable to formal study (section 4.4).

'I bring motivation – the drive to never give up.

I bring resilience and determination – the desire to always do my best'.

(story chapter 4, p93)

4.3.3 Interpersonal attitudes

Charbob

> Charbob told many stories about her life and two in particular stood out concerning empathy: her family situation and working with others in industry.
>
> She is a dedicated single mother to her children but has seen many struggles due to her son experiencing learning difficulties. Her working-class father had taught her early on 'never judge a book by its cover' and that 'we should all just accept each other' as 'people are people' and this had been reinforced by her experiences in trying to support her son. She noted her need for:
>
> 'A lot of tolerance, a lot of forgiveness to other people, making sure you bang down doors if you need to get the best for your child, determination that they're going to achieve ..... it's really weird when a child has learning difficulties of any form, I would imagine it's the same as being a refugee in a sense – 'cos you have to learn a different language, understanding, culture, approach, tolerance, acceptance'.
>
> Her passionate consideration for others could also be seen in her work at school where she endeavoured to 'understand children in a different way'.
>
> Secondly, at work, particularly her time in the union, taught her 'confrontation doesn't work – negotiation worked better'. Alongside this was her ability to deal with 'each individual as an individual' whether they were clients from a high or low brow source: 'it did teach you how to master people but that was done through learning on the job'.

All participants referred to some form of acquired attitudes pertaining to people, with family (n=12) being significant to learning how to accept others (Charbob). These attitudes helped the participants to be with others productively in a variety of situations or to 'get along with people' (Loki). They comprise a growth in patience and empathy, an openness to the views of others and broad-minded attitudes: 'we learned acceptance' (Flo).

Some of the stories associated with learning the attitudes of patience and empathy now follow.

Patience

Patience, along with empathy, can be seen as a learned attitude associated with EI as it supports the understanding of oneself and others. Although the least expanded upon, it was consistently listed with other attitudes or referred to using a synonym (n=14), such as tolerance, respect, acceptance. The need to wait and think was seen as a vital coping strategy for family and work situations. The family was an important location for learning

‘Patience…..incredibly understanding, patient’ (Imogen) due to interactions with children (Charbob, Jessica), the elderly (Hope, Petal, Cousin It) or difficult parents (Petal). Facing new cultures and new situations were also significant as well as working with different people, especially children (Imogen). Former work places contributed to a patient approach (n=9) by working with customers (Flo, Cousin It) and teenagers in need (Ginger). Primary school children and colleagues (Clarissa) provided opportunities to learn patience in order to resolve matters and move things on.

Empathy

Empathy and ‘appreciating people’ (Gail) is an important attitude relating to EI. I include it here as a learned attitude to support the interpersonal and to prepare for the section on EI as, along with other attitudes such as patience, flexibility and so on, empathy contributes to the translation of emotions into attitudes that culminate in EI. Empathy was overtly mentioned (n=13) or alluded to by referring to attitudes associated with it, such as compassion.

Empathy, including tolerance and being non-judgemental, when understanding others and acknowledging ‘they’re all different’ (Donna) was important and learned due to family experiences (n=5). Despite having problems with parents, Jessica decided that you need to ‘accept you can’t change other people’s opinions’ and whatever her child, now grown, continued to do, ‘have a sense of humour’. Additionally, Louise pointed to her decision, rooted in more positive family experiences, to ‘be kind to other people’. Louise saw ‘each child is different’ referring to her own and the ones she supported in her kindergarten; Hope emphasised her acquired drive to ‘help people’ and Ginger acknowledged that her ‘own struggle’ had put her ‘more in touch with these emotional needs’ of others.

Three participants located the development of empathy in the community, with Clarissa being most active in her church where the experience of working with children confirmed her desire to help and understand others. Equally, Donna’s time at music and special interest meetings, established the attitude that ‘everybody has got something different’ and one must be tolerant: ‘you don’t judge a book by its cover’.

Donna also saw the development of empathy through work, as did nine others, when ‘dealing with different customers’. Hope emphasised the need to ‘not judge’, ‘get rid of any preconceptions’ and ‘treat everybody the same’ when working for a dentist. She learned how to ‘look at things from their point of view’ and Ginger too, during her work with young and often troubled parents as well as children she supported as a TA, understood the need ‘to see it from other people’s point of view’ and to prioritise what ‘they need rather than what

you need to get from them'. Gail also realised the value of 'appreciating people' through working as a team leader in a factory but also as a TA.

It cannot be overlooked that all of the participants found their way into a school setting either as volunteer, TA or unqualified teacher and this had enormous impact on their empathy. This is typified, by Louise's enthusiasm to draw on 'the compassion in me', 'the need to help people' and see 'a child as an individual'. Likewise, Clarissa pointed to her desire to 'see them learn and grow' and 'if I saw a need, I would try to think of a way of filling it'.

This group of graduates showed a strong propensity for 'getting along with everybody' (Loki) which was key to successful group dynamics in their BA classes (Flo). Their learned empathy meant they were willing to see from other people's perspectives. Empathy also supported their learned skills of communication and team work which now follow.

4.3.4 Interpersonal skills

Cousin It

> For Cousin It time spent in the 'camaraderie' of the charitable society had been most instructive on 'how to conduct yourself' as well as acquiring public speaking and 'people skills'. The charity work especially was mentioned for 'giving something back' via fund-raising, where you had to learn how to:
>
> 'talk to people ….It's not everyone's cup of tea I know - it was just about making people better people in a time of the industrial revolution when it all came in…You get up to becoming what they call XXXX which means you're in the chair for the year and you run…something like that did help me greatly - I learnt an awful lot of people skills'

Loki

> Loki also talked passionately about what she had attained from her previous pastime of being in a band: 'Team work definitely…that helped me get along with people, following instructions was a big thing, teamwork then I learned……Discipline!'
>
> She also reminisced about marrying into another culture and how that had affected the way she saw and interacted with others: 'I try to see two sides to the story now: not just one'

Communication

As illustrated by the vignettes for Cousin It and Loki 'communication is the key' (Hope) or 'speaking appropriately to people, which I got from being a parent and being a professional' (BB). The most commonly recurring learned interpersonal skill was communication (n=20),

including the absolute need to learn to listen (n=11) and be patient (n=14): 'being able to say your point but listen' (Loki). Five participants specifically referred to negotiating and listening (Charbob, Louise, BB, Ginger, Hope).

For Flo, learning to listen to her children was important to re-establish a relationship with them after a difficult marriage and by this she meant to 'really hear their opinions'. Loki had married into another culture and learned to get on with others and communicate properly. Hope, too, had learned these things but from growing up supporting a younger brother and concluded that there was so much more to communicating: in this case she had to learn to 'read body language'.

Participants mentioned experience with neighbours or friends as affecting their communication skills (Hope, Jane), ability to mix beyond the family (Louise) and be considerate (Petal). Acquiring people skills via interactions in the community (n=11) also occurred: Donna's time spent helping scout leaders required 'diplomacy' whereas Petal, as a member of a professional institute, had the opportunity to persuade others of its value. Chatting and listening to friends and neighbours was not fully examined by the questioning and is discussed further in the limitations section (6.4).

Working with customers (Hope) or clients (Flo, Cousin It) showed the need to cooperate with colleagues (Loki, Charbob). A variety of work places, including experiences before taking on the role of TA (for example nurse, barber and entrepreneur) were discussed. How to 'control a situation' and 'deal with people' (Petal) were seen as a skill subsequent to work situations (n=17). Flo recalled how she 'really enjoyed talking to angry people and turning it around' during one of her jobs; Donna had to learn 'how to read people' and both Hope and Ginger developed 'diplomacy'. Gemma felt that it had been vital to learn 'asking questions'; whilst Lisa mentioned advising and explaining to support others.

The development of communication skills had also occurred working in education. Supporting pupils, either as a one-to-one, many with special needs (BB, Imogen, Jessica), or generally within the class and with the class teacher fostered good communication skills, especially the need to listen (Loki).

These communication skills, developed in informal situations, were significant to their family, community and work life but also noted, by them, as important to formal study (section 4.4).

Team work

Working 'well together' (Cousin It) is inevitably connected to communication; however, teamwork (see glossary, p6) was talked about as a separate area involving the ability to

share and negotiate in an open and approachable way (n=15). Team work was discussed in the context of family (n=4) with regards to 'how to get on with other people' (Hope), being 'open' (Flo) and also Gail's need for teamwork with the TA who helped her son. Community relations (n=8) supported team work, especially 'sharing' (Bob), being 'open' (Donna), 'approachable' (Gail), 'honest', 'friendly' (Gemma) and 'people management (Hope). Donna felt part of a team in her special interest community and music pastime where she saw the rewards and comforts of being 'able to get on with people'.

Being able to cooperate with others was part of work (n=12), with Hope learning how to 'calm situations' during her time at a dental practice. Hope had experienced a number of very different jobs from selling at markets to training others when working for a large firm, however she pointed to her time as shop manager as the most important for learning 'how to delegate' and sustain a fully functioning team. Petal had to master how to 'deal with grumpy people' when an instructor and Flo had to 'make people feel comfortable' and cover for some of the sales' representatives. Jessica talked about the need to 'support the rest of your team'.

Working in education was significant to the skills of being a good team member. It is important here to remember that all participants continued to work in the relevant field of education whilst taking their applied degree. Some spent time working in the school office (T) or as supervisors (BB) before becoming a TA, gaining insights into group dynamics and administration. For the TA role to be successful they had to work with other TAs and class teachers to support the pupils. Above all, time in work taught 'give and take (Ginger)'.

The seemingly balanced interpersonal attitudes and skills of the participants show they were happy to equally talk or listen (Ginger), act or observe (Tina), be independent or a team player (Clarissa). A variety of approaches to 'mixing with people' (BB) had 'opened up possibilities to me' (Flo) and made all participants social beings, feeling 'comfortable working with others' (Cousin It) or seeking out others to help due 'to that need I have as an adult to always try my best for other people' (Hope). They had learned how to interact with a diverse range: 'getting on with different people' (Donna) so consequently could function successfully with others.

4.3.5 Emotional intelligence (EI)

As stated in section 4.1, many aspects of learning relate to attitudes that support the capacity to control one's emotions, and handle those of others (Goleman, 1996). It is my interpretation that the learned attitudes of empathy, confidence, resilience, patience and so on contributed to and culminated in the EI of these participants. A significant aspect of their acquired EI was fostering a fearless and strong mind set. Attitudes developed from

emotions experienced during a range of life spaces led them to be able to better manage both their own emotions and those of others as well as have the strength to keep going.

The role of being a parent or looking after children (even the child-free participant had been an au pair) was stated as developing EI and empathy (n=15) (section 4.3.3). Humour and a positive attitude accompanied these for some of the participants (Gemma, Gail, MM, Petal). Both Gail and Ginger respectively developed a 'don't take things too seriously' and try to 'see the brighter side' attitudes. Bella discovered the need to be caring, compassionate but 'hard as well'.

The importance of EI and using one's emotions (n=10), acceptance and seeing things from the perspectives of others, featured mostly when talking about family. Petal spoke of how the negative role models from her parents had made her enthusiastic, open and accepting with her own children. T spoke about developing 'those skills where you are emotionally involved' as a parent and Charbob upheld the attitudes of tolerance and forgiveness central to developing EI when supporting her son: not just for her son but for herself as 'you live with guilt'. Jessica too noted how she had learned not to 'be shocked' but take things in her stride due to her child's behaviour. Hope grew up alongside a brother with a specific need and cared for an elderly neighbour, so doing she learned how essential empathy and acceptance were for her survival. Equally, Cousin It told of learning how to 'manage' and 'compartmentalise' emotions after supporting an elderly relative. Participants had learned how important it was to control emotions, such as anger, and not to be scared (BB).

Experiences in the community or during leisure time were significant for developing how to handle emotions (n=16). The influence of reassuring friends (Louise) as well as pastimes that reinforce one's self-worth, including DIY, being part of a society or interest based community, travel and painting was clear (Ginger, Donna, Cousin It, Bella, Flo). Donna's adoption of unwanted animals enabled her to see beyond what others saw and her involvement in a special interest community taught her to be non-judgemental because 'we are part of everything' (Donna). Charbob told stories of the strength of the neighbourhood she was brought up in with its tolerance and acceptance.

Experiences in many different fields of work equally impacted on EI (n=10) as Flo dealt successfully with angry customers in her job as telephonist and realised 'I'm not frightened'. Bob learned to 'just accept it, it's not personal' from some of the more negative interactions she had with others during her time as a beauty consultant.

4.3.6 Summary

Life provided 'a whole bank of experiences' (Flo) for these participants to learn how to function successfully with others and to 'look beyond' (Louise). Their encounters in the family, community and work, over a number of years, prepared them to interact with a diverse range of people and see things from different viewpoints: 'being older – it definitely gave me greater perspective.'

> 'I bring the skills of co-operation, negotiation and seeing different views'
>
> (story, chapter 4, p93)

4.4 What mature part-time students brought with them to formal study

The final research question number 3 (section 4.1) summarises what mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies. In addition to what has already been extrapolated from the interviews, this section presents data related to what they directly said they brought from their life learning journey, between leaving school and starting their applied degree, to support their HE studies.

It was apparent that this group of graduates had not started their degree after a 'gap' of fifteen years but had filled the time since leaving formal education learning from life experiences. Rather than acquiring a formally constructed and recognised body of factual, objective knowledge, they had gained knowledge in the form of attitudes and skills essential for successful functioning on a familial, social and professional level: 'I've learned so much more than academic stuff' (Flo) (section 2.3.5). These intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills acquired through 'being older, being wiser – realising it's not easy' (T), such as empathy and flexibility were of great use value (Zipin et al., 2012) in formal study (section 5.4.2). As Flo stated above, one learns so much beyond objective facts while Gemma emphasised the importance of 'having been through it all'. It was evident that 'things that have occurred through life that make you the person that you are' (Bella) were vital in shaping their approaches to people and situations and these attitudes and skills were transferable (section 4.4.2)

The data on how the participants acquired a positive attitude to learning will now be presented before summing up what they said they brought from their life journey to support study in HE.

4.4.1 Attitude to learning

Louise

> Louise was originally trained for a role in the medical community and reached a senior position but as the job altered and a family came along, she changed direction; firstly volunteering in a school and then becoming an unqualified teacher in charge of the nursery. She enjoyed reading a broad range of books in order to look at things from different perspectives and viewed learning as life long, being keen to 'always be learning – up-dating'. Correspondingly what she had learned from working in schools, 'bringing my knowledge of working in schools', supported the degree.
>
> Her passion for discovering and understanding grew as she explained 'it's not just a tick box - I've done those, and I can stop, you are learning something new every day.' Having graduated she confessed 'I can safely say now there are some weekends when I think, 'Oh I wish I had some essay to write or something' – I quite miss it every now and again'. Learning was fundamental to her identity.

Louise provides a clear link between life learning and study which will be expanded in on in section 4.4.2. Her thoughts remind me of the quotation: 'O this learning, what a thing it is!' (*Taming of the Shrew*, Ili*, Shakespeare,1590-2) which is pertinent in its reference to the power of learning but also since the central character in the play is regarded as someone who must change as she does not appear compatible to society's expectations. She speaks her mind, is intelligent and should be seen as admirable, not deficit: in this she is like the subjects of my thesis.

It is difficult to categorise this asset as it interlinks with attitudes of motivation, confidence and work ethic. I place it here as a prelude to what the participants said they brought to their learning in HE because the desire to apply oneself or 'always need some way of moving forward and learning' (Ginger) displays intrinsic incentive needed for success in education.

A number of feelings translated into a love of learning for all participants, including confidence, satisfaction and longing. Twenty mentioned their acquired 'need', 'want' or keenness to keep learning in some way; either resulting from positive experiences (Charbob, Cousin It) or negative (Imogen, Ginger). The positive attitude to learning took many forms including learning to organise ideas or problem-solve and arose from different situations. Often individuals had to 'learn on the job' (Charbob) and discovered you can learn from others by observing them (n=9). Tina told of her early days working as a kitchen assistant

and being asked if she could cook. On replying she could they told her she would be the next cook:

> 'they really didn't teach me how to do it. One lady said, 'Can you observe her?' She said, 'Don't ask me any questions because I am so stressed blah, blah, blah' so just observing what I'd be doing so I had to observe her then had to cook myself the next day, so it was quite scary and challenging but yeh I've done it.'

This method of learning relates to Bandura's (1977) social learning and Tina shows consciously using it in a work situation caused her to internalise this method as successful and enjoyable when learning.

The informal life spaces of family, community and work and mainly the roles of parents and employees were talked of when acquiring a positive attitude to learning. Reading for pleasure and researching holidays or areas of interest using the internet were recalled (n= 10): 'if you don't know how to do something there is always a You Tube video' mused Ginger about her DIY. The skills required for such pastimes were translated into study skills when in formal education (Hope, Clarissa, Cousin It) (section 4.4). Some of these situations in family, community and work will now be considered.

Firstly, the family was seen as the site for acquiring a love of learning (n=15): parents or being a parent influenced a positive attitude to learning. Clarissa and Ginger saw their fathers as a role model: 'Dad was a teacher – when I was a teenager myself teaching was one of the options' (Clarissa) and 'my dad because he's a bit of a learner' (Ginger). Clarissa's early interest in teaching, and T's later consideration of it is important because it indicates a growing interest in learning. The role of parent again showed to be vital to positive feelings about learning as participants wanted to learn to be better parents and 'You have to learn fast' (Bella), or they had learned from their children: Imogen was 'taught so much by my daughters'.

Acquiring the love of learning was remarked on with emotive words such as 'thirst' (Louise), 'necessity' (Hope) and 'passion' (Charbob) (n=10). A common theme was realising the need to keep their 'brain from shrivelling' (Imogen) and searching for different situations in which they could challenge themselves, for example Imogen engaged in ESOL (English as Second Language) classes to support her work in school. Others (n=13) used their hobbies, such as DIY (Ginger) or going on trips (Bella) to build their capacity to further their knowledge. Petal learned her internet searching skills from finding out about the illnesses afflicting her family and friends and how to support them.

Work was the site for furthering their love of learning and continued development (n=21), with ten achieving vocational qualifications. Hope noted:

> 'every job I've done has had some element of qualification or training attached to it so I think, actually, although I didn't go to uni when I probably should have…I've actually always gone for something that's going to give me that little bit more - it's not just a job - it's that continual learning process as well.'

Every participant shared how they had built positive feelings about learning throughout their adult life journey so, perhaps not surprisingly, all found their way into school to support children in their learning. Jessica noted what had been learned in life informed work as a TA: 'When I started, I don't think I had any (skills) apart from my own life experiences'. T also saw how 'you learn so much' by being with children and working with others'. Thus learning in work is also through the informal.

Charbob had built a love of learning through woodwork and talked about studying on the degree 'like a passion… like a new world'

> *'Above all I bring a true and deep love of learning'*
>
> (story, chapter 4, p93)

4.4.2 What they said they brought to study as mature, part-time learners

Clarissa

> 'to do talks, presentations, organise big events as well as teach and really, when I look back just putting together a talk or a lesson and doing all the research for it, writing out and making sure it flows, are the skills I really used for my degree and I didn't know at the time I was going to be doing the degree …….and also in the community with my children I've always been quite proactive and stuff so ……always been the treasurer of the play group, on the committee for the preschool and organised things. I was the school PTA secretary for eight years and used to organise summer fairs, Xmas...'

Above Clarissa explicitly addresses the link between what had been learned in life and its usefulness to the degree. The quotation from Clarissa demonstrates a clear ability to vocalise and recognise how learning acquired in informal life spaces was transferable and useful in formal study. When approaching study, Cousin It also observed 'perhaps using some of those skills' had helped when planning and writing essays; indicating a clear awareness of the value to HE of what has been gained from life: 'I think these kinds of life skills are imperative, but I think that comes with time and experience' (Cousin It). Gemma

also mused about seeing how it all works, having been through it all, as contributing to her success on the degree. This was replicated by twenty participants mentioning what had been gained by 'experience in life' (Charbob) and Flo described 'a whole bank of experiences' (Flo). The choice of vocabulary here is significant as it relates to the learning as something that can be drawn on and used like a fund (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu 1986) (chapter 5). Bella talked about 'things that have occurred in life that makes you the person that you are' and BB 'just every little thing really' had culminated in 'I knew that I could do it' (Petal).

The final summarising questions in the interview schedule (Figure 3.1, p71) directed all participants to what they had brought to formal study from life or how being a mature student affected them. Either 'the experience that life brings' (Clarissa) or things that happened naturally (Hope) were recognised as the influences that have supported these useful and useable attitudes and skills (n=16). What had been learned in informal life situations stayed with them (Jessica) and could be applied elsewhere as 'once you've done it once, you retain it' (Charbob). What had been learned during their years as a TA, or 'bringing my knowledge of working in schools' (Louise), was also acknowledged as important to the applied degree. This active learning in real life situations had been memorable and transferable thus an asset to life and formal study.

The intrapersonal was also commented upon (n=18) when asked to summarise what they brought with them to their study, as a mature learner: 'It just makes you grow as a person, changes how you look at things' (T) and 'it's just every little thing that I didn't have that I got as I got older' (BB). A deliberate understanding of the value of their learning can be seen as they commented upon how life 'changes how you look at things' (T).

Motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence, patience, empathy, communication, team work, a positive attitude to learning and EI had been developed through life experiences and brought by these individuals as potential assets to formal study: 'just basic life skills: all the things I've tried in and succeeded' (Ginger) as 'when you've got time to do things and learn naturally, it stays with you' (Jessica). Hope clearly summed up: 'all the elements I've learned along the way…culminated in the degree. I've got so many things stored…enabled me to study at a higher level'. The image of stored links with a reservoir of life experience (Knowles, 1980) which she goes on to explain 'I picked out in class over the four years', capturing how she drew on past resources to support current learning.

'Please see the worth of all that *I* have to offer'

(story, chapter 4, p93).

4.4.3 Summary

Participants mentioned how, over time, they had gained 'experience' (MM) to support them. Donna summed up what she brought to the degree as 'just having that general life experiences of being married, having children, moving house, living in different areas of the country, having a fair – not a lot – of jobs, but fairly varied career'. These learned attitudes and skills from family, community and work are mutually supportive of, and interconnected with, each other, providing a wealth of affective assets for each individual.

Table 4.1 below provides an expansion of Table 3.3 (p87) by considering the interconnected nature of the affective aspects of learning that occurred most frequently across the findings to form the assets that mature, part-time students bring with them to study at HE.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Learning from the 'everyday'
FAMILY COMMUNITY WORK</td></tr>
<tr><td>General codes/themes from the analytical framework</td><td>Findings on specific assets arising from the data</td></tr>
<tr><td>Motivation</td><td rowspan="2">Motivation links especially to work ethic/resilience but also supports attitude to learning
From and for others
From and for themselves
Negatives that drive
Work ethic – links to attitudes to learning / motivation/resilience
Confidence – links to resilience / independence/ communication/team work
Resilience – links to almost everything but especially flexibility/ motivation/ independence/EI
Flexibility – links to resilience/ independence/EI
Independence - links to work ethic/ motivation/ attitude to learning / EI
Organisation links to independence</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intrapersonal Attitudes and skills</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpersonal attitudes and skills</td><td>These link to EI
Patience
Empathy
Communication - links to teamwork
Teamwork – links to communication</td></tr>
<tr><td>Emotional intelligence (EI)</td><td>– links to everything above which directly contribute to it</td></tr>
<tr><td>Attitude to learning</td><td>Love of learning - links to intrapersonal attitudes / work ethic / motivation/negatives that drive</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Useful in HE</td></tr>
</table>

Table 4.1 Summary of the relationships of assets arising from the data

Table 4.1 above shows affective aspects support EI and arise out of 'everyday' life experiences in the family, work and community. They are mutually supportive of, and link with, each other, forming 'whole person' learning (Jarvis, 1987). For further explanation of the links between each asset see chapter 5 (sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2). All assets can be transferred to other situations in life, including formal education.

‘Lo, I bring great treasures to lay at your feet’

(story chapter 4, p93).

4.5 Conclusion

The data have shown that the range of intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills gained by learning in life experiences challenge the conceptualisation of a single form of useful knowledge. Moreover participants vocalised an awareness of bringing their learning from life to study. The participants conceived of these attitudes and skills as everyday. I interpret this as part of their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) based on literature in chapter 2 and as such are valuable and transferable to the classroom. Chapter 5 will build an argument that the attitudes and skills recognised in this chapter are assets, as identified in chapter 2, which support successful study in HE.

5. Arguments arising from the findings. Joining the conversations

5.1 Introduction

Knock, knock……..

"Who's there?"

"'Tis I," said the Ed D researcher, "can I come in?"

The chapter begins with an explanation of the title and anecdote above to indicate that in presenting the arguments in this thesis I aim to join existing conversations on adult learning. I use the term 'conversations' since it relates to the exchange of ideas with connotations of the informal as does the use of the 'knock, knock' format: this thesis conceives of informal and formal learning as equal. To envisage this chapter as a process of joining in with an existing dialogue, I foreground the contribution the study makes to the associated debates on adult learning and values assigned to different forms of learning.

The purpose of chapter five is to critically examine my findings (chapter 4), in the light of the literature, to extrapolate arguments that address my research questions and ultimately my research focus concerning the value of life experiences to learning in order to add to the discourses on mature, part-time students and the learning they bring to support study in HE (chapter 2). Chapter 4 presented findings arising, having applied my analytical framework, on intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills that have been gained by learning in situations involving the family, community and work. The chapter concluded with a summary of what individuals said they brought to formal study from life. I now interpret these findings to build arguments to address my research questions (see below).

Consequently, insights into what mature part-time students bring to HE that contribute to their success will be offered.

Firstly, analysis of the findings that address the three research questions are addressed below and will be shaped into the three arguments discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Research question 1: What has been learned from life experiences in family, the community and work?

The findings illustrate that these social contexts are significant sites for learning.

Research question 2: What specific affective aspects of learning have been gained through learning in real life situations?

There is a pattern to what individuals say are the specific attitudes and skills acquired; forming luggage filled with intra and interpersonal aspects of learning, including confidence, flexibility, resilience, independence, patience and empathy.

Research question 3: What do mature, part-time learners bring from previous life experiences to their studies?

The attitudes and skills gained through learning in informal situations pertain to the whole person particularly the affective and are seen as a resource for adults. These attitudes and skills were constructed as useful by the participants who regarded the learning as everyday: part of their learned behaviours (section 4.4). This equates to acquiring their own 'funds of knowledge' (FOK) (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005; Lavender, 2015) (section 5.4) with value. In this case, the value lies in their usefulness or use value (Zipin et al., 2012) through its transferability to different learning contexts, including the formal (section 4.4). In due course the ideas posited here address the importance of the 'told' life journeys of mature, part-time learners by arguing that the attitudes and skills they bring from them are assets compatible with HE and need to be included in formal learning situations and pedagogy.

The inter-related arguments in this chapter lead to making a central claim concerning the value of what mature, part-time learners acquire in everyday situations. Figure 5.1 below is a visual representation of arguments arising from the findings (chapter 4) about the importance of the life journey of mature, part-time students.

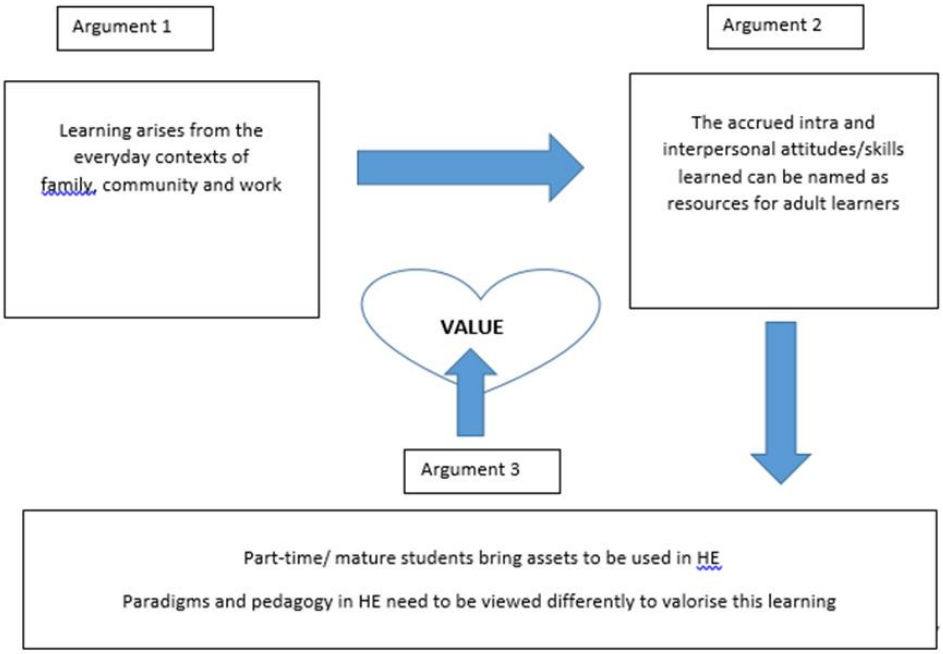

Figure 5.1 Overview of the key arguments of this research

As referred to in Figure 5.1, I begin by establishing learning arises from the social contexts of family, community and work. Having recognised learning does occur in informal situations as well as how social interactions, observing others, and the need to make sense support this process, I move onto argument 2 that specific learning content can be named to allow for better classroom use of the intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills. This is central to a study which set out to investigate what mature part-time learners brought with them to support success in HE and includes arguments concerning the accrued experiences, within the luggage of my conceptual framework (Figure 2.2, p55), as resources for adult learners. Argument 3 presents these specifics as compatible with, and useful for, study at HE which is a vital part of the asset model of the adult learners' conceptual framework. This argument necessarily moves on to the need to view these students and the assets they hold positively and consequently challenge existing paradigms and pedagogy to valorise this learning in HE. Finally, I reiterate my central claim based on the findings, that mature, part-time learners should not be seen as deficient but instead bring assets from their life journey which are of value to their degree level learning.

Before ending the chapter, a summary of the significance of the arguments concerning mature, part-time students, their learning and place in HE will be provided.

5.2 Argument 1: Learning arises from everyday social contexts

It is clear that learning does arise from everyday experiences: the research directed participants towards the informal but despite this many referred to the learning as 'everyday' (section 4.2). Social situations of family, community and work (see glossary p4-6) were sites of significant learning for the participants who mentioned how observing and imitating others, discussion and taking part were important processes of learning which added to existing knowledge, attitudes or skills.

Being with a family or people from the neighbourhood, community or similar interest groups and mixing with work colleagues were all significant to acquiring attitudes or skills and developing emotional intelligence (EI). This speaks to the conversations regarding real world learning (Lindeman, 1926; Dewey, 1938) and the essential social nature of learning (Jarvis, 2006; Illeris, 2007; Holford, 2017). Equally, participants were aware that what they brought with them to formal study was the 'experience that life brings' (Clarissa) or 'life experience capital' (Lavender, 2015, p95); acknowledging learning as life-long with 'something new (sic) every day' (Louise). Thus this study offers empirical evidence for Tough's (2002) iceberg model of 80% of learning arising from everyday human activity and Rogers' (2014a) assertion that everyone learns informally in life; neither were based on empirical research. The significant contribution of the family, community or leisure and work environments are

noted by other academics (Jarvis,1987; Colley et al., 2003; Illeris, 2009) and findings from this research corroborate their assumptions that learning occurs in these informal life situations. The specific attitudes and skills acquired in life will be discussed in section 5.3 to provide empirical data for an under-researched area.

Firstly, the influence of the family underpinned all sections of findings in chapter 4 (intra and interpersonal, EI and supportive attitudes to learning). Predominantly attitudes and skills acquired from parents and from occupying the role of parent located the family as a place of learning; particularly in terms of developing EI and communication skills (section 4.2). 'Hands on' knowledge (Jessica) from caring for children, interacting with relatives; the day-to-day management of running a home, and marrying into a new culture contributed to self-motivation and constructive attitudes to learning, such as confidence and resilience (section 4.3.1). These findings align with discussions on the affective aspects of learning referred to by Krathwohl et al. (1964) and Illeris (2007) that the emotional and social are substantial parts of life learning. Likewise, they reinforce the need to recognise what is brought as FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005), with use value (Zipin et al., 2012) (section 5.4).

Community events were a space for learning too. Researching interests or teamwork in various groups 'does need skill' (Petal). These activities relate to leisure pursuits involving people beyond the family and work: friends, neighbours and those with similar interests. Leisure time developed intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills (section 4.3).These findings reaffirm the importance of social and communal learning (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014). However, participants' comments about learning from leisure time were limited. There needed to be more prominence of questioning, in this study, with regards to what was learned through social activities so a gap remains in this aspect creating an opportunity for future research. It would be helpful to recognise and value the capital students acquire from socialising (Bathmaker et al., 2013.) Research focussing on this aspect would be informative.

Much was learned in the work place (Colley et al., 2003). All participants had experience of work, manual and professional, prior to moving into the educational setting (section 3.5) and all required on the job learning. A variety of both professional and non-professional roles led to learning from doing, observing others and making sense of things in context. Intrapersonal attitudes and skills had been acquired by engaging in a variety of jobs (section 4.3) indicating learning arising out of many daily activities (Rogers, 2014a). Occupying the role of TA also equipped them with many resources (Bovill et al., 2021).

These discussions of the family, community and work in the three paragraphs above illustrate the diversity of experiences the mature, part-time student has (Hinton-Smith, 2015). Skills are learned in community, family, vocational and social groups (Faure et al., 1972; Aldridge and Hughes, 2012). There is a worth of learning from beyond the academy (Nottingham, 2019) as learning is constructed through human activity (Kim, 2001) and is entwined with everyday aspects of life (Hannon, 2015). The research participants showed they learned through interactions with people and events in all life aspects. Concerns regarding the value of this learning (MacClusky, cited in Merriam et al., 2007), particularly in the context of study at HE, will be addressed in argument three (section 5.4).

Thus, this study contributes to knowledge on adult learning that takes place in the social situations of family, community and work by beginning to address gaps in empirical knowledge on learning in diverse settings (Rogers 2014). It offers qualitative data to illustrate that adults have learned in informal life situations (Tough, 2002).

Findings in chapter 4 illustrate that experiences of the world (Welling, 2003) affect learning through doing, talking and observing outside of formal educational settings (Vygotsky,1978). A lack of empirical evidence has led to criticism of this view but findings indicate learning occurred in these situations by 'just observing what I'd be doing' and 'you watch and then you adapt' (Tina) so role models (Bandura, 1977) are significant to what is acquired.

Learning occurred in these situations within their 'told' life journey by doing and being with others, that is to say learning by accommodation, assimilation, imitation, addition and accumulation, (Illeris, 2007) (section 2.3.3). Aspects of former jobs had been learned by doing and adding to existing knowledge but also by accommodating new things previously not encountered because it was important to do so. Learning 'on the job' also involved assimilation, that is to say taking in new ideas to modify existing knowledge of the field. The accumulation of 'All the elements I've learned along the way' (Hope) were crucial to formal study as useful and transferable: 'It stays with you' (Jessica); 'once you've done it once, you retain it' (Charbob). This data corresponds to, and offers empirical evidence to support the situative nature of learning (Jarvis, 1987; Knowles et al.,1998) as well as Illeris' (2007) thoughts on how learning occurs through the five facets listed above.

The findings are somewhat in disagreement with Jarvis's (2006) concept of learning by disjuncture, which calls for something to make individuals aware of what has been learned before it can be actively used. Despite some hesitant starts, all participants went on to articulate the what, where and how of their learning with only the stimulus of the life grid and research questions. It could be argued that the research process prompted their reflections but all found it easy and quick to identify the sites of learning. Comments on what mature

students brought that supported formal study 'having been through it all' (Gemma) indicated emotional responses and learning by doing were assimilated into their funds of attitudes and skills. This supports Illeris' (2016) criticism of disjuncture in favour of the five facets outlined in the paragraph above.

Even negative past experiences were used constructively (section 4.3.1). There may be potential problems of reinforcing negatives from the past (Rogers, 2014) but this study shows resilience and fortitude can result to support progress (Crozier and Reay, 2011) and the negative can be a base for future learning (MacKeracher, 2002).

To summarise, the argument here is that learning does occur in the social situations of family, community and work. Spontaneous learning can subsidise FOK (Moll et al., 1992), virtual school bags of skills (Thomson, 2002) or, in my thinking, a Tardis, containing multiple pieces of luggage, each filled with a wealth of attitudes and skills gained from travelling through time and various past experiences, 'stored' (Hope) for future use. The image, taken from creative writing, suggests the need to be forward thinking. Despite the science fiction genre, the subtext explores social relationships and the associated tensions between appearance and reality. A Tardis may look unimpressive but is full of brilliance to be admired. The next argument builds on this by naming specific attitudes and skills to be found within each piece of luggage and conceiving of them as assets; making past experiences a resource for adult learners.

5.3 Argument 2: It is possible to name the accrued intra and interpersonal attitudes & skills learned as resources for adult learners

There is a pattern to what individuals say are the specific attitudes and skills they developed from past experiences and these are resources for adult learners. This argument is divided into two sections (5.3.1 and 5.3.2). Firstly, I name and explore the content of what was learned (Illeris, 2007) or the specific assets referred to by the participants in order to establish a list of what was brought to studies in HE (5.3.1). It is important to this investigation to state the attitudes and skills for others to acknowledge. Having recognised exactly what has been learned in informal situations, I move onto arguing that what the mature, part-time student brings from them are resources for adult learners (5.3.2).

5.3.1 Naming the attitudes and skills gained in life experiences

In section 5.2, I concluded that learning does occur in the social situations of family, community and work but the learning content (Illeris, 2007) needs to be named for it to be useful for educators. In naming the attitudes and skills this argument explicitly addresses research questions 2 and 3 (section 5.1)

I arrived at the specific attitudes and skills by noticing the patterns in the frequency of use as claimed by the participants. This naming of specific affective aspects of whole person learning locates my study in an area little researched due to the difficulties associated with reaching real-life situations (Rogers, 2014b). There was a need to find out what mature, part-time students were already engaged in, as well as what pre-understanding and specific FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) they brought with them (Rogers, 2014a) as the existing data on the latter is limited. The specific attitudes and skills acquired are both intra and interpersonal and have been found by this study to be:

- Intrapersonal: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence and organisation
- Interpersonal: patience, empathy, communication and teamwork
- EI
- Positive attitudes to learning.

The order of discussion follows that of chapter 4 with the last afforded a distinct section. The list forms a set of resources that participants acquired from life experiences and used thereafter. Other students might also use these resources to support learning in a variety of situations.

Related intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills are drawn from learning in life experiences (Figure 5.2). I tried to capture the variety of assets in my field journal by referring to the mature learners as 'sociably chatty, listening fiercely/ independently self-sufficient working well with others – a giver and taker' (Appendix G). The attitudes support EI and I later argue that EI is of value in formal study (Zhoc et al., 2020) being at least, if not more, important than traditional measures of intelligence (Goleman, 1996) such as examination or test results (section 5.4.).

Figure 5.2 below is a graphic representation of the interconnectivity of specific affective aspects of whole person learning arising from the findings (section 4.3). The complexity of inter relationships was noted previously in table 3.3 and 4.1. A human being is complex or, as Shrek notes, like an onion with layers (Elliot et al., 2001) so it is not surprising that each factor relates whilst remaining distinct. Bidirectional lines indicate one can support the acquisition of another or strengthen its use by working together. As the western tradition is to read left to right the left shows the intrapersonal frequently referred to in the findings and the right the less discussed interpersonal. Figure 5.2 can also be read upwards to EI and positive attitudes to learning via different attitudes and skills that contribute to them. Team work and organisation provide a foundation of concrete skills that support but also arise from

the attitudes above. Acquiring an independent attitude and resilience have been placed centrally to show the former lies at the heart of affective aspects. Resilience links directly to everything, hence its centrality to the whole figure but underpins independence which is placed at the top with the lines representing my interpretation of the connection between the attitudes and skills that that are symbiotic and yet independent. Both the emotional and social shape the intellect (Goleman, 1999) and are of equal importance to adult learning.

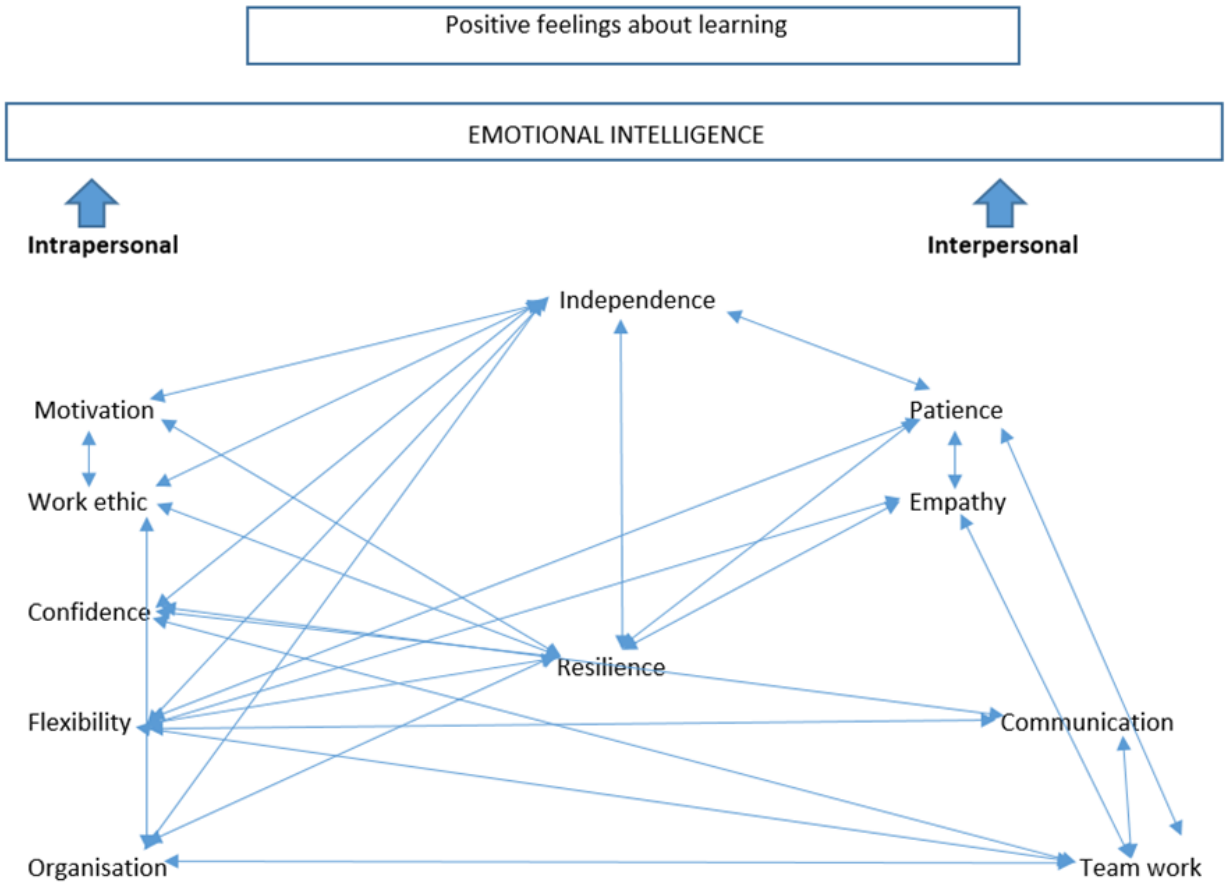

Figure 5.2 The interconnectivity of specific affective aspects of whole person learning

I begin this argument by discussing the affective characteristics of whole person learning before tracing the specifics of the left-hand side of Figure 5.2 since the intrapersonal was the area that arose mostly in the findings (section 4.3). The acquired attitudes of motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility and independence will be discussed along with the more concrete skill of organisation. The right-hand side of Figure 5.2 will be considered next, namely, patience, empathy, communication and teamwork. All assets support or contribute to EI which will be examined before considering positive attitudes to learning.

Patterns in the data showed learning associated with human living went beyond facts (Jarvis, 2007, 2010) to include attitudes and skills (section 4,3). This everyday aspect of whole person learning is raised in my poem 'Everything that I am' (Appendix C). The word

'everything' links to a body of whole person knowledge including the psychological and emotional as individuals acquired intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills: 'I've learned so much more than academic stuff' (Flo). This reinforces the idea that learning theory involves EI (Goleman,1996) and using emotions can enhance reasoning (Brackett and Salovey, 2013) as there is more to learning than the cognitive associated with the mind (Krathwohl et al., 1964): the affective has its places too. These attitudes and skills which support emotional competency are significant contributors to success (Parker et al., 2005), including professional success (Coleman and Argue, 2015).

The consistent reference to the attitudinal, affective and social (section 4.3) is reminiscent of the four pillars of learning to know, do, live together and to be (Delors et al.,1996) and supports Knowles' (1970; 1980) assertion that learning engages the whole person. Similarly, the qualitative evidence for the affective attitudes and skills that follows relate to the holistic (Hansen, 2009) and illustrates the ideas of Jarvis (1987) and Illeris (2007); whilst the named specifics offer an important contribution to knowledge. According to Illeris (2017), Jarvis' whole person inclusion of skills, attitudes values, emotions and motivation (Jarvis 2006) complements Illeris' (2002) three dimensions of learning: content, incentive, interaction. Whole person learning (Jarvis, 1987) involving acquiring attitudes and skills as part of the learning content (Illeris, 2007) will be illustrated in the sections that follow.

5.3.1.1 The Intrapersonal

Findings relate to gaining a set of attitudes and skills that could be used in a variety of situations (section 4.3). The most frequently mentioned were: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence and organisation. What follows offers arguments to substantiate the naming of these as assets.

Motivation

Motivation or incentive (what activates a behaviour) was gained from life experiences and corresponds with Graham's (2019) acknowledgement of its role in a mature learner's return to education. This can be viewed as the content of what was learned but also moves into incentive (Illeris, 2007). The tale below invites the reader to consider what constitutes a true motivator.

The constant soul and the three motivators

Once upon a time there was a constant soul who journeyed conscientiously through life until one day three mysterious looking jars appeared in the middle of their path.

The first was big and called to them lovingly to look inside. Upon opening, it sang a song of comfort that inspired the soul so they packed it into their rucksack as a reminder that there are many people in life whose support and encouragement should not be forgotten.

The second, slightly smaller jar looked equally tempting, so the constant soul prised the top off but instead of the hoped-for happiness, a wave of disappointment washed over them. The constant soul was unperturbed, resolving, 'Life can be full of sadness and guilt, but time is too short to punish yourself with this and the negativity of others'. So they packed it tightly in their sack as a reminder that despite occasional troubles, life is what you make it.

Finally, the last and smallest jar smiled unassumingly at them. 'I wonder what lies within such a plain façade?' mused the soul. They nearly walked away but it whispered persistently to them. Finally, the soul slipped off the lid to reveal a mirror in which they saw their own face and a song, this time of promise, floated in the air. This jar was just right so the little soul placed it into the very top of their bag and took it forever on their travels as a reminder that only you can achieve your dreams.

This tale captures the idea that we find many things on our life learning journey that motivate us, positive and negative, but ultimately learning to motivate ourselves is the most important attitude to gain (For explanation of the use of these folktales see section 3.4.3).

Motivation to achieve was realised through informal life experiences (section 4.3.1) then applied to other situations, including learning, to show or please others and reaffirm self-worth. This offers empirical evidence to illustrate attitudes have a great impact on learning through driving incentive which is conceived by Illeris (2007) to be the total sum of motivation and engagement arising from life. My field journal reflected on incentive as a crucial asset: 'Everything that I was and/ could have been/ walks by my side/ whispering, 'Go on'. This vision of the affective driving motivation is shared by Goleman (1999) who notes that motive and emotions have the same Latin root, 'movere', meaning to move us: the findings offer evidence to illustrate how attitudes move us by driving actions. Equally understanding and managing emotions (EI) promotes greater student engagement (Zhoc et al., 2020).

Three different ways of looking at motivation came out of discussions and will be considered in the order that follows:

- Constructive influence of others
- Negative influence of others, turned into positive
- Wanting more for oneself.

Work ethic follows as inextricably linked to determination and the desire to behave in a constructive manner.

The constructive influence of others

Intrinsic motivation, rooted in emotions such as pride and happiness, arising from interaction with people, is a significant part of what mature students bring to support formal study (section 4.3). The power of positive attitudes in motivating one to learn (Jarvis, 2003) can be clearly seen in the data, as individuals assimilate and accommodate positive beliefs and attitudes in order to use them to move life and learning on (Illeris, 2007). This links to teaching children to have aspirations and work ethic (Morrin, 2019) so what is passed on by parents is a 'fund' (Moll et al., 1992) to draw from.

Negative influence of others, turned into positive

People were also recognised as a source of negative feelings (section 4.3.1) including parents, ex-partners, old friends and work colleagues. However, this source of potentially destructive emotions or dark FOK (Zipin, 2009), including regret and disappointment, was conceived of as positive motivation. The participants' frustrations had pushed them forward and created a determination (Goleman 1996) to succeed by looking for ways to remedy and solve (Dweck, 2000). Not one of the participants felt held back but used the negativity to spur them on. This latter point is considered next.

Wanting more for oneself

The closing argument on motivation relates to developing a desire for more, not just materially but socially and emotionally, to reinforce self-worth or prove oneself (Wong, 2018), giving studying at HE private value. Acquiring the attitude of motivation to guide oneself is an essential part of character and success (Zhoc et al., 2020), particularly in formal study (Lewis, 2017).

The poetry in my field journal (Appendix C to G) emphasises this will to succeed (Lavender, 2015) and the image of the mirror in the story of 'The constant soul and the three motivators' represents an individual's acquired attitudes. One's beliefs have an effect on abilities, since 'the most powerful motivators are internal' (Goleman, 1999, p106). The self is dynamic and has constant potential for change (Dweck, 2000) as we acquire and change attitudes, including turning negatives into positive, throughout life.

Work ethic

The data relating to work ethic were presented in section 4.3.1. The influence of family as an incentive creator can be seen in the references to 'work ethic' and is linked to organisation, resilience and determination to be and do better. Work ethic has not been discussed widely in relation to adult learning (chapter 2): although there is some evidence for work ethic as a predictor of academic motivation (Meriac, 2014; Milward et al., 2016) it appears most

frequently in psychology and business-related contexts (Olsen, 2015). Consequently, the role of work ethic in the success of mature, part-time learners is an important contribution to knowledge fundamental to my study in acknowledging that these students are energised by the 'drive to do my best' (story, chapter 4, p93).

Work ethic is an appropriate concept for adult education linking to the previous motivator to improve oneself.

Confidence

Confidence is linked to motivation, supports EI and underpins being independent. Contrary to the deficit discourse concerning adult learners as lacking confidence, it was something that the data (section 4.3.1) shows, though wavering at times, had been learned in life. Confidence is one of the 'assets of the person' (Jarvis, 2010, p129) and can be built on during early degree study. Academics point to confidence as one of the qualities children need to learn in order to be successful in education (Goleman 1996) and mature, part-time learners report that this developed through various life experiences, confirming 'temperament can be tempered by experience' (ibid, p88).

Confidence is a significant contributor to applying oneself and being self-sufficient that made participants more likely to succeed (ibid.). Likewise, sureness in the potential to grow and sustain confidence in the face of challenges was crucial to success in education (Dweck, 2000).This latter point links confidence to flexibility and resilience which will be considered shortly.

Resilience

Resilience lies at the heart of the assets mature, part-time students bring with them from life (Figure 5.2) and can be the difference between why some succeed and some fail (Day et al., 2011). The tale below presents a world fraught with strife that can be survived by developing the ability to overcome obstacles.

Three TAs

Once upon a time there were three TAs who lived on the edge of a deep dark wood. Time passed slowly until one day out of the deep dark wood, the deep dark world came to call. Brutal and cruel, the world looked them in the eyes and hollered, 'I bring you adversity and struggle that bends the strongest of wills.'

The three TAs trembled as he yelled, 'I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down.' And that's exactly what he did.

Momentarily bowed by the darkness of their lives they sobbed, feeling worthless and small; but silently and unnoticed a fragile tendril of resolve steadfastly wove itself around their hearts.

'Stuff this!' they cried. 'This is not going to beat us.'

So, they stood straight and vowed to always carry on. And that's exactly what they did.

The story of 'The three TAs' captures the darkness of life but also the resolve to never give up. This independence of spirit, formed by surviving cruel events, is an asset to be used in formal study, especially at a time when mental health issues are rife among students due to stress and anxiety (The Insight Network and Dig-In, 2020) and the contemporary pandemic. This data (section 4.3.1) builds on Tough's (1971) work where he argues for the importance of perseverance as part of self-directed adult learning but also Day and Gu's (2014) association of resilience with the persistence of hope and endeavour. These are certainly not the qualities of a deficient adult learner and support the view that mature students bring resilience and commitment (Crozier and Reay, 2011; Lavender, 2020).

This resilience had been acquired 'through interactions' (Day, 2011, p03) in life events but, contrary to Day and Gu (2014) who argue the need for love to build resilience in teachers, the research participants showed how they had built it through pain as dark FOK (Zipin, 2009). Consequently, in contrast to coping with the life-changing events of being psychologically abused by a partner, suffering depression or bringing up a child with a need, the challenges of writing an essay could be approached more judiciously. A resolute mind-set: 'I wasn't going to give up' (Ginger) supports growth (Dweck, 2000; Milwards et al., 2016).

Flexibility

Flexibility, or the ability to juggle, aids resilience which can be seen as successful adaptation in the face of trauma. Modifying cognitive, emotional and behavioural routines is crucial in order to deal with new situations (Lavender, 2015; Collie and Martin, 2016) and the data in section 4.3.1 shows it is an attitude brought by mature, part-time students to their learning. The story 'Adaptable Alice in Wonderland' below celebrates the flexible, quick thinking attitude of mature learners in a new world, ostensibly HE.

Adaptable Alice in Wonderland

One day Alice found herself in a new, very different world, but as a self-reliant and determined individual, she was undeterred. In the distance, she saw a beautiful garden and immediately began to problem solve how she could get there. Before she could put her plan

into action, she saw two notes on a table: 'To leave you must take this to shrink and this to grow'. It was perplexing to have to change one's plans, but she was flexible.

She had to decide which way to go but this presented no trouble as she was quick thinking and organised. In a matter of moments, she was sat in a grassy glade singing to herself when she met the Cheshire cat.

'Are you not scared and unsure?' mewed the cat with a sly look in his eyes.

'No, I have the courage of my own convictions and I am unafraid to change my course,' Alice replied.

She carried on her journey meeting many new people with exciting ideas that altered the way she looked at things. On leaving Wonderland she knew that trusting in herself but being willing to adjust her views had supported her journey.

The tale recognises the power of adaptability when approaching new situations and expectations. It is a force that supports resilience in its refusal to accept failure. Flexibility (section 4.3.1) is an asset acquired in social contexts and has value in education where active regulation has been seen to lead to enhanced learning outcomes for children and young people (Martin, 2012). Similarly, flexibility is central to teaching and learning (Collie and Martin, 2016). Being 'a rigorously organised, flexible juggler' (Appendix G) brings versatility and willingness to the formal learning environment by being 'prepared to do everything' (Bob) or 'expect the unexpected' (Hope) and is shown to be gained through years spent dealing with children, their own and others, or customers. Being flexible is a necessary precursor to success and the ability to change and grow leads to achievement (Dweck, 2000). Controlling change management by choosing realistic coping strategies for identified potential problems was also seen 'quite strongly' as important factors for success in the student sample involved in the research of Parker et al. (2004).

Flexibility is essential to support resilience and both were seen to be significant contributors to independence.

Independence

Findings indicated a learned approach to accepting one's own decision making, as it 'doesn't matter what others think' (Gail). Being unafraid to voice views and be decisive in the face of other's disagreement allowed individuals to take on any challenge (Goleman 1999); which consequently meant that an attitude learned in life was independence. Other intra and interpersonal skills were essential in supporting independence (Figure 5.2) forming a fund of assets to contest the deficit discourse of adults lacking what is needed to succeed in HE (Tett, 2017; Wong and Chui, 2019).

This study reveals mature, part-time students have already learned their own approach and motivation to study which supports some of the assumptions of andragogy outlined by Knowles (1970; 1980) concerning self-directed learners and Tough's (2002) iceberg including motivation as part of informal learning. Acquiring independence, including self-esteem and self-efficacy, are important qualities to possess (Milward et al., 2016; Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2013). Being self-planned (Jarvis et al., 2003) and proactive are assets in learning: an ability to think and work independently is needed in HE to support overview and criticality (Lewis, 2017).

Organisation

Finally in this section on the intrapersonal, the data revealed that more concrete organisation skills were vital to 'doing' (Illeris, 2007) and being self-planned (Jarvis et al., 2003). It arose out of day-to-day activities including running a home, co-ordinating children, supporting neighbours and good working procedures (section 4.3.2). Organisation involved both the time and thought management of independent individuals who had learned to be efficient by adopting a one step at a time approach to problem-solving. This relates to Knowles' (1980) self-directed learners and the personal learning and thinking skills of self-management and independent enquiry (QCA 2006) essential for success in formal study.

5.3.1.2 The Interpersonal

The interpersonal, or that which is related to working with others, such as the attitudes of patience and empathy and the skills of communication and team work were shown in the data (sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4) These were learned content but also link to interaction (Illeris, 2007). The tale below illustrates what can be achieved with well-practiced interpersonal attitudes and skills.

Maven and the diverse but finally understood small people

Once upon a time there was a group of diverse people living just outside of town. No one ever took the time to talk or listen to them; in fact, they seldom listened to each other and spent most of the days squabbling. Needless to say, they were very unhappy creatures.

That is until the day Maven strode purposefully over to their small cottage. On arriving she heard the most awful chaos but instead of imposing herself on the argument she waited patiently until things calmed down. She listened carefully to Grumpy, Happy, Bashful, and Dopey, acknowledging their concerns.

'Right!' she said, 'may I suggest what we need?'

'Yes,' came the reply from Happy, Bashful, and Dopey but Grumpy screwed up his face and said, 'No!'

'Why do you disagree, Grumpy? Please tell me your suggestions.'

On hearing someone willing to hear his point of view, Grumpy's hard heart melted.

Maven delegated duties and included them all so peace and calm reigned.

She immediately returned to the town and shared her story of how lovely the little creatures were. Everyone insisted on visiting them and one day moved them into the centre of town where, thanks to Maven, they would never be misunderstood again.

The choice of name for the central character is deliberate since Maven means one who understands thus encapsulating the importance of empathy. The tale cautions people to understand others, be patient and find ways to truly communicate and work together.

Getting on with others in a successful and productive way, by using patience, empathy, communication skills and team work were seen in the data (4.3.3 and 4.3.4). An awareness of others was shown to be essential for success in a US study of managers (Billings, Kowalski and Pisanos, 2011) and should be recognised in mature, part-time students. I begin with patience and relate this to empathy, communication and team work as all were noted across the told life experiences. Again attitudes or skills relate to the content (Illeris, 2007) learned in social situations.

Patience

One affective aspect of the content learned in life, related to empathy, was being 'understanding, patient' (Imogen) (section 4.3.3). This attitude, forged from inter-actions in the family, being a parent and entering into a new culture by marriage was crucial for working successfully with others in the family, community and at work. There was limited reference to patience in the literature reviewed (chapter 2) but Goleman (1996) talked about acquiring self-control as significant to success when working in both professional and manual positions and this could be patience. Learning to wait and be thoughtful, tolerant and adopt coping strategies links to empathy and teamwork: the latter is something younger children need to learn for success in education (QCA, 2006) and working well in groups is required at university (Lewis, 2017). Thus, acquiring them in life places the mature, part-time student at an advantage.

Empathy

The interpersonal attitude of empathy, based on one's ability to understand and respond to the feelings of others, including the need to be more broad minded was a dependable

finding (section 4.3.3). Empathy, learned from interactions in a variety of life situations, resulted in the understanding and management of their own and the emotions of others. The role of empathy when relating to others is crucial (Parker et al., 2004) as feeling management is seen as part of the emotional aspects of learning that had been prioritised in the school curriculum (DfE, 2005; QCA, 2006) and my findings have confirmed empathy to be part of what the mature, part-time students brought with them from their life journey (Lavender, 2015). It emerged that life had taught them to 'look beyond' (Louise) the obvious in the 'acceptance' (Flo) of others which reinforces Goleman's (1996) necessity for people to hear the feelings behind what is said or seen. Thus I advocate 'emotions as essential elements of human intelligence' (Nussbaum, 2003, p3) as seen in the frequency and substance of participants' thoughts on the importance of the management of feelings (section 4.3.3).

Empathy is vital to emotional and social competence, being important in work and learning and is itself a learned capability (Goleman,1999). The need to 'get rid of preconceptions' (Hope) and 'accept each other' (Charbob) were paramount to what had been learned through life and would continue to be requisite for good team work, aiding the building of constructive relationships. I noted in my poetry the primacy of 'accepts everyone' (Appendix G) and in the Maven story the contribution of understanding others to successful team work.

Findings on the affective aspects of empathy and later EI (section 5.3.1.3) support Bandura's (1977) theory that attitudes and behaviours are acquired within social contexts and Rogers' (2014) learning in informal life situations leads to the acquisition of attitudes and skills related to emotion. Empathy was seen as positive and associated with patience, resilience, flexibility and the skills of team work as assets gained in life. This recognises the power of emotions in learning and inseparable from it (Illeris, 2007), thus providing some empirical evidence on the importance of empathy to the holistic development of a learner (Hansen, 2009).

Communication and team work

Empathy and patience link to working successfully with others. Learning how to communicate well with others and build teams were shown in the data (section 4.3.4) as some of the content mature, part-time leaners acquired from life experience. Communication and listening skills are 'the key' (Hope) useful interpersonal skills learned in life. The specifics were all associated with building relationships:

- being open and approachable
- negotiating, listening
- diplomacy

- advising, explaining
- persuading, convincing
- avoiding confrontations
- honesty.

These interpersonal skills are important not just socially but intellectually as 'socialising shapes the brain' developing ones' social, emotional and cognitive intelligence (Goleman, 1999, p200). The ability to get on with others is fundamental to learning in all situations both informal and formal as both require discussion and peer collaboration (Vygtosky, 1978). The 'told' life experiences of participants showed that they had learned the skills of working well with others (Goleman, 1999, p202). A variety of work roles, including TA, had taught 'give and take' (Ginger) and using open communication made one an exceptional team member (Goleman, 1999). Such open communication explains the successful group discussions which regularly took place as part of the degree seminars.

Thus findings in section 4.3.4 reinforce life situations as fundamental to the development of attitudes and sociability (Tough, 2002; Rogers, 2014). One of the required assets for university entry is a positive attitude to group work (Lewis, 2017). Within life we learn the interpersonal skills of communication and empathy (Hansen, 2009) and develop mental and social processes (Illeris, 2007) to be able to navigate our way successfully through our journeys. This latter point corresponds to the navigational capital referred to by Yosso (2005) (section 2.4.2) as they have learned how to manoeuvre successfully within environments, including family, community and work and can apply this to educational spaces.

Sections 5.3.1.3 and 5.3.1.4, respectively, now look at the culmination of findings on the intra and interpersonal as being supportive of EI and positive attitudes to learning.

5.3.1.3 Emotional Intelligence (EI)

The data show that you cannot divide the cognitive from the emotional (Brackett and Salovey, 2013) and that attitudes are essential tools to support thoughts and social relations, becoming inseparable from thinking (Nussbaum, 2003). Thus acquiring EI allows successful functioning on an interpersonal level and a way of successfully approaching learning by processing emotions to guide thinking (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008). As part of the acquisition of intra and interpersonal skills evidence that the participants learned EI came through clearly in the data (section 4.3.5). EI (ibid.) is a complex concept but becomes part of the content learned in social situations and is related to interaction (Illeris, 2007). This study shows it to be a resource built from varied life experiences, including parenting and work in schools. Knowing and managing one's emotions as well as recognising emotions in

others in order to successfully handle relationships is a central part of the learning from the everyday that these students bring with them into HE, and as Zhoc et al. (2020) have demonstrated, greater EI results in higher levels of engagement and success at university. Emotions are not fixed but can be nurtured throughout life (Goleman, 1996) and often underpin success (Coleman and Argue, 2015).

Emotions are guides to be embraced and used (Goleman, 1996): 'I think it's emotions more than anything' (Petal). EI leads to success in all aspects of life, including education, and predicts academic progress (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2013) illustrating the relevance of the emotional to the academic. Controlling anger and not being scared in order to move on, while recognising the need to balance caring with a certain hardness for survival and deploying humour and a positive attitude are vital assets for navigating new situations.

5.3.1.4 Positive attitudes to learning

Positive attitudes to learning has been placed here as a culmination of the attitudes and skills in section 5.3 and as a bridge to argument three concerning compatibility with education since a commitment to learning (section 4.4.1) is one of the top seven qualities needed in university (Lewis, 2017).

The data (section 4.4.1) show a desire to do one's best in learning as a need or want. This may in part be due to the sampling procedure (section 3.5.2) as all worked in classrooms to support pupils and had graduated from a degree thus showing a clear propensity towards study: 'I always need some way of moving forward and learning' (Ginger). Learning occurred in different forms such as reading, research, observing and talking, and was found to be an important motivator: 'I always had a thirst for knowledge' (Louise). The story at the opening of chapter 4 recorded their 'deep love of learning' and success in the degree is a testimony to the power of positive thinking as emotions 'enhance our ability to think and plan' (Goleman, 1996, p80). Their enthusiasm motivated them to enrol on, and achieve, a degree and goes some way towards supporting Goleman's (ibid.) discovery that school pupils who worked hard succeeded more than those with a higher IQ; as well as a positive attitude towards study and an inquiring mind being principal qualities for university students (Lewis, 2017).

5.3.1.5 Reflections on this argument

The data advocate the recognition of the named assets of motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence, organisation, patience, empathy, communication, team work and EI along with positive attitudes to learning gained by participants through life. There are gaps when naming the specific assets brought by adult

learners which need more research (Rogers, 2014) and the list above is not necessarily comprehensive, but goes some way towards filling those gaps.

Findings in section 4.3 also align with the need to resurrect the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning agenda (DfE, 2005) and for its application to study in HE. Self-awareness, feeling management, motivation, empathy and social skills are central to what mature learners in this study possessed prior to taking their degree. Similarly, my evidence supports the central role of teamwork, self-management, independent enquiry, reflective participants and creative thinkers (QCA, 2006) which lay at the heart of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills and illustrates the need to revive the emphasis upon them at all levels and stages of learning.

This study shows that mature students possess six of the stated qualities seen as necessary for success at HE:

1. A positive attitude towards study
2. A passion for the chosen subject
3. An ability to think and work independently
4. An ability to persevere and complete tasks
5. An inquiring mind
6. Good written English
7. An ability to work well in groups (Lewis, 2017).

'Good written English' was not covered in this research; whereas all of the others have been identified in section 5.3 and will be fundamental to the argument concerning the compatibility of named assets to HE (section 5.4).

It has been too easy to underestimate or ignore the usefulness of what is brought to formal study from real life learning (Thomson, 2002) but I present mature, part-time learners each as a Tardis full of luggage containing named assets, arising from patterns traced across the twenty-one participants, acquired by travelling through a variety of experiences. Wong and Chui (2019) noted a 'can do attitude' amongst their non-traditional third year students aiming to achieve a first-class degree but focussed their study, on pathways to academic success, on the inhibiting nature of pride and fear as preventing the students from maximising their available opportunities. They conclude that a different approach to pedagogy could have avoided this but by directing the students themselves to what they bring to support learning

at HE, as my study does, we can gain a better understanding of the assets such students have to offer and how university tutors and students might capitalise on them.

Therefore, when considering what mature students bring with them from life experiences there is a multitude of attitudes and skills that have been named by the participants. Whilst the sample was small, comprising twenty-one graduates, (for limitations of the study see section 6.4) it can be seen that there are patterns where more than half of the individuals refer to the same or similar concepts. The evidence corresponds to arguments relating to the significant role of attitudes (Jarvis 2006, Illeris, 2007; Hall, 2012) in learning and lends credence to an earlier, briefer and more assertive, piece of writing conducted in a similar setting, that these students can self-organise and bring enthusiasm and willingness (Walsh, 2009). The attitudes and skills named in section 5.3 are useful for adult learning as will be discussed next.

5.3.2 Past experiences are a resource for adult learners

Having named specific attitudes and skills found within each person's Tardis, I now argue that past experiences, and what is learned from them, are a resource for adult learners. I begin by emphasising the cumulative nature of learning from life experiences and then linking the usefulness of these accrued experiences to assumptions associated with andragogy (Knowles, 1980). I argue that there is a relationship between the adult learner and the past to support the idea that adults are the sum of their experiences (ibid.). It will be acknowledged that even negative experiences can provide positive resources (section 5.3) for adults to bring to current study which are supportive of their success. This will be related to argument three (5.4), that these resources, funds or capitals are transferable and of use in formal learning.

The learning generated by past experiences is additive with one experience building on another to inform the present: 'every little thing I've learned' contributes (BB). What was learned over a number of years was shown to be: motivation, work ethic, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence, organisation, patience, empathy, communication, teamwork, EI and positive attitudes to learning (section 4.3). Experiences in the family, community and work shape current actions by providing attitudes to tackle life and study at HE. As a result of this accumulation of experiences participants remarked that their mind-set (Dweck, 2000) changed and this was instrumental in their approach to formal education (section 4.4); which reinforces another part of my conceptual framework on the role experience takes for the adult learner. The evidence supports Lindeman's early (1926, p9/10) edict that experience is the 'resource of highest value in adult education' and Dewey's (1938) emphasis on the value of past experiences to education.

As mentioned previously, the data offers qualitative evidence to illustrate the assumption of andragogy concerning the role of accrued experiences as resources for learning (Knowles, 1984). Andragogy assumes adult learners to be autonomous individuals who have internal motivation, hold readiness to learn as important and want to problem-solve and apply. The nature of the degree (section 3.5.1) supports this latter point as it is in education and the participants were able to apply these assets to their degree. Knowledge, attitudes and skills from experiences as a TA were also seen to directly contribute (section 4.4.2). Arguments in 5.3 provided an explicit statement of the attitudes and skills that make up this fund of assets gained in life to use as a learning resource. This is reinforced by participants emphasising they what they had brought to their degree was 'The experience that life brings' (Clarissa) or 'banks of experiences' (Flo).

One of the criticisms of the supposition that adults can access a 'reservoir of experience' (Knowles, 1970, p39) is the lack of evidence to test the assumption so this study goes some way towards providing empirical confirmation and can sit alongside Robert's (1983) research that concluded the main element of andragogy valued by his Fiscal Management trainers was experience as a learning resource. Equally, the data illustrate that experience amassed over the years is crucial to learning (Boud et al., 1994) as life is a resource that generates skills (Rogers, 2014). This study also complements the ideas of Reay (2002) that these learners possess assets relevant to the academic if only the connection between life and education was recognised.

In section 2.3.4 the lack of empirical evidence supporting the value of past experiences as a resource for adult learners was identified (Brookfield, 1998). This study provides data to satisfy this censure. The findings indicate that participants' life journeys between leaving school and starting their degree were both formative of their mind sets and useful to their degree as resources that could be used to enhance formal study: 'I've got so many stored…I picked out in class over the four years' (Hope) (section 4.4). Thus empirical evidence to illustrate some of the assumptions of andragogy (Knowles, 1970; 1980) is offered.

Some question the quality of the informal experience (McClusky cited in Merriam et al., 2007) in its relation to the value of the learning produced: this will be addressed in section 5.4 when considering the way different fields view learning. Here I maintain that experiences in the family, community and work led to useful resources for adult learning whilst acknowledging Simpson's (1980, cited in Brookfield, 1998) thoughts that even though past experiences can provide valuable learning to enhance study they can be problematic too but resilience can be nurtured (Day, Edwards, Griffiths and Gu, 2011) and character is not static (Dweck, 2000 (see section 4.3).

One of the findings that came through strongly in the data was how negative experiences, or dark FOK (Zipin, 2009), can transform into positive resources for mature students. These findings contradict the concern that negative experience could distort one's approach to the present (MacKeracher, 2004; Merrill, 2012) while reinforcing that all past experiences provide resources, even the negative.

It has been said that adults are the sum of their experiences (Knowles, 1970) and participants in this research reinforced this by emphasising 'Things that have occurred in life…make you the person that you are' (Bella). These points confirm Jordal and Heggen's (2015) placing of experience as essential in students' meaning making processes and strengthen Butcher's (2015) conclusion that adults bring professional capital (sections 2.3 and 4.4). The resources brought need to be recognised by shifting paradigms to include a wider view of intelligence (Goleman,1996) and a broader range of attitudes and skills as essential to learning (Illeris, 2007).

Part-time, mature students and what they bring with them to formal study needs more research (Maguire, 2013). My qualitative data supports the research of Merrill (2012, 2015) and supplements the quantitative work of others (Maguire, 2013; MacLinden, 2013) in this area by providing empirical evidence on what mature students had to say about what was learned in past experiences. It also goes some way towards substantiating Kleiman's claim (2019) that if HE wants motivated, autonomous, real learning the 'classic learning from life strategy' is valuable in showing the assets mature students already have (section 5.3.1).

The arguments on specific affective skills as resources learned through accrued life experiences bring together two elements of my conceptual framework (learning in informal situations and the role of experience with whole person, including affective, aspects) and supports the final argument (5.4) on the value of what has been learned to formal education.

5. 4 Argument 3: These attitudes and skills are compatible with HE and are assets, to be used and valued, in formal learning situations and their pedagogy

This section brings together previous arguments arising from my research questions to address the importance of degrees at HE recognising the assets that have been gained from the life journeys of mature, part-time students by seeing what is packed in the luggage of each Tardis (section 5.3 and 5.4.1). Arguments one and two have established life experiences develop attitudes and skills as resources for adult learners. Section 5.4 proposes that these attitudes and skills are valuable and useful in formal learning: they constitute many of the qualities HE requires (Lewis, 2017) or aims to build (South East

England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer, 2016). I will argue that they are equally an integral part of informal and formal learning environments.

Findings on the compatibility of the asset model of adult learners to study at HE are inter-related to, and dependent upon, arguments in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of this chapter. As stated at the start, a cumulative approach has been taken which leads back to the current context of widening participation at FE and HE (section 1.2) with the consequent need for a new manner of viewing mature students by recognising the usefulness of what they have brought from family, community and work. Section 5.4.1 will argue for a refocussing on the asset based model of adult learners before moving on to make a case that these assets are compatible with HE (section 5.4.2). The final consideration of the value attributed to these assets within HE, using FOK and forms of capital, asks for a shift in paradigms and pedagogy by recognising what mature, part-time students possess can enhance academic excellence rather than dilute it (section 5.4.3).

5.4.1 The asset based model of adult learners

As stated previously it is important to see adult learners are different, not in deficit, (Counsell,1982, cited in Thomson, 2002) and do not have a gap in their learning because of time away from the classroom. My claim is that they have filled any years away from formal education with learning from people and events in family, the community and work (section 5.2) creating FOK (Moll et al., 1992): all have 'led me to this moment' (Appendix C). I assert that instead of seeing these students as bringing 'baggage' we see them as bringing 'luggage'. The semantics here are important as baggage implies being weighed down and held back, whereas luggage relates to that which is packed to support a future journey. The conceptual framework (section 2.5) is presented as a piece of luggage where ideas can be stored for use: this now transforms into luggage containing the named assets gained from learning in informal situations that are kept within each Tardis and can be used in HE (Figure 5.3). These students are not empty vessels (Chen, 2014) unable to think or respond to the world but proactive constructors of meaning (Jarvis, 1987) with attitudes and skills that underpin construction, such as motivation, resilience, flexibility, independence, communication and EI (section 5.3). They are aware of diverse perspectives, recognising how they themselves have developed their 'mind set' (Cousin lt). Time away from formal education equipped them with a commitment to learning. It is a powerful thing, to be invested in something as belief makes one more likely to succeed (Dweck, 2000). Motivated, hard-working, well equipped students are better able to cope with adversities they may encounter in their journey to BA and their value needs recognition: 'Please see the worth of all that I have to offer' (story, chapter 4, p93).

The gaps mature, part-time students are presumed to have in writing skills can often be a focus of debate (Wilans and Seary, 2011). I argue that the affective funds or capitals these students bring help overcome any potential disadvantage in technical accuracy at an academic level. Student Support and unit tutors help redress the functional requirements of academic writing but it takes longer to develop a mind-set that will question and persevere: it takes a life journey. To honour the lived experience (Folk, 2018) we need to recognise 'all the elements I've learned along the way' (Hope) that they bring with them (Lavender, 2020). A lack of understanding of what these student bring to HE needs to be replaced with a theory of student success (Bensimon, 2007) by knowing the whole person and thereby recognising the assets rather than making assumptions of deficit (Moll et al., 1992).

This asset based model, perceived as luggage to be added to during life is the crux of my conceptual framework (section 2.5), that adults bring attitudes and skills needed for formal learning (Rogers, 1983). However they are often not drawn on in both study and work (Roffey-Barentson and Watt, 2014) or even seen (Tough, 2002): the key to opening the luggage is to recognise the usefulness of these affective aspects to learning (Jarvis, 2006; Illeris, 2007). In arguing for the assets these student bring from life I add to the belief that students do bring something worthwhile from learning in informal life situations: a 'bank of experiences' (Flo) as previously mentioned, in their professional capital (Butcher, 2015) and unrecognised FOK (Moll et al., 1992).

5.4.2 These assets are compatible with, and of value to, academic study

The evidence shows that there is a congruence between what is required at HE and what the participants said they brought: 'Lo, I bring great treasure to lay at your feet' (story chapter 4, p93). Participants referred to how they transferred their attitudes and skills to use in formal study (section 4.4). The application of what they had acquired in life made them self-sufficient students when they were given the opportunity for second chance education: the degree was 'like a passion…..like a new world' (Charbob) and was missed once complete. The assertion that what has been brought from learning in life is compatible and useful in formal learning supports research affirming that individuals do bring resources from the local (Thomson, 2002; Merrill, 2012). If we recognise the abundance of these FOK they can be drawn on and used in education (Thomson, 2002). This evidence also relates to the attitudes and skills expected in a more than capable university student: autonomy, confidence and flexibility, team work, responsibility for their own learning and communication (SEEC, 2016). Moreover, six out of seven assets looked for in university students, as outlined by Lewis (2017), have been recognised in this study (section 5.3.1).

By getting to know the whole person (Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama, 2012), the funds brought by mature students can be valued and their potential classroom use recognised. The richness of the life world can usefully inform teacher practice (Hogg, 2011; Tazewell, 2020) if formal learning embraces different ways of knowing (Gonzalez, 2015 cited in Llopart and Esteban-Guitart, 2018) and subsequently appreciate its use value (Zipin et al., 2012).

5.4.3 It is a question of what we see: value needs to be ascribed to these assets within HE

The arguments in Figure 5.1 and set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 lead to a questioning of how mature, part-time students are valued by HE. The data in this study has shown that the attitudes and skills of these students are of value, so the important epistemological question that should be asked is how can this be recognised by the system? By using FOK to change paradigms we recognise the wealth of resources marginalised students bring and the requirement to view them from a non-deficit perspective (Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018). Value needs to be ascribed to all learning, formal and informal (Todd et al., 2019) if we are to embrace the assets gained in life and their significance to education. A shift in views is required (Kyama and Rios-Aguilar, 2018) and so I argue that true value lies in the usefulness of what is acquired (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011): since mature, part-time students bring attitudes and skills that are essential for formal education they have strong use value (Zipin et al., 2012). There is a need to modify the hierarchy of capital valued in the field of formal education (Bourdieu,1986) and replace it with more modern interpretations (Yosso, 2005) to allow new concepts of capital to be embraced and different voices to be heard (Reay, 2019) (section 2.4). By using FOK teachers can be supported to rethink what is useful (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) and employ different ways of knowing (Gonzalez, 2015, cited in Llopart and Esteban-Guitart, 2018) to support formal learning.

Having argued that my participants construct their own meaning from life experience (Jarvis, 1987; Illeris, 2007) gaining FOK or capital that is useful for study at HE, and valuable to HE, (section 5.4.2) the remaining point is to emphasise that this should be recognised by formal education (Thomson, 2002). Value is affected by the way the dominant discourse views what others bring (Bourdieu, 1986) and the capital of mature learners has been undervalued in HE where not all 'knowledges' are treated equally (Cho and Yi, 2020). It is time for the academy to acknowledge this, use a more democratic interpretation (Wallace, 2019) of the assets different groups possess and for assumptions (Morrin, 2019) to be rethought and replaced with knowledge of the whole person (Rios-Aguilara and Kiyama, 2012). I apply this to adults returning to formal education, as possessing the FOK or capital of affective skills, essential to academic study that need to be recognised.

Earlier I noted that some question the quality of the learning gained through informal social contexts (McClusky cited in Merriam et al., 2007) but I assert it is about the way different fields view quality. Findings show that mature students have FOK acquired from life situations that are compatible to HE study and have been applied and used by the participants 'for my degree' (Clarissa) (sections 4.4 and 5.3) but the way we interpret things and what we view as valid learning can make all the difference. This study shows that affective learning supplements the cognitive by forming attitudes that affect 'how you look at things' (Loki). It is time to change the discourse (Tett, 2017): if the views held of what constitutes valuable learning shifted to recognise that affective learning complements other sorts of learning, HE could better serve mature, part-time students by using a suitable pedagogy and by engendering more suitable tutor expectations (Crozier and Reay, 2011) whilst enhancing its own prestige: eighteen of the participants achieved at least an upper-second class degree.

It is thought provoking that a crucial attitude learned by participants in this study was being 'non-judgemental' (Donna) and here I advocate for this at HE and by use of the Tardis image: formal education needs to avoid assumptions and look beyond as 'all that glisters is not gold' (*Merchant of Venice*, , II vii, Shakespeare, 1605). As individuals, mature, part-time students are not problematic; nevertheless, the way they are viewed by the dominant discourse in HE can mean that they are regarded as such (Crozier and Reay, 2011). FOK, used with elements of forms of capital, argues for equity so existing knowledge not customarily valued can be recognised (Moll et al., 1992). Those considering the value of FOK and different capitals need to appreciate what different communities have to offer (Yosso, 2005).

Assets accrued from the everyday (5.2 and 5.3) become part of useful FOK or capital supporting individuals as aspirational navigators of their destiny: 'there's no reason why I can't aspire to something else' (Hope). Aspirational and navigational are newer forms of capital to be valued (Yosso, 2005) and I add affective capital, rather than emotional (Reay, 2004), to encompass a broader range of attitudes and skills beyond nurture (section 2.4.2). I use Bourdieu here to show unrecognised capitals which could convert to value within classrooms and learning environments due to their usefulness. The application of the assets gained in life is paramount and adults can capitalise on their assets for learning by a shift to thinking about their use value (Zipin et al., 2012). Research participants showed that they acquired skills over many years and by travelling through various fields: their habitus accommodated new attitudes due to the additive nature of human learning (Illeris, 2007). Rather than being torn, or cleft (cited in Thomson, 2017), their habitus showed adaptation as participants moved through life areas of family, community and work. Instead of creating

tension, their experiences had been constructive (Illeris, 2007) as they occupied the roles of both learner and teacher (Jarvis, 1987) and even negative, dark FOK (Zipin, 2009) became useful.

A variety of new valuable and useful FOK or capitals (Rodriguez, 2019) must be recognised in HE pedagogy to further the creative pursuit of learning (Kleiman, 2019) rather than the objectified credentials of a degree (Hall, 2012).The favoured exchange value (Zipin, 2009), which privileges capital embodied in elite social networks and exchanges it for other commodities such as qualifications, should be replaced with usefulness to valorise a range of knowledges acquired through informal learning over time (Thomson, 2002). Knowings and knowledges (Thomson, 2002) point to the plural possibilities that learning is complex including mind, body and emotions (Jarvis, 1987). Intra and interpersonal intelligences gained from life learning support academic success (Goleman, 1996) (section 4.4).

Consequently, what mature, part-time students bring should be seen as an enhancement to academic excellence. I propose that a greater threat to academic learning is the market commodity view of a degree but that discussion is a thesis in its own right: instead I assert the need to change the dominant discourse of HE and government. The current discourse is about the status ascribed (Zipin et al.,2012) rather than the usefulness of what is brought. Mature students enrich HE due to the compatibility of their intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills with what is required by the academic.

This study shows the need to value what has been learned in informal situations and remove incorrect assumptions about the learning and the learners (Hondzel and Hansen, 2015) by increasing the status of the 'submerged' (Coffield, 2001, p1). There is a need to broaden the spectrum of talents seen as necessary for success in formal study and for it to include attitudes and skills related to the intra, interpersonal and EI (Coleman and Argue, 2015). I suggest my findings lead to an inversion of Tough's (2002) iceberg of informal learning, as originally mentioned in chapter 2 (p34) to allow the submerged to rise to the surface and for all to see what is on offer in order to adapt paradigms and pedagogy accordingly.

Figure 5.3 below is an adaptation of the conceptual framework of the asset based model of adult learners to show what has been gained from informal life experiences. It transforms Tough's (2002) iceberg into a piece of luggage which contains the accrued assets that can be carried on a learning life journey and used at future destinations. This study offers the naming of specific attitudes and skills as a contribution to knowledge but also the framing of them as assets that are compatible to formal education.

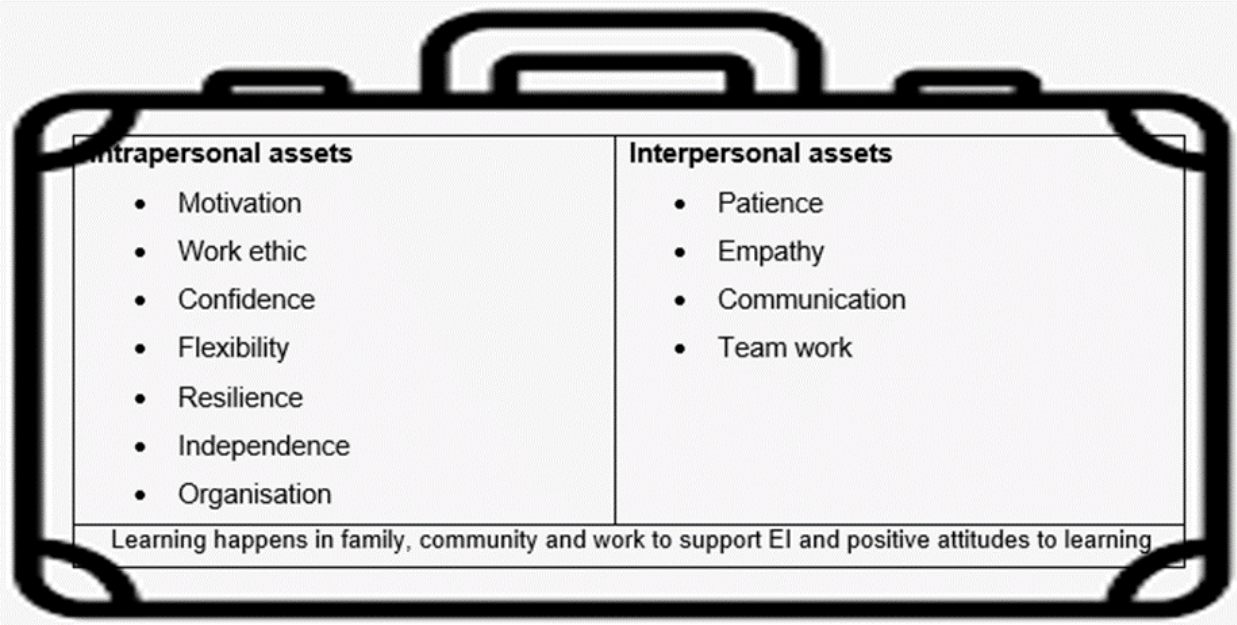

Figure 5.3 Named assets that mature, part-time learners acquire from informal learning and bring with them for use in HE

The recognition of these assets gained from life experience supports a renewed pedagogy for adults that unites theory and practice (Cullen et al., 2002) to include affective, cognitive, informal and formal elements of learning. It also corroborates Wong and Chui's (2019) conclusions that a change to student-centred approaches in their university could have avoided barriers arising mistakenly out of 'pride and fear'; whilst illustrating this study's claim that adults bring clearly articulated assets to support formal learning. Modifying paradigms and pedagogy to embrace the assets mature, part-time students bring to HE will go some way towards making the rhetoric of WP and LL a reality as well as refining HE itself.

Thus arguments in section 5.4 claim what adult learners bring from informal life situations is compatible with HE and of value to study so must be included in formal learning. An evolution, rather than revolution, is needed in HE in order to embrace the power of learning from the informal. More emphasis on providing the opportunity to use, rather than reveal what has been acquired is needed; by instigating this at the start of any degree the assets of mature students bring can be better applied and built on.

5.5 Summary of the central claim of this study

The central claim of this study is that the life journeys of mature, part-time students are of crucial importance: time away from formal study is not a gap as learning happens everywhere and all the time. The life experiences of these students have provided attitudes and skills significant to academic study. Rather than spend time mistakenly trying to fill presumed gaps, HE tutors need to ask and listen to the students' accounts of what they bring with them. This will allow teaching at HE to recognise and value the assets already in possession and use them, right from the start, to support academic learning.

If HE misses this, not only has the social justice agenda introduced in 1972 (Faure et al.) failed, HE, itself, is in danger of losing students with real academic potential. Mature, part-time students have been a great success story (Universities UK, 2014), TAs offer a good deal to universities (Bovill et al., 2021) and six of twenty-one participants in this study achieved a first class degree. All were deeply motivated to succeed, illustrating Goleman's (1996) assertion that motivation predicts academic success.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the arguments related to the research question, leading to claims with regards to 'the importance of recognising the told life journeys of mature, part-time students returning to formal education. The impact of life experiences on learning'. It has revealed three areas concerning adults and their learning from informal life situations:

- Learning arises from the everyday social contexts of family, community and work;
- It is possible to name the accrued intra and interpersonal attitudes and skills learned (motivation, work ethic, confidence, flexibility, resilience, independence, organisation, patience, empathy, communication, team skills, EI and positive attitudes to learning) and these are resources for adult learners;
- These attitudes and skills are compatible with HE and are assets, have use value, and need to be included in formal learning situations and their pedagogy.

All of the above offer insights which add to knowledge in the existing conversations on adult learners by providing evidence from the student perspective. A significant contribution is the naming of the specific assets that make up their affective capital or FOK. The arguments also support and illustrate empirically the theoretical work of others such as Knowles (1981), Jarvis (1987) and Illeris (2007) regarding the whole person and affective nature of learning. They contradict out-dated presumptions of mature, part-time learns as deficit, blank slates or problematic while reinforcing the claims that they bring assets (Thomson, 2002). Ultimately, the evidence shows the compatibility with formal education of what is brought from life experiences and in doing so offers a warrant for the value of learning that comes from informal situations as useful. This in turn illustrates the necessity for a shift in paradigms and pedagogy to better accommodate the profile of mature, part-time students resulting from WP and LL and to ensure the luggage within in each Tardis is opened in order to embrace the academic potential of what lies within.

These thoughts will be further considered in chapter 6, in order to clarify the contributions this study makes to adult learning and HE; alongside appropriate recommendations for practice and future research arising from it.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study urges the lay reader to 'develop a different set of eyes' (English and Bolton, 2016, p23; section 2.4.2) to recognise the value of learning from informal life contexts. I argue for its equal valorisation to formal learning rooted in its use value (Zipin et al., 2012) in the HE classroom.

6.1 Introduction

This research set out to explore, and name, what mature, part-time students bring to formal study after at least fifteen years away from education. From my professional practice and experience, I conceived that time spent away from the classroom might not constitute a gap but could be filled with various learning opportunities in social situations. This research illustrates the interconnections between 'knowledges' (Thomson, 2002) as the affective is arguably as important as formal qualifications, if not more so, in its value to academic study.

The contribution of content learned during the life journey is critical both as a mature part-time student and a tutor of mature, part-time students. At twenty-one I achieved a lower second-class degree which was not sufficiently academic to complete an MA and yet as a mature student I have gone further to study at doctoral level. In this research, despite comments concerning the deficit nature of mature students, I have found their engagement, to be impressive. I wanted to research what they brought with them that supported their engagement and success and to hear it from their point of view. In looking to recognise what they brought I aimed to locate any patterns of specific attitudes and skills to make them explicit to others and frame them as assets of value to formal education. Also, as a daughter of a union man, I believe in sustaining the social justice agenda of second chance learning (Callender and Thompson, 2018) for these students by affirming an asset based model that will augment HE.

This work is important beyond my own personal and professional positions in the policy context of Widening Participation (WP) in HE and the conceptualisation of Lifelong Learning (LL). A change in student profile, from mostly full-time eighteen to twenty-one year olds to a greater number of mature students, makes it necessary to examine what the latter provide in order to question the appropriateness of teaching and pedagogy. In doing so a recognition of the value of affective learning, accrued from past experiences in informal situations, must occur as well as raising the status of post-1992 universities that support more part-time courses and students than their pre-1992 equivalents.

Table 6.1 below provides a summary of the significance of my research by considering the potential impact the recognition of what these students bring can have on a number of areas, on multiple levels.

Area	Potential impact
Practice Education system	Shift views on what is seen as valuable in learning and question pedagogy
HE	Enhance HE by the presence of the mature, part-time student
Research	Assets named for further research Evidence theories on learning from life
Policy The mature, part-time student	Maintain second chance education to further careers and self-fulfilment
Society	Improve our social world by reinforcing awareness of inclusion
HE	Widen political perspectives of what are useful 'knowledges' for formal education

Table 6.1 Why my study is important

There is a limited body of qualitative research on the mature, part-time learner and their past experiences so this research is important in adding to the existing conversations on adult learning (chapter 2 and 5) by naming the funds of affective assets they bring. This study aims to complement the qualitative work of others such as Merrill (2012), supplement the quantitative (Maguire, 2013) and in doing so provides empirical evidence for the learning theories of Knowles (1980), Jarvis, (1987) and Illeris (2007). I extend the debates about what HE is, who it is for and consequently what is of value to it. In chapter 2, I framed my literature review as a series of conversations which I aimed to join. Having now presented my findings, I assert that the significant conversations from that chapter that my research responds to are:

- learning from life experiences in social situations (Tough, 1971; Rogers, 2014)
- whole person affective aspects of learning (Knowles,1984; Jarvis,1987; Illeris, 2002)
- what is brought from family, the community and work to education and the value of this learning to HE (Moll et al., 1992; Thomson, 2002; Lavender, 2015)
- the way we view 'funds of knowledge' (FOK) or capitals and what is valued in HE (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005).

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Summarise my contributions to the field of adult learning and consider implications for practice, research and policy
- Set out possible recommendations based on these conclusions
- Reflect on the possible limitations of the choices made for the research process
- End with final reflections on the research.

6.2 Summary of Key Arguments and Contributions

I have investigated what adults brought with them to formal education and named these assets. I extend the ideas of Moll et al. (1992) on children having FOK to develop an asset based model for adults who have travelled through time and gained named attitudes and skills that can be used in the classroom. A creatively academic approach has been taken to magnify these messages at key points which provides an original perspective to the contribution of this thesis.

Learning can be seen occurring in the social situations of family, community and work: even negative experiences, or dark FOK (Zipin, 2009), can be used positively. This learning is affective, involving the intra and interpersonal rather than the acquisition of a body of factual knowledge (Jarvis, 1987, Illeris, 2002). Dickens' criticism of utilitarian education in *Hard Times* supports my sense-making here in the negation of Gradgrind's conclusion 'Facts alone are wanted in life' (Dickens, 1854, p1). The attitudes and skills shown to be important for these mature learners can be named as:

- motivation, work ethic, positive attitude to learning, confidence, resilience, flexibility, independence and organisation;
- patience, empathy, communication and teamwork;
- emotional intelligence.

All are compatible with study at HE; thus providing a counter-argument to the dominant discourse in HE of these students as deficient by recognising the worth of their FOK (Moll et al., 1992) or capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005). I argue for a change in perspective to a theory of student success (Bensimon, 2007) (section 2.4.). Formal education needs to use this social and emotional intelligence learned from life experiences to develop HE pedagogy.

Another contribution of this research is that it has provided data that support theories of adult learning concerning the role of experience as a resource, learning in informal situations and the significant role of the affective and social in learning (Knowles, 1980; Jarvis, 1987; Rogers, 2014).

To sum up, this study has named the assets mature learners bring with them to formal study and in doing so confirmed the need to replace the deficit view of adult learners with an asset

model. HE would benefit from reconsidering what is valued as learning in order to provide second chances for the mature student but also strengthen academic study by seizing the potential this offers (Goleman, 1996).

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

The arguments and evidence in this study are of direct relevance to mature, part-time students who are at least 30 years old, taking a social science course but may also be of interest to other courses especially full time programmes where students fit the age profile, have a family and are still in work due to financial constraints.

Below I set out implications for the three areas of practice, research and policy originally referred to in table 6.1. For each area above I will then present possible recommendations based on the conclusions of my study in order to suggest what the impact of this research should be.

I take practice first as central to my concerns as a researcher studying for a professional doctorate in education but also as an educator in HE.

6.3.1 Practice

It is important that the ideas within this study are used and shared in practice by application in my own teaching and dissemination to others taking and teaching the degree but also to other courses in my setting and other similar settings in HE.

The findings offer an endorsement of the use of what has been brought from life experiences that can be seen in some universities and on some courses as well as offering implications for the future. I have already begun to apply the asset based model in my teaching, in conversations with students and fellow tutors at my university and have presented at Nottingham PGR conferences (Lane, 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

As a department, we aim to explore the asset pedagogy to question our teaching, examine what we value as useful study skills as well as how we view our students. An exploration of my research will be scheduled, leading to team discussions concerning teaching strategies involving a pedagogy to explore affective aspects of learning. Ideas arising from this research have already been used in a limited way in one recruitment session, where time was spent outlining to the students just what they had to offer study at HE. I have also used an asset pedagogy with my classes by referring to what resources from real life I saw them using on the degree and setting tasks that explicitly required the skills.

The main recommendation for practice (my own, my department, faculty and in similar HE contexts) is to consider how the specific affective findings can be applied to students,

recruitment, induction and courses. I also advocate some time being spent in engaging students in discussion about what they bring and how they do or could use it to support their study. This needs to be built on by securing publication of journal articles and contributing more widely to academic and professional conferences.

6.3.2 Research

This research has contributed by naming the assets students bring to formal education from life. Upon completion of this study and its dissemination, a future step would be to investigate what the asset pedagogy should look like in the classroom. In joining the existing conversations this study has also illustrated and strengthened current thoughts on adult learning and learning from informal situations. More qualitative research is needed on mature, part-time students in different level 6 contexts across the UK to increase the body of evidence for the value of learning from life experiences.

It became apparent during my research that insufficient attention was being paid to social events, such as going out for a drink with friends, and so data on what was learned in these situations is limited. Further research is recommended.

In retrospect two other areas have shown themselves to be worthy of future consideration. Firstly, twenty participants were parents and this featured in discussions about life and learning: it would be useful to explore what impact being a parent has on formal study. Similarly, the participants were either a TA, HLTA, unqualified teacher or volunteer in the classroom: it would be informative to conduct further research on how this impacts on study and would add a new perspective to the existing work on TAs.

Finally, I have been writing this thesis as a global pandemic unfolds and this research should be extended to what 'knowledges' undergraduate students have gained in their learning from informal situations imposed by lockdown during 2020/21.

6.3.3 Policy

The area of policy is problematic in how much research can influence a return to social justice when it seemingly is not on the contemporary government's neo-liberalist education agenda. However, 'research raises questions that need to be investigated further' (Thomson, 2020, point 1). I would welcome policy reinvigorating the WP and LL agenda to resurrect the spirit of Faure et al. (1972) and by doing so turn past rhetoric into present reality. The current Covid-19 pandemic may support a shift from examinations to new ways of access to HE as a necessity by acknowledging what has been learned away from the classroom, in lock down: this might require a widening of current political perspective and a consideration of my findings.

A focus on the affective will have benefits for individuals, society and the economy as personal improvement can strengthen social inclusion and economic advancement (Aspin and Chapman, 2001, cited in Nottingham, 2019). An emphasis on paradigms, pedagogy and students rather than the economic priorities seen by the increasing commodification of HE, and a foregrounding of the mature student, would go some way towards balancing recent neglect in policy and, perhaps, begin to address the decline in part-time courses and numbers. It is important for HE and society that we do not lose these students and these courses as they provide second chances for those with previously overlooked potential, speak to the social justice agenda of access to higher learning and have a significant public benefit (BIS, 2014)

In the present day, when education is viewed as a commodity, it may seem naïve to call for a refocus on learning to expand the mind and soul. Without passion and curiosity, one must question the point of education: testing and labels are reductive and restrictive whilst the true worth of learning is to further humanity (Faure et al., 1972). We need to reclaim HE for learning: it may seem idealistic but 'Idealists foolish enough to throw caution to the winds have advanced mankind and have enriched the world' (attributed to Emma Goldman, 1869-1940).

As I write this conclusion we are faced with unprecedented times: the Covid-19 pandemic is making us reassess what we see as important. Examinations for sixteen and eighteen year olds are being scaled back and universities are considering alternative ways to recruit. Moreover if there is anything positive to come out of the current pandemic it will be society remembering the value of public services: where we applaud not only the doctors and nurses that are keeping going in the face of such adversity but also the delivery person and grocery store worker. What they offer should be valued. My results are applicable for anyone who wants to return to education for whatever reason, as a reminder of the worth of life skills and their value in academic study. A recommendation for policy would be to revisit and reinvigorate the WP and LL agenda with a focus on pedagogy and paradigms that recognises the value of different' knowledges', especially in the wake of Covid-19.

6.4 Possible limitations of my study

Before concluding it is necessary to consider any limitations to my research. I aimed for congruence across my methodology, tools, ontology and epistemology (chapter 3). I supported this by using biography as suitable for a study intending to look at the life experiences of others and life history grids (LHGs) with semi-structured interviews (SSIs) as a means to elicit the authentic voices of mature, part-time students expressing insights into their lives. This was compatible with an interpretive ontology and subjective epistemology as

it spoke to the importance of the perspectives of others. I supported decisions on research design with the use of a conceptual framework constructed from key ideas on adult learning arising out of the literature review (chapter 2). The conceptual framework was translated into an analytical framework (section 3.7) to maintain a focussed exploration of the data. The use of creative writing in my field journal was also in keeping with an epistemology that seeks to assert the value of different kinds of learning.

However, I amend Shakespeare's (1599, *Henry V*, IV i) comment on fallibility' I think the king is but a man' to 'I think the Ed D student is but a human being', consequently I am aware that there are three main limitations to my study:

- The small sample size of twenty-one
- The subjective nature of qualitative research
- The potential of researcher bias due to positionality.

These have already been acknowledged in section 3.9 but I outline a number of pertinent points here. Firstly, in having a small sample size I am in good company with other qualitative research in the field of mature students (Crozier and Reay, 2011; Merrill, 2012) so my study can accompany the ideas of others to form a picture over time (Bassey, 1981). The smaller purposive sample allows for the voice of the participants to be heard in a more naturalistic setting which is appropriate to the aim of the research to listen to the students to ascertain a more compelling picture of what they bring and where it has been learned. It is not my intention to claim findings are applicable to the whole field of HE, although there is potential for transferability in the era of Covid, but to those that are similar to the sample or, 'typical' (Lincoln and Guba,1985). My 'moderate claims' (Williams, 2000) may illustrate a broader set of recognisable features.

Comparison to other literature and research in the field of adult learning supports the credibility of the findings as I join existing conversations to add to, illustrate or contradict what has gone before. This has been further strengthened by reference to patterns within my study across twenty-one participants and the use of both a conceptual and thematic framework.

The qualitative nature of my research is actually one of its strengths as it gets close to real life situations, despite its difficulty (Roger, 2014b), and will further illustrate the quantitative work of others such as MacLinden (2013) who concluded the need to consider how adults are driven by previous experiences: I offer data to address this. In a study that looks at epistemological questions concerning what is valued as learning and asserting the status of the informal, subjective and affective it is highly appropriate to use a qualitative approach.

Using SSIs based on a LHG allowed me to listen to the voices of my participants but a limitation was not questioning sufficiently about leisure activities. I am aware that there are a number of areas left needing further study that have already been outlined in the section 6.3.2.

Finally, my positionality may lead to bias at all stages of the research and particularly due to the chosen research questions and use of a LHG. This has already been recognised in section 3.9 and an honest and reflexive method has been taken. The LHG was framed by the research questions, but every effort was made on the part of the interviewer to allow the participants the freedom to tell any story. I endeavoured to be true to their words by using quotations to make my findings dependable and confirmable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); however I did select the quotations and removed them from their immediate context so my interpretation must be conceded even though various parts of the research were checked by the participants and my supervisor.

6.5 Plan for my time after the thesis

After completion of the thesis I intend to disseminate key messages by writing journal articles and talking at conferences in university, both internal and external. The Head of Faculty has already expressed a wish for me to present at a faculty meeting, but I will also submit papers for consideration at a whole university level and beyond.

I shall continue to question my own teaching and discuss teaching approaches across the degree and department.

At some future point, I plan to conduct research on what the asset pedagogy should look like in the classroom.

6.6 Final reflections and thoughts

I have always been a teacher but now I have become a researcher and the journey has been a treasured one. It has reminded me of my passion for learning and learning for all as well as why I came into education: to get others to question and create. The latter being one of the highest goals of thinking (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000) and a creatively academic approach intended to support the sense making process for both researcher and reader. This process has confirmed that learning is about the whole person and is most successful when we are committed to our students and they are committed to their studies.

Education should be open to all regardless of formal qualifications achieved as a child. I was asked at the beginning of my research journey 'Where does HE draw the line?' and this question reverberates through my mind, work and life. At eleven I would not have passed the eleven plus but, due to the comprehensive education system, I achieved A Levels; and

at twenty-one I would not have been accepted on an MA but now I am nearing the completion of a doctorate. The issue is not where we draw the line but who decides and why? Those who make the decisions related to access to education should view individual potential based on the breadth of learning from many situations: not culturally biased tests restricted by age, class and school attended. We need to find a way to 'see the worth of all that I have to offer' (story chapter 4, p93).

It has been a privilege to work with mature, part-time learners to appreciate the value of the social and emotional and to recognise it as the life blood of the cognitive. It has also reminded me of the joy I have for learning: I would now alter a line in my life story (section 3.2.1):

'And so, it happened that the little girl from a mining village near Sheffield journeyed once again to the great hall of academia: only to find she had come home'.

It is imperative my arguments convince the reader of the importance of life journeys to learning and to, consequently, debate the paradigms and pedagogy in HE. We need a change in perspective in order to see the assets mature, part-time students bring and thereby ensure the rhetoric of WP, and LL second chance becomes reality. By offering a system that takes into account the value of what has been learned in the family, community and work, HE will become more democratic, more just and all the better for it.

7. Reference list

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8. Appendix

On a scale of 1 to 10 [very negative] to 10 [very positive] how do you rate your experience at:

a. Primary school- why?
b. Secondary school-why?

Time / Areas of life	Family Parents, siblings, partner, children….	Community Friends, neighbours…..	Work	Anything else e.g. being a parent your ambitions
The years between leaving secondary school and becoming a TA				
The years between becoming a TA and completing the BA				Teaching approaches on the BA

On a scale of 1 to 10 [very negative] to 10 [very positive] how do you rate your experience at:

a. Primary school - 2 – Teacher low expectations: said I asked too many questions
b. Secondary school – 5 – Coasted: not pushed at schools but home expectations to get work done

Time / Areas of life	**Family** Parents, siblings, partner, children….	**Community** Friends, neighbours…..	**Work**	**Anything else**
The years between ~~leaving secondary school and becoming a TA~> ..leaving teaching in secondary school and gaining MA	Dad died – positive affect as determined to make him proud [union man] Young step niece [partner's family] got MA - jealous Sister – love of books Partner – studied on electrician courses – return to learning as adult possible No close family experience of HE - had to think for myself - independent	Rowing – team work, organisation Jackie [friend] – already had MA Spinfit – self-directed/ no quitting!! Self-reliance	Love of learning from working with teenagers & adults Barry – mentor, coach – such fun!!! What an inspiration Carole – team leader at LA – confidence building, self-belief Working with adults as consultant – TA training sessions/Heads of English meetings	Chance – leaflet on long distance dropping out of post onto my lap! At day spa, bumped into 2 lovely older ladies who were doctors Aldeburgh poetry festival and seaside - creative
The years between ~~becoming a TA and completing the BA~> ……gaining MA and starting Ed D	Sister – believes in me Partner - supportive	People met on MA – fun Experience of doing the MA – both positive and negative led to learning. Self-reflective Sue Jackson (scholar) – narrative approach to research – life stories	New job – colleagues: role models Love of learning – students on BAAES	**Chance –did MA unit on UOB course & met contact** **Reading, theatre, poetry – imagination, thinking and interpreting** **Teaching approaches on the BA - Share, value, facilitate, learn, enjoy, use experiences**

C

Everything that I am
has led me to this moment.

Everything that I was
and could be
walks by my side
whispering ‘Go on.’

The past – good, bad, indifferent –
I stand in its wake
and know, above all,
I have the will to succeed.

D:

I did not know how
I glided over your
shiny surface.

You did not know how
I admired what I saw.

Today my heart broke.

To realise the trauma from
which you rebuilt yourself –

The manure your flower
has grown so magnificently from.

It blooms – you bloom -
and everything you touch.

E:

And so, I am here once again
moments later:
with sadness
for all your
woes;

full of wonder
at your
resilience;

full of pride.

F:

Sadness weighed me down

- for the past,
- for the present.

If only you truly

knew

how

magnificent

you

are.

G:

You’re an oxymoron wrapped up in a paradox.

You’re a parent:

a rigorously organised, flexible juggler.

You’re a neighbour:

sociably chatty, listening fiercely.

You’re a worker:

independently self-sufficient, working well with others

- a giver and taker.

A balancer:

who never judges others,

respects individuality,

accepts everyone,

is kind to all.

H:

LIFE HISTORY GRID – COVERING LETTER

Thank you for giving consent to take part in this study on the influence of life experiences on learning.

Please find attached/included a participant information sheet and an electronic/A3 version of the life history grid to think about before we meet to talk. The factual information sheet is to provide context to the study.

I would be grateful if you could spend a little time thinking about the grid and what you have done in these years, particularly, which people, places and events have influenced your learning between:

A. leaving secondary school and becoming a TA
B. becoming a TA and completing the BA

There is also a request at the top of the grid to briefly report how you rated experiences at primary and secondary school (again to give context to the study).

Only fill in what you feel happy disclosing. Jot down ideas using notes or bullet points; or, if you prefer, do not fill in the grid and just think about it prior to the interview.

The ideas from this grid will form the basis of a one hour interview (to be arranged at date and time convenient to you) when we will discuss the points with regards to what experiences, people and places have influenced your learning.

I:

Participant Information sheet

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree to take part it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to carefully read the following information. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Please think about it carefully and then decide whether you would like to take part or not.

What is the project about?

As part of my Doctor of Education (EdD) studies at the University of Nottingham, I am investigating the learning processes of mature students (now graduates), working as teaching assistants, who returned to formal education after a gap of about 15 years.

What are the aims of the research?

I intend to find out whether and how previous life experiences enrich current learning.

Who else is and can be involved?

I am inviting mature graduates from the BA Education degree (2016 – 18) to take part in this research from the two local hubs I taught at.

What sorts of methods are being used?

I want to understand your views and experiences with regards to the influences of life experiences on your learning. Two related methods of data collection have been chosen. The first will involve filling in a grid focussed on significant life experiences that influenced your education. The second will be a follow up interview to discuss the ideas and fill in any gaps.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen as you are a mature graduate from the BA Education degree (2016 – 18).

What are you being asked to do?

If you participate in this study it will involve completing, as far as you feel comfortable, the grid about the key events and relationships from family, community and work that have contributed to your learning journey. This will be accompanied by a participant information sheet to capture factual details. The grid be used as the basis for an hour long interview discussion about the grid, where we can explore what has been entered, fill gaps or fill it in completely, depending upon your preference.

I will record and transcribe this interview, with your permission and then make transcripts and analysis of my findings. You will have the opportunity to check the transcripts and make changes as you see fit. This would also take a little of your time.

After you have read the transcripts it is perfectly acceptable for you to withdraw from this study. If you choose to withdraw your data will not be used.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The data I collect will be treated confidentially and only my university supervisors will have access to the raw data (if necessary). All information collected while carrying out the study will be stored on a database which is password protected and kept strictly confidential. The digital and textual data resulting from the interviews will be kept in a secure and confidential location. Your name will not appear on any database or any information which is then published. Instead, a number or pseudonym will be used as an identifier on all data associated with you.

I will report the results anonymously. When results are reported all individuals will be anonymised, so you will not be identifiable. I will provide a summary of the main findings by request

I am committed to carrying out my research according to *The University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics* (2016) and the ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (2011). This study has been approved by the School of Education ethics' committee.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of study will be used as evidence for my doctorate. I also expect to present findings at professional and academic conferences and publish them in academic and professional journals.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is important you understand that you do not have to participate in the project at all, and even if you decide to take part you are still free to stop at any time before the findings are published and without giving a reason. Participation or non-participation will not affect any future study or references.

I will not ask you to participate without you formally providing your fully informed written consent. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the accompanying form giving your permission to take part.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I anticipate the grid may take between 1 and 3 hours to complete. The interview will take up to one hour of your time. I realise that some people may find this tiring or difficult. I will ask you to reflect on your life experiences but do not expect you to discuss anything you do not want and I understand that this, for some, may stir emotions or cause anxiety. Otherwise, I do not believe there are any other risks or disadvantages to you in taking part.

What are the possible benefits to me of taking part?

I hope that your views, and those of others, will be used to develop informal learning centred pedagogies and to help university practitioners understand how life learning is an asset for mature learners. I also hope that you will personally feel energised by taking part.

If you have any concerns about this study or the way that you have been approached, please contact Susan Lane or my supervisor Dr Lucy Cooker or the School of Ethics' Coordinator (see contact details below).

J:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.
- I understand the data collected will be treated confidentially and only university supervisors will have access to the raw data (if necessary). The digital and textual data will be kept in a secure and confidential location. All information collected will be stored on a database which is password protected and kept strictly confidential. My name will not appear on any database or any information which is then published. The data will be stored for 7 years from first publication and will be used to provide evidence for a doctorate research paper and, potentially, in academic and professional journal articles conference papers.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham,
  I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …… (Research participant)

K: Word Cluster Example

EMOTIONS/EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Determined pig-headedness x 7 strong don't give up

You have to be positive **attitude** don't take things too seriously x2

It's up to you

Eyes opened I'm more capable I've not reached it yet how to deal

Intuitive / instincts x2 kindness, calmer, caring accept/ forgive say how you feel

CONFIDENCE X 13 [LACK OF X 1/2?] **PERSEVERENCE** X 6

I can do this in own practice fearless ask for help

Self-belief x 5 Fortitude

Panic & fear listen to yourself stubborn

Don't compare yourself not being shocked or surprised

Don't give a stuff be brave

commitment

Challenge misconceptions

Know who you want to be

RESILIENT X 9 thick skinned x 2 big shoulders

Survive guts

	Family	Community/leisure	Work
Motivation P'I			
Motivation Positive influence of others	Cousin - and looked up to her. I thought I'd like that .....I want to wear that hat..... Just make you want to do that	Friend - She's the one that got me to do uni like 'come on, we can do this' she's the one that pushed	Support of boss - like 'yes, go and do it'
Motivation Negative influence of others			
Negatives drive	Dad - he always wanted me to do well the disappointment from my mother and my father... ...I think it probably not a good impact cos when you're put there and then you fail there is so much disappointment.....		
Love learning	Being a mum You have to learn fast constantly questioning yourself. **reflect and learn from this. reflect and improve to**	we did kind of research it	Did GNVQs – on job repetition,
Attitudes Determined		the drive to do it.....	
Attitudes confidence		strong and confident	be confident artistic, creative and patient caring , compassionate person, be hard as well confidence, tough skin
Emotions/ EI	it was always me but I didn't think I was clever just enjoy and be happy		that's what's helped me grow..
Work ethic	The children - they need to work hard		

Inter Social - commn.	communication skills..	communication,	talk to your clients communicate
Soc comm /Attitudes Humour			
Intra Life /Personal skills	Firm, consistent, hard and soft.....organised, have routine..... Organisation.....practical skills.....	Co-ordination, sorting out	organised..... manage proactive planned things organisation, writing skills -Memory..... knowledge
Natural / Everyday	well... I don't really know - you just get on with it	Hols - don't think that's influenced my learning though	
Summary start	experience, maturity.....things that have occurred through life that make you the person that you are. the older you get the more you want to do .		
Summary end	Life experiences .....it's really hard isn't it - cos you just get on with it - and do it don't you? confidence wanted to prove to people - my dad, mum - not that need to prove to them but I felt like I did so that was another reason for doing it cos they were disappointed in me prioritising		
Being a mature student	so I think you realise time is precious, I definitely wouldn't have put the effort in.		
	....I think I thought back then it makes people look at you differently if you've got a degree.....		
	Parents at after school club - they used to just over look me and thought the older ones were better than me		

it was always me but I didn't think I was clever just enjoy and be happy	Patience, caring - when you put your mind to something you really do achieve it' to listen to myself when you put your mind to something	not to give up pig headedness very strong women equality	Perseverance stubbornness determination I'll do what I've got to do Try to achieve your potential humour confidence, believe in yourself... tolerance, acceptance love a lot of forgiveness the biggest shoulders you live with guilt it isn't you, it's life I've got to brave	resilience!! keep going patience, confidence learn to manage your emotions compartmentalise actually take it, reflect on it as and when I need to	**Proactive** with children Didn't got to uni - persistent	Not to give up, to do your best you put your 100% in to keep trying trust Patience..... not to compare knowing there's not a right and wrong way it's just your own way and just unconditional love giving it a go and not worrying knowing when to open up and when to share upset
Discipline and respect- **Loyalty** family is everything – being a parent – to show how you felt	Eye opening my confidence raised it doesn't matter what others think..... It strengthen me [son ASC]	you can just keep at it, That you can just keep going do your best cos that's all you can do. you never know what the next second is going to be like. sense of achievement: I'm a mum first.....	Perseverance, acceptance, patience, **look at things from other people's perspectives** and not always assume guilt family is more important than anything	x	Patience Not give up not to just blame myself thick skin hardened had my eyes opened Don't be shocked, have a sense of humour.....	resilient self-belief

Patience	x	..... I still carried on **and I just thought I was nothing** Humour [p'l] it was like I was a caged animal: I had been let loose...because I can do it,'	patience, , My children are the world to be open and to say how I feel to accept that people do believe that you can do what you want to do natural; caring it's ok to be different	determination emotionally involved emotional	thick skinned	x

Patience	8
Resilience	13
Confidence	9
Emotions/ EI	10
Humour	3

N: Tallies

Life area motivation related to	Family	Community	Work
Participants	16	5	17

Summary of number of participants (out of 21) referring to some form of motivational driver captured in the LHG interviews

Specific motivators mentioned		Constructive influences of others		Centrality of 'me'	Negativity as a positive driver	
		Positive/ constructive influence of others	Having children/ being a parent	Me	Negativity of others	Negative emotions
Area of life motivators related to	Family	14	3	2	5	3
	Community	5		0	1	1
	Work	10		9	3	4
Total of participants		19	10	18	10	11
					Total referring to negatives in some form = 15	

Number of participants (out of 21) mentioning specific motivators captured in the LHG interviews