Breaking Through The Dumb Barrier

An in-depth study of the signals
the education system sends to
adults in adult education

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Education
(Adult Education)

Massey University
Wellington
New Zealand

Mary-Adrian Ledingham
2004

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores some of the aspects faced by students who return to learning after a number of years out of the education system in New Zealand.

It highlights issues which affect confidence, acceptance, access to information, ability to be heard, finances, workloads, family/friend relationships and the many realities of being an adult student. At the same time it rejoices in the strength, courage and determination shown by those who have dared to return to formal education.

A number of case studies and focus groups have been used to develop the critical analysis. Past and present literature has assisted in creating the anchor to the ideas that have emerged.

A combination qualitative and interpretive methodology was followed in the production of this thesis. The reality that unfolded was a recognition of also needing to develop a workable framework, as personal assumptions were left behind, new information was discovered and became an integral part of the environment and subsequent information sharing of the researcher and the study participants.

The experience of each and every one of this group provided both questions and answers to the usefulness of past and current systems in terms of positive facilitation into education. The failure of the system with its dependency on academic correctness and academic systems will require a more open and transparent re-culturing to enable equitable opportunity, encouragement and practice, or the changes will remain cosmetic and result in sameness.

Systems, while necessary, are not in themselves enabling. They can be useful tools to ensure enabling, but if they serve only to disable the very people who are left with no choices but to try to navigate them, then the quest for education can be lost.

Education is for people, it is about people, and only if it retains this focus will it continue to educate.

Each of the stories in this thesis has at the root of each individual's success, a thread of how "an enabling person" (or persons) made the difference to a system that was fraught with difficulties, that was often cold, inhuman and unbending. These were the lucky ones as, like me, they too came to realise that the system sends very mixed messages to some people. This is not the way it should be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

mother. I am proud of who you are and of your achievements in life, in every respect, and I like to think that somewhere in all of this, perhaps I made a little difference.

My thanks too to the members of my wider family who have encouraged me to the finish line and to my friend Patricia, for being so pedantic and ensuring all the i's were dotted and the t's were crossed and for being a sounding board, especially when things were not coming together in quite the way I had planned.

This thesis is for all those, who like me, stand on the brink of life and dare to question things that do not make the world a better place. I live in hope that your stories, your courage and your strength will open ears and get the attention of those in "academia" who have the power to make so much difference to so many people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER SEVEN

Findings

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions and Recommendations

APPENDICES

BREAKING THROUGH THE DUMB BARRIER

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> *And when we speak we are afraid*
> *our words will not be heard nor welcomed*
> *but when we are silent we are still afraid*
> *So it is better to speak remembering*
> *we were never meant to survive.*
> *(Lorde in "Litany for Survival" 1984)*

BEING DUMB

I am writing this thesis because I want to understand why for most of my life, and I am now 56, I have considered myself dumb, and why I stayed quiet to avoid attention and to remain unnoticed and so get by. Throughout my childhood and young adult life I felt silenced and I want to know what impact this may have had.

I need to know why I grew up with low self belief and why despite my feelings of being "dumb", being silent, and explaining it away to myself by considering I was a slow learner, I still took the risk and undertook further education as an adult. I want to understand why I placed myself at risk of being exposed as being even dumber and of failing and feeling even more foolish.

This thesis is about a puzzle, the puzzle of how a middle class, European woman feels so alienated from education, in fact over the years has felt like a stranger in the education system.   My subsequent discovery in my thesis of the

gap between what and how I wanted to write, as compared with "academic writing" illustrates for me, that outsider feeling.

The second part to the puzzle is that despite these feelings I also now know that I am me, and me is just about okay!

I needed to understand my own story and I chose to explore with other people, their stories. I was astounded to find that so many others had feelings very much in tune with mine. Many talked about the "dumb" feeling, or not feeling they quite fitted into the system.

In exploring these stories I came to realise that this thesis would not be so much an argument, as an exploration, an exploration of what the implications of the stories of the past are, for the present.

I undertook my journey with some basic assumptions including the fact that education was about learning and it was empowering. If this is not so then what is the point.

As my journey progressed I realised that the exploration was deeper than I had at first considered, and that I was questioning education itself. I realised I have questioned for some time, what goes on in education. Now, thanks to *Marg Gilling*, I am challenging this. I want to know not only how people can find meaning in education, but also why it has been so hard for so many.

- *Does education really set out to be all inclusive and all embracing - if so then why did I and others feel like outsiders?*

- *Is education really about **be**-ing – or is it about people fitting into the status quo?*

- *Is there more to education than "education"?*

2

On this journey I explored the literature to find out what had been written and to look at other people's research.

On this journey I have introduced the participants as I sought to understand them and their experiences.

I listened to other people to hear their stories. I told my own story. I analysed and compared the literature findings with the stories I explored.

In my deep desire to understand how I, and others, dealt with the past and built on it by seeking formal qualifications I realised that I was looking at the past *and* the present. I had widened the original research focus to include looking at the implications of what that meant for the people in my stories in relation to what they are involved in doing now. This fact did not dawn on me until almost the end of the journey and this revelation is well captured by *T.S. Eliot.*

We shall not cease from exploration

and the end of all our exploring will be

to arrive where we started

and know the place for the first time

TS Eliot (Little Gidding, 1942)

(I have also referred to this revelation in my findings in Chapter Seven)

To be really alive and human is to be fully conscious of our purpose, just as the people in my stories are. Only when we think through the aims of what we are doing do we really begin to make a difference. I believe that excellence in teaching is about having the ability to reflect, to create purpose, to define excellence and to embrace humanity with dignity and spirit and to be alive and engaged in growing.

FEELING DUMB

Why is it that so many mature adults, returning to education after some years, label themselves as being "dumb", or recount "feeling dumb" or not quite fitting in? Who or what is it that creates the "dumb" signals and the "I don't quite fit in" for them and why?

What, if anything, is done to dispel this feeling? Does anyone know, or pick up any signals that many mature students feel like this? Just because they did not feel at ease with the new environment did this mean they were dumb or did not fit in? Why did they put themselves in the position of feeling dumb? How did they cope? Did education make a difference? Do they still feel dumb?

Freire (1998) stressed a pedagogy of education which begins with the present reality of the people's lives. He contends that men and women must begin their journey in their own here and now. The here and now of where they begin, emerge and change.

He also captures the importance of the link between people's perception of their condition and liberation. He sees that those who recognise their state as being limiting, but not unchangeable, will be those who challenge and change their futures. The exploration and analysis in this thesis, of the recognition of the participants that they needed to take up the challenge shows the significance of this link.

DUMB DISCOVERY

In recent years much has been done, with varying degrees of success, to show people coming back into education that they "know things", that they have life skills that are recognisable and valuable and they have capabilities that they are not fully aware of. However the characteristic trait of self-depreciation is deeply embedded in many people, particularly those who reach adulthood without feeling they have aspired to anything in an educational sense.

The nature of this research is very general. This research provides a challenge and an opportunity to contribute to the transformation of the way in which those returning to education as adults, can experience learning in an inclusive and positive environment.

It has not been restricted in gender or academic level. It uses a qualitative research methodology based on the stories arising from the informal discussions, as it explores the experiences of a group of mature students as they set out to make some changes in their lives.

This research, in looking at the ways in which people attempt to empower themselves and to develop appropriate strategies to do so, also acknowledges the patriarchal structure of power and knowledge. In considering the existence of privileges and inequalities, the assumption of the 'level playing field' will be explored.

Of significant importance will be the recognition of the diversity of the experiences and of resources, as a pre-requisite to the empowerment. Nichols et al; (1985) in outlining strategies for empowering academic women, allowed me to see such strategies had application in the wider sense: The suggestion made was that as institutional structures were so slow to recognise the need to ensure women had full opportunity afforded them in the academic profession, this could be combated from within by women working on the informal levels of the organisation.

I believe such thinking can be equally applied across all facets not only of education but of every profession and of life in general.

In the following chapter I will introduce the literature reviewed in my search for the answer to the question of "being dumb". In subsequent chapters I will outline the methodology, present the data, the analysis and findings, followed by the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE DUMB FACTOR

LITERATURE REVIEW

*"I came to theory because I was hurting; the pain within me
was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to
theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what
was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I
wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a
location for healing. (Hooks. 1994:59)*

INTRODUCTION

The literature reviewed for this study was abundant and I soon became deeply embedded in the literature search. I began with my mission mapped out – I was on a search for what had been done in the broad sense, but was keen to see what had been done in New Zealand. This turned into a mammoth task and I found myself constantly confused, I would take out 30 and 40 books at a time. I was excited and keen to delve and discover all I could, but I began to get bogged down and needed to pull back and remind myself of my original reason for my research.

I found that there was much research from countries outside New Zealand. But I have endeavoured to also use the most meaningful of the literature from within New Zealand as this study was primarily about study in New Zealand. Some of

the literature I found was "bland" - it did not speak to me, or convince me of its findings, while other literature really did reach out, grab me and really shout its findings.

My later reflection of some of it made me most acutely aware of the "academic" nature of what I was attempting, and even more acutely aware of the fragility of the personal and private stories that had been shared with me. Despite each person telling me they so much wanted to be a part of the journey with me and that they had little concern for anonymity, I felt a little confused by the burden of wanting to represent them well and in a very real way, but at the same time having to keep to the academic rigours of the thesis process.

RESEARCH

My quest began with my needing to bring understanding and focus to my use of literature. Strauss and Corbin (1990:177) (quoted in Silverman, 2000) outline five purposes that existing literature can be used for when undertaking qualitative research. In summary these are:

- *To stimulate theoretical sensitivity*

- *To provide secondary sources of data*

- *To stimulate questions during data gathering and data analysis*

- *To direct theoretical sampling*

- *To be used as supplementary validation*

The literature which forms the framework of this thesis reflects these purposes to some extent.

Creswell (1994) adds further direction by helping me to understand that the literature review needed to be used inductively so that it did not end up directing

the questions of the researcher. On that basis I could consider three placement areas for the literature which I sum up as follows:

- *As an introduction*

- *As a separate section*

- *At the end of the study*

In this thesis the literature review has been presented as a separate section at the beginning of the study. However there is also some referencing back to the literature towards the end of the thesis where it is used to link the results that emerge throughout the work.

RESEARCH METHODS

This relates to my search for a framework upon which to base my study. I needed to be comfortable with, and be able to explain how I had gone about my research. I needed to find out what had been done, how it had been done and where it had been done. I have endeavoured to compare the views gleaned and apply them to my research findings in a systematic and rational way.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:86) summarise three paradigms for research when dealing with differing approaches of the study of behaviour. These are normative, interpretive and critical. The Interpretative approach, which includes the following, reflects the research I undertook in that it appears to consider the following:

- *The individual*
- *Small Scale research*
- *Human actions continuously re-creating social life*
- *Non statistical*
- *Subjectivity*
- *Personal involvement of the researcher*

- *Understanding actions/meaning rather than causes*
- *Investigating the taken for granted*
- *Micro-concepts: individual perspective, constructs, negotiated, meanings, definitions of situations*
- *Phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists*
- *Practical interest*

The literature that informed me regarding method led me to look at what methodology I would be using. Kaplan (1973:93) says the aim of methodology is to look at the methods used, carefully examine the limitations and resources, including the assumptions and consequences, and then apply any potential to what Kaplan refers to as the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:73) also say that research design is governed by the notion of *"fitness for purpose"*. The purposes of the research determine the methodology and design of the research. This literature gave me the basis on which to proceed as did Miles and Huberman (1994:8) with their notion of *"puzzlement"* in pointing to the role of methodology. They argue for transparency in research processes:

"It is not just that we must somehow please our critical colleague audiences; the deeper issue is avoiding self-delusion. After that we can turn to the task of being honest with our readers about how we did the study, and what worried us about its quality. Without such methodological frankness, we run the risk of reporting "knowledge that ain't so". (1994:294)

RESEARCH THEMES

Like Ribbens and Edwards (1998:15), I found myself at times confused by the tremendous gulf between the nature of my academic project and the personal and private lives of those who had dared to share their stories with me. This kept

9

forcing me to ask myself where I fitted in terms of this private experience and the public knowledge I wanted to be able to share in.

This theme was echoed in Mies (1993:68) and the concept of *"conscious partiality"* which necessitates the researcher locating herself in the research process. From this perspective, my own role as an adult student clearly gave me a place within the research process. I believe that had I continued my academic career in my teens, I would not have been able to understand the perspectives and circumstances of my story tellers in such a full way. This has allowed me to also share my own story in a way that is appropriate.

COMPLEXITY

Another recurring theme in the literature was the complexity of adult education participation and the significance of life long education and how it may be promoted as a way of assisting people to cope in an aging and changing society. There was evidence to show that many of the psychological and personality factors along with the important of social influences, both personal and contextual, had been considered.

Zepke (2003:7), talked about the use of a sociogram, and the pattern of development which emerged. Those for whom the classroom was a comfortable space held the centre ground of acceptance while those who felt uncomfortable or who were noticeably different in some way to their peers ended up on the margins. It was these marginalised people, he contended, that had trouble connecting with their peers and the teacher.

I concur with much I read about diversity and believe that diversity is and will always be, something to be celebrated as inspirational, the challenge however, is in adopting inclusive and power sharing systems that enable everyone to learn and grow.

Lindeman (1926) talked of the need to ensure that the adult learner is involved in the learning process. He commented along the lines of none but the humble becoming good teachers of adults, and that the student's experience is as valuable as the teacher's knowledge. It would seem therefore that the best outcome could be seen in the difficulty of knowing who is learning the most, the student or the teacher. A heart warming concept.

This, though many years before the sociogram concept, fits well with the ideas proffered by Zepke (2003).

Knowles (1990) further summarised Lindeman's (1926) assumptions which have been since supported by research and now constitute the foundation of adult learning theory, which can be summed up and paraphrased as follows:

- *Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting point for organising adult learning activities.*

- *Adults' orientation to learning is life-centred; therefore, the appropriate units for organising adult learning are life situations, not subjects.*

- *Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.*

- *Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.*

- *Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place and pace of learning.*

This view is widely echoed in the work of Parr (2000:10) who, as a returning college student from a working class background in the United Kingdom, identified with the barriers and past traumas of those she studied alongside. It is her contention that the impact of prior experience shows that previously defined definitions no longer fitted the shape of the identity of adult learners.

Habermas (1971:230) has consistently and consciously placed individual and social learning processes at the core of his beliefs. Habermas has the view that the full accomplishment of human individuation requires rational structures that permit "non-distorted communication" and concrete opportunities to exercise autonomy and responsibility. One of the practical effects of emancipatory theory, Habermas says, is to advance the "*interest of reason in human adulthood*".

He uses the term "*culture*" for the stock of knowledge which communicative actors draw upon to come to an understanding about the world. He sees society as being the legitimate order through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity. Personality, he believes, is the competencies that make a subject capable of speaking and acting and able to participate in the process of reaching understanding and asserting their own identity.

Therefore, the interactions woven into the fabric of every communicative practice constitute the medium through which culture, society and person get reproduced. These reproduction processes cover the symbolic structure of the life world. So it follows for Habermas that all significant social events and processes are directly or indirectly manifest in the world and any adequate understanding of human action must move inside the meaning people give to their actions – the interpretive procedure. No single person is ever fully aware of the way the "background consensus" is shaping their everyday lives. I come back to the fragility of the human person and the responsibility of those who are in the responsible "educative" roles in their lives – the power for both negative and positive impact is so enormous it is frightening.

Martin (1999) in her study into the changes in higher education in both Australia and United Kingdom, talks about the fact that central to student learning should be the knowledge that students learn in different ways and the best and most productive and satisfying way occurs when students take responsibility for their learning and when they believe that their experience and their learning matters. So any learning experience that is invalidated, for whatever reason, by those in the teaching role, can only be destructive to the learner. Obviously new situations, experiences and times will always highlight their own paradoxes, but change must be informed by the reality of day to day experience. The virtue of the past can only remain valid if it allows the growth of today and the demands of tomorrow to be met.

FRAMEWORK

In order to be able to find understanding about the reasons people went back into education in their adult years, often despite feeling "*too dumb*" to succeed, I needed to be able to build some sort of framework from which I could gain insight. Much of the literature to this point had been generalised and overlapped in many areas of this transition into adult education, rather than being systematic in direction. I was keen to locate an anchor on which I might be able to locate the journeys of those who were about to share their stories with me. I believed at this point that it would be reasonable to make the assumption that the transition period of all the participants while being unique, would also have some commonalities, and from those commonalities I would be able to form conclusions and/or recommendations.

Of particular meaning was the Transition Cycle concept as proffered by Nicholson, N (1990:89). While not specific to New Zealand, this four phase concept enables findings to be reached in a systematic way. Given that my study was about to encompass a wide range of participants, who were self selecting – that is they had heard what I was doing and expressed keen interest in being involved - long before I was ready to meet with them, it was important for me to

be able to find the commonalities and differences as they related directly to the transition and to be able to interpret them in the most succinct and meaningful way. This Transition Cycle appeared to offer me the most logical and workable framework to be able to do this.

An earlier Australian model, Boud & Griffin (1987) which deals with transition into self directed learning, while directed to educational transition has an eight pronged approach but is more widely focused and I considered much of this to be outside the scope of my thesis.

NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH

Some of the adult education literature that is specific to New Zealand, concerns itself with participation and non-participation in adult education, eg: Benseman (1992), Taylor (1995). While this was of interest, it was not directly helpful.

The feminist analysis covering schooling in New Zealand does have implications that can be seen in the adult education context. Jones (2001) and in terms of more adult education specific, the work of Stalker (1996) stand out as voices in the wilderness of the time.

Du Plessis & Alice (1998:94) while devoted to feminist views and experiences, talked about the need recognised in the New Zealand Polytechnic sector, to deliver programmes that are more learner-centred. This could mean smaller, more intimate classes and in recognition of the need to ensure that the wide range of abilities seen in students could be catered for, there was a requirement that all teaching staff complete training in adult education. They point out that as far back as the late 80s there were guidelines and criteria developed to ensure education was gender inclusive. The reality of this recognition does not ensure it has become a fact.

Pattison and Rosier also in Du Plessis & Alice (1998:94) comment, *"As part of an assignment for an "Images of Women" paper which is part of the Unitech Certificate in Women's studies, a group of students wrote a poem together:*

Taking the academy down among the women transforms both

The learning's coming I don't have to force

Fluid flexible the way we study is subject to

A new representation – women in our own strength

They conclude by saying:

"Taking the academy down among the women transforms both. The radical purpose of women's students is to make a better, fairer, more equitable world for women".

LATEST RESEACH

One of the most recent books I located, which was of greatest significance for me was the work of Davey et al (2003) who report on the findings of their studies into the experiences of those undertaking university study after reaching the age of 40.

The study maintained that leaving school early and moving into the workforce with minimal qualifications was often associated with low socio-economic status and low educational achievement over the life course. However, of those who did return to education, most did very well.

It looked at the achievement of those who returned to education in terms of occupational status, qualifications gained and of personal satisfaction. This is captured in the following comments:

> *"Now I have more knowledge of myself and am more confident with people. **I don't feel dumb any more**. I can now say I don't know and ask for explanations. It's feeling good about yourself, making the best of what you have".*
>
> *"When it [education] comes to you at this stage of your life it is much more precious and you value it more highly. Women at my age can feel beached and unwanted. Now I am confident and have so much more that I want to do." (Davey et al 2003:39)*

The feelings of achievement were not confined to the women in the study, but there were elements of gender expectations in the way the participants viewed their experiences. They were proving things to themselves and others, despite their lack of education in their youth. They lost their shyness and made friends more easily, and they were able to discuss things more articulately and confidently.

This study also shows some of the less positive aspects such as feeling isolated and a lack of academic support. Some felt their backgrounds were not accepted in the academic environment and they experienced ageism and sexism. For others the completion of the qualification did not provide all the answers to career and financial problems. This is captured in the following comments:

*"My financial position is vastly different from others of my age
group."*

"I don't think I chose my courses very well".

*I see no changes except that I am four years older – penniless
and no prospects. I thought that the BA was going to be a
magic ticket. (Davey et al 2003:42)*

Despite this, Davey et al also make the statement that the advantages gained by
these early school leavers through their educational achievements, allowed them
to transcend the barriers of class and gender expectations which may have
limited their early educational development, giving them greater capacities,
confidence and personal resources that may have otherwise been possible.

Jane Renwick, in Davey et al (2003) notes of the males in the research that all of
them had experienced adversity and none had progressed all the way through
secondary school. They all had a great sense of accomplishment but
acknowledged that the achievements were frequently made possible through the
support of a female partner, who took on the necessary family and caring work.

CULTURAL ASPECT

Te Puni Kokiri (2000) confirmed that mature Maori students participate in tertiary
education at higher rates than non Maori.

This is also referred to by Stephens and Higgins in Davey et al (2003) and there
is some discussion about the cultural goals being every bit as important as goals
centred on career improvement or notions of self improvement through
education. The participants of their study acknowledged their roles as the
bearers of knowledge to other members of their whanau and to people outside

their whanau. So in this sense, tertiary education was seen to be as much a collective good as a good accruing to the individual.

However some of the women participants had other concerns, while they did not want to denigrate the mana of Whanau, they also did not want to be viewed as better than other Whanau members. It was unclear if the men had these concerns for they certainly did not voice them, rather they spoke more positively about their achievements and the positive feedback from Whanau members.

Stephens and Higgins note that all members who had been undertaking Maori language lessons at the university saw the irony of attending a Pakeha tertiary institution to learn about their reo and tikanga. While there were some negative comments about the structured lecture based system none of the participants saw a need to change their approach to their own learning, but felt that being able to speak to other mature students with similar needs and experiences would have been very helpful.

Two of the participants expressed concern about how Maori knowledge could be protected within tertiary institutions:

"What protects our Maori things from being taken over?
These things become the property of the university not of
Maori".

"It's like selling your soul".

(Davey et al 2003:73.)

While this work had arisen from an interest in the implications of the ageing population of New Zealand, and therefore the research was focused on the reasons why adults over forty are going into tertiary education in increasing

numbers, it also looked at the policy implications of the research. It concludes that if the suggestion by the Tertiary Education Advisory Committee in 2001, that open entry to university for those over the age of 21 be removed, then the learning objective of the "Learning Society" would be severely compromised. Certainly all those in my study would have been excluded, had this entry criteria been in place when they ventured to make changes in their lives.

BEING A GIRL AND KNOWING YOUR PLACE

Yet another theme was that of growing up as a girl - a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother. While the British research of Wilkinson et al (1997) appeared to be saying that *"women's importance in society was set to rise"* the reality of this, particularly in England, was further compromised by the labour market which had middle class women dominating the professional and managerial scenes.

While class distinctions are not as obvious in New Zealand, what is significant is that many women in New Zealand, as in most other countries, are still denied full citizenship, through poverty and economic dependence. According to Briar and Cheyne in Du Plessis and Alice (1998), traditionally women in New Zealand have been expected to rely upon a male sexual partner for economic support, and this had been strongly reaffirmed since 1990. It is this, they contend, that contributes to women's hidden poverty, since household resources are not always shared equitably.

Research from Britain also shows that even in low income households, it is usual for male partners to retain money for their personal consumption, whereas wives commonly feel an obligation to stretch household resources by going without essential items themselves, often at the expense of their health. (Graham, 1993; Payne, 1991; Wilson, 1987) The treatment of adult women as financial dependants is arguably a denial of full citizenship. Even males who may want to

19

share income fairly may not be able to provide family with material comfort, since the average male wage is often too low to support a family adequately.

Briar and Cheyne (1998) note that women are more likely to experience poverty at all stages of the life cycle. Women in tertiary education, along with their male counterparts, have to take out ever increasing loans to pay for fees and subsistence. Add to that the lower pay levels for females and this means paying the student loan off more slowly. Women in their middle years are more frequently expected simultaneously to help their adult children and to provide care for aged parents and to work to save for their retirement. The conclusion drawn here is that the supposed equal treatment of women in neo-liberal social policy disguises new forms of subtle discrimination, and the authors argue that *'female friendly'* social and economic policies are a possibility, and appear to be a necessary precondition for full citizenship for women. Such policies would improve women's access to economic independence and security, without dictating lifestyles. They would reward and raise the status of caring work while also widening women's opportunities in the paid workforce.

While the literature both informed and inspired me, it also angered me, I found so much that told me my experiences were not unique. I wanted to keep on exploring, but reality told me that I had to keep my eye on my goal and the need to actually complete my thesis. My Literature review could not go on forever.

In the following Chapter, Chapter Three, I outline the methodology and process followed and this shows that I am not relying on a previous, or well formed hypothesis, but a search into the richness of the experiences, without any focus on outcome other than what was shared with me.

I will describe the process that was used, the challenges that I encountered and the way in which I analysed what was shared in order to arrive at some conclusions that could lead to some recommendations for the future.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

There is little point in carrying out a research project (whatever the scale) if there is no ultimate aim to achieve something as a result. (Clough & Nutbrown 2002:6)

If, as stated in Clough & Nutbrown (2002) the task of methodology is to uncover and justify research assumptions as far as practicably possible, then the researcher must identify not only her research tools but also her rationale for their selection.

The inseparability of research and researcher impacts on the way in which research is conducted. Research methodology is deeply linked to personal values which inform ethical and moral responses to problems and challenges. In this giving of voice to participants (Mitchell, 1993:55) contends *'... the informed researcher's voice no longer provides an authoritarian monologue but contributes a part of the dialogue.*

Feminist researcher Oakley, 1993:58 advocates the integrity of self and research participants in research. "*A feminist methodology of social science requires that this rationale of research be described and discussed not only in feminist research but in social science research in general. It requires further, that the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives".*

Initially, when reflecting on this section of my thesis, I was uncomfortable about not being able to clearly define what I believed was required in the

section. However, as I continued to reflect about my methodology I began to appreciate that it began in my very early thinking about what I wanted to investigate and challenge, and how I would go about it. I was concerned about the experiences I had, being mirrored in so many others. What was known about these experiences?

Accordingly, it really began and continued from my early thinking about the best way to initiate the questions and ensure they enabled me to clarify my thoughts about the underlying reasons for my research, right through to the collation of the material which brought me to my conclusions.

This was an all-consuming process as it also took into account my personal credibility in choosing the most appropriate paths/people/places in the circumstances I chose to operate. This also included the issue of the participants volunteering to be part of the study, long before I had started to think about who I might choose.

I had begun to think about how I would choose my participants and the variety of sampling strategies that could have been used. However this was to a large extent a snowball sampling that built up through informants, and so it was largely self-selected.

However I still had to be able to justify, firstly to myself, then to my supervisor, and ultimately to my peers, the reasons I chose the experiences I did, and to prove that I really did look beyond the obvious. I found myself going back to some of my own ideas, needing to justify them further, and also to revisit my methods and undertake some focussed discussion with some of the people in my groups in order to "dig a little deeper and/or wider". The objective was to ensure I truly captured the full reality of the experiences and the thinking.

The real value of the more focused conversations was in being able to take the shared information, reshape it and create it in a new way without losing anything of what had been shared. It became obvious that when I went back to participants after the initial discussion, to discuss or check out issues

arising, this not only clarified existing information, but it triggered new ideas which added to the process and the research.

Another concern was whether my way of presenting my thesis by using the stories of my research would prove "academically acceptable". However, I have arrived at a point where I know that, in order to honestly recognise the contributions of those I talked with over time, I must write about their stories within the context of placing myself within their story telling. In my view I had no choice as it is this context that given meaning to my work.

Finally too I realised that I could encompass all the volunteers as this in itself ensured I did not consciously or unconsciously make biased judgements about selection.

Initially, I considered keeping a journal, but the reality was a multitude of notes on a multitude of pieces of paper as I came up with ideas and thoughts I needed to explore further. My office ended up with a clutter of handwritten and typed notes and all manner of newspaper cuttings as things that "mattered" and/or sparked ideas to build on were collected over the best part of the last three years. Perhaps this clutter could be called a research journal in its own right.

The other compelling learning for me was that, having set out with specific objectives and having also investigated and explored what has been written to date in these areas, then by looking at the significance of the data, there evolved a political construct, almost without my being aware of it.

While I do not make the mistake that I am necessarily "out to prove something", I do acknowledge that I have a need to understand why things are as they are, and a hope that I may, albeit in a minor way, be able to change things for the better. I say this not because I think I am "a researcher" but because it has a purpose, it is relevant, and I am motivated to achieve some useful result. I also believe that research should affect thinking and practice, otherwise why undertake it?

Stenhouse (1975:150) comments that research *"becomes"* research when it's written report is made public, thus giving expression to the standpoint of its authors in a given context. So it follows then that it is the context that gives the research its real meaning.

So it is with my research which has taken place in a society that, despite some bridging of the gap between male and female opportunities in terms of education and employment, is largely biased towards women being in traditional women's' occupations and being paid at a lower rate of remuneration as compared with men doing the same job. Historically too, people of Maori descent were looked on as having limited ability and therefore more suited to taking up employment in the trades.

While the tide is turning, the systems still cling on to the hierarchical structures which in many cases are still made up of "old boy's networks" and these ensure that women hit the glass ceilings long before they "become a problem" to the system.

Some of the early experiences of the majority of the people in this thesis, in terms of the discipline methods they experienced, took place long before the contemporary thinking about children's rights and the banning of corporal punishment. Therefore, as I have indicated throughout, this data represents itself in every respect, but it also represents my own interpretation of it, given my own moral, professional and political stance.

A qualitative/interpretive approach was used. This approach meant I did not rely on any previous hypothesis, it simply enabled data and theory to emanate from the participants, the literature and my own learning.

I did not base my research on an assumption that my own experience would be validated, rather I wanted to examine general experiences through the detailed sharing by the participants. However I must accept that my own experiences and the fact that I had read widely before I began the field work may well have influenced my questioning and the way the data was analysed.

I used a practical approach in the design of semi-structured discussions, with focused questioning where I needed to clarify, followed by in-depth analysis to flesh out the characteristics of the information.

The technique used in my study was to ask several starter questions and only come back to the questions per se if I considered they would continue to give meaning to the process.

Creswell (1994) appeared to be indicating that the method provides information that is reflected on by the interviewee and that people are not equally perceptive and articulate. I did try to keep this in mind and can only comment that if the discussions were a little less structured than may have been desirable, that lack of structure was uniform. On reflection, what did seem likely to me was that within the relaxed and non-judgemental atmosphere of the meetings, the participants were comfortable talking about issues they may not have talked about in a more formalised setting.

The research background information was designed to build on what my participants had heard I was doing. By this I mean that initially I had discussed my proposal with one or two people and the response to this was overwhelming in that people literally lined up to take part, some well before I was ready to begin, and even having to wait until I was ready, did not deter them in any way.

METHOD AND MEANING

The main method chosen for my research is that of hearing people tell their stories. I did this by way of discussions and conversations with individuals and with members of focus groups. I also chose to include details from my own autobiography. I could see the advantages of this method – the data from the participant's experiences had the capacity to be strong and real and to be more accessible and persuasive. The range of stories could allow for generalisations from a specific instance to a more general issue and I would

have the ability to show the complexity of social life. Clearly too the stories had the capacity to provide more questions and so be useful in further research.

Blaxter et al (2001:73) pointed out, though, that there could be disadvantages in this method. The complexity of the stories can make analysis very difficult because of their holistic nature. Everything can appear to be relevant, when it is not. It is this context of the stories that can be a strength and yet make it difficult to see a beginning and an end. I came to understand this point of view as I struggled to analyse some aspects of the stories.

THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION (APPENDIX 1)

One of the interesting and quite amazing facets of this research was that when I initially approached the first of the participants to discuss whether she may be interested in taking part, she then mentioned her involvement to several others who then approached me. This snowballed as they told others and so my sample selection was literally self selected.

Despite the fact that all the participants had some idea of what I was doing I was anxious to ensure they had as much information as possible before they confirmed that they really did want to be involved.

The background information was given to each participant of the one-on-one discussions, and also to the three women in the final focus group. This gave each person information about what I was doing and why and outlined the format of the process and their role in the process. All discussions took place in contexts that were familiar and comfortable for the participants. This included the use of my home, their homes and the homes of mutual friends. It was important to spend time going through this information so that, despite the participants having volunteered to be part of it, they really did understand what they were becoming involved in with me.

While I gave each person a Journal and a camera, none elected to use the camera. Some used the journal. All preferred to sit and talk with me as I carefully listened to understand and to really hear the stories they had to tell me.

The final focus group changed in direction from the outset of the first meeting, albeit unplanned, but this still fitted well with the overall intention and structure of the research.

THE STARTER QUESTIONS (APPENDIX 2)

These questions were for my own use and were mainly used as a guide to keep the research focused. The reality was that I did not have to refer to them other than to begin the discussions. Where the discussions were held over extended time periods, I did refer back to them, but they generally served the purpose of a checklist.

THE INFORMATION SHEET (APPENDIX 3)

This was designed for the Focus Group sessions. These were meetings held at the premises of the group of employees, as this was where they were most comfortable. The Information Sheet was used to explain to the participants the full nature of the group meeting, and in particular the added dimension in relation to my undertaking research for my thesis. It was important to go through this very carefully so that each person understood the part they would have in the process.

The use of this information had been offered to me by my employer, my current position being within a Work Based Training Organisation. This organisation works with industry employers in the provision of training of staff. The information had been focused on looking at attitudes, achievement and outcomes in training and was part of the process of evaluation and review.

So while none of the group members were employed by my employer, they were part of my employer's stakeholder group and their evaluation was significant.

Much of the material discussed and prepared as being appropriate for the organisations use, also provided information that added another dimension to my thesis research. I was happy to accept the opportunity afforded to me by my employer.

ETHICS

Reading and research informs me that ethics is associated with following ethical guidelines and gaining ethics approval from academic bodies. For me however, the responsibilities involved in researching private lives and then reporting on them publicly raises issues which do not necessarily fit under such rules and guidelines. Somehow there appears to be a gap between practice and principles, so for me to feel comfortable about what I am doing I find I must focus on responsibility and accountability.

My own ethical stance reflects my own moral, social, spiritual, political and cultural being. The approval I gained from the participants had been given prior to my discussions about protection, confidentiality and anonymity, which saw me take considerable time to go back and discuss these facets of the research.

It was very important to me to keep the ethical considerations uppermost in my thoughts throughout the entire thesis process. In ensuring the participants understood the objectives of my research I was able to accept their commitment and consent and to feel comfortable that any possible elements of risk and harm were negated.

The participants in Focus Groups One and Two were employed by an organisation outside the one in which I am employed, their feedback was part of a stakeholder process of evaluation.

My employer suggested I include this facet of information in my research. I provided these participants with a signed statement outlining my position, despite them insisting that it was not necessary, and I ensured they retained a copy for their own information.

I did not see any potential for conflict in my role as the researcher, but do agree that I hold a dual role in that I have also provided an account of my own personal experience.

I chose not to go through Massey Human Ethics Committee because there was no low risk protocol in place at that time and no other requirements of me to do so.

In the next chapter I will introduce you to, and tell the stories of the eight participants in the one-on-one discussions, and also outline the discussions of the two focus groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

LISTENING TO THE VOICES

As I outlined in the previous section I initially chose to work with four individual people and three focus groups, and to use my own autobiography.

This altered as the research progressed as the third focus group was, in reality three individual stories. This meant I had eight individual stories and two focus groups. In this section I introduce them and tell their stories. I acknowledge that the stories are not all of equal length, but I felt that any further editing of the more lengthy stories would risk the loss of the context I felt was necessary to my research and the subsequent findings.

They are presented in the following order, simply because this was the chronological order of the discussions and meetings. My own story was included after I had completed the first four discussion write ups.

1   Paula
2   Sam
3   Jeanne
4   John
5   Mary
6   Focus group One
7   Focus group Two
8   Mere
9   Peti
10 Hine

In all cases, apart from my own, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

PAULA'S STORY

Paula, now in her fifties grew up in hard times. The youngest of three children she spent much of her early life in institutions and foster homes. She attended some 14 different schools and when discussing her coping strategies, she explained *"My sister and I trained ourselves to be invisible, that way the lack of education went unnoticed. I was always a reader, what I read was not of an academic nature, but it helped me to develop word skills and I got by on bullshit and keeping my head down until I could leave school at the end of the fifth form".*

Paula recalls causing some concern at school as she did not fit the stereotype of "state ward" or "welfare child". She was too bright for the low streamed classes she inevitably found herself placed in and there appeared to be a reluctance to move her to "A stream" classes.

Paula's first job was obtained through her high school, working for a neurologist as his secretary. He wanted someone cheap which, Paula maintains, is why he approached the school. She recalls that it was a good job and did get her off to a good start. After that she went to work in a law firm, and while this was really interesting to her, there was a woman there whose mission in life, Paula says, was to "terrorise the younger staff". She had been the senior partner's secretary and when he retired there was little for her to do so she appointed herself as supervisor. Paula admitted that she hated her with a passion and decided that she would never want to end up as a grey-haired old lady that no one knew what to do with and who didn't know when to call it a day. Paula was a quick learner and become secretary to one of the senior partners.

After a brief working holiday she took up a position in another law office and her employer, recognising her ability, offered her the opportunity to get a tertiary qualification.

Paula explained *"This was a real turning point for me – someone actually believed in me – this was not the experience of my past."*

32

Paula found she had an affinity for matters legal and became really interested in how the law worked and in the people involved in the legal system. However, she was not enthusiastic about doing a law degree. *"I didn't really think I could do it and anyway nobody else was going to provide me with financial stability so I needed to ensure I had marketable skills. I had noted that lawyers were a dime a dozen and many of them didn't have good marketable skills despite their degrees. I did agree to complete the Legal Executive Certificate my employer also encouraged me to do."*

While Paula did not enjoy the tertiary classes per se, she did become friends with several other students. When asked if this was a study group Paula's commented with a smile *"Absolutely not, we never did any study together, but we did prop each other up to some extent. We socialised together and held a shared view that many of the tutors were just not up to the mark. They did not appear interested in what they were doing, just read out of books, which for us may just as well have been in Swahili, because we didn't understand them. As for support and encouragement, forget it, there was little interaction between students and tutors apart from one or two of them, who did try to make the subject a bit interesting."*

Her little group all worked in law offices and considered they had the ability to recognise competent and incompetent lawyers at a hundred paces.

Paula commented here *"I don't recall much about exams but seemed to stumble my way through the course, I think it was accidental learning really. Anyway I was not actually aiming at getting a qualification I was just responding to my employer's encouragement. I don't think I was ambitious for myself, but there was no way I would have let the boss down".*

In reflecting on the things that may have inhibited her studies, she commented that at that point she was only concerned with doing what had to be done. She also commented that she can see clearly how the culture and values of New Zealand at that time made it very difficult for many working women to advance in terms of their education.

After some twenty plus years Paula resigned. At this point she was the practice manager and also worked as a litigation legal executive. She was responsible for all aspects of the practice, including hiring and firing. She had the status but not the title of "partner". Her income was more than adequate.

At this point Paula talked about her values, she said *"I know that I did not really have beliefs and values in my early years, but I must have subconsciously acquired them during my working years. Values thinking did not enter my head until well into my 20's."*

Paula married in her early 20's and had a firm view by then that she did not want to have children. She believed that she would not be a good or adequate parent, and voiced the view that people should be licensed before they had children. Some years later she and her husband separated.

When Paula left the law firm she took some time off to reflect on what she wanted to do in the future and she eventually took up a sole charge position at a satellite campus of a Polytechnic. This says Paula, *"was character building to say the least. I had little idea about how to teach, let alone what I was supposed to teach. I had no idea how tertiary institutions operated, no idea how to keep teaching and student records, but was fortunate to have a class who had already been at the campus for a semester, so we taught each other and I found out quickly what it is like for students to be caught up in the bureaucracy of a tertiary institution."*

When financial difficulties hit the institution Paula was transferred to the main campus and continued to teach. She enjoyed the students but discovered that the so called "student centred" organisation was a myth. The bureaucratic nonsense also began to frustrate her even more so she decided to take a break and went back into a law firm for a while. Some eighteen months later she made the decision that the law office was not what she wanted to be in and decided that she would like to do some full time study, not a law degree, but something that would challenge her.

She enrolled in the Bachelor of Applied Information Systems degree. She says she really enjoyed it, admits it was hard work, but in getting there she experienced life in a tertiary intuition from the other side.

Paula recalls *"my life as a student was easy in some respects because I had been in the system as a tutor. However when I enrolled I asked staff not to mention that I had been a tutor in front of other students, as I wanted to be seen as a student, just like everyone else. I did not want to find myself stereotyped and placed on the outside of things."*

When her background eventually became known Paula had found her place among her fellow students but was amused when most of them told her *"but you don't behave like a tutor."* Paula is still considering just what this means.

Of her experience Paula recounts *"Here I was, this little grey haired old lady surrounded by young men and women who were very computer literate, who knew where they are going and what they were doing, whereas for me I was there for the challenge, albeit a very expensive challenge".*

Paula appeared to enjoy recounting the reaction of the tutors having her in their classes. *"Initially the tutors appeared to be uncomfortable having me in class; they had difficulty knowing how to deal with me as a student. But eventually they relaxed and made the transition that I had made and I enjoyed the experience immensely."*

Paula explained how she became much more aware of how difficult things could be for a student, and how empowering successful academic achievement was for many of them, particularly the women. She talked of getting to know them and learning about their personal lives, their experiences, their feelings about life in general and about being a student in particular.

Then a new challenge arose as Paula was asked to do some part time tutoring. This again unsettled other tutors but they too got used to the woman with the two hats and learned to treat her like a student in class and in every

aspect of her study and then to acknowledge her as a colleague when this was appropriate.

Given the uniqueness of the situation I asked Paula to comment on her observations from each perspective.

"I became so much more aware of how difficult it can be for a student, but also how empowering academic achievement is for them, particularly the women." I could see that regardless of what they were studying and where they came from, most of them were determined to achieve despite the obstacles put in their way.

When asked to be more specific about "obstacles" Paula talked about family commitments. The polytechnic was a regional one servicing a poor area of the country. Whanau was very important to students, particularly the women who often had their own children as well as being part of an extended family. That family commitment put many students' ability to satisfactorily complete their studies at risk. While they were determined to achieve, all sorts of issues arose that could prevent them from doing so, eg: children getting sick, parents needing looking after, having to attend tangis and other ceremonial occasions, constantly being short of money, having to share what little money they did have, with the extended family. These obstacles applied equally to all students irrespective of race or creed.

In Paula's view, money, or rather the lack of it, was the single greatest problem facing the students. The students could not just go out and get a part time job to help fund their families and their study. There were no jobs for most of them, this was not a large city, but they still did their best to carry on. Paula feels this is amazing and commented that she did not know that she would have the fortitude of many of them, especially some of the women.

Another factor commented on was the lack of preparation for tertiary studies. A significant number of the students did not do well at school for all manner of reasons, the least of which was ability, and while they were reasonably literate, they were not used to the language of academic life. When these

particular students were at school and into their teenage years they would never have conceived of ever wanting to enhance their education in later years.

Paula commented further *"Sadly a number of male students could not write in sentences and were very hesitant and inarticulate speakers. They came to the Polytechnic better themselves and were thrown into classes without any understanding of what they needed to do to achieve their objectives. Female students were often diffident about speaking up and I noticed something of my past self in that they seemed to try to make themselves invisible to the tutors".*

The following comments were also disturbing *"Some tutors, thankfully a minority, take pleasure in undermining a student's confidence, publicly criticise them, talk about them in a derogatory way behind their backs, mark work negatively, assume that certain students, apparently because of their race or background, will never do well and treat them accordingly. It is these tutors who often have difficulty relating to their colleagues, are abusive and aggressive, often in public, and seem determined to make everyone's life miserable. Tutors can cope and stand up for themselves, but often students can't.*

It is Paula's view that a tutor's personality plays a significant part in their relationship with students. As do the personalities of the administrative staff that students have to interact with. If a person is unpleasant, or abrupt, or discourteous to a student then Paula believes that the student will simply fade away. She believes that the attrition rate for students who do not complete their studies is partly attributable to their experiences with the people in the institutions, as opposed to the course or commitment to study that is required.

Paula talked about witnessing managers and other administration staff speaking to students in a totally unacceptable way. The tone of voice, the body language, the words and phrases used, doing nothing to build good relationships and encourage students. She had seen students simply

disappear from classes because they could not or did not know how to deal with some of the people they had come in contact with.

She again reiterated that not every student had the pleasant experiences that she had. She saw them disappear if they didn't like the tutor or manager, or if that person spoke to them in a particular way. Students see people they are not confident about as a barrier to their learning and, rather than deal with it, simply leave.

In some casual conversations with some of her fellow students Paula noted that it was clear they saw a power imbalance in the tutor-student relationship. Paula saw too that the imbalance often goes the other way. *"Tutors have to be so careful about how they relate to students, and sometimes this can mean they don't get the message across in a meaningful way. Some students will complain about the most innocent actions of tutors, and when a complaint is made all hell breaks loose."*

Of the bureaucratic barriers Paula commented *"by their nature these types of institutions set up bureaucracies that are difficult to navigate. There are times when students need help that is beyond the brief of the student counsellors – that is the professional ones who are employed to help students. Often too the counsellors who are employed by the institution are reluctant to help with some types of problems, especially when it means taking on the system on a student's behalf. I think the system is inflexible and often designed to aid the administrators and not to be student friendly. If the student's problem does not fit into a particular routine or philosophy, the student is often abandoned and nothing is done to resolve the issue".*

Paula gave an example of when the on-campus childcare centre was closed. Students who had children attending the centre were left high and dry. The Polytechnic seemed incapable of helping them find alternative, affordable childcare, so many of those students simply disappeared never to be seen again.

Another example was when a student has not paid their course fees by the due date. This can occur because there is a problem with their loan application. But instead of at least comforting and providing moral support, the polytechnic leaves the student, who is often ill-equipped to deal with it, to try to resolve the problem. This student, according to Paula, will probably disappear too.

Scheduling of classes also caused problems for some students. Classes could be timetabled any time from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm. A large proportion of the female students were responsible for children, whether or not they had partners, and many class times were simply impossible for them. They might be late for class, not attend all the classes and thereby miss essential lectures and work. In Paula's experience these students get further and further behind and then just disappear. She believes, "*sadly, that there is a whole army of disappeared students out there in my region.*"

In thinking about the student who is in regular employment and attending as part of their professional development or employment requirements, Paula said these were a different kettle of fish altogether. Her experience was that a few attended because they were compelled by their employers, but by far the majority enrolled on courses to up-skill in their existing careers, or to acquire new skills so they could move onto something better. Their motivation was quite different. Almost without exception, there were few absences from classes amongst these students and they seemed to mange to juggle their work and family commitments with their studies. However, timetabling was still an issue, even for this group.

Paula is now a real advocate in encouraging older people to undertake tertiary studies. She defined "older people" as those over 50 who either want to up skill or who want to learn about a particular subject or who simply want to keep their brains active.

SAM'S STORY

Sam, now in his early forties grew up in a small rural town, the eldest of three children. He was 12 years old when his parents separated.

"I used to go to the Salvation Army Sunday school, and remember really good times with my friends. We had a lot more freedom in those days; somehow the world had not been touched by the dangers ever present in today's society."

In talking about his father leaving them when he was 12, Sam says that while this was hard, he was pleased when he was able to leave home, particularly when his mother remarried a hard Scotsman who physically abused his younger brother. Sam commented that he had been estranged from his birth father since the early 90s as his father had a "new" family and had refused all communication with Sam since that time.

Of his early school years Sam says *"Most of these memories are okay, and I particularly remember a teacher at Intermediate level who was really neat to be around, I seemed to be able to get confidence and educational stimulation from him."*

Of secondary school Sam said *"Secondary school was different altogether, I went to a single sex boy's school where corporal punishment was the norm, and there were some particularly violent teachers who used corporal punishment for no good reason at all. The school culture bred bullies and the teachers didn't seem to notice, they certainly didn't care. I hated it. There was no chance to get to know anything of the person of any of the teachers. I longed to leave the place."*

Sam wanted to be a chef in the Navy. However, his mother was convinced that he would end up a homosexual drunk, as that was *"what happened to Navy personnel"*. She had a work colleague who was ex British Navy and he

sat down with Sam and told him his mother was right, and that it would be a big mistake to join up.

While that door shut, his mother did say that he could leave school if he found an apprenticeship to go into. So desperate was Sam to escape the violence and bullying at school that he did his homework and discovered that the only apprenticeship available in the local area was in Glazing. Sam had absolutely no idea what this was, but duly entered into an apprenticeship as a Glazier.

He was a conscientious and diligent trainee and spent the next 19 years in the trade, but while he admits he became an expert, it was never what he really wanted to be spending his time doing. He was also something of a perfectionist and whatever he went into he was keen to acquire full knowledge which meant he learned more than most and could turn his hand to most things. Such was his thirst for knowledge that he considered doing other building and engineering type apprenticeships so that he could know all he could about construction and put it all into practice.

He reflected back a little to add that when he was in his early 20s he decided that he should get some school qualifications, and had some thoughts about doing a Veterinary Degree, so went back to school as an adult student for a year and did School Certificate. While he would have liked to continue, it had been a financially draining year and as he was sharing a flat with his sister, he knew he needed to go back to his trade so he could continue to pay his way. He had been working nights as a wine steward, but that did not afford him any saving to continue his study plan.

Not long after this he took a position in a large Southern city where there was to be ongoing advancement and scope for him in the Management area. He began to do some NZIM papers at the Polytechnic, but the company was eventually taken over by a larger group and the Management area became overloaded.

Sam recalls *"I lost interest then as no one really encouraged me or was interested in what I was doing and anyway with the new merger there was no longer any management scope open to me. I felt let down with no real goal to aim for."*

By then he had married and had the first of his three children, so the family became his focus. He did however recognise that if he wanted to survive in what was becoming a fast changing society he needed to keep all his options open and take up other challenges and learn more. This was motivating for him as his thirst for knowledge had never been suitably quenched.

In the late 80s he and his family moved north where he did an Access course in the Dairy/Agriculture area. He really enjoyed this work and worked for a farmer in a rural area with the idea that he would eventually have his own herd. However, he kept being told by farmers he came to know that he was a bit too old and the life style, while fantastic in one respect, gave him no family time. He worked from 4.30 am to 7.pm every day and had only one weekend a month off.

He still felt it was a good learning experience as it had advanced his knowledge in yet more areas. Then he moved further north and went back into the Glazing business. He was then poached by another firm and so became Foreman in a smaller, but more closed community. The difficulty in this community was that his wife could not get into the area of her expertise, and so ended up working in the supermarket, which Sam feels was degrading for her at that time.

Eventually they decided that they were never going to get ahead financially unless they both got well paying positions and when an opportunity came up in a bigger town further south for his wife, she took it. This meant that the family would move again.

Sam then looked at positions in the Glazing industry, but somehow knew it was just not what he wanted to continue to do, so he took a job with a

Regional Council as a custodian, thinking this would give him the opportunity to sort out his next move.

One of the realities Sam had experienced as a Glazier was that it was considered a "nothing" job by people in general. Sam feels that when he met people for the first time and they asked what he did that if he had said he was a builder or an electrician he would have been considered a more worthwhile person, as it was he says once he said he was a Glazier it turned into a conversation killer and he began to feel embarrassed to tell people as it meant his social status became non existent.

He was able to turn his hand to almost anything and when the Y2K debacle was looming he was taken on in a second capacity by the council to help with the Y2K compliancy issues. He had helped out in the IT area and the IT staff encouraged him to think about a career in that area. Sam recalls, *"The staff in the council were very supportive of my skills in the IT area and they believed I should consider it in career terms. So it was this support and encouragement that found me seeking IT training."*

He looked about to see what he could do and saw that there was a degree on offer locally and that he felt, would be just the thing to prove to himself he had "made it". He did look further afield but decided that financially the family could not afford to move to a large city, as the cost of living would be too high. It is interesting to note how badly he had suffered from the "stigma" effect that had come with the perception of the worth of a career as a Glazier, and he felt that if he had a degree this would make him feel like he had made it in life.

"The staff at the council continued to encourage me and even arranged my employment hours around my lecture times. This was a real turning point for me. I also had the support of my family and my brother, who by this time had become well established in corporate life and was doing extremely well. My brother became my mentor, despite him being eight years younger. He had made it, he was "successful" and he was always willing to share his experiences. This meant he was always on my case, encouraging and

pushing me to achieve. I was convinced that having the degree would give me greater employment opportunities and I really enjoyed the challenge of the whole area of technology."

Sam's wife became the sole bread winner, and he applied for a student loan. His support system was fantastic. The eldest child did a lot of the meal preparation and housekeeping and the younger two were picked up after school by his mother.

"My family were fantastic, they all made sacrifices, and I was so aware of all the things they missed out on during the years I was doing my degree. But they didn't complain, they just got on with it and did what had to be done. For all of us it was just like my job, and I went to work everyday as usual, but the other reality was that they just didn't get to go places or do things much anymore."

The thirst for knowledge was ever present. However one of the most daunting aspects of degree level study was the "self learning" aspect, as opposed to the tutor driven work. While Sam acknowledges that this was a reasonable part of the course structure, he does think there were some real problems in the way the degree, new to the institution at that time, was rolled out.

He felt some of the papers were poorly planned and that the tutors changed the goal posts too often. He, by his nature, would begin work on assignments as soon as they were given, however, others, often leaving theirs till the last minute, would debate aspects of the work and then he would find the tutor would change the requirements. This was a real frustration.

On reflection too, he can see that the mix of tutors was not exactly right either. While acknowledging that the degree was "new" he also felt that the students suffered and so it is understandable to him that only four of the original class of 21 ended up graduating.

"I honestly felt that some tutors were only there to get the pay - as they lectured over us, did not engage in healthy debate and often left us confused

and frustrated. There was however, one tutor who stood out. This tutor was probably the least academically qualified but he had a real passion for what he was doing and drove us in every way he could. I would go as far as to say that this man was one of the main reasons I survived. He was always there to help us in whatever way he could. He didn't have any of the academic hang-ups so many of the others had, but he was totally knowledgeable and even charismatic in a tough sort of way. His classes were the highlight of the week for most of us."

The other support that Sam recalls that he could not have survived without was the peer support, having others to discuss things with helped them all feel a little less stupid or thick, as it somehow showed them all that they all had something to offer.. He said he very quickly found out who worked and who coasted and made friendships with those he identified with. He is adamant that without that peer support he would not have made it either. He believes he was fortunate that he had such great home support, a wife who really was firmly behind him and believed in him and a family who did not complain, but just got on with life. He also still maintains some of the friendships he formed during this time.

Sam reiterated that some classes were just the pits, the delivery was poor and he and most others just turned off. This then meant more hard work and the research was twice as hard. Handouts often helped, but ideally more tutors with a passion for what they were doing would have been the answer. He also reflected that at least there was the internet, and that without this tool he would never have coped. In general terms he found that there was one class per semester that was really good, and that was what kept him going. But of course it was also the reason others didn't continue, and this was tragic too.

Now that Sam has his degree? *"It's not the big deal I thought it might be. However, I would still do it again but perhaps not quite in the area I did."*

After he finished he gained employment in the industry, but found, despite tutor's saying what salary he could expect to get, that he was little better off than when he was a Glazier. However, the bottom line was that he was at least enjoying what he was doing. He also now experiences a totally different response in social settings, when he says he works in IT.

Two years later, he was still no better off financially and this was beginning to get him down, as he thought about what his family had sacrificed for him. He happened to be talking to someone one day and a currently advertised position was mentioned. Sam said he had seen the advertisement but didn't consider it was what he could do. The person, who was actually in the industry, told him that he was exactly right for the position, but the position had been poorly worded by someone in administration who really didn't know anything about the position or the person specification that went with it.

After some discussion Sam did apply and at the time of writing he is about to start in a position that is of great interest to him. His salary has increased by 25% and things are beginning to look up for him.

Sam still has his thirst for knowledge, and always will, but for him, just now he is at last beginning to see some of the fruits of his efforts. What is next for him, well he believes this will unfold in time, but he continues to have a thirst for knowledge and I have no doubt that he will continue to learn and grow in this new career.

Sam is also a person who will go out of his way to help anyone who he sees is trying to better themselves. He has that warm and supportive interest in what other people are doing. He maintains this is how he can give back to others what has been given to him by those special people who made the difference for him on his journey.

JEANNE'S STORY

Jeanne, now in her early fifties did not talk too much about her early childhood, though says it was pretty normal and happy for her. She had only one sibling, an older brother. She recalls that when she got to secondary level she was not really interested in school and was a rather rebellious pupil. She admitted to considering that rules were there to break and she got a real sense of achievement in breaking the rules by smoking, wagging school and forging notes. Wagging was far more interesting than school was at that time. She considers she was typical of teenage girls of her era and was more interested in boys and planning what to wear to the weekly Saturday night dance at the community centre.

She recalls another reason that made school un-enjoyable. This was the structure of learning where her only options were to take either a commercial or an academic course. Her parents convinced her to choose the academic course, but this meant she could not take art, a subject she really loved. Without knowing it then it was apparent that she was a visual/kinaesthetic learner. She commented that schools probably didn't even consider different learning styles back then.

Jeanne recalled maths being a problem for her – she felt she was totally hopeless and definitely not interested in sitting silently in a classroom solving mathematical problems. Science was Okay, but did involve maths to some degree, however at least it had practical experiments, as did biology. English she enjoyed and found easy, while History was a real bore. Sewing turned out to be the most useful subject and she practically made all her own clothes. French was not difficult but she decided not to take it as a School certificate subject so dropped it after a couple of years.

"My whole objective was to pass School Certificate so I could leave school and get out to work. I wanted to get past the rigid routine of school and of home . I wanted the same freedom my brother had. My life seemed to be so much the opposite of his. He worked and did well at school, did School

47

Certificate, and University Entrance and was even a prefect. When he left school he got this cool job with Air New Zealand. It all looked pretty good to me and seems like the way out for me too."

When Jeanne left school her brother took her on her first overseas trip, for he was able to get discounted staff airline tickets. It was this holiday in Los Angeles that was a turning point for Jeanne, she was bitten by the travel bug and decided that she had to get into the travel business somehow.

Jeanne recalls that throughout her up bringing, her parents were far more strict on her because she was a girl. Jeanne did reflect that some of her friend's parents were a bit more liberal in the freedom they gave their daughters. A couple of friends had got married quite young, so it annoyed Jeanne that she was still ruled by the pre-midnight curfew. Even a date with a boyfriend meant he had to have her home by midnight which she found most embarrassing. In fact she hated it so much that she sneaked out the window several times, but also got caught several times as well!

During that time she felt a sense of jealousy towards her brother who stayed out till all hours, never had a curfew, even in his teens. He would not take her anywhere with him as he did not want the kid sister tagging along to cramp his style. Jeanne's curfew was finally dropped when she was 19 years old.

Jeanne recounted, *"Somehow it seemed that boys were not as answerable for anything as girls were. I mean my brother was able to borrow the family car and come and go as he pleased. Once he got his license Mum and Dad financed him into a vehicle, but this was never even considered for me."*

Employment was not too difficult to come by in those days and Jeanne's first job was a clerical one with a construction company. Then she managed to get a job in a travel agency and quickly became the supervisor of the New Zealand domestic travel department. This position entailed quite a lot of book keeping and accounting, which, despite her dislike of maths at school, she mastered well.

Jeanne recalls being desperate to leave home and go flatting. She tried at aged 18, but her parents would not have it. She even considered marrying the current boyfriend as a way of being able to leave, but the subsequent talk of wedding plans was enough to make her reconsider. She knew in her heart she wanted to travel and could see that this could never happen if she got married. She then met another lad and thinks this may have been a real true love, but it was still not deep enough to get her to forgo the plans to travel.

Jeanne went on to say, *"It was interesting to note that my brother never ever had any inclination to leave home. I am sure this is because he already had all the freedom he wanted. My wish to leave was purely to get some freedom. I still wonder at my parent's logic of not allowing me to leave home at 19, but then allowing me to go overseas only a matter of months later, I mean what was the difference!."*

At 20 Jeanne headed overseas. Leaving home was more traumatic and tearful for her Mum than for Jeanne. She admits that she was upset about leaving the Yugoslav boyfriend though as they had decided to totally split up as Jeanne had no idea how long she would be away. It was a strange mixture of feelings, partly of a lost love, a bit of scaredness at the prospect of being out there on her own, not wanting Mum and Dad to see her cry, but also the overwhelming emotion of sheer excitement.

Her first stop was Paris where she had arranged to stay with a cousin who was married to a French man. She already had five children and they were expecting number six. She became their au pair for a few months and really enjoyed living in suburban Paris where the children were bi-lingual and so communication was easy.

She then received a letter from the Yugoslav boyfriend inviting her to his country and off she went to Croatia to stay with his family. She said they were what would be described as a peasant family and she took her turn in spraying the grapes, making the bread and generally becoming part of the family. A family which she explained was even more male dominated than

she had experienced in New Zealand, but it was holiday time and she knew it would not be forever, so she enjoyed the opportunity to experience another culture.

Then it was back to Paris for a few weeks and then to London where she managed to get live in work in a hotel. During this time she managed to travel through Europe quite extensively and really enjoyed this freedom and all the wonderful friends she made. Her rostered shifts meant she sometimes had four or five days off at a time so she and her mates would head off on yet another adventure in yet another part of the world.

About this time New Zealand authorities began to clamp down on immigrants getting back into New Zealand and since she was travelling on a British passport she sought advice from the New Zealand consulate in London. She was advised to return to New Zealand.

Back in the travel industry she was soon promoted, and took advantage of the extra opportunities to travel. She also developed a love of diving at that time and even did some study so she could teach scuba diving.

Jeanne recalled, *"I was once the Junior Swimming Champion and received a Bronze medal at the New Market Olympic Pools. I competed with Sandra Blewitt. I remember that at that time I was quite safe to go biking and swimming, without fear of being set upon".*

Then along came the movie Jaws and Jeanne became a little more respectful of the sea and the dangers and says she was not as adventurous after that. Jeanne says she had no conscious view of the future, she just enjoyed every moment of her life. She was so interested in the underwater world she go hold of a book called "The Collins Book of New Zealand Fish" and could identify every fish she saw when diving. The only down side to the sport was that it was very expensive, as she was always wanting to go on diving tours and these were at least $300 per weekend.

After another trip overseas Jeanne returned to New Zealand and went temping until she heard of a position at Continental Airlines. She was able to get into the airlines as she had the travel background. She worked shift work, but said this was like having a part time job on a full time salary, as the shifts were really short hours in those days.

Then Continental Airlines withdrew their New Zealand Services so Jeanne was made redundant. She did a few months in a call centre, just to keep the money coming in, as by this time she had bought a property and had a mortgage to consider. She managed to get back into the Airlines at ANSET and after doing the two week required Training Course herself was offered the role of Trainer. She held this position until ANSET, through QANTAS went into receivership. Everyone lost their jobs and there was no redundancy this time.

Jeanne took a job training for Asia/Pacific Airlines. This was only a four month contract, so she began looking at other things outside the travel industry.

"Then I saw this position advertised for a Training position for a TOPS course, I had no idea what a TOPS course was, but once I had researched it I decided I was interested enough to take it on. The interview went quite well, though I was not impressed with one of the directors who came across as very arrogant and he didn't seem to have very good things to say about students. However I did have the experience to run the course and decided to take up the challenge. The reality was a real struggle as these were WINZ students who, in many cases did not want to find employment. The point of the course was to find them employment, so there was often a real mismatch. The bureaucracy was also a nightmare and seemed to work against the people who really wanted to get back into employment."

However, Jeanne developed her negotiation skills and her ability to think outside the square to survive despite the lack of support from the directors. She survived by making the students her sole focus, and believes the

experience was invaluable. During this time she developed an interest in helping international students as she had so encountered so many on her courses that had difficulty with English. She began to give private tuition to a young Korean boy and the seed of an idea grew for her.

Jeanne went on to explain, *"It was during this time that I was encouraged by the Deputy Principal of the establishment to get an Adult Education qualification. I did this and really enjoyed what was a challenging but motivating experience. I then took fate into my own hands, and resigned to take up full time study on an ESOL course.*

What a challenge that was! There were 40 applicants for the course and only 18 were accepted. It was gruelling, and at times I felt quite out of my depth, but I survived and in some ways even enjoyed the pressure, but this was only because it was a short, but full on course and I knew it would not be forever. I was elated to pass and three weeks later accepted a position at an International School.

Jeanne says she really enjoyed the teaching, the students were hard working and appreciative, but with the SARS outbreak and the subsequent immigration downturn her position became redundant.

From there a former colleague offered her an administration position in a large Work based Training establishment, and this eventually turned into a more training oriented role which she currently enjoys.

In terms of support and direction she says that the right people were also there for her and that her family were most supportive of what she was doing. Often she became frustrated by the system, but could always think outside the square and overcome the hurdles that seemed to be put in her path. When reflecting on the study she did, she recalls the Deputy Principal organising group sessions, as there were others also doing the Adult Teaching Certificate. She recalls these sessions as being most helpful, and motivating and snapping them all out of their feelings of inadequacy. She

believes that it was this motivating mentor and her peers that made it possible for her to keep on keeping on.

Jeanne believes she had key people with the experience to guide her and she used these people to keep her on track. *"I have been fortunate, the right people were always there for me and I will always be grateful for that. I feel immense pride when I look back and see how I have totally 're-educated" myself. I really do think that as long as you are doing things you believe in, your life will never be dull and boring. In my present position I get tremendous pleasure in seeing people achieve too, it's about seeing people grow and achieving in life."*

Jeanne concluded by saying that she really feels she has found purpose and meaning, she loves what she does and the success of others is her success too.

JOHN'S STORY

John, now in his early thirties grew up in what could be termed a middle class family where his father provided well, his mother was an excellent manager and home maker and he wanted for nothing. He was the youngest child and the only son

His father was from England and had come to New Zealand to take up a position as an Industrial Chemist. While here he met his wife and made New Zealand his home. There was, however, a chapter of John's life where his family lived in England, so that he and his sister's could get to know his English heritage. This meant easy access to other countries and so John was well travelled, even as a youngster.

He was a very alive and imaginative child, well loved by all his family. He was not keen to stay on at school past fifth form and left to take up a carpentry apprenticeship. At some time in his teens he became involved with a church group that provided for teens, this was something he explained was lacking in his own church at that time. From there he began to work with younger people and had much to offer in terms of energy and talent through music and bands. He had his families approach to helping others and gave unstintingly of his time and talent.

When reflecting on his beliefs and values, John said " *I think these come form my sense of wanting to contribute to humanity in some way. I feel sure that a full and meaning full life comes from incorporating these values*".

He went on to say that as an adult he began to read more and came to value the thoughts and insights of those who had gone before him. He was particularly inspired by the depth of understanding of human nature found in novels of the Russian writers *Tolstoy* and *Dostoyevsky*. He also found spiritual interests that led him to writers like *Richard Foster, Brenan Manning* and *Paul Tillich*.

Of these authors John says, "*Their writing showed me the value of study and thought. It was largely this that inspired me to further pursue the world of books and to take time out to contemplate my own reactions and beliefs regarding the ideas I was discovering.*"

He married quite young and he and his wife became involved with youth at risk and were, at one time involved with overseas mission in countries like Serbia and Romania. They learned to exist at the most humble of levels and were continually amazed by the simplicity of life and deeply saddened by the was they saw as a cheap regard for human dignity.

On his return to New Zealand he decided to follow his heart into some study and at this time too he and his wife added two children to their family. His interest in working with people seemed to tell him that he needed to do a degree to be able to continue in the work that seemed to suit him so well.

His thinking too, at this time was that life decisions should not be controlled or dictated to by societal norms, so although he was nearing 30 and a father, he decided that ideas such as "I should be more sensible or stable at this time of our lives" would not dictate or influence his decision to become an adult student.

He began a BA and started with a sociology major at Auckland University. At the end of year one he transferred to Massey and did a double major in Philosophy and Religious Studies. In his view *"the self knowledge that had come to me as an older student allowed me to choose subjects that fitted my character. Consequently I was happy to take my studies very seriously. This in turn led me to feel as if I was genuinely gaining wisdom and insight from my study, as opposed to merely learning how to pass.*"

He says he was staunch in devoting himself entirely to the task. He did not take on any part time work during the semester time and threw himself completely into the reading and writing that was required. This he says gave him a feeling of control of the process and consequently he felt he was able to cope.

John was also quick to point out that *"Being able to devote myself to my studies was enabled by my wife and my family. I took out a student loan and we lived simply but adequately on the student allowance. It also helped that we moved to a small rural area where rent and living in general was cheaper. My wider family were wonderfully supportive too. My wife delighted in encouraging me and was genuinely interested in all I was doing. She was fantastic at understanding the pressure of exam time and her energy and support got me through any periods of waning enthusiasm or self doubt. This made so much difference to me"*

As he was studying by correspondence there was no opportunity to meet with other students. He was assigned one pen pal for a creative writing paper which was fine, but he says it was not especially helpful in the long run. He had no hesitation in asking for help from Massey tutors and reflects that had he been shy about asking questions his marks would definitely have suffered.

He also believes that the system worked against him at times. *" I often felt that the pressure of exams diminished the level of learning. After a semester of reading, thinking and writing, the enormous pressure of having to cram so much into your head for a three hour exam had to result in poor levels of retention when compared to the assignment based assessments. It seemed crazy and disappointing to feel like you had not done justice to the course you had put so much into over the semester. In hindsight I think that I should perhaps have searched for papers that placed more weight on assignments rather than on three hour exams, but these were few and far between".*

John talked about his survival skills – keeping up to date with work and setting personal dead lines for completion. He learnt along the way how to work out what readings to ignore and what to ensure he read thoroughly. He went over old exam papers to get ideas and he also made sure he took time out and turned his mind to other things – this was his way to survive.

While commenting that he really enjoyed the whole experience and viewed it as some of the most fulfilling times in his adult life, he does see things that

could have helped him such as, ensuring that instructions were clear about where and how help could be accessed. He feels that there should be less emphasis on examinations and more on showing understanding of the topic via assignments. He also added here that less interest on student loans would be a major improvement plus.

In terms of the people who made the difference for him, he singles out his wife, and then his family who were all supportive at a time when they could have chosen to place pressure on him to better provide for his family.

He also makes special mention of an older couple at his church who, he says, played a pivotal role in his decision to study. They had both been involved in reasonably recent study and were full of enthusiasm in terms of the enrichment it brings to an adult. *"They really made me feel as if I would miss out on something that was really too important to miss. That coupled with the inner voice that was tugging at me, made my decision easy. I have so much respect for this particular couple and am so pleased and thankful that they influenced me the way they did."*

He is currently teaching in an integrated school in Auckland, and finds this, his first year, most challenging, but is enjoying every minute of it. The opportunity to add to young lives for the better is something he excels at and finds most fulfilling.

MARY'S STORY

I am in my fifties, closer to sixty than I care to admit. My life and my education seem to have been intrinsically linked in a way that makes it hard not to see them as "being me". This is my story.

I was born into a Catholic family of eight, the fourth child, the youngest daughter. To a very large degree my beliefs and values were determined by my religious upbringing which included Catholic schooling. This meant being a dutiful daughter, working hard at school and at home, never drawing attention to yourself and never questioning your elders.

We were not well off and my reflection on how my parents managed to send us all to Catholic schools with their uniform and fee requirements still amazes me. However, we were a typical family in our Catholic parish and in many ways lived in a very sheltered environment thinking that everyone said what they meant and meant what they said. I certainly had no real concept of the world at large.

My father was a hard man. He did not relate well to us as children. He worked from dawn to dark six days a week, and the bringing up of the family was left to mother. My mother was a very strong person, who was intelligent, managed well and had the answer to every one's problems. People were quick to seek her out as a person who was always there for them no matter what and who always had words of comfort and never made judgements about anything they may have done, or not done.

Sometimes I think I resented the fact that our home was always filled with people, and I dreamed of having some one-on-one time with my mother. We always had other children staying too. The nuns asked us to take a boy from the orphanage during the holidays and then there was another girl that had a working dad, a solo parent, and so she was taken in too. Happy memories include walking in the door after school to the smell of wonderful food. There

was always enough for others too and we all brought friends home on a frequent basis.

Despite being one of eight, I was a quiet and shy child, and felt I did not quite fit in with my family. When asked as an adult to paint a picture of myself, I could not do so. It was as if I had no personality or face. I do not feel any sense of upset about this; it's just how it is for me. I lived in a sort of dream world, of abstract space.

In my eyes my eldest sister was beautiful and my mother's right hand. My brothers were my brothers; they were all very different, all part of a unique group that had a special bond and belonging. My only other sister was a bit of a tomboy, so she gained honorary boy status which made her part of the boy's team. I was a small scrappy child and tended to retreat into reading and make believe. However, I was for the most part quite happy, albeit lonely and lacking in confidence. There were times when I found myself in bother for "*having my nose in a book again*".

I suspect it was my lack of confidence that made me work hard at school. I did my best, tried hard not to draw attention to myself, but always lacked the ability to question anything or to seek help with anything. I did well at primary and intermediate level, always in the top quarter of the class and was, for the most part happy with this.

My brothers and sisters were, in my eyes, very colourful and I was happy to be identified as part of their family. I did however, long to be more like them for they appeared to be able to do anything and do it well. Oddly though I did not see that anyone had any expectations of me, so over time decided this meant I was not good at anything.

Secondary school was not a positive experience for me. It was a large Catholic girl's school where most students were from reasonably well off families. I was the poor relation. I kept my head down and tried my best as usual, but my lack of ability to ask for help saw me flounder and produce

mediocre results. I was not happy with this, but as nobody ever appeared to expect much more anyway, I just boxed on as best I could.

I avoided any school social occasions as they highlighted the gap in socio-economic terms. I did not consider I had any social skills and hated going anywhere where I might have to talk to people. I was always glad to have the second eldest sister around as she was not only my spokesperson, but also my minder and I was always grateful for that as it gave me a sense of security. Our eldest sister was very much a second mother and we did her bidding without question, as that was what was expected.

On reflection, a down side of this was that I never managed to form opinions for myself. I could always see things from everyone else's point of view and so decision making was sometimes a trauma for me. I did however, always enjoy the successes of other people and never ever had any concept of being jealous. I have wondered since whether the inability to feel jealous and to complain was the reason I went so apparently unnoticed as I grew up. I certainly did internalise things and dreamed of how it could be different, but nobody knew that inner child or the woman I grew up to be.

I left school at the end of the fifth form, having turned 15 part way through the year. My future was arranged for me, I was to work in the business of an aunt and uncle, for this was what a dutiful daughter did. I do not really recall wanting to further my education, but wonder if this was because I was not happy at school, so was glad to be out of the place.

I was a most unremarkable person, but was generally happy with my lot. My sister and I went out to dances and I eventually found I could make polite conversation and even had numerous marriage proposals. However I knew that my parents would not allow me to marry until I was at least 21. At 22 I met a man who seemed to have eyes for only me, he seemed to put me in the centre of his life and nothing else was important. Soon after my 23rd birthday I married him.

Once we married he absolutely ran my life, right down to telling me what I thought. Then when our first child was about to be born things went wrong, the doctor told him that the baby had died and that I was critically ill and it was a very hard time for us all. However both baby and I survived and eventually came home. I was in seventh heaven and totally in love with our child but my husband then confessed that he never really wanted children and that there was no room in his life for anyone but me.

Obviously this caused incredible friction. On the one hand I had a possessive husband who I tried desperately to please and on the other I had a beautiful child who I loved with a passion and I absolutely died inside as I was unable to share the delight of my child with my husband.

I learned to balance things as best I could, but made a decision that this one child would have a sibling, for at least then there would be someone else to share in our love. The extended families had no idea of the inner turmoil as my husband was very clever at painting the picture of the devoted husband and father, and I ached inside at other's comments about how much they envied our little family and our happiness.

Being pregnant again caused more friction and my husband was quick to have a vasectomy. He was very angry and was certainly not going to allow any more children to take up my time and attention. I did toughen up a bit, I had to protect the children as their father had no patience with them and expected them to be seen and not heard at all times.

Eventually it was more than I could cope with and I left with a three year old and a one year old. This was a brave move, but it was for my children's safety so I had no choice. What followed was a nightmare but after some bad years I was able to put a deposit on a small home and begin to think about our future.

During this time I worked cleaning houses for elderly people and doing typing at home from Dictaphone tapes for a solicitor and with the help of my family I managed to make ends meet. The worry of how to provide a decent life for

the children was always uppermost in my mind and I knew that as soon as they were off to school I would have to look at better employment so that their education and life style would be the best I could give them.

During this time too I had begun doing study, some by correspondence, some at polytechnic, choosing papers round kindergarten hours, as I would never leave the children with anyone. I had not decided what I might be able to do once they were at school but knew I needed to have better qualifications to offer an employer.

I had several extended family members in the teaching profession and one of them suggested that I would be well suited to teaching. I thought this was a bit of a joke, but as there was a campaign at that time to get mature people into commerce teaching an uncle encouraged me to go for an interview. In fact, as I recall, he made the interview appointment. It still astounds me that they interviewed some 200 people, took only 16 and I was one of them!

I can recall the interview like it was yesterday. It was the first time I had been interviewed by a panel and I remember feeling very small and intimidated. I thought I had blown it completely so the letter telling me I was 'in' was an absolute shock. When the initial shock wore off I began to panic, thinking that it wouldn't be long till I was exposed as a dummy and thick head for sure.

The first month was very stressful as I struggled to come to terms with the campus, the language and the system in general. Everyone else seemed to be confident and know what they were doing, but I was like a duck – serene topside and paddling like mad underneath. Eventually I came to enjoy the experience and the other students. I did get very frustrated by the bureaucracy though, so many pointless processes and time spent on things that really did not matter. I did not feel we were well prepared for the reality of teaching, but did find "going out on section" extremely beneficial, albeit very frightening too. But somehow the feeling of being a "thick head and a dummy" was never dispelled.

One of the more ludicrous examples of "nonsense and time wasting" I vividly recall was being called to the office of a tutor where he wished to discuss my signature. He pointed out that I used a Capital R in the middle of my signature and this was not correct. I listened, didn't argue but did not change my signature, it was mine and my business not his.

As the course drew to a close we began to look at the positions available in the schools. One of the tutors commented that if we were able to leave the city we would have greater opportunities available to us. I turned this over in my mind and decided it was possible to do this as my own children were only beginning their education and so would quickly adapt. I applied for three positions, but the instant offer made was the one out of the city. After much deliberation I accepted the position and at the start of the next school year shifted to a rural country area 200 kilometres away.

In many ways it was quite traumatic, I knew no one, but kept the brave smile and the serene demeanour for the children's sake. I have to say that the country people were quick to make us welcome and I settled into teaching in a medium sized co-educational secondary school. Over the next 12 years I was to hold the position of Dean, Head of Department, Careers Advisor and Assistant Principal.

I was in a school house for the first year, but then purchased a house in town, some 35 kilometres away so that my children could attend the Catholic school. I made a conscious decision to never have my children at my school as I had already seen the pressure it can put "teacher's kids" under. This was not what I wanted to inflict on my children.

I believe I did okay during this time, but did feel sometimes that I was not quite a "real teacher" as there were those on the staff who commented about my back door entry to teaching. However, others were really supportive and I continued to study extra-murally and eventually completed my Education Degree. On reflection, nobody ever enquired as to how I was going. There

was an assumption that because I looked like I had it all under control that I was okay. It would have been nice to have been asked.

My extra-mural study had its black times too. I can recall having some of my personal experiences dismissed, as being not likely to ever happen. I admit I ended up learning to write what they wanted, which to my way of thinking, totally defeated the purpose of my study at this level.

I can recall being under pressure and reading chapter summaries only, throwing together an assignment and being astounded to find I was awarded an A or B+, while on other occasions when I did incredible research and really did extend my learning and grew as a result, I would get a C or maybe a C+.

The whole process made me feel very disillusioned. I saw what I considered "gate keeping" where information would be forthcoming only after assignment deadlines. In the end I figured that I would just head for the finish line, give them what they appeared to want, but vowed that if ever I could effect even the most minor change I would do so. This was quite brave of me, I think, as I consider myself the least confrontational person in the universe.

When it came time for the children to leave the nest I decided that I should be looking to have some sort of social life. My children were now well educated and beginning good careers and I did not want them to feel in any way responsible for me in future years. Of course I had lots of blind dates organised by well meaning friends over the years, but again I had made a conscious decision that I had enough to contend with bringing up the children and keeping my career on the boil. By this time I had gone from teaching at a secondary school to teaching at the local polytechnic.

During this time I met a man who had recently lost his wife to cancer and we began to spend some time together. He appeared to be a very genuine and honest person and when he asked me to marry him, though I did have some misgivings, I thought about my family and friends telling me how thrilled they were and how much nicer it would be to have someone to share life with, and took the plunge. On reflection I see the Mary of old, listening to the elders,

doing the right thing for everyone, but not necessarily doing the right thing for me. In my life experience "I" was never a major consideration.

Unfortunately this man was not financially secure and also had some health problems and this added stress at a time when things should have been getting easier. Still we muddled along for over a decade then without warning he sent me an email saying our marriage was over. After the shock of this I had to then face the legal realities and ended up worse off financially than I had been when we met.

I have begun again, and have managed to purchase a home again, with a large mortgage to prove it. I have to confess to still having difficulty seeing my own personality. I do acknowledge that this goes back to my childhood, but it also goes back to never being encouraged or understood.

As I reflect back I can see that people appeared to see me surviving, and that was what I wanted them to see, but this then led them to make assumptions that I was okay. Of course I probably do not help myself as I never ask for help either. I feel sure there would be people who would be saddened if they knew how I feel, but in my view people do not want to know you if you are negative. So life is easier to cope with when you have a positive outlook. I do not blame anyone or anything, nor do I expect anything from anyone, it's just the way I have come to be.

I am now completing my Masters Degree. I still feel this is beyond the reach of someone like me and this was not something I ever envisaged doing However there has been one tutor in particular who has enabled me and given me the courage and motivation to give it a go. I have also had my children and some of my extended family behind me too and this has made so much difference to my ability to hang in. I honestly believe that what makes the difference has little to do with academic subjects. In my experience the institutions I have had connections with have served the needs of the institution better than serving the needs of the students. If I had been relying

on the system alone, I would never have come this far. That I know to be the absolute truth.

I am no longer in the tertiary teaching system, I now work in the quality training area of education, still very much with adults though, and I really enjoy this. I still have a passion for enabling people to succeed and am dedicated to improving the lives and futures of people. I feel sure I always will.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FOCUS GROUPS

FOCUS GROUP ONE

THE SOUTH AUCKLAND GROUP

This was with a group of eight people employed in the retail industry who were involved in completing workplace training within their employment. This involved them completing NZQA Unit Standards as they worked their way through the required units to complete a National Certificate. The group included a range of people doing different qualifications to include retail, butchery, produce and bakery. They were asked to take part in an evaluation and review process being undertaken by the organisation providing the workplace training resources. To protect the identity of the members of the group all names used are pseudonyms.

Initially the approach for a further dimension to the discussion of my thesis had been offered to me by my employer who was aware and supportive of my study. I then approached the company Training Manager of the retail industry employer and discussed the possibility of my being able to include this particular feedback in my study. The Training Manager spoke with the people who were going to be attending the evaluation and review process and indicated that I would be speaking with them to explain the extra dimension. Each person agreed to allow me to explain what it was I wanted to do, and then to make a decision about whether they still wished to be involved.

The meeting was held in their training room on the site of the retail business within which they were working. This allowed them to be in surroundings that they were familiar and comfortable with.

I began by providing each person with an Information Sheet, which I had signed and I asked them to sign and date this too. I had the Information

Sheets photocopied and left the original with each of them, taking the copies for my own records. Each person expressed both their approval and interest in what I was undertaking.

The make up of the group was 25% female and 75% male, the ages ranged from early 20 to late 40. This group was made up of people from the following cultures: Maori, Maori/Chinese, Pakeha, Samoan, Cook Island, Indian/Pakistani. One was a relative new comer to New Zealand; the others had been born in New Zealand or had lived here for most of their lives.

In discussing what it felt like to be told that training was part of the employment expectation, there was a mixture of feelings expressed *"To begin with I was worried, I was in a new country, I was thinking that the system of education would be new to me and I wondered how I would cope."* And *"I had not done very well at school, so I worried about being able to achieve in the workplace. I didn't think I would because I couldn't get anything right at school"*

However there were also feelings of gratitude that training and qualifications were being offered. None of this group had been offered training in any previous employment. There was also recognition that the qualifications were not going to cause undue financial pressures, so they could learn as they were working and being paid.

All said they felt able to ask about things. In fact all were very comfortable about asking questions and put this down to the ethos of training within the company and the very supportive training staff available to them. This they felt, was the main reason it was able to work for the benefit of everyone.

Apart from one of the participants, none had achieved particularly well educationally in the past and so there was some measure of feeling they had to prove something to themselves and in some cases to their families and friends.

When considering what difficulties were encountered most talked about their hobbies and sports and also the social pressure of their peers, *"I had times of thinking I would just give up, especially when my mates hassled me to go out with them instead of doing my theory work, so for me it was quite hard to go against everyone outside work".*

The influence of others was seen as a big issue. Some felt study intruded on family time. Some also faced a stigma of being perceived in a 'fill in" job in the retail industry, so that was seen as not okay, and very off putting. But for some this was turned into a motivating factor, making them want to work harder and show everyone how they could gain National qualifications and be someone at a higher income level within their present employment.

Tama, a young man of part Maori, part Chinese descent, whose father had wanted him to stay at school, and was not happy when he left school and more unhappy when he went into retail employment, had moments of wavering about the job. On the one hand, everyone was giving him a hard time, but then when he went to the store trainer to say he was leaving, she invited him and his Dad into a meeting to explain what was possible for the future. She then saw to it that this young man went to the annual award evening, where the National certificates were awarded and the Management Development Awards were made. Getting Tama's family to understand the possibilities for Tama in terms of present employment meant they could begin to support his study and quest to improve himself and his employment prospects.

This, Tama says, *"made me see that I could have a real future within the industry, Dad saw that too. We both saw that I had the opportunity, and the support, right here. I am now in Year Two of the Management Development Programme and my goal is to get into Company Management and to eventually take ownership of one of the large outlets."*

Sonia, from the Cook Islands, talked about how her daughter was impressed with her mother being able to gain qualifications and she was beginning to

think that if her mum could do this, perhaps it was possible for her too. Sonia's daughter had not achieved at school, and had not previously considered any study possibilities. Sonia when on to say, "*My daughter is pregnant now and the future is not looking very encouraging, but she says that seeing me managing to do some study and get promotion and seeing how it is changing my life, she is considering how she could do the same and improve her future too. She has changed her attitude to me too. She is much more helpful to me now, doing things around the house so that I can have the time to study and do my assignments.*"

Some members of the group also talked about the lack of feedback as to why their work may not have been 100% correct. The general consensus was that you can learn a great deal from the feedback, as long as there **is** feedback. The group went on to agree that even when assignments come back showing the candidate as being Competent, it was also good to have a "*Well done*", or "*Great work*" comments included. It made them feel like they had been noticed and that someone else had noted how well they were doing. This was considered very important by everyone.

The Provider of the resources had recently introduced some "combined" assessment tools. This was so that where some units overlapped others the candidates did not have to repeat processes just for the sake of repeating them. The group were asked for their feedback on these combined tools. It was noted that some of the group felt that this often made it seem more difficult and that in general they would rather take one thing at a time and get it done, and done correctly. Also the combined units looked so much more difficult, and so long. That was off putting, so one at a time seemed a more rewarding option, despite the overlap in unit content.

When discussing the text material supplied, some felt that often the text did not provide enough information or that it was limited in its scope and did not take into account the vastly different ways of doing things within the differing parts of the industry, and therefore the different experiences of different people. This led them to often not extending answers to reflect their own

70

personal experience and views. Or if they did, they felt they risked going off the track and not being found competent. Quite often the terms used in the assessment tool and the text differed from the language in employment, so it was felt things should be better aligned so that everyone knew what was being asked for.

Also in acknowledging that sometimes things do change, several commented that if you get caught in the changeover it is often confusing and you tend to feel disadvantaged. One member of the group did admit that he was a person who always left things to the last minute, and a further discussion ensued regarding how many people need varying degrees of pressure to enable them to perform.

The positive aspects of training were noted as they applied to this particular company. The group felt it was very easy to ask for support, there was good support and advice in-house. All acknowledged that without this support they would not have managed to succeed. They talked about the win/win situation, they got qualified, got better at their jobs, got promotion and a pay rise and realised that this meant the boss did better business which meant everyone had secure employment.

There was a real willingness to make use of those on the staff who had already qualified and to go to them for help and advice. They also felt that they benefited from workshops where they met others in similar departments and situations, it helped them share and gain knowledge and it also reminded them how good things were in their employment.

All agreed they needed to have goals in life and could not imagine not knowing why they were doing things, it would not seem worthwhile if you didn't have a target and the support of others, including family. For some the workplace was like home and family too.

There was some discussion regarding the fact they each of them had come into the industry without the knowledge of what opportunities were available within it. They all felt this message should get out there for several reasons,

firstly that it would inform those who knock people in the retail industry, and secondly, it would show them that anyone can achieve if they really want to, thirdly you could go right to the top and there were plenty of examples right there in the industry to show this was happening all the time. They talked about their own boss starting right at the bottom, a long time ago.

All felt that they lifted their views about what they could do once they began to have success, it made them keener to share knowledge with those coming after them and more determined to go further for themselves.

All agreed that their families were always proud of their success, and several talked about the celebrations and the gifts received when they achieved success.

While this particular company had never charged the employee for training in the past, that was about to change as the company had decided to do so from now on. There was discussion regarding whether this would make a difference to those taking up the challenge, and it was felt it might, but that the message should be out there so that new comers can see and take advantage of the opportunities.

It was felt that even if they did have to pay, with the price the company was going to charge being so low, it would still be on the job, earn as you learn and there would be no need for a student loan debt, all of which were very positive reasons to take up the challenge.

This group was reluctant to bring the meeting to a close. They acknowledged how much they had gained from the meeting together, and how they felt about being asked for their input and being listened to. As the facilitator, I was most humbled by this experience and reiterated that it was my also my gain as I in turn learned so much from them.

Focus Group Two

THE WEST AUCKLAND GROUP

This was a group of six people employed in the warehouse of a large wholesale industry who were involved in completing workplace training within their employment. This involved them completing NZQA Unit Standards as they worked their way through the required unit to complete a National Certificate. They were asked to take part in an evaluation and review process being undertaken by the organisation providing the workplace training resources to them. To protect the identify of the members of the group all names used are pseudonyms.

The same protocols and processes followed in the first of the focus group meetings were followed with this second group.

The meeting was held in their training room on the site of the warehouse business within which they were working. This allowed them to be in surroundings that they were familiar and comfortable with.

I began by providing each person with an Information Sheet (Appendix 3) which I had signed and I asked them to sign and date this too as a confirmation of their understanding and agreement to be involved. I had the Information Sheets photocopied and left the original with each of them, taking the copies for my own records. Each person expressed both their approval and interest in what I was undertaking.

The group was made up of people from Samoan, Cook Island, Maori and European cultures. It was 17% female and 83% male which reflected the gender balance in the warehouse. They ranged in age from 18 to 35. The cultural make up was 50% Samoan, 16% European, 17 % Maori and 17% Cook Island. This reflected the cultural make up of the employees in the warehouse.

This group were initially shy in contributing information and preferred to consult each other before committing any information to me. As time elapsed they became less shy and contributed more independently.

Several members of this group expressed a sense of pressure at having to complete unit standards which they saw as being outside their experience and commented that nobody had explained the system to them. This made them reluctant to get involved and fearful of not being able to do the work.

Several felt that if they were successful they may have to do more and end up being asked to do things that were further outside their experience. A few commented that they were never confident about getting things right and didn't want to be seen to fail. The sense of fear of failure was very evident here, even where they had succeeded at a lower level, they were concerned at failing further up the ladder.

All agreed that if someone had gone through the expectations with them, then they would feel better about being involved. One group member commented *"Sometimes it felt like your superiors just wanted to see how you handled pressure."*

Several comments were made regarding the fit of the unit standards as they often did not have anything to do with what the employee was doing at work. Several agreed that there seemed to be a lot of paperwork involved and that it would be good if this could be reduced. They were most comfortable with the idea of being able to work at their own pace.

Wade, a young Maori lad said *"I had been told about the ability to complete qualifications when I came for interview, but in two years I have not been given too many opportunities, mind you I haven't pushed myself either. I think that's because I really don't have much confidence in myself."*

In terms of the idea of doing qualifications that meant you could make progress in the company and earn more money and status, all agreed this was a good thing, but that it did not seem to happen like that for them in their

employment. One comment was "*When a position comes up it's more likely to be advertised and given to an outsider, rather than first letting present staff know of the vacancy and giving them the opportunity to apply. This does not seem very fair, how can we apply if we don't know about it!*"

There appeared to be some contention around equality. On one hand they felt why would they do courses if they were not going to make any difference to their employment, and on the other hand often they were not given the opportunity to do courses they would like to have done. It was felt that more group meetings to talk about what was available would be an excellent idea. The idea of tackling this aspect as a group was more appealing than doing so independently.

Dave, a Samoan lad, commented "*I was given some unit standards that were aligned to the retail industry not the warehouse industry, so I didn't really see the point of them; they didn't have much to do with what I was doing in my job.*"

There was discussion round the fact that they are all involved in practical work, so less accent on theory would suit them much better.

In terms of celebrating success they commented that this was not done at work, and for their own part they were just pleased to be finished. There was some discussion around this, and while they initially said they would be embarrassed if it was celebrated at work, they did come round to the idea that perhaps it would be okay and at least it would let them know they had been noticed and recognised as having succeeded.

In general terms there was an agreement that there were better options for them and they would do better if the options were aligned to their work and interests.

While this group was initially not very open and relaxed they soon became interested in the discussions and contributed well and thanked me for giving them the opportunity to be heard.

I could see that this particular group had benefited greatly from the opportunity to be heard as a group. It gave them a collective confidence that enabled discussion that would never have happened on an individual basis.

In considering the cultural make up of this group, I am reminded of a recent session I attended at the New Zealand Association of Private Education Providers (NZAPEP) Conference in Wellington, which informed me that while a European may hold that "*I think therefore I am*" a Polynesian will hold that "*I belong therefore I am*". The implications of this statement were very evident to me in terms of the way the focus group thrived and grew in belonging.

Once again I was humbled by the open sharing of this group.

FOCUS GROUP THREE

THE JOURNEY TO NORTHLAND

This was a group of three Northland Maori women in their forties and fifties who had heard what I was involved in doing and asked to have some input. This reflects my comment that "some things simply fell into my lap". While I had envisaged this as a focus group, what unfolded were three unique stories from three unique women. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of each of these women.

The order in which these stories were told was not planned; it was just the way it happened. The meeting took place in Northland in the home of a woman who was known to me and to each of three Maori women. We had all travelled some distance to meet together and our mutual friend had ensured that we had food and drink, a comfortable and quiet space in which to chat and that we were free of interruptions.

We began with the general discussion about what I was doing and as the discussion unfolded they began to tell their separate stories.

These are their stories.

MERE'S STORY

Mere, now in her late forties did not talk about her early years other than by talking about the vision her parents had always had for her as she was growing up. They wanted her to become an administrator/office person. The reality she says was, *"I left school after gaining School Certificate as a Second year fifth and then left home to go on the big South Island tour, it was something lots of people did in those days. I was acutely aware I had not lived up to my parent's expectations but I was a strong and stroppy independent girl and I was determined to do my own thing, whatever the consequences. I reckon I had a good brain, but school was just so dam boring."*

Mere married in her late 20s and had three children. After living in what she termed "domestic violence" for much too long she chose to become a solo parent to try to make a better life for her children. She decided that she was not about to become a long term benefit statistic and so after doing a self esteem course she developed the idea of going back into education herself in order to make a better life for her children and also to fulfil the expectation her parents had of her in her youth.

The reality was quite difficult for her. She had to place her youngest, her four year old son, in childcare and this was quite traumatic for both him and his mother. It was really hard to leave him with strangers and both mother and son needed much assurance that he was going to be okay. *"He had to get used to not having me around, but to understand I would be back for him later in the day. I had to develop trust in the people who were looking after him. It was hard; he had never been left with strangers before. It took a while, but it did get easier as he made friends and I saw he was happy to go off each day."*

Attending the Polytechnic was, in Mere's words, *"A real culture shock. It was everything I feared an institution would be. Big, faceless, hundreds of total*

*strangers both Pakeha and Maori and there I was well over 40, a dumb Maori
who had been out of school for 25 years."*

Mere said that she really had to think about this new pathway she was
treading, *"I had to read books, and try to focus and also keep the home life
balance. It was not easy that's for sure."*

As Mere had not sat an exam for over 25 years, there was real fear of not
being able to do this well enough in her forties. Her first year she says was
very stressful, the classes she was in were made up of predominately young
people, but she says that she learnt from them and they learnt from her.   It
was clear she could offer them some life skills and some good support in
many ways and they could offer her IT skills. But by far the biggest challenge
was to understand the system, all the policies and procedures around the
Polytechnic and the education system.

She learned to accept the friendship and support of peers and of tutors too.
She had to learn to ask for help, and eventually, over time, she began to feel
more comfortable. She commented again and again that some of the tutors
made all the difference. They were the few who were so helpful and went the
extra mile to see she was able to achieve all she could.

On the home front things were difficult to juggle. She would find that if she got
stuck into the books too early in the day the kids would run wild, so she learnt
to study at night and 11.00 pm through to 2.00 am became *"her time"*. She
also learned to take the kids to the park or the beach in the summer and take
her books along so that she could watch them having fun, but also get some
much needed reading and study in too.

Her mother was most supportive at this time, and as she lived close by she
could look after the children at times. Her family in general were pleased to
see Mere making progress and so gave her help when they could, particularly
with the children.

Mere commented that she soon learned that everyone, regardless of their race, colour or creed seemed to have their own personal crosses to bear, so she came to see that she was not so different to most others after all.

She began to see that the Polytechnic, *"the institution"*, she referred to it as, was okay. It had all the facilities she needed, but she did comment that at a personal level she would have found life so much easier had she had a computer at home. She also found it difficult to find extra time to go to the library and talked about the fact that many Maori of her generation didn't understand about the Library and Resource Centre, and how to work their way around referencing. She said that Maori of her time did not have the ingrained reading and library skills that Pakeha seemed to have. She saw this was a major disadvantage.

Mere found she had to learn time management as well as a personal management of the library so that she could work out how to find the things she needed. She thinks that mature learners need more help with these things. She also felt it would have been good to know where to go and how to navigate not only the Library, but the whole campus.

As she reflected back Mere said "*I was really glad to have had the opportunity to get back into education. The time was right for me and I found I became a role model for my family. My two younger children are doing better at school as compared to their elder sister. The younger ones have grown up with me doing homework, its part the norm in our house and so I think they will learn more and they should have better futures as a result.*"

Mere is now employed as a Senior Corporate Support Officer with the Ministry of Education. She tells me she has finally aspired to the vision her parents held for her all those years ago. She is adamant that changes should be made within learning institutions to make them more user friendly and less daunting and that this would make a huge difference to people like her in the future.

PETI'S STORY

Peti, also in her forties, began in a similar way telling her story with little focus on her early childhood but commenting that she did well at school in the far north but in her day the Maori pupils left the rural areas at the end of fifth form to go to Auckland to do trade training.

She said that the general thinking of the time was that Maori children did not have the ability to aspire to being doctors or lawyers, so trade training schemes were provided so that they could be good clerical workers or carpenters or fitter and turners. She reflects that the idea of racism did not enter her mind at that time, but it certainly does now.

Peti did well at trade training and came back to the north well qualified but seen to be too young to be able to get any position befitting the qualifications she held. Eventually, after applying for countless positions and being turned down she took a job in the post office as a toll operator and during her 12 years there learnt every skill she could within the various departments.

When the Post Office was sold off she went to work for a Security Firm as a communications officer and continued to do this for some eight years. It was during this time she decided to do some night classes as she could see she needed some IT skills in order to be able to help her daughter get ahead in the future.

She enjoyed the night classes so much and the tutor was so motivating that she decided to study full time in order to get some qualifications in the IT field. She had done some homework and discovered that this tutor also taught on the day time business course, so that made the decision so much easier for Peti. She had good support networks around her and willing people to take care of her daughter.

Peti loved the Polytechnic experience. It was so well organised and she thrived on this. Her domestic relationship with her child's father was foundering and came to an end. Going to the Polytechnic enabled Peti to

leave all that behind her and move on with her life. Her daughter at 12 years old was easy to work around. She had been brought up by her grandfather until she was six years old and was happy to have others looking after her. However, it was a matter of pride to Peti that she provided financially for her daughter in every respect.

In going back into education herself though, she set the scene for her daughter to aspire to having a career and she proudly told me "*my daughter is now a teacher, and a very good one too.*" Peti knows that she influenced her daughter and showed her that education was important for everyone's future.

Peti had no problem with study; she loved to read and to learn about everything. However, she still admits there were down times when she wondered why she bothered, but then the family was there in support and she knew she had something to prove to herself and to her family, so she kept on keeping on.

She reflects also that her peers were most supportive and most classes had a good mix of young and more mature people so it was a most supportive and safe environment to be in. She talked about the wonderful support of some of the tutors and her realisation along the way that she had to also take responsibility for her self and her progress, it was a joint effort, but she was in the driving seat all the way.

In reflecting on what may have been useful for her and Peti says the use of mentors and having a more comprehensive orientation would have been helpful as she never did get to find out everything that was going on at the campus.

She maintains that she found her education journey quite inspirational at times and believes she got out of it what she put into it. She confesses to be somewhat driven by inspirational tutors and was fortunate enough to encounter several who did inspire her and this helped her along the way.

82

She proudly told me that her daughter is the only one in her generation that is in a good job. *"I am proud to say that she has the work ethic and this I believe is vital to the success of everyone, but most especially to Maoridom."*

Peti is now employed at the Polytechnic in an administrative role and enjoys her ability to play a part in the empowering of others like her. She has become a grandmother, and has great hopes for her grand-daughter's future, which she says will be so much better for being born into a family that places a high value on education.

HINE'S STORY

Hine, now in her fifties, began by telling me how her husband, an excellent bread winner had died and how she suddenly found herself alone with three children and no visible means of support.

She also recalled her Dad's dream for her to have "*a good job in administration*". So she decided that she would need to do some study to get some good qualifications in order to land a good position.

She enrolled at the Polytechnic in a management course but found it was mainly young people and she felt that she did not fit in. They all seemed to know more than her and she felt very insecure around them. However the tutor was most supportive and she did okay.

As the semesters wore on and she met more and more mature learners she felt more comfortable. However she did comment "*My in-laws were not too happy about me going off to the Polytechnic every day, they felt as a single parent after their son had died, I should stay home and look after the children. This was rather hurtful for me, they just didn't understand that I needed to ensure a better life for the kids, not just exist with them. Besides I needed to have a focus and to move on after my husband died, you can't just stay home and feel sorry for yourself forever, can you!*"

Hine found the campus Library a very unfriendly place; she didn't know how to navigate it at all. However, as she learned to ask for help the Library assistants were very accommodating and eventually she reached a stage where she could go to the Library to read and study and enjoy the quiet time with no distractions.

Reflecting back she says in her early years of study she could not find time to go to the Library, so having Library time timetabled into her course could have been a good thing for her.

The family then had more sadness as her Mum died, then the following year her sister died, and the year after that her Dad died. This was devastating for Hine and she began to wonder if she should be pursuing a career at all. However she kept remembering the promise she had made to her father that she would continue with her studies and do well for the future of her children.

One of her sisters was most supportive and she would take the children on a Saturday so that Hine could study. Apart from that they did most things as a family and Hine ensured that the children were in bed by 7.00 pm at night so she could get on with her study. She had times where she kept wondering why she bothered, particularly as she climbed the ladder to success. It took a lot of hard work to understand and pass papers. She continued to work part time when she could.

At one point she got some relief work in the reception area of the hospital for a month and this was her first experience of working at something she was really interested in. However, she slowly realised that she needed to get involved in Te Reo so that she could really embrace the depth of the work she now knew she wanted to be involved in. Hine did her final year in social services and is presently a casual worker in the mental health area. Te Reo enabled her to be able to work with more than just one culture and this was really important to Hine.

Hine says her time at the Polytechnic taught her so much. She found her interaction with her own children changed as she encouraged them to make the best of their opportunities. She was driven by her will to see her children do well, but admits she did discover that while she can lead her children, she cannot always force them to do things the way she wants them to.

She singles out several tutors who encouraged and supported her throughout her journey and like Peti says she wishes she had been able to understand the library earlier in her studies.

Hine too has enjoyed her journey and continues to encourage her family to place a high value on their education.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of all these stories shows that the participants represent a variety of backgrounds, expectations, experiences and perspectives. While their tertiary education experiences were unique to them and therefore very personal, there were many commonalities. Many of the discussions with each of these participants followed similar patterns, but each had its own unique direction.

This chapter begins with a brief glimpse of each of the participants in order to remind the reader. It then goes on to examine the similarities and differences in their stories and look at the gap between their aspirations and the reality of their experiences.

PARTICIPANT MICRO SKETCH

PAULA

Paula is in her mid fifties. Born in New Zealand, her parents abandoned her when she was a young child. She grew up a ward of the state. Paula left school as soon as she was legally able, without any formal qualifications. She completed a Legal Executive Course in her early 20s. She worked in the legal sphere for over 25 years. At 50 she undertook a degree in Applied Information Systems. Paula lives on her own in her own home in rural Northland. She is currently a tutor in a tertiary institution.

Paula's story unfolded over three informal discussions which took place in her home. Paula was given a copy of the write up from the discussions and added several extra points to her story.

SAM

Sam is in his early forties. Born in New Zealand, his father left the family home when he was 12 years old. Sam left school at the first opportunity he could to take up a Glazier's apprenticeship. He was never happy being a glazier and had several career changes before becoming interested in Information Technology. In his thirties he gave up employment and undertook a degree in Information Technology. Sam is married and has three children, one of whom is at University. Sam and his wife have their own home. Sam currently works for a large Health Organisation in the Information Technology area.

Sam's story unfolded over one lengthy discussion at the home of a third party. A more brief second discussion also took place in the same setting. This was followed by telephone and email discussions to clarify some of the points that had been raised.

JEANNE

Jeanne is in her early fifties. She was born in South Africa, of English parents and came to New Zealand when she was four years old. Jeanne rebelled against the difference she saw in the rules for boys and girls. Jeanne left school at the end of fifth form with School Certificate and followed a career in the travel industry. In her late forties, after having been made redundant several times she undertook an Adult Teaching Certificate. Jeanne is currently employed by a Workplace Training Organisation.

Jeanne's story unfolded over three informal discussions sessions in my home. Jeanne then clarified several of the points that had been raised.

JOHN

John now in his early thirties, was born in New Zealand. His father was English and John and his family spent some time living in England when he was young. John left school at the end of the fifth form to do a building apprenticeship. As a result of working with youth and music in his Church group, he travelled overseas to work with disadvantaged youth in other countries. On returning to New Zealand he undertook a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Philosophy and Religious Studies, with a view to working with youth. John is now in his first year of teaching at a Catholic single sex boy's school in Auckland.

John's story unfolded from a series of informal discussion in my home. John wrote up his own reflections and these were clarified with him as I sifted through them during my write up stage.

MARY

I was born into a large Catholic family of Irish descent. I left school at the end of the fifth form and took up office administration employment. At 32 finding myself a solo parent with two children I undertook Teacher Training in Auckland. I spent the next 14 years teaching in various secondary schools, mainly in Northland. I then took up a position at a rural Polytechnic. Three years ago I became involved in the area of Workplace Education and training. During this time I decided to undertake a Masters Degree in Adult Education.

My autobiography had been written prior to this study and it was partly as a response to this writing and reflection that I developed the deep desire to comprehend what was happening around and within me. Having written up the four preceding stories I felt it was appropriate to include my own.

FOCUS GROUP ONE

Focus Group One took place in South Auckland in May 2004. The group of eight were employed by a large retail industry organisation. The venue was their training room, where they were comfortable in familiar surroundings. These participants were experiential learners involved in "Learn as you Earn" programmes that led to National Certificates. The group range in age from 20 to late 40. Maori, Pakeha, Samoan, Cook Island and Indian/Pakistani cultures were represented. The gender balance was 25% female and 75% male.

The discussion began with my explanation of what I was doing, particularly in relation to my thesis. This group were familiar with the evaluation of programme process but because of the added dimension I needed to ensure they were happy to proceed. The discussion flowed and the group were reluctant to end the meeting. All participants thanked me for taking time to listen to them and commented how good they felt about having taken part.

FOCUS GROUP TWO

Focus Group Two took place in West Auckland in June 2004. The group of six were employed by a large warehouse industry organisation. The venue was the company training room, where they were comfortable in familiar surroundings. These participants were experiential learners involved in "Learn as you Earn" programmes that led to National Certificates. The group ranged in age from 18 to 30. Maori, European, Samoan, and Cook Island cultures were represented. The gender balance was 17% female and 83% male.

The discussion began with my explanation of what I was doing, particularly in relation to my thesis. This group were familiar with the evaluation of programme process but because of the added dimension I needed to ensure they were happy to proceed. The discussion started slowly and this group were initially very shy about giving their views, but some hours later were

reluctant to bring the meeting to a close. Each of them thanked me and said how beneficial it had been to share information.

FOCUS GROUP THREE

What began as Focus Group Three, but evolved into three separate and unique stories, took place in Northland in July 2004. This came about because I had been contacted by Peti who asked if she and her two friends could contribute to my research.

The meeting took place in the home of a mutual friend in Northland. These Maori women were excited about being involved with me and spoke about never having been listened to before. None of the women had more than three years secondary schooling and all left school with minimum qualifications. We had all travelled some way to meet so the hospitality of our host was greatly appreciated. I was humbled both by the individual's stories and by the women's interest in my research.

GROWTH IN SHARING

All of the participants involved in this research have become special to me. We have shared too much for it to be otherwise. I am changed, I feel so much richer for having had this experience. I feel a deep respect for every one of them for sharing so much of themselves with me.

Sometimes dialogue is happy sharing:

But in the course of life there are those important and frequent moments when dialogue means conversion.

Because we have listened, because we were willing to let go the little world we had made for ourselves

Because we gained a new understanding of reality, we have become persons in a new way.

Our response to the word addressed to us helps us to make us who we are.

Cited in marg gilling

Where do we find our Meaning?, 1999:83,84

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Age Range	Gender	Schooling	Ethnicity	Key Facets
Paula	50s	Female	To 5th Form	New Zealander of Irish descent	• Abandoned as a very young child • Learned to be quiet and go unnoticed • Longed to leave school • Lack of self confidence masked by sunny nature • Not ambitious for self • Took up study as response encouragement from employer • Now single • Looked for new direction • Relied on self for support • Now involved in Adult Education • Passion for empowering others
Sam	Early 40s	Male	To 5th form	European	• Father left when he was 12 years old • Mother remarried – step father abusive to younger sibling • Ambitious about getting ahead • Felt social stigma in not having high level qualifications • Was encouraged to undertake study • Had total family support when going back to study • Found general lack of tutor support and guidance

Jeanne	Early 50s	Female	To 5th Form	English	• Born in South Africa of English parents
					• Happy childhood two parent family
					• Longed for freedom her brother had
					• Rebelled, perceiving different rules for boys and girls
					• Well travelled
					• Confident
					• Decided to retrain after several redundancies
					• Found support in study groups
					• Now involved in Adult Education
					• Passionate about people making the best of their opportunities
John	Early 30s	Male	To 5th Form	English/ New Zealander	• Happy childhood two parent family – father English
					• Lived some years in England as a child
					• Well travelled
					• Confident
					• Involved with working with youth at risk
					• Deeply spiritual, searching for meaning in life
					• Encouraged by friends to undertake university study
					• Had total family support
					• Found himself working to "what was wanted" by tutors
					• Now involved in Secondary Education
					• Passionate about making a difference in the lives of others

Mary	50s	Female	To 5th Form	New Zealander of Irish Descent	• Fourth child of eight, youngest daughter • Learned to behave and be quiet • Saw different rules for boys and girls • Very shy unable to see self, lived through others • Solo parent with two small children • Undertook Teacher Training at 32 • Passionate about empowering others • Moved to Tertiary sector to teach adults • Undertook Education Masters in early 50s • Now involved in the quality training area of education in the workplace • Has deep desire to effect changes in the education of adults • Passionate about empowering others
Focus Group One	20-40	25% Female 75% Male	Only one of eight went past 5th Form	Maori/Chinese, Pakeha, Samoan, Cook Island Indian/Pakistani	• Did not enjoy the "school" experience • Initial concern about ability to be able to achieve qualification in workplace • Found peer pressure difficult to cope with • Saw lack of understanding of career possibilities in retail sector • Saw support as being vital to success • Saw feedback as vital to feeling they had achieved something • Saw value of goals • Saw value in celebrating success • Enjoyed having their views valued

Focus Group Two	18-30	17% Female 83% Male	Left School At Legal Age With No Qualifications	Samoan, Cook Island, Maori, European	• Did not enjoy the "school" experience • Concerned about undertaking study – outside their experience • Had a real fear of failure and a lack of confidence in self • Saw lack of alignment with study and workplace tasks • Saw celebration of success as embarrassing – but acknowledged benefit of being recognised as having succeeded • Enjoyed opportunity to discuss issues as a group • Gained collective confidence in group
Mere	50s	Female	Gained School Certificate As Second Year Firth Former	Maori	• Bored with school – ignored parents dream for her future • Left home in teens, strong independent person • Experienced domestic violence in marriage • Solo parent with three children • Not willing to be benefit statistic • Wanted better life for children • Undertook Polytechnic study in late 40s • Felt like "a dumb Maori" • Found "institution" hard to navigate • Learned to ask for help • Found support from peers and specific tutors • Became role model for family • Now employed in Education

Peti	40s	Female	To Fifth form	Maori	• Loved school
					• Sent to Auckland after 5th form to do "Trades course"
					• Had difficulty finding position to suit qualification
					• Took IT course to be able to help her child
					• Motivated by Tutor to consider further up skilling
					• Found family and peer support
					• Would have benefited from better orientation
					• Was inspired by several tutors
					• Role model for family
					• Now employed in administrative role in Polytechnic sector
Hine	50s	Female	Left without qualifications	Maori	• Partner died, left with three children
					• In late 40s undertook Management Study at Polytechnic
					• Felt dumb, tried to go unnoticed
					• In laws disapproving of her decision to up skill
					• Found difficulty navigating the campus, particularly Library
					• Parents and sister died, promise to father made her continue
					• Driven by will to see better life for children
					• Saw need to know Te Reo - places high value on education
					• Found niche in social services
					• Singles out several tutors who encouraged and supported.
					• Now Working in mental health area

TALK & TEXTS – EXAMINING THE MATCHES & MISMATCHES

The literature on adult participant in education explores many relevant psychological and personality factors. However the research I have undertaken also acknowledges the social influences, both personal and contextual.

My intention in bringing together some of the common threads and raising issues about mature learners will also raise issues for the tertiary sector as a whole.

INCLUSION

Common to many of the research participants was the notion that they felt a lack of inclusion:

Habermas (1971) consistently and consciously placed individual and social learning processes at the core of his beliefs with his view that the full accomplishment of human individuation requires rational structures that permit "non-distorted communication" and concrete opportunities to exercise autonomy and responsibility. Habermas (1971) believed that while all institutions were educative, not all were true communicative learning communities. He encouraged asking whether the institution was truly enabling every human being to unfold their potential.

Knowles (1980) captures this lack of the ideal in relation to his framework describing how adults learn. One of the conditions he talks about is the learning environment, which he felt needed to be a place of respect, trust, helpfulness, physical comfort, respect for differences and had at its heart an acceptance of freedom of expression.

Lindeman (1926) was of the same mind.

This thinking echoes the experiences of some of the research participants.

It was a real culture shock - Í felt like a dumb Maori. (Mere)

They all seemed to know more than me. (Hine)

Nobody explained how the system worked. (Focus group two)

I worried that if I did okay to begin with and got promoted, I might fail after that. (Focus group two)

I didn't push it because I didn't have the confidence anyway. (Focus group two)

We trained ourselves to be invisible, we kept our heads down. (Paula)

I didn't really think I could do it. (Paula)

The tutors might just as well have been speaking in Swahili, because I didn't understand them. (Paula)

The institution serves it own needs more than the needs of the learners. (Paula)

The student centred organisation was a myth. (Paula)

The tutors were uncomfortable having me in class. (Paula)

They lectured over us. (Sam)

I was sure they would soon discover how thick I was. (Mary)

Everyone else seemed to understand except me. It felt like I was on the outside looking in. No one ever asked if I was okay. (Mary)

I soon learned to give them what they seemed to want. (John)

EXPECTATIONS

Piaget (1967) and Popper (1972) while holding some differing views, saw that no experience was free from interpretation, and that people sought to learn to make changes to their lives.

None of this group was totally clear about what their expectations were, but in seeking to make changes to their lives they clearly had an expectation they would do so.

I wanted to be able to give my children a good life. *(Mary)*

I did not want to become a long term benefit statistic. *(Mere)*
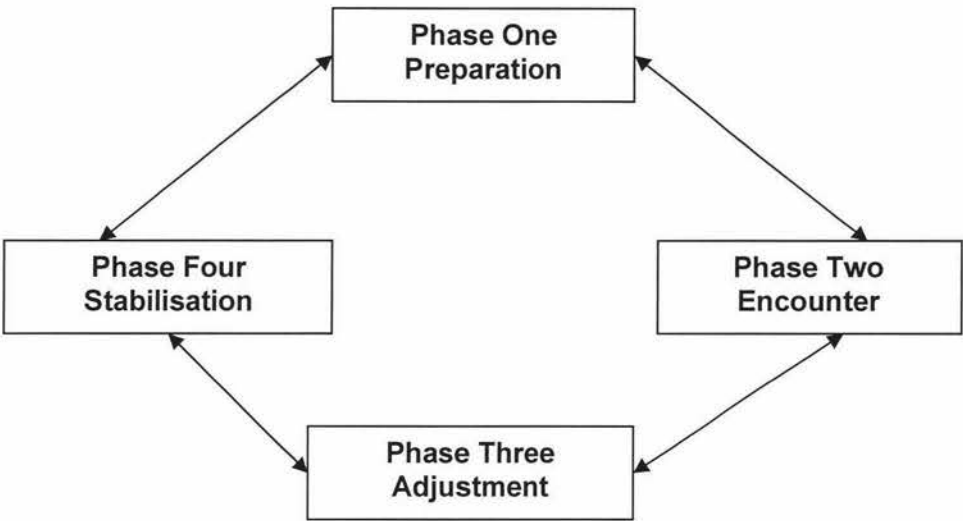
I needed to be financially secure. *(Paula)*

I wanted to feel like I was doing something more worthwhile. *(Sam)*

I needed to provide for my children. *(Hine)*

I wanted to work with youth. *(John)*

NAVIGATION, ADVICE AND UNDERSTANDING

In terms of navigating the system and understanding the processes and relating it to, Nicholson's (1990) Transition Cycle model can be used as follows:

```
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   Phase One     │
                    │   Preparation   │
                    └─────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────┐         ┌──────────────┐
        │ Phase Four   │         │  Phase Two   │
        │ Stabilisation│         │  Encounter   │
        └──────────────┘         └──────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Phase Three    │
                    │  Adjustment     │
                    └─────────────────┘
```

Phase One - Preparation, the stage of getting ready – is when the participants should have been gathering information about what to expect. The majority of these participants talked about the lack of knowledge, and wishing there had been better orientation processes. Most participants talked about their initial lack of ability to ask for information and incredibly, several completed their study *"without ever knowing what else went on in some parts of the institution."*

Pascarella and Terenzini. (1991) along with Upcroft and Gardner (1989) speak forcefully about the importance of a good orientation process that provides adequate grounding into every facet of life at tertiary level. Such a process would have made the transition a great deal easier for many of the participants of this study.

Phase Two – Encounter, this stage was more individual and wide ranging:

I learned to write what the tutor wanted. (John)

I decided to head for the finish line and give them what they wanted. (Mary)

The goal posts seemed to change along the way. (Sam)

I soon learnt what to read and what to leave out. (John)

I was deeply upset at having my experiences discounted as being never likely to happen. (Mary)

If the problem did not fit the system it was simply ignored. (Paula)

The system appeared inflexible and there was a perceived power imbalance. (Paula)

The backgrounds varied but were predominantly lower middle class, with feelings of being "*a poor relation*"; being abandoned and wanting to "*keep a low profile*" being the norm. All of the storytellers talked of an authority that somehow controlled them and of schools being places ranging from "*breeding*

a culture of bullies"; having to endure corporal punishment for very minor offences; and of feeling discriminated against because of "*being a girl*". All had a sense of place in both family and school life and saw different rules for boys and girls at that time. Being a boy was somehow a defence in itself, but girls were meant to be quiet and well-behaved.

ETHNICITY

Those of Maori or Polynesian descent more often felt discounted, they didn't fit, and they felt "dumb" and only just tolerated. Their culture and background was completely ignored, which made them feel like they did not exist, therefore they did not matter. However this was not peculiar to this ethnic group as some the same feelings were voiced by Paula and me.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

A number had strong religious backgrounds where there was a more heightened male-dominated way of life. Girls were meant to be "*dutiful and good*", while boys could "***be boys***". There was also some sense of having a need to contribute to humanity and to provide for others in order to find fulfilment in life.

All left school as soon as they were legally able. Some having done reasonably well; some leaving school with no qualifications at all. But all went directly into employment.

While all entered education as adults, the specific detail of the way in which each one re-entered the educational arena is interesting in its own right. For several it was partly as a response to a traumatic time in their lives, but for the others it was about ensuring that they kept up with employment prospects and ensured future financial stability for their family and themselves. For some it was also a sense of finding their place in the world and feeling as

though they did not get the best school education and wanting to rectify this and also keep up with their children in today's world.

What is particularly remarkable is the shared experiences of the educational process as adults.

The system, as many termed it, came under fire in many respects. There was very frank and open discussion regarding the worth of many of the tutors. Some of the experiences at the hands of the tutors was less than ideal. One experienced being *"put down" and "shown* up" and several had many of their life experiences discounted or dismissed. One spoke of the classes often being "*the pits*", and a "*real turn off*" and that "*you were lucky if you got one good class per semester*". There was what was perceived as poor planning with changing expectations and of boring lessons with little or no interaction.

THE ONES WHO CARED

However there was equally as much discussion about the people who made it all worthwhile. Most found one or even two really supportive tutors, and it was their ability to go the extra mile that kept the learners coming back for more.

This theme of having "*some one who cared*" came up over and over again. Paula responded to her employer's encouragement and had a sense of not wanting to let him down. I had an uncle as my mentor. Sam talked about one "*good teacher*" who showed he cared, and the one tutor at the polytechnic who did not have "*academic hang-ups*" and really "*could explain things*" and get learners motivated to keep learning and growing.

John talked of an older couple in his life who, enriched by their own adult educational experiences, encouraged him to take up the challenge of adult study. Jeanne talked of the Deputy Principal who encouraged her and the group sessions organised to keep them focused. Each of these people reached their decisions and arrived at their goals with the input of others.

They all shared the view that education is *not just about subjects – it's about people"*.

The bureaucracy came under fire at times and the criticisms included the lack of knowledge about how the place worked and the lack of anyone interested enough to do anything about it in terms of giving good and easy explanations to new comers. Some comments were made about the inability of *"the system"* to deal with any situation that did not fit the norm.

Paula used the closing down of the crèche at the polytechnic to show this point. She was also concerned at the way the institution timetabled lectures; she felt there was no consideration for mothers with young children, and the system often appeared inflexible and unfriendly to many. This gave a sense of a power imbalance for some and often robbed them of what little confidence they had.

In looking at the support structures for males and females there was a clear difference in what was experienced. The males in the group talked about the amazing support given to them by their families and how this enabled them to totally immerse themselves in their study and not have any other pressures to think about. This meant major sacrifices for the families but it was done willingly and without complaint.

Conversely, the females, while having some help with children, did not have this degree of support. They continued to have the expectations of wider family to take into account, and often this caused friction and pressure, despite the fact that the family was proud of their achievements. It would appear that the traditional patriarchal role perception and expectation is still alive and well in New Zealand in 2004.

The major recurring theme was that of the people who made it possible, and often these were people who had *"been there"* in terms of also going back into education as an adult too.

I am aware that most of my findings match those that have gone before me, but what I am at a loss to comprehend is why the system – the bureaucracy – has not changed.

In acknowledging that no matter what is going on "*out there*", an opportunity always exists for both growth and learning, I also believe that in many situations academic staff, that is those with the power to effect change because of their independence of thought and their inclination not to join the current band wagons, are particularly good at maintaining the status quo. I am not suggesting that this is not a good thing; rather I am suggesting that they learn to listen more generously before closing their academic ears.

READING THE SIGNS

So what could and should be done to address the issues that have been highlighted in every one of the stories presented in this thesis?

We are all acutely aware that the range of student diversity is increasing. We know that learners with physical and learning disabilities along with learners for whom English is a second language now have their needs considered. But very often that consideration is not backed up with adequate funding and so this just places extra demands on an already overburdened system.

Yet that very increased diversity, through this educational challenge, can enrich and strengthen the institution as a whole. This means though that those who are to meet these diverse needs are going to have to be openly educated and prepared to do just this. Those holding the power and the purse strings need to reach beyond the gate and welcome those learners who might not otherwise have considered entering the world of learning so closely guarded as it presently is.

While it is clearly obvious that adult learning has been affected by a redefinition of epistemology, knowledge constructs and ways of knowing, the future is still dependent on how these changes develop. Clearly the decisions made today shape that future. The future will to a very large extent depend on

our ability as adults to learn from each other, to jointly define and solve problems, and to communicate those solutions to one another in a way that we can adopt them and act on them. The stories in this study show clearly that the extent to which learning can occur in an adult is dependent in part on flexibility. If the system remains rigid, learning will be limited.

The reality is, education cannot wait for great people to come to support change for us, we must look to ourselves and expect that our own contribution, however minute, combined with the contributions of others, will be enough to make a difference.

Ghandi put it in very simple terms –

"We must be the change we wish to see in the world".

It will not be enough to simply open the doors of higher education a little wider; this does not of itself guarantee access for all.   Unless the range of support systems necessary to maximise the potential of all learners is well and truly evident and robustly working, the gate-keeping will continue as it always has.

There is no doubt that adult life is full of experiences that provide the potential for learning and that learning leads to growth and development and to an even greater capacity for learning. The South Auckland Focus Group findings clearly showed this. Such life experiences shape us and influence how we think about and value both ourselves and the world around us, yet the process by which we learn from life experience is difficult to capture, or study. We do know though that experience and learning are intricately connected.

The Focus groups provided another dimension – that of the treatment of young Maori, particularly women. To say I winced as the women in the Northland group told their stories would be an understatement.

Here were three able and intelligent women who grew up in a culture that told them they would never aspire above trades level. They each acknowledged that as they look back they see racism, but did not think about it in their youth.

All agreed that they are now stronger for having had to face their struggles which they say have been from within Maoridom as well as from society in general.

I know that I am not responsible for the cultural conditioning of Pakeha philosophies, beliefs, practices and processes, but could not help but be greatly saddened as I listened to stories that showed how severely inhibited Maori of this era were. I realise too how patient Maori have been in waiting for Pakeha institutions to adapt to their needs. I am pleased when I reflect that changes have been made, albeit slowly. A true bicultural or multi cultural society must include the fact that we must all be aware of the culture of those living side by side with us. I am absolutely sure that no one culture will ever have a monopoly of wisdom.

I am reminded of the Maori proverb –

"He aha tem ea nui o tea o? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata"

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, people, people.

For Maori the reality of the past was schools modelled on those of Victorian England, humanistic and Christian in development, based on the Christian ethic. Sadly this denied much of the rich cultural heritage of every Maori.

So much of the success of a school or institution depends on the climate of the school/institution. This climate should give all those it encompasses the pleasing feeling that they belong. This then gives rise to a commitment to be worthy of belonging. It promotes loyalty and an obligation to ensure that others share the pleasures and satisfaction of belonging.

The climate of the institutions the Maori women in this study attended did not always give them this feeling of belonging. There was either no orientation or, if there was, it was inadequate for their needs. They spoke about never ever knowing what else went on throughout the campus and of the library being a

place they approached with trepidation. They talked about not knowing how the system worked, who to go to, or how to handle situations that arose.

In their reflecting on what would have made a difference, the whole library experience could have been one where it was built into their classroom experience. If they had clear instructions and guidance, they could have put these to real use in locating material related to what they were studying. To give learners a brochure and generally point to different sections of the library proved grossly inadequate for these women, and it literally took them years to be able to navigate their way around the library so that it began to serve their needs as it should.

My experience and learning, along with many of the participants in this study, was largely in learning environments where there was an authority figure who took responsibility for almost every aspect of the process – what was done, how it was done and how it would be evaluated. There was also a great measure of control about who said what, when and to whom. So it is not hard to understand why the entrenched view of education is that it is an authoritarian based transmission of knowledge, skills, and to a greater or lesser degree, attitudes.

While there must be some accountability around maintaining of standards, providing a desirable and competent learning experience, the need to evaluate individual progress, and being able to certify and report results, the task is about how to maintain the necessary authority while at the same time not ending up with authoritarianism.

What is clear is that every adult enters into any situation with a different set of experiences from those of his/her childhood. For a child an experience tends to be viewed as something that happens to the child. The child identifies his/her self via external sources, such as who his/her family are, where they live and so on.

For an adult, his/her experience **is** him/her. So the adult is what the adult has done because the adult defines themselves to a very large degree by the

108

experiences had. There is very often a deep value placed on these experiences, so when a situation arises where the adult is outside his/her experience, then the sense of self worth is minimised. This too can also mean his/her experience appears to be rejected, and therefore he/she feels rejected. This is reflected again and again in the participant's stories.

The participants in my study know exactly what this rejection does. It is disabling and destructive, which is where I began my quest to understand why those with the power continue to allow this to happen.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE DIFFICULTIES AND MAKING SENSE OF THE MATERIAL

In analysing the rich data in the material I had gathered, I found it difficult to begin editing each story. Each one had an impact; each one stood out, cried out to be told. Each story was unique, having been born out of amazing and often traumatic events and the subsequent effects on individual lives were major.

I felt deeply immersed in the stories, partly because they were so representative of some of my own experiences. I was also concerned that if their stories were to be channelled through me, they would somehow become less powerful. I felt my work would not lend itself to a structured and positivist approach. Initially I found it difficult to isolate patterns and contrasts, and after a time I decided that I needed to paint a real picture that represented not just data (as this could be distorted) but to build links between that data in terms of the events that each person had to cope with and the way that education featured in their coping strategies.

I set out to examine the experiences adult learners coming back into education and why many felt "*dumb*" or that they "*did not fit*" and in doing so hoped that if I could highlight some of the issues and challenges, the

implications may be taken seriously in terms of raising awareness for future practice.

I believe my thesis has painted a picture that represents the bringing together of the stories of each of the people, and that it highlights the needs and the difficulties they faced, and also the significant achievements they had along the way.

In acknowledging that the research very much represents itself and that each of the stories is a personal one, I acknowledge that this has meant the findings cannot be generalised across all adult learners. It is difficult to estimate how typical this group would be, but it is reasonable to assume that the experiences are not unique.

While the data is a good view of this group, it cannot reveal everything, however it is in keeping with the stories as told to me over the months of field work and while the perceptions of the participants may alter as their journeys continue, they will always play a significant part in the person of each one of them.

What can be said to be clear in the data collected, is that the experience of other adult learners in other parts of the world is often quite similar. Much of the literature has had a quantitative approach, but that in itself assumes sameness among learners, and this is not the case. Each learner is an individual on an individual journey.

Each of these participants used their life experiences to deal with the challenges they faced. Education was a part of their coping strategy for each individual in each individual situation. These experiences were both similar and different to greater and lesser degrees which has made it difficult to arrive at defined conclusions. However it would be true to say that the learner's perception of the quality of some of their tutors was not positive; however they all had positive experiences in terms of finding "*the best class tutors*" over time.

A common thread to this "*best class*" analysis was that the tutor believed in them, was always positive towards them, validated their experiences and was never too busy to go over things in a different way if the student's understanding was lacking.

Another common thread was the passion and motivation each of these participants had on a personal level, and the amazing fact that many of them are now in roles where they are enabling others in a positive way. This speaks volumes for those who enabled them.

There are several other observable threads from the data as presented and these are that these adults think dialectically, that is rationalistically or in a rational way, they apply practical logic, they all know what they know and how they know it and they have the ability to evaluate their previous experiences.

The insights from the literature show quite clearly that much research has been undertaken and that some excellent theories have emerged, however such theories can only be useful if they are applied to learning, so that in turn this may influence the educators who educate. Such application is conspicuous by its absence to a large degree.

Habermas (1971) talks about institutions being educative but not necessarily communicative learning communities, and this was evident to varying degrees in every participant's experience. It was so easy to see the "*culture*" which Habermas (1971) called the "*stock of knowledge*" each had, that was used to understand the world, and the fact that the experiences of many did not give positive meaning to actions which gave less than positive identity reinforcement.

Both Piaget (1967) and Popper (1972), while having some differing views, agreed that no experience was free from interpretation, and that people sought to learn to make changes to their lives. This too was evident in the stories that unfolded in this study.

111

Knowles(1980), Kaplan (1973) and Miles (1993) all agreed that learning needed to be fit for the purpose, it needed to be able to foster comfort, respect, trust, and acceptance in people. This was lacking in many instances for these people. Zepke (2003) offered the connection theory and talked about the lack of such connection with peer and tutors, and this was echoed in the feelings of many of this group in that they felt the system dictated and that the individual was alone with no one really caring.

Lindeman (1926) and Knowles (1990) were definitely of the same mind that the student and the teacher had much to share and that experience is at the core of motivation to follow in learning that was self directing, fitting differing needs and providing optimal opportunities. Mutual enquiry was considered important, as was the fact that the idea of learning "subjects" no longer fitted.

Maack (1994), Stanworth (1983) and Edwards (1998) along with Maher (1987) offered similarity of ideas as far at the "old ideas" no longer fitting the adult learner identity. There were some differing ideas about the importance of role models but an agreement in general that role models made a difference.

The gender bias experienced by females gave rise feelings of guilt, while males felt less need to depreciate their abilities. Both Edwards (1998) and Maher (1987) saw women as part of the oppressed. Freire (1986) talked about women having a lack of self confidence and self esteem because of the male dominated system, so it is clear that these facts are well documented too.

Sinnott (1994) talked about the over emphasis on the IT and Science areas and the need to know self better first, which again would have been beneficial to most in this study.

Literature tells so much, but until it is applied nothing will change, at least not in any meaningful way for people like those in my study, who represent a good cross section of those who take up the challenge, for whatever reason,

and enter the halls of academia. I am heartened to know that the literature shouts the findings, but disheartened to see the slow pace of change.

Just as clearly, the challenge remains now, as it was found to be from the research of those before me, in adopting inclusive power sharing systems that enable everyone to learn and to grow.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS

THE TIES THAT BIND

We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot (Little Gidding 1942)

The feelings and experience of many of my participants are recognisable in the work of Zepke (2003), as he talked about the use of a sociogram, and the pattern of development which emerged. Those for whom the classroom was a comfortable space held the centre ground of acceptance while those who felt uncomfortable or who were noticeably different in some way to their peers, ended up on the margins. It was these marginalised people, he contended that had trouble connecting with their peers and the teacher. Although Zepke (2003) appeared to be applying this concept to the school setting, I believe it has application to every learning setting.

It could be argued that some people would deliberately choose to be in the margins, and some may not even be aware of their situation, many are aware of it, but feel powerless to change it. Like Zepke (2003) I am asking the question in the widest sense and believe that something can be done to change, what many people, and certainly many of the participants in this research, find as oppressive structures.

I must concur with much I read and believe that diversity is, and always will be, something to be celebrated as inspirational. The challenge is in adopting inclusive and power sharing systems that enable everyone to learn and grow in ways best suited to them.

Many of the participants in my research talked about *"being on their own"*, *"being misunderstood"*, *"nobody appearing to care"*, *"nobody ever asking how they were getting on"*. None of this group chose to be marginalised – the system made the choice for them.

In much of the literature that bombards our homes we are constantly reminded by politicians that in order to grow as a nation and take our place in the world, we need to be a knowledge-based economy, which indicates that it will be the application of knowledge that will sustain us as knowledge overtakes labour, raw material and capital in production processes. While there is good sense in realising that many jobs have become technologically complex and that more and more jobs are requiring a workforce that has more sophisticated work skills, it is also important to realise that the very same politicians have done little to prepare for this "knowledge economy".. That aside, the need for every adult to be knowledge able and trainable is paramount. This is evidenced in the increase in those seeking adult education and training.

In pondering the literature that looks back at the great teachers of the past such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Confucius, the Hebrew prophets and even Jesus in Biblical times, it is plain to see that these were teachers of adults and their concept of teaching was definitely not simply imparting information. Rather it was thinking through a process, often in the form of a parable or situation being described and the whole group working together to seek some sort of agreed solution. My mind explodes with possibilities when I think of the ways in which this could be so fitting in today's learning culture.

My findings and thoughts about the experience of all participants in this research, and the deficiencies are part of my challenge of the educational practices of many in education today.

As a teacher I can say that my own experience has seen me, in my teaching past, at the beginning of each semester, explaining to learners that I will learn as much from them as I hope they will learn from me. While this occasionally

saw some raised eyebrows, as the semester progressed they began to see my ideas unfold and came to learn that the class experience was a learning time for everyone, not just for an individual or at an individual level. It was this type of experience that some of the participants of this research extolled as being *"the best classes"* to be in.

The views of Knowles (1990) which have since been supported by other research and now constitute the foundation of adult learning theory, I find I can sum up to include the following:

- Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interest that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting point for organising adult learning activities.

- Adults' orientation to learning is life-centred; therefore, the appropriate units for organising adult learning are life situations, not subjects.

- Experience is the richest resource for adult's learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.

- Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.

- Individual differences among people increase with age: therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place and pace of learning.

I find this view widely echoed in the work of Parr (2000) who, as a returning college student from a working class background in the United Kingdom, identified with the barriers and past traumas of those she studied alongside. Her contention being that the impact of prior experience shows that previous definitions no longer fit the shape of the identity of adult learners.

I find Habermas (1971) consistently and consciously placing individual and social learning processes at the core of his beliefs. He uses the term *"culture"* for the stock of knowledge which communicative actors draw upon to come to an understanding about the world. He sees society as being the legitimate order through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity. Personality, he sees the competencies that make us capable behaving and communicating and so able to reach understanding and to assert our own identity".

This leads me to the finding that the interactions woven into the fabric of every communicative practice constitute the medium through which culture, society and person get reproduced. These reproduction processes cover the symbolic structure of the life world. So it follows for Habermas (1971) that all significant social events and processes are directly or indirectly manifest in the world and any adequate understanding of human actions must move inside the meaning people give to their actions – the interpretive procedure.

It is not difficult to realise or understand that no single person can every be fully aware of the way the *"background consensus"* is shaping their everyday lives, and therefore recognise the absolute fragility of the human person and of the responsibility of those who are in the *"educative"* roles in their lives – the power for both negative and positive impact is so enormous it is frightening!

Elaine Martin (1999) in her study into the changes in higher education in both Australia and United Kingdom, talks about the fact that central to student learning should be the knowledge that learners learn in different ways and the best and most productive and satisfying way occurs when learners take responsibility for their learning, and when they believe that their experience and their learning, matters.

Therefore any learning experience that is invalidated, for whatever reason, by those in the teaching role, as it was for some of the participants in this research, can only be destructive.

While new situations, experiences and times will always highlight their own paradoxes, change must be informed by the reality of day to day experience. The virtue of the past can only remain valid if it allows the growth of today and the demands of tomorrow to be met.

My findings also suggest that role modelling has its greatest impact before individuals attain adulthood and this was evident with the participants of this research, as they talked about people who they looked up to in their years of gowning up. But I also find that there was constant, and therefore significant, discussion about the teachers or tutors who also made a difference to their adult education years.

Maack and Passet (1994) seem to be telling me that identification with a role model does not guarantee easy passage. I agree with this finding but also find that it can lessen the sense of loneliness and help to aid the transformation process. In some instances in this research, the more appropriate term for the role may have been "support person", but whatever the title, what was clear was the recognition that often this person made the difference between going the distance or giving up. The fragility of this finding is a real wake up call that must be listened to more clearly in future.

I found too that other aspects of the research showed that for many people the drive or quest for knowledge was innate. For many it became a personal challenge, but often relied on the support of those who believed in them. For Paula it was never about *"academic subjects"* It was about Paula in the context of the meaning in her life.

In pondering yet again the fragility of Janet Frame (1983) struggling to find a bridge from her inner world to the outer world – I see these bridges being sought by everyone, to a greater or lesser degree. Sadly in some academic institutions the bridge is up and learners must navigate the moat without too many directions or real help.

Piaget (1967) believed that we develop cognitive skills in order to manipulate the world to our advantage, while Popper (1972) believed that we are

compelled to learn by our search for a coherent and complete horizon of expectations. While Piaget (1967) was centrally concerned with the growth of intelligence, Popper (1972), like other transformation theorists, focuses on the generation of knowledge. He held that all points of view are preconceived and no conscious experience is free from interpretation. I find agreement among transformation theorists that our efforts to understand the world, generate the continuous testing of our most fundamental assumptions, not merely the testing of our attempts to extend our knowledge. This should , I would hope, ensure a wealth of good research and subsequent application of such good research!

My findings show me that efforts to formulate theory about what we know from experience and research about the way adults learn have been under way for many decades. So I do find it has been an ongoing concern, however my quest to find what has been done as a result, is not easy to find. I can only confirm that while the research is prevalent, the documented changes are not.

Literature does tell me that after the First World War there was a greater push to understand the unique characteristics of adult learner, and from there the pedagogical model and the andragogical model of concepts have emerged.

The pedagogical model, designed for teaching children, assigns responsibility of decision making regarding content, timing, mode and evaluation to the teacher. Learners can sometimes play a quite submissive role. The andragogical model focuses on the education of adults and maintains that adults need to know why they need to know something, that they retain the responsibility of their own decisions, their lives have a greater readiness to learn, and they are more responsive to internal motivators than external motivators. Adults, it contends, enter the educational activity with a more varied and greater volume of experience than children, which of course makes perfect sense and is clearly evident in many of the stories in this study.

Knowles (1980) maintains that the pedagogical model is an ideological model that excludes the andragogical assumptions. The andragogical model is a system of assumptions that includes the pedagogical assumptions. The andragogical model is not an ideology. It is a system of alternative sets of assumptions, a transactional model that speaks to those characteristics of the learning situation.

For any theory of learning to be useful, it must be applied to learning and this in turn will influence the way in which the teacher teaches. My findings suggest that when teachers simply regurgitate information, this is rote teaching.

Teaching should promote learning – the process of how to think – not what to think.

In accepting that adults can be paradoxical learners and that they can readily draw on the rich fabric of their experiences, yet still find it hard to have to accept new thinking that challenges what they know already – I find that adult learners are not alone. The system itself finds it hard to accept new and other ways of thinking.

Several research participants recounted explaining something from within their own experience, only to be told *"no, this just does not happen"*. In several cases not only were real experiences discounted, but grades were also adversely affected. This did not validate individuals or their experiences and did not encourage thinking and debate. Rather it was dictating what to think, despite the life experience to prove otherwise.

The issue of equity was one that had surfaced for many of the research participants and this led me to look a little more closely at New Zealand history so that I could comment on this in the context of my findings.

During the first Labour Government (1935-1949) schooling was based on a liberal philosophy of a belief in the equal rights of individuals to compete for positions in social and educational hierarchies. Opportunities were to be

limited only by lack of ability or effort. Such views were based on assumptions about the naturalness of gendered curricula and the sexual division of paid and unpaid labour.

By 1989 Labour's gender equity policy decreed that both sexes should make informed choices on the basis of having experienced the full spectrum of curricular activities. The reality lags far behind the aspirations.

Participation in adult education is ever increasing and more women are taking advantage of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. They are also succeeding in subject areas which have conventionally been male choices. This growing presence of women has affected the curricular/course provision and teaching, learning and assessment practices, as it should. For any system to claim to be gender equal, it must cater for the needs of every learner. To do this it needs to take into account gender bias and teaching styles. It needs to ensure it enables learners.

In looking more specifically at women adult students, it can be seen they include those who have no formal qualifications, those who need basic education and self esteem building, as well as qualified women who wish to update or retain for future opportunities. Most of the participants in this research can be included in the first two categories.

Many such learners can be classed as educationally disadvantaged. Many left school early without adequate qualifications for a wide number of reasons. Stanworth (1983) suggests that such reasons would include the gender bias of subject choice available, or the bias of teachers who had been proved to favour the needs and responses of boys over girls, or the ethos of the school itself, which demanded concentration and study at a time when there were pressures to confirm to peer norms and choose friends over homework. Jeanne stands out as being one of those disadvantaged by gender bias.

I found some instances of the status of being an adult student having an unsettling effect on family and friends, but of also giving many adults an identity. *Edward's 1993* study in Ribbens and Edwards (1998) reported

121

learners feeling that study was self-indulgent, or that they would be found out as not being to achieve to the same level as their colleagues. But once the first few assessments and assignments were marked, returned and pondered over, they became the impetus to keep going. This was certainly true for Hine, Paula, Sam, Mere and me to greater and lesser degrees.

Edwards (1998) went on to say that many women felt a need to apologise for their work, commenting that it could have been better, while the men did not seem to need to depreciate their own abilities or worry about potential failure quite to the same extent. This reflects my findings in this study.

Lack of confidence, lack of support, confusion and hostility, all harm the possibility for success. Edwards (1989) contends that while participation in higher education may require a separation from family life, it may also allow women to seek peer affiliation or connection that can increase confidence.

Edwards (1989) also says that any women in any male dominated environments will experience expectations that are patriarchal. Male identity in many cases depends on the male/female role perception, and this will always mean that any woman in a situation of power, or in seeking to progress in any way, will be seen as a threat and may experience difficulty in relationships with some men. The reality is that the issues centre around men's perceptions rather than women's realities. This remains the case in educational environments where women's needs are often not considered.

My findings in 2004 cannot convince me that much has altered in this respect. We have certainly become more aware of the need for more flexible and better designed processes and strategies to encompass the needs of **all** in education. But awareness of itself is not enough. There must be real building on the strengths of diversity, knowledge and experience. While practice must change, so too must behaviour and the educational culture at every level. This will allow better response to the demands of the education of every individual and perhaps allow for better response to the labour market skills shortages in New Zealand.

My findings tell what education should be - not what it is. I agree with these findings and that we need to be open to all ideas, all methods of teaching and learning, and most importantly – our ability to work together.

Education is not about spending time and energy looking for ways to compete, we need to learn from each other. No one way has all the answers, but in these continuing times of both challenge and opportunity, we should be able to meet the needs of learners in a better way than we have done in the past.

Every adult in education has previous experience, both good and bad and that must be acknowledged and valued. Everyone should have the opportunity to grow and develop and be enabled to play a role in making society a better place. So many people who have so much to offer, as my research shows, have felt frustration with a system that did not serve them as well as it could have. Systems should serve the needs of people, not people serving the needs of the system. When this becomes the case systems become redundant and should be redesigned.

My own story has raised for me many issues from the numerous and complex collection of feminist educational theories. Maher (1987) in her liberationary model does not take as a starting point the notion that women have inherent qualities which mark them out as distinctive thinkers, but rather sees women as part of the oppressed who share a particular way of seeing the world and acting within it.

It also raises some aspects of the relational model as outlined by Freire (1972) which sees a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, and a feeling of diminished value in a mainstream society that is organised from a male-dominated perspective. Liberationary pedagogy can be characterised as a process by which individuals come to see and understand the structures which stand between them and what Freire calls being *"fully human"*, that is, unexploited and whole.

123

While I did not live in poverty, I was in a family and society where being a girl meant being good and behaving, not demanding or drawing attention to myself, while my brothers could be themselves - this was their defence for whatever they did or did not do.

I find confirmation of my thinking in my research which is one of the reasons I want to challenge the gate keepers of "academia." Who controls what knowledge is acceptable and why this is acceptable?

I acknowledge that in my role as an educator, the perceived expertise and position I hold, automatically confers power. However, as an adult educator, the goal must be to share the power and control. How do I, or any of my colleagues learn to do this?

Focus Group findings and Literature findings leave me still wondering why so many young people do not achieve and school. In looking beyond that, to when they come as adults to a tertiary institute to try to "make up" for what they lost, I see this is not always recognised and they are not necessarily given the basic tools with which to begin again. How can they build on what they don't possess? This is a recipe for failure, or at the very least a recipe for struggle and reason to give up.

Casazza and Silverman (1996) asked the question *"What is the purpose of Post Secondary Education?"* and went on to outline that Ezra Cornell, who was the founder of Cornell University, approached the professor responsible for admission decisions and asked why so many applicants were not passing the entrance exam. The professor replied *"they didn't know enough!"*. Cornell then asked why the university could not teach the students what they didn't know. The ensuing conversation uncovered the fact that the University would admit only qualified, prepared students.

It does not take too much imagination to see that the tension between democratic ideas and classroom reality still rages. The clear goal, in the time of Cornell, was to create educated elite who could lead the new society. As

124

for those who should attend – *"well qualified"* students at this time could be defined as *"males with the proper family background"*.

Fortunately we have moved on a little since that time. Foundation courses have been set up in many institutions to address the transition aspects of entry and re-entry to tertiary education. But the tension and argument still remain in terms of how to maintain standards while opening the doors to an increasingly diverse student body.

Sinnott (1994) suggests that one means of fostering the integration of cognition and emotion is to encourage the experiential, intuitive knowledge generated from direct, rich life experiences. Life experience is closely linked to adult learning. It provides a good basis for knowledge because it is direct and intimate. Experiences allow us to not only challenge our beliefs and assumptions but to know ourselves.

Sinnott (1994) goes on to say that an education system with an over emphasis on science and technology fails to help people better know themselves. Mastery of specialised knowledge and skills would not in itself help one to gain insight into self, or develop one's full potential, nor would it help one become integrated and wise.

Freud is reported to have said that *"maturity is the capacity to work and to love"*. The participants in this study were motivated primarily by their love of their families and friends as they engaged in learning to improve their lives and their futures.

WHAT DID I FIND?

The findings show that there has already been a considerable amount of research and exploration into the area of adult learning and the experiences of adults in education.

The research adds to this work from a New Zealand perspective and in so doing acknowledges the experiences of many New Zealanders.

The findings continue to raise questions and issues, as any research should ,and these include the following:

- Adult students do feel marginalised – despite the fact that much has been documented about marginalisation

- Adult students often feel nobody cares about them – despite what is known about the value of role models or mentors

- Good teaching is characterised by interaction – yet many continue to "lecture" in the same old way.

- Life experience is a vital component to a person's view of themselves and the world in general – yet in far too many instances it is discounted by academics in the system

- There are numerous ways of learning and teaching – but in many instances the mode of teaching remains traditionally narrow

- While the drive for success can be innate, the enablers along the way have tremendous power to evoke incredible achievement in others

- Theory is only as valuable as it can be in practice – this should influence the teacher to promote interactive practice more than is currently the case

- Equality means meeting each individuals needs – not dishing out the same measure and style to everyone

- A "good tutor" is a humble tutor

- There is acknowledgement that the systems are often lacking – yet changes are slow-

- This research has the capacity to make a difference

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education is about **be**-ing. There is so much more to education than education. Education is about learning and growing oneself and in doing so understanding others and the world around us.

Education is not just about using big words or writing thousands of complex sentences – it is so much more than that. It is about being and knowing in a thousand different ways.

Education is a journey that never ceases. If systems dictate otherwise they will serve only to stifle education.

Throughout this thesis I have considered carefully what has occurred and what researchers have had to say about such practices. I have seen the writings of many apply to the situations that have been presented. I have found much that is not as it should be and in order to come to a rational conclusion about where to from here, I have developed the following conclusions:

CONCLUSIONS

- Orientation and induction into the adult education environment was inadequate in many cases

- Second chance learners have few if any, research skills, and they may not understand library classification systems

- New learners often find conflict in the approach of the academic staff, who show interest in their progress, and the approach of management who expect them to fit into "the system";

- Often what tutors are attempting to do is undermined by administration staff and administrative procedures

- There is often no appropriate counselling help available within the campus, and outside referrals are out of the question for financial reasons

- There is often no process is in place to identify the foundation needs of those coming back into education without basic study skills, and, in some cases, minimal literacy and numeracy skills

- The size of an institution can cause apprehension and fear. Some leave without ever knowing what else goes on at the campus, or even where the nearest facilities may be

- Student experiences were not always valued and some instances were totally discounted

- Structures were not user friendly – time tabling of lectures was organised to suit the institution and/or the lecturers, not the learners and certainly not learners with children or other family needs

- There was little or no evidence of any mentoring system or any support and encouraging of learners

- Tutor interaction was often minimal; and students do not feel they are listened to or heard"

- There were instances of tutors being ill-suited for the subjects they "taught" and some instances of academics who had been in the system for a long time being out of date in their subject areas.

Furthermore, the success of these people was attributable in part to the few tutors that "cared" and "enabled" them.

These facts suggest that appropriate support for learners may be woefully inadequate. There is so much more contained in each of the stories that I want to keep reading and writing. However, the reality is that I cannot do that, but I can keep asking questions.

My research confirms that I am right to keep asking why we allow the system to dictate and wonder if and when we will accept that there are ways we can do things a lot better and be richer for it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Re-education of the educators – ensure everyone gets the opportunity to gain accurate insight into the emotional, spiritual and cognitive aspects of adults in education. This will help better equip educators to help adult learners through difficult periods of learning. Research has identified what should happen, now it needs to be put into practice.

- Give more emphasis to the peer support and mentoring structures that can be so positive in encouraging learners to share their private feelings, recognise they are not alone and take heart in belonging. This will better serve all needs and fit particularly well with Maori and Pacific Island cultures of belonging.

- Ensure that no learner experience is ever devalued or invalidated – this too will require some re-education of educators

- Ensure academic and administrative staff are student friendly, even when students don't fit pre-conceived profiles.

- Ensure learners are made aware of all the support services and that the services are more than 'lip services'

- Make library orientation part of first semester studies so that the library is a user friendly place from the outset of learning

- Consult learners about what they are doing and how they could be better helped to achieve their ambitions

- Value and openly celebrate staff who are true "enablers"

- Re-examine systems, particularly those that appear to serve the system rather than the learner

130

- Be seen to be learner centred as well as claiming to be learner centred

- Maintain the quality of learning and of the teaching environment

- Never assume anything

- Become learning communities rather than "places" of learning

- Where learners have family commitments, consider how best to help lessen any impact this may have on their learning.

- Listen, and truly hear the voices of all learners

This study represents a very small part of a very big picture of adult learners. The findings do suggest that some institutions are beginning to understand that these learners have a wide variety of needs. However, there is much room for improvement and also for a willingness to listen, to hear and to understand and to take action.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benseman, J. (1992). Participation revisited – who gets to adult/community education 1970-1990?. *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning, 20* (1), 11-20.

Boud, D. & Griffin, V. (Eds) (1987) *Appreciating Adults Learning: From the learners perspective.* London: Kogan Page.

Briar, C. & Cheyne, C. Women and Social/Economic Policy: New Feminist Agents For Changing Times? In Du Plessis. R. & Alice, L. (1998) *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa New Zealand – Connections and Differences.* Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of Meaning.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Casazza, M. E. & Silverman, S.L. (1996). *A Guide for Effective Practice.* New York: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education.*(5th edn.) London: Routledge Falmer

Cresswell, J.W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* California: Sage Publications Inc.

Davey, J.A, Neale J. & Morris Matthew, K (2003). *Living and Learning: Experiences of University after Age 40.* Wellington: Victoria University Press.

Du Plessis, R. & Alice, L. (1998) *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa New Zealand.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frame, J. (1983). *To the is-land: an autobiography - Janet Frame.* London: Women's Press

Freire, P. (1986). *The Pedogogy of the Oppressed.* London: Penguin.

Gilling, M. (1999) *Where Do We Find Our Meaning"*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Print.

Graham, H. (1993). *Hardship and Health in Women's Lives.* London Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Habermas, J. (1971). *Towards a Rational Society.* London: Heinermann

Hayes, E. & Flannery, D. D. (2000). *Women as Learners.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Jones, A. (2001) Difference and desire: Dividing classrooms. *Set 1. Life application Bible: The living bible.* (1988) Tyndale House Publishers.

Kaplan, A. (1973). *The Conduct of Inquiry.* Aylesbury: Intertext Books.

Knowles, M. (1980). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education, From Pedagogy to Andragogy.* Cambridge: The Adult Education Company. New York.

Lindeman, E. (1926) *The Meaning of Adult Education.* New York: New Republic

Maack, M. N. & Passet, J. (1994) *Aspirations and Mentoring in an Academic Environment.* Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Maher, F.A. (1987). Toward a richer theory of feminist pedagogy: A comparison of "liberation" and "gender" models for teaching and learning. In *Journal of Education,* 169 (3), 91-100

Martin, E. (1999). *Changing Academic Work – Developing the Learning University.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mies, M. (1993). *Towards a Methodology for Feminist Research.* In M Hammersley (ed). *Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice.* London: Sage

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.* London: Sage

Nichols, I. A.., Carter, H. M. and Golden, M. P. (1985) 'The patron system in academia: Alternative strategies for empowering academic women', *Women's Studies International Forum, 3. pp. 383-90*

Nicholson, N. (1990). The Transition Cycle: Causes, Outcomes, Processes and forms. In S. Fisher, & C.Cooper. (1990). *On the Move: The Psychology of Change and transitions.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Pascarella, E & Terenzini, P. (1998). Studying College Learners in the 21st Century: Meeting New Challenges. *The Review of Higher Education* Winter 1998. Vol21. (2). 151-165.

Payne, S. (1991). *Women, Health and Poverty: An Introduction.* London: Harvester wheatsheaf.

Piaget, J. (1967). *Six Psychological Studies.* New York: Random House.

Parr, J. (2000). *Identity and Education: The Links for Mature Women Learners.* Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Popper, K. (1972). *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach.* Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Ribbens, J. & Edwards, R. (1998). *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research – Public Knowledge and Private Lives.* London: Sage Publicatoins.

Ritchie, J. & J. (1978). *Growing up in New Zealand.* Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research – a Practical Handbook.* London: Sage Publications.

Sinnott J. (1994) *Interdisciplinary Handbook of Adult Lifespan Learning.* Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Stanworth, M. (1983). *Gender and Schooling.* London: Hutchinson.

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development.* London: Heinemann.

Stalker, J. (1996). New Zealand adult and community education: An international perspective. In Benseman, J., Findsen, B., & Scott, M (Eds.) *The fourth sector: Adult and community education in Aotearoa/New Zealand.* Palmerson North: Dunmore Press.

Strauss, A. & Cobin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* Newbury Park California: Sage Publications.

Taylor, K. B. (1995). *Adult Learning Routes to Tertiary Study.* Unpublished master's thesis. Wellington: Victoria University.

Te Puni Kokiri (2000). *Progress Towrds clsing Social and Economic Gaps Between Maori and Non-Maori – a Report to the Minister of Maori Affairs.* Wellington.

Thomas, D. (1995). *Flexible Learning Strategies in Higher and Further Education.* London: Redwood Books.

Tolerton, J. (1994). *Convent Girls.* New Zealand: Penguin Books.

Tolich, M. & Davidson, C. (1999). *Starting Fieldwork.* New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

Upcraft. M. Gardner, J & Associates (1989). *The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Learners Survice and Succeed in College.* California: Jossey Bass.

Wadsworth, Y. (1997). *Do it Yourself Social Research.* New South Wales: Allen & Unwin

Wilkinson, H. and Howard, M. with Gregory, S., Hayes, H. and Young, R. (1997). *Tomorrow's Women.* London: Demos.

Wilson, G. (1987) Money: Patterns of responsibility and irresponsibility within marriage, in *Give and Take in Families: Studies in Resource Distribution.* Eds J. Branne & G. Wilson. London: Allen & Unwin.

Zepke, N. Nugent, D. Leach, L. (2003) *Reflection to Transformation – A self-help book for teachers.* New Zealand: Dunmore Press.

Appendix One

Background information for the one-on-one discussions
INTRODUCTION INFORMATION

As you are already aware, I am doing a Masters degree majoring in Adult Education, through Massey University. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the research component of my thesis. I appreciate the time and energy and private information you are sharing with me. If you have any concerns at any stage of this process please feel absolutely free to withdraw or edit anything at all along the way.

FORMAT

The aim of my research is to examine the factors that led you to participate in adult education and your experiences in the access and delivery of such education.

In order to ensure I am interpreting your comments from the correct perspective I would like to ask you to share with me, as much as you are comfortable in sharing, your beliefs, your values, your family, your employment, the colours you like, and so on so that I can get a complete picture of who you are in the context of your participation in adult eduction.

At the same time I do not want to inhibit you in any way, so please understand that there is no right or wrong information. I will value everything you choose to share with me. I will confer with you during the writing up of my thesis to ensure that you are happy with the information it contains that relates to you. You will not be identifiable – we will discuss how your privacy will be protected.

After this initial discussion I would like to leave with you, a journal and a camera. We can agree about when we will meet again, and when I will seek the return of the journal and the camera.

The aim of the journal (though please feel free to use a keyboard, if this is easier for you) is so that you can take time to consider the questions I will pose in our discussions, and to enable you to write things as they come to mind, rather than try to remember everything at once. The camera has been supplied so that you can take pictures of people, places, or things that have been important to you on your educational journey. (you may already have pictures that you are prepared to allow me to copy as well). (*You may even want to include such things as letters to your children, or grandchildren about why you returned to education. Whatever way you want to tell the story, it will be perfectly acceptable and much valued*)

Once you have had the opportunity to reflect and collect your thoughts we will meet again and I will be able to show you how I have interpreted your initial discussion information and we will move on from there. You may have more information you want to add to the initial questions/discussions we had. I will then write up your material from your journal and the photographs and come back to you when this is completed so that you can validate/approve my interpretation of your story.

Appendix Two

Why have you decided to return to study? Is it necessity, eg needs to retrain; a job; professional development in an existing job, etc – gives me room to compare/contrast differences between the respondents when analysing the data.

then extrapolate that to the beliefs and values things.

- I would like to begin by discussing your beliefs and values and how they contributed to your decision to take up studying as an adult. You are free to tell me as much or as little as you want about the things in your life that influenced your decision and your participation in the adult education system.

- How do you think your beliefs and values led to your decision to become an adult learner.

- What were you studying?

- What support structures did you have to put in place so that you could study, eg, childcare, part-time work, support of employer.

- How did you cope? Why etc, etc

- Tell me about life as an adult student at ....

- Were the systems formal or informal? Need to ensure understanding of systems.

- How were things arranged so that you could get help if/when required? Be more specific – what sort of help do you mean? itemise different types of help, eg, to be able to enter adult study; learning support; family support; financial support, etc.

- What learning guidance was available? – do you mean tutorials; study groups; online access to tutor, etc. - examples as part of the question.

- What did students tend to do to help each other? Did they help each other?

- Did you feel helped or enabled by anyone, anything specific?

- Could you list the positive and/or negative aspects of your personal experience of adult study?

- Were there times when the system appeared to work against you rather than for you?

- So hindsight may suggest?

- What survival skills did you have to begin with, and what survival skills did you develop along the way?

- If you could change any aspect about the way you went about adult education what might that be?

- What about what the system (individual institution and generally) could you comment on any need to change to make it more student-friendly.

- If you could have input into changes that you feel could benefit people like you during your adult educational journey, what would these be?

- Who were the people who enabled you the most – during this time and in your life in general – can you give me examples of what these "enabling" people did.

- Were there people outside the education system who put up barriers, eg husband, parents, children …

- As an adult back in education can you tell me about the way people reacted to you? (both positive and negative reaction if possible)

- Would you like to comment on the outcome/s of your return to study, eg, got a job (good/bad/indifferent); personal satisfaction; no particular outcome; wish I hadn't done it/glad I did, etc.

- If you could single out one person, place, time, event that impacted on your journey, what would this be?

Note: The above list was kept by the author and in most cases was purely a checklist, as the information given flowed in a way that did not necessitate any great questioning, rather just probing for deeper or wider explanations and meanings.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this focus group. I really appreciate the time you have given up to do this.

It is important that you understand what the purpose of this group is, and that you feel comfortable about your part in what happens.

I am currently employed by your PTE, CTNZ and have been asked to look closely at the services we provide for our learners with an ongoing view to being able to continually improve our service to you.

I am also currently undertaking a Masters in Adult Education and as part of this I am interested in finding out not only how people learn, but in particular the things that enhance or hinder that learning.

So you can see that these two objectives fit well together and the information will be useful in terms of raising general awareness of those in positions of power to be able to make changes for the future.

I need you to be aware of the purpose and use of the material and information that I gather and so I can give you an undertaking as follows:

My ethical considerations are –
- I will do no harm
- This is voluntary participation
- I have informed consent
- I will avoid deceit
- I will ensure confidentiality or anonymity

I will not be identifying anyone by his or her name, I may with your permission give you a name, but it will be a first name only and not one that identifies you in any way.

I may include geographic, gender and age details but these details will be statistical only and will not identify individual people.

I will be happy to provide you with a copy of any information that I use in subsequent writing.

I ………………………………………….. understand and am happy to allow the essence of this discussion to be used for the purposes as outlined above.

Date: ………………………………