Costs, Compromises And Opportunities:

The Experiences Of Mature Women Students In Flexible Delivered Teacher Education

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Abstract

This case study research examines the factors that shaped the distance study experiences of eight mature women students who completed a three-year teacher education qualification through flexible delivery at a New Zealand tertiary institution. To obtain perspectives on their experiences as mature students, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women following their completion of three years of study.

The women encountered challenges in their dual contexts of study and family. Study was a cost to the women's family situations, particularly family relationships. The results convey the compromises the women made in their personal and academic spheres. Overwhelmingly the findings confirm personal and professional opportunities gained from the study experience, including positive outcomes for self and family. Support and connectedness generated new meanings for the women. Experiencing academic success, self-growth and transformation of identity were considered ultimate outcomes of the study experience.

This research enhances understanding of the intersecting aspects of family and study for women distance students. Recommendations have been made for addressing the specific needs and supporting the study experiences of mature women students.

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To the other people, particularly my professional colleagues who listened and guided my thoughts, I am grateful. In line with the messages conveyed by the women in this study I too encountered the constant juggle of study and family to complete this project. My affinity with the experiences of the women students provided a constant reminder of the dual realms of women students' lives, that of study and family.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The mature woman student who returns to education is typically profiled as motivated, resourceful and determined to succeed in her chosen course of study. The home and study domains of the woman distance student are inextricably connected in a context that is manifestly different to that of her on-campus counterparts. These dual realms often generate unanticipated challenges and unexpected outcomes during her study period.

This study addresses eight mature women students' experiences as distance learners in an early childhood teacher education degree qualification. This research illustrates how a group of women calculated the costs, managed the compromises and captured the opportunities of the study experience. The women are often referred to collectively as a group, but the uniqueness of each woman's situation is an important factor in appreciating their experiences. Note: the term flexible learning (as describes the delivery model of the institution under study) is inter-changed with the term distance education throughout this study.

Developments in Distance Teacher Education

Changes in New Zealand tertiary education policy and new funding arrangements aimed at maximizing student participation in tertiary education have impacted on developments in distance delivery programmes. Flexible delivery and distance learning were identified key strategies reported in the Tertiary Education Sector Profile & Trends report in 1999 (Ministry of Education, 2000). The 1990's had signalled a period of development and consolidation in teacher education, with the advent of new higher-level qualifications, and an extension of these into a variety of (distance) flexible delivery programmes. The women in this study entered a teacher education programme at a time of expansion in the institution's existing delivery models.

The Flexible Learning Initiative in Early Childhood Teacher Education

In the late 1990's, following the implementation of a 3-year degree qualification in teacher education, the institution in this study developed flexible learning programmes for its primary and early childhood teacher education students. It aimed to provide teacher education for students who were not in a position to enrol in on-campus programmes at the institution's main campus. The institution considered the new development in distance education fulfilled one of the institution's strategic goals, "if it is to serve its students by 'pursuing excellence in all aspects of teaching and learning' [Strategic Plan 1998-2000, Goal 1], and to maintain its leading status in an increasingly competitive environment" (Delta College, 1998, p. 3).

The early childhood division of the institution considered the extension of an existing on-campus teacher education model into flexible delivery to be an important market initiative. The new programme was introduced in a geographic region where some early childhood services were not staffed fully by trained teachers. Several women in the study were employed as untrained workers in such settings. The enrolment benchmark for this flexible delivery programme was established at a minimum level of approximately 15 enrolments for the initial student cohort.

Early Childhood Flexible Delivery Programme Structure

Programme co-ordination was delegated to an academic staff member and professional guidance in course design and delivery was provided to lecturers.
The three-year full time study programme required students to complete on average, 40 hours per week in study. The flexible delivery course schedules and timetables matched those for on campus delivery. Delivery models incorporated distance study modules and regular face-to-face class sessions. Additionally, students attended three-day block sessions at the main campus during one term break in the first and second years of study. The initial fortnightly and subsequent monthly face-to-face sessions were designed to minimize student isolation and enhance learner and lecturer interaction. The scheduled monthly contact sessions and teaching placement visits also ensured regular guidance and supervision of the students' professional development.

As far as practicable the students were placed in their geographic area for the required (six) teaching experiences. However, due to the limited number and range of

early childhood centre settings in their immediate vicinity, the students were encouraged to shift temporarily to another region for at least one of the teaching practice experiences. Several women travelled considerable distances from their homes for up to five consecutive weeks of teaching experience.

The management of student enrolments, assignment distribution, and provision of institutional support services were centralized in the institution. Additional services were managed by the respective flexible delivery teaching sectors. Specific institutional systems were structured to support flexible delivery operation. The 0800 phone line and e-mail service provided access for academic, administrative matters and a range of support services. The institution's off-campus regional sites provided additional facilities and resources and one of these regional sites was the scheduled meeting place for the students in this study.

The Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the impact of experiences encountered by a group of women enrolled in an early childhood teacher education flexible learning programme. This study will contribute to the existing knowledge of mature women students' distance study experiences and will also introduce new material pertinent to distance education teacher delivery.

The main research question asks: what are the experiences and perspectives of a group of mature women students undertaking a teacher education qualification by flexible learning?

The following questions support the main research question:

- How does a flexible learning study programme impact on mature women as a client group?

- What factors are most likely to influence the women in undertaking their study?

- How do women's public and private realms relate in a flexible learning study programme?

- How does the experience shape women's identity?

- How can this research inform an institution's flexible learning (distance education) practices?

Background to the Research Topic

My interest in this topic evolved from my association with mature women students in a teacher education programme, experience as a mature student learner and subsequent personal interest in the issues many mature women encounter during the course of their studies. Through such associations I became interested in profiling the experiences of a group of mature women who demonstrated remarkable tenacity to succeed in their chosen course. In my experience, the characteristic scenario is a woman striving to complete her studies amidst pressures of differing intensity.

As a mature student undertaking distance education, I also had first hand experience of this study mode. Therefore, I shared a personal affinity as well as a professional relationship with the women in this study. In a similar style to Parr's (1998) research on mature women students, my approach to this research evolved from both academic and personal underpinnings.

Specifically I was interested in ascertaining the interplay between public (educational) and private (personal) realms of women's experiences as mature distance students in a particular socio-cultural context. This study is about a set of conditions and events that brought about change for each woman. In conveying the women's stories, their experiences are conceptualised and made visible to others.

Summary of Research Chapters

Chapter 2 reviews the international and New Zealand literature on mature women students, and discusses the scope of literature that contributes to knowledge and understanding of mature women distance students. The literature highlighted the issues considered in this research.

Chapter 3 addresses the theoretical underpinnings of this qualitative case study research, describes the methodology, introduces the participants and outlines the relationship and role of the researcher and participants. Ethical procedures and considerations are explained.

Chapter 4 presents the data gathered from the interviews with eight mature women students. Introductory information outlines the women's personal and education backgrounds and employment experiences, their reasons for study and their expectations and aspirations. The results are reported under key themes from the interviews: study and family, managing roles and study, support, connections and connectedness, time and space, fulfilling institutional requirements, academic outcomes and identity.

Chapter 5 focuses on analysis of the results addressed in Chapter 4. The themes identified in Chapter 5 are considered within the study framework of costs, compromises and opportunities.

Chapter 6 discusses the implications of the findings in relation to the research questions. Recommendations for institutions are considered. The limitations of the study are addressed and recommendations for further research proposed. A major conclusion draws the study to a close.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Mature women students' experiences in higher education are distinctly represented in the contemporary literature. The emphasis in the literature pertaining to characteristics of women's study experiences and personal lives enhances understanding of the factors operating in their study contexts.

This chapter addresses the range of issues in the literature pertinent to mature women's experiences in tertiary education. The review will commence with an introduction to mature women students in the tertiary context, and then consider issues and perspectives pertaining to their dual roles in family and education. This review specifically addresses the available literature applicable to teacher education and distance education. Due to limitations of research in the field of distance education, it is necessary to draw from a range of studies to illustrate points of general relevance in regard to mature women's educational experiences. Many of the issues for mature women students are considered to be similar irrespective of their study mode. However, as this is a study of relevance to distance education, the distance learner's study context is the prime area for focus and comparison. The review concludes with a summary of the key issues raised in the literature.

The Mature Woman Student in Tertiary Education

This section identifies the circumstances of the mature woman student who re-enters education as an adult learner. It also addresses literature pertaining to mature students in New Zealand tertiary education.

Mature adult students are an established feature of diverse student populations in tertiary institutions. Literature utilizes a variety of classifications of adult learners. They are profiled as mature students, re-entry learners (Tittle & Denker, 1977), non-traditional learners (Cross, 1981; Scheutze & Slowey, 2000), or as adults seeking

'second chance' education, usually following a significant break from formal study (McLaren, 1985; Giles, 1990). Although there is some variation on age definitions of adult learners, many studies consider mature students as those aged 25 years or older (Apps, 1994; Paase, 1998; Davey, 2001). There is no common agreement in the literature regarding the characteristics of mature students because of their diverse backgrounds and experiences. However, historically women feature as an under-represented and disadvantaged group of returning students, compared to their male counterparts (Roehl, 1980; Acker, 1984; Faith, 1988a). Accordingly, attention is given in the literature to addressing inequalities in women's study experiences.

The pioneering studies of Cross (1981), Acker (1984, 1995) and Faith (1988b) advocated qualitative methodology in researching women's education experiences. This methodology suited the focus on describing women's access, participation and educational experiences in higher education. Cross (1981) advocated an interactive approach in analysis in contrast to an identified piece-meal examination of women's education experiences. The interactive approach strengthens many subsequent accounts of women's education experiences (Grace, 1991; Karach, 1992; Hayes and Flannery, 2000).

Mature Students in Tertiary Institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section summarizes patterns of mature student enrolments in tertiary study in New Zealand, and provides background information on mature women's access to higher education.

Adult learners' educational opportunities are enhanced when endorsed by appropriate government initiatives. In line with international trends, New Zealand government policy recognises the socio-political and economic advantages of life-long learning (Scheutze & Slowey, 2000). The significant policy changes implemented under the 1989 Education Act and release of the Learning for Life document (The New Zealand Government, 1989) signalled new intentions and developments in the tertiary sector's operation in New Zealand, including a commitment to improving the participation of non traditional learners in tertiary institutions. The 1989 Education Act intended to improve the lower rates of participation in tertiary education by under-represented groups, including women.

Participation statistics from New Zealand's Tertiary Education Sector's Profile and Trends report indicate that in 2000, "nearly half of the formal students enrolled in tertiary education were aged 25 or older" (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 9), with data indicating that "women's participation has surpassed that of men since 1993, and in the past seven years the gap has been increasing" (ibid, p. 21).

Although the New Zealand education reforms of the 1990's aimed to enhance participation of non-traditional learners, Boshier and Bensemann's (2000) report on the development of the New Zealand's tertiary education sector suggests that the ideology of life long learning was not matched by what eventuated in a competitive market. According to Boshier and Bensemann, although government commitment may have enhanced women's access, high user-pays study costs negate the intended government ideology of life-long learning.

Other literature reports on similar issues. Scheutze & Slowey (2000) analyzed contemporary changes in higher education policies across 10 countries in line with the policies and developments that were implemented to support non-traditional student enrolments. Several concerns are highlighted. They question the premise of increased participation by under represented groups and identify institutional policy changes as being more pronounced in the less traditional or newer institutions offering tertiary study to a more diverse group of students than in the more traditional or elite institutions. The authors also question the extent to which institutions have modified their structures and systems to accommodate mature students' needs.

Developments in Early Childhood Teacher Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section introduces the context of early childhood teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand and profiles distance teacher education in this country.

May's (1999) paper illustrates the developments and outcomes of the decade subsequent to the release of two key documents of significance to early childhood education; Education to be More (The Meade Report, Department of Education, 1988a) and Before Five, (DOE, 1988b). May's examination of early childhood political issues traces challenging developments in early childhood services. Training developments

also come under scrutiny, and May's views on quality training highlight the impact of policy outcomes on teacher education programme developments.

During the 1990's a few New Zealand studies addressed characteristics of teacher education experiences. Renwick & Vize (1993) studied the relationship between teacher education and life experiences in a group of primary trainees in colleges of education. Middleton & May (1997) investigated the teaching experiences of early childhood and primary trained students and teachers, providing a historical social overview of training and teaching experiences. In-depth studies on experiences of women early childhood teachers in New Zealand appear limited to the research of Bethell (1998). Moreover, few in-depth qualitative studies on early childhood teacher education in New Zealand appear in the literature.

The Context of Distance Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

A small selection of literature addresses the distance study experiences of mature women students in tertiary settings in New Zealand. The existing literature is predominantly university based, with a few studies centred on teacher education contexts.

New Zealand literature addresses similar themes to international studies: expectations of novice distance students (White, 1997), theory and principles of adult teaching and student learning (McLachlan-Smith, 1998), motivation factors (Taylor and Webster, 1994), and issues relating to supporting students (McCahon, 2000). Some literature profiles contemporary developments and challenges for teacher education distance delivery, evidenced in writings addressing the integration of educational technologies as a feature of contemporary distance education (Anderson & Simpson, 2002).

Although several New Zealand studies focus on the educational needs of returning students, only a few studies specifically address women's experiences in distance education. White's (1997) study provides insight into expectations and perceptions of novice distance learners. From interviews with 18 prospective learners enrolled at Massey University, six domains of expectations were identified as the basis for further investigation. These matched students' views on prior learning and their

perceptions of advantages and disadvantages, including strategies for success and control in their studies. Phase two of the research compared 23 novice learners and 26 experienced learners' perceptions of distance learning success and control. The findings from this study suggest that initially novice learners depend on external factors to support their transition into distance study, but over time they develop internal control. Although White's review provides a preliminary insight into transition processes for novice learners, it does highlight some key factors that impinge on students' learning experiences. One limitation of this review is the inconsistent differentiation and analysis of gender-specific views.

McLachlan-Smith's (1998) paper explicitly addresses the teaching and learning needs of adult distance education students enrolled at Massey University. From an analysis of student evaluations McLachlan-Smith ascertained students' perceptions of the teaching and learning dialogue they experienced as adult learners. McLachlan-Smith discussed the factors that impacted both positively and negatively on the teaching and learning relationship between the adult student and teacher. Her findings suggest several factors pertinent to effective instructional design, approaches to lecturer feedback via assessment, suggestions for consideration of student workload and administration. Although McLachlan-Smith provides relevant anecdotal evidence from students' direct experiences, and a theoretical framework for considering the teacher-student dialogue, the overview is, as the author suggests, an introductory paper. It does not elaborate on the profile of adult student participants, numbers, institutional faculties or courses.

Very few international studies report on the distance learning experiences of mature students in teacher education programmes, and New Zealand studies are also limited in this area. However, studies undertaken in colleges of education in New Zealand give some insight into the distance learning experiences of teacher education students (Delany and Wenmoth, 1998, 2000; Anderson & Simpson, 2002).

The limited available literature on New Zealand studies indicates many issues encountered by students are similar to those of their international counterparts. From a teacher provider perspective Delany and Wenmoth's (1998) paper to the DEANZ (Distance Education Association New Zealand) conference outlines a survey undertaken with a group of 118 Primary Open Learning Option, (POLO) students enrolled across

three years of study at the Christchurch College of Education. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the students' motives and perceptions of their training experiences. Delany and Wenmoth applied quantitative and qualitative methodology through obtaining profiles and administering surveys to the 118 students, which included 12 males. The findings illustrate students' differing reasons for choosing distance study. The particular study option allowed for lifestyle flexibility and opportunity and met students' specific learning style preferences. While there is some reference to implications for the institution involved, the authors address students' experiences, not institutional responses. However, the paper provides a useful preliminary insight into stakeholder needs in distance teacher education.

Further to their 1998 study, Delaney and Wenmoth's (2000) paper considers issues faced by a small group of (predominantly) women teacher education students. The authors addressed anecdotally the challenges and opportunities experienced by a group of 14 third (final) year mature women and one male studying through POLO in the Hokianga area. The findings highlighted the classically documented dual challenges facing the women in managing study and family responsibilities. However, the authors highlight features of the women's growth and contributions to their community as an outcome of the study experience. The paper affirms the importance of tailoring institutional practices and course delivery approaches to meet specific stakeholder needs. Furthermore, this paper sheds insight into cultural contexts of distance education students, a perspective that is not prevalent in the New Zealand literature.

Contemporary distance education institutional practices in teacher education in New Zealand are addressed in a paper by Anderson & Simpson (2002). Anderson and Simpson's case study illustrates the background and contextual operating factors for Massey University's teacher education distance delivery programme. This institution has a firmly established tradition in distance education, and the authors' address issues relevant to contemporary delivery models and the identified needs of the students enrolled in a teacher education programme. Their discussion addresses delivery challenges in meeting client group and market needs, and highlights implications for effective institutional planning in the technological world.

Despite the developing focus on teacher education programmes generally, a discernable gap exists in international and New Zealand literature specifically relevant to early childhood teacher education students studying through distance delivery.

Issues for Women Students and Their Education

This section considers the literature addressing issues pertinent to mature women students' involvement in education. Studies applicable to distance education are considered in the context of the wider literature on mature women's education experiences.

The international literature reports on the diversity of academic and personal experiences of the mature woman distance student. However, there are fewer comprehensive qualitative studies related to distance education than accounts of mature women's educational experiences in general.

A critical review by Grace (1991) provides insight into gender issues identified for women in distance education in the 1990's. From a feminist stance Grace addresses a selection of women's inequities and achievements portrayed in research to date. She distinguishes and discusses issues of women students' participation and curriculum and addresses teaching and learning approaches. As an overview, Grace's critique imparts the essence of subsequent issues that are addressed in literature of the 1990's.

Challenges and Barriers to Study

The range of literature addressing challenges experienced by mature woman students is discussed and issues pertinent to the distance learner's context are considered.

The barriers encountered by women students undertaking study are an established feature of discussion in the literature (Cross, 1981; Sperling, 1991; Bhalalusesa, 2001). Burge (1998) cautions however, that barriers are documented with depressing regularity. A number of authors distinguish the barriers encountered by students as institutional, situational and psychological or psychosocial (Holliday, 1985; Apps, 1994; Barratt, 2001). New Zealand literature affirms the barriers encountered in a woman student's transition to study, family and study, institutional issues and financial

costs match those documented in international studies (Miller, 1993; Ash, 1999; Barratt, 2001; Davey, 2001).

In one New Zealand study addressing the difficulties encountered by mature students, Ash (1999) identified five areas of challenge for the students pertaining to issues with home and family, career, finances, study skills and support. Ash also addressed the links between stress and coping. Her findings illustrating the major issues for students related to prevalent themes of home and family, financial costs and study skills are similar to other findings internationally. Ash proposes several practical recommendations for institutions and policy makers to support students' requirements.

Davey's (2001) New Zealand project on 959 older students at Victoria University revealed the most common barriers to study were linked to time demands of family and work commitments, identified predominantly by the women in the project. This project highlights several differences in barriers expressed by students from diverse ethnic groupings, particularly with respect to personal factors such as costs and study skills.

Literature reports that although many women students experience similar barriers irrespective of their study mode, distance learners encounter context specific barriers in their studies (Furst-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001). From focus group discussions with 40 returning adult students (20 participating in face-to-face interviews and 20 in 'virtual' focus groups), Furst-Bowe & Dittmann's qualitative study in a Canadian university reported a range of issues for women. The most commonly identified barriers to women's learning were structural hindrances to effective learning, and expressions of 'disengagement' as result of poor course design. Furthermore, the women's identified needs replicated issues arising in earlier studies: institutional support, contact with other students, technical assistance and specific student-teacher communication systems. This study provides a constructive critique of distance delivery models that utilise a range of technologies for course delivery.

Another study providing insight into the New Zealand tertiary context is the research undertaken by Barratt (2001). Barratt focused on the impact of government funding policies on the educational experiences of mature students enrolled at Massey

University. Barrett surveyed a range of issues pertinent to mature students' study, including barriers or difficulties encountered, provision of assistance and the impact of actual 'costs' involved in studying. Barratt identified academic, domestic and financial barriers. The women were more likely to experience difficulty in meeting both the financial and personal costs of study, due to reduced employment and childcare costs. The more commonly expressed issues were family demands impacting on women's time and meeting the costs of study. Barratt's research confirms the issues encountered by students in the context of tertiary education in New Zealand are similar to their international counterparts.

Although the literature addresses a range of commonly described challenges and barriers to study, qualitative studies addressing similar themes for women in distance education in New Zealand appear relatively scarce.

Motivation and Persistence

A range of international literature considers aspects of mature women students' motivation and persistence. Commonly the issues addressed pertain to: women's motives for returning to study, the effect of motivation and persistence on study (Scott, Burns & Cooney, 1998; Davey, 2001), factors that motivate students through the various phases of study (Grace, 1994; Taylor and Webster, 1994; Kaziboni, 2000), and the relationship between persistence, course completion and attrition (Jacobs and Berkowitz King, 2002). Another perspective studied is the development of the distance learner's self-concept (Gibson, 1998). Literature also confirms that when an institution provides appropriate, meaningful support, students' motivation levels are more likely to be sustained (Kirkup & von Prummer, 1990; Scott, 2000).

Both New Zealand and overseas literature suggest that as well as seeking qualifications, women's desire for psychological and personal fulfilment and personal interest are significant motivators for women to engage in study (Grace, 1994; Taylor & Webster, 1994). Findings from several studies suggest women's tenacity in persisting with their studies is often driven by intrinsic motivation and a drive to succeed 'against the odds' (Spanard, 1990; Miller, 1993; Grace, 1994; Scott et al, 1998; Peters, 2000; Furste-Bowe & Dittman, 2001). Motivation, determination and persistence are

characteristics considered synonymous of mature women students in general (Cross, 1981; Miller, 1993).

Miller's (1993) paper addressing her New Zealand research of adult women students enrolled in an on-campus university transition course provides insight into factors of students' motivation and determination. Miller positions her paper around educational policy changes of the early 1990's. Findings from an initial questionnaire and subsequent in-depth interviews with 12 of the original women illustrated their determination to manage study 'against the odds', coupled with the motivation to search for new knowledge, focus on a change in direction and engage in personal and self-development. The women's anecdotes confirm that issues encountered by returning women students in New Zealand match women's study experiences in other international findings.

A related issue is ascertaining the effect of personal contexts on women's motivation (Grace, 1994; Scott et al, 1998, Scott, 2000). Grace (1994) examined the motivating factors of 17 male and female distance education students at a Queensland University. Her findings illustrated that students' motivation was contingent on them being legitimized and supported by significant others in their study contexts. In sustaining their motivation, Grace ascertained that women students' success rates "compare so favourably with those of men in spite of the structural, cultural and psychological obstacles to be overcome, (which) suggests a very strong motivation associated with desire for change" (ibid, p. 20). Women students were strongly motivated to succeed and focused on overcoming a variety of obstacles (structural, cultural and psychological) as distance education students. The women students' anecdotal accounts illustrate the residual power of gender as a factor impacting on women's attitudes and motivation to succeed in their studies.

Scott, et al (1998) reported on differences in motivation between 118 mature women continuing education students with children who had discontinued study, and 117 women graduates who completed a course of study. The variables considered were family, age, relationships and the women's previous study experiences. Their findings showed little difference in motivation between women who completed and those who discontinued study. Scott et al concluded that despite difficult personal circumstances

the women maintained high levels of motivation. However, it was the variations in their personal circumstances that contributed to women's success in their studies. The authors offer a caution in predicting study success being based solely on motivation. They concluded that personal circumstances might affect the likelihood of graduating rather than motivation alone.

Another factor under study is that of educators' roles in supporting the processes of distance learners' academic self-concept. Gibson's (1998) review of research and viewpoints is supported with anecdotes from students' experiences. Gibson illustrates the process of students' adjustment to the learning context as an evolving academic self-concept. She identifies enhancers and detractors operating in the distance learner's environment. Gibson links the students' experiences to institutions' responsibilities to minimize barriers to learning and maximize learner success. Her overview of strategies could be applied to educational settings generally. Gibson's references to research, inclusion of a variety of students' perspectives, coupled with recommendations provides a constructive overview of factors impacting on the development of students' academic self-concept.

Despite the attention in the literature to characteristics of motivation and persistence in general, few studies explore in depth the range of factors impacting on mature women distance learners. However, some attention is given to these aspects as associated features of the distance learner's study experience.

The Public and Private Worlds of the Woman Student

This section summarises the literature portraying the mature woman student in the potentially dichotomous (public) worlds of the institution and the (private) world of family. Specific attention is given to these competing dimensions of women's social contexts. Evidence relating to distance education contexts is also presented.

Literature confirms generally that home and study are competing realms for women students (Ballmer & Cozby, 1981; Wisker, 1988; Edwards, 1993). The term 'greedy institutions' (Acker, 1984) is applied in a number of subsequent studies to depict demanding family and study contexts (Edwards, 1993; Duncan 2000; Hayes, 2000; Griffiths, 2002).

Edwards (1993) research provides detailed analysis of women's public and private worlds and their experiences of 'greedy institutions'. In a study of 31 mature women on-campus students enrolled in degree study in the United Kingdom, Edwards focused on women's differing accounts of processes of connection and separation between study and home situations. The findings indicated the extent to which women chose to separate and compartmentalise their study so they could minimize the emotional conflict of family relationships. These decisions were made in response to partners' reactions, but the findings revealed that children showed less resistance to their mothers studying. Edwards concluded, "That both (education and family) are greedy but have distinct, antipathetic, value bases that are weighted differently in particular contexts" (ibid, p. 157).

Although Hayes (2000) endorses the views of Edwards (1993) in her analysis of women students' social contexts, she also considers the transforming features of the study experience for women. Similarly, Griffiths (2002) considers the public and private division may not be as strongly delineated as has been previously described in the literature.

In a longitudinal comparative case study of two cohorts of student mothers (13 and 6 participants) in a teacher education programme, Griffiths (2002) investigated the intersection of the women's public and private spheres. The focus of this study was on the relationship between women's parenting experiences and study, and specific issues relating to domestic responsibilities. Griffiths' comparative analysis identified consistencies and differences in women's adjustment as students. The findings highlighted particular differences between the two groups in relation to strategies in managing family and study. At the same time the findings revealed consistencies in the types of family related stressors encountered by mature women students generally.

Despite the attention in the literature generally to women's public and private contexts, distance education studies appear limited in addressing these dimensions. Moreover, the intersecting dimensions of public and private realms for mature women students is not widely addressed in New Zealand literature and appears currently limited to the work of Bethell (1998).

Women Students and Roles

The public and private dimensions of mature women's study experiences is often described as an array of challenges and adjustments in their roles as students and family members.

A mature woman's socialisation into the student role is considered by some to be a complex process of personal adjustment (Garland, 1994; Gibson, 1998; Duncan, 2000; Peters, 2000). In an analysis of barriers to women's learning Garland (1994) identified an underlying theme of contradictions between the student and adult role. Her ethnographic study of 30 persisting and 17 withdrawn distance education students investigated the problems that posed barriers to their study. Problems were identified as situational, institutional, dispositional and epistemological. Anecdotal examples illustrate the reality of tensions and social contradictions experienced by the students. Garland's suggestions for institutional practices centre on providing a study environment that addresses students' individual needs, yet also encourages them to be self-efficacious and take responsibility for their own learning.

Some studies addressing women's integration into teacher education programmes provide additional insight into how women students' simultaneously manage and integrate roles (Duncan 1999). Duncan's (1999) research was incorporated in a publication of guidelines for mature women students. Duncan examined the experiences of 25 mature women undergraduate students studying in a teacher education programme on campus in the United Kingdom. She focused on patterns of socialization across family, institution and school settings during the students' first year of study. From a series of interviews and diary accounts, Duncan ascertained the women's adaptation to study, confirming their socialization into the student teacher role was about challenges and contradictions for them as students and mothers. Duncan analysed the range of strategies used by the women to manage competing aspects in their lives. Important to this ethnographic study was recognition of socio-political factors impacting on the women's lives. Although the findings from the study were specific to a student population of white, married women, the issues raised in Duncan's research are matched in other studies (Garland, 1994; Grace, 1994; George and Maguire, 1998; Home, 1998).

Researchers have also reported on the positive outcomes for women in encountering new challenges (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1986; Peters, 2000). An earlier study on women's roles by Hirsch and Rapkin (1986) considered the contradictions of roles, suggesting that women's multiple social roles not only reflected competing demands, but also lead to personal growth and development, and therefore were synonymous with opportunities, autonomy and success. In another study of mature women students enrolled in a Women in Higher Education programme, Peters (2000) addressed a range of cultural, social and learning issues relating to their studies. A prevailing theme in Peter's findings was the women's positive reconciliation of combining study with their other roles.

Multiple Roles and Challenges for the Mature Woman Student

One outcome of a woman's return to study is positioning her role as a student alongside established and socially prescribed roles. Specific attention is given to research pertinent to gender-prescribed roles and the challenges for women in managing competing roles and multiple commitments.

Earlier studies confirmed that a woman's involvement in higher study often caused personal disjunction to her role in the family (Ballmer & Cozby, 1981, Martin, 1988). Similarities in the findings of Ballmer & Cozby (1981) and Martin (1988) suggest conflict in balancing the roles of mother, partner and worker. Martin's (1988) account of her study highlights through 46 women's stories the all too familiar issues encountered by women who juggle study and family responsibilities.

A small number of studies examine women distance students' management of roles (Grace, 1994; Home, 1998; von Prummer, 2000). Grace (1994) and von Prummer (2000) found multiple role demands and conflict to be pronounced for women with partners and dependents. Von Prummer (2000) confirms personal challenges experienced by women in contemporary distance education environments, suggesting the context does not necessarily ameliorate the demands encountered in their private lives.

Home (1998) investigated relationships between life situations, the institution, support measures and predictors of role conflict for 443 mature women on-campus and

distance education students. From sample questionnaires measuring women's reactions and responses, Home's ascertained demands as predicting role strain, conflict or contagion. Of note in the findings were differences in the on-campus and distance education students' responses. The delivery characteristics of distance education, including individualised and flexible study reduced women's vulnerability. Other findings such as managing role contagion were similar for both groups of women. Home's research provides an initial insight into the types of role-related issues encountered by women experiencing different delivery models. A limitation recognised in this study is the lack of qualitative analysis that would enhance the meaning and value of the women's accounts.

Clouder's (1997) paper addressing her research on women's identity and stability balance in relationships describes how women adjust their behaviour and roles when faced with the external challenges of study. Drawing on the work of Hall (1972, cited in Clouder 1997) Clouder outlines from her interviews how women encounter different dimensions of role conflict. Clouder describes the strategies available to women to manage role conflict as 'the must work harder challenge', 'compromise' or 'moving the goalposts.' She ascertained that the women in her study were limited in their ability to "renegotiate demands made on them by the course" (ibid, p. 148). Despite the brevity of this paper, Clouder's description of strategies and specific suggestions for women students and institutions are worthy aspects for consideration.

A few studies provide insight into women's management of domestic roles in the distance study environment (Effeh, 1991; von Prummer, 2000). Although reported several years apart, similar findings from both Effeh (1991) and von Prummer (2000) report that women distance students continue to hold the main responsibility in managing the range of domestic tasks in the home. Von Prummer (2000) addressed changes and patterns in male and female students' domestic roles since enrolling in study. Her findings confirmed that traditional divisions of labour continued to operate in many families, despite students' views that enrolling in study would alter their established obligations to domestic responsibilities.

Another aspect of interest in the literature is mature women students' management of study and family time, commonly addressed as an issue of competing

roles (Effeh, 1991; Edwards, 1993; Home, 1998; Hayes, 2000; Furste-Bowe & Dittman, 2001). The available literature suggests a women's allocation of time for study as a distance learner is managed differently to that of a student studying on-campus (Effeh, 1991; Home, 1998). Studies report that distance courses can challenge women's efficient time management skills (Effeh, 1991; Furste-Bowe & Dittman, 2001).

In one of the few studies specifically addressing women distance students' use of time, Effeh's (1991) evaluative survey of 84 woman distance learners in Nigeria focused on patterns in women learners' daily study habits and addressed what factors determined their choice of study time. The findings confirmed the prevalence of other responsibilities (including domestic) as impacting on the time the women could allocate to their study. However, the questionnaire methodology restricts detailed insight into women's situations. Furthermore, as this study was located in a particular cultural context it may not be appropriate to generalize the findings to other contexts.

Minimal attention is given in the literature to addressing distance women students' management of their study space, and currently appears limited to von Prummer (2000) who briefly addresses the problems encountered by women in establishing a study space in the home.

Support, Connections and Connectedness

The support and encouragement of family, connections with other students and the on-going support of the institution are known to assist women overcome study isolation and assist them generally in their studies. This section considers the literature addressing aspects of support, connections and recognizing connectedness as a supportive feature of women's learning.

Family, Friends and Other Students

Evidence from the international literature suggests the support of family and friends is an important feature of women's study experiences (Kirkup and von Prummer, 1994; Edwards, 1993; Grace, 1994; Asbee & Simpson, 1998; von Prummer, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2001). The small body of New Zealand research affirms international findings (McCahon, 2000; Barratt, 2001). A further aspect of relevance is

the recognition by some authors validating women's preferences for connectedness as meaningful to their learning (Kirkup & von Prummer, 1990).

The existing literature tends to focus on support as a solution to barriers encountered by women students rather than detailed examination of support practices. Asbee & Simpson's (1998) paper outlining their 1996 small-scale survey illustrates students' responses to sources of support, but the findings primarily emphasise institutional responsibilities. Within her study on mature students, Barratt (2001) analysed sources of support and encouragement for women distance education students. Small mention is made in Barratt's study of family encouragement supporting women in their studies. Although recognised in the literature (Edwards, 1993), the support roles of wider family members and children of mothers who study is not widely researched.

Few studies generally report in any depth on the support provided by other women during their programme of study, either on-campus or in distance programmes. To illustrate the attention given to women's specific study needs, the small-scale study of five mature undergraduate on-campus students undertaken by Karach (1992) considered the "strategies which women have used to help themselves cope with the struggle of studying at university " (p. 310). Karach's intent was to address a range of issues women were likely to encounter as students. Interviews with the women revealed their most common coping strategy was the network of female friends, both on and off-campus. Specifically, working together on assignments and sharing resources were considered crucial to women's study success.

Some literature distinguishes the effect of cultural contexts on women's study experiences (Bhalalusesa, 2001). Bhalalusesa's qualitative study of 24 women secondary teaching students studying at the Open University in Tanzania provides useful insight into distance learners' cultural contexts. Consistent with other literature Bhalalusesa reported that women encountered more difficulties with their studies than men. Findings from interviews with the women illustrated the barriers they encountered, their coping strategies and their perceptions of necessary support from both their immediate social environment and the institution. In identifying the women's specific needs, Bhalalusesa focused on the social factors that contributed to their study. The

anecdotes illustrating women's preferred support from the institution provide useful suggestions for institutions' planning for women students' requirements and needs.

For a number of years, researchers internationally have affirmed that women students tend to prefer a distance delivery model that is social-based and interactive (Cox & James, 1988; Burge & Lenskyj, 1990; Kirkup and von Prummer, 1990; von Prummer, 2000). This is an important consideration for women who study by distance and whose opportunities for social-based learning may be limited by their geographic location.

Findings from Kirkup and von Prummer's (1990) comparative study of students at the German Fu University and The British Open University found that study isolation was considered more challenging for women than for men. A distinguishing feature of this study is its application to two study settings in different countries. Within a survey of male and female first year students Kirkup and von Prummer focused on students' access to support services. Their quantitative data and qualitative findings confirmed that contact with and the support of other students assisted women in their studies, reinforcing the importance of connectedness for women. The study suggests practical implications for institutions in providing appropriate and locally based support measures that accommodate distance women students' specific learning needs.

Another dimension to research investigating aspects of support are applicable studies on caring activities of women teachers. Using a feminist theoretical base, Acker (1995) undertook an ethnographic study of teachers' caring behaviours with children and their teaching colleagues in an English primary school. Acker reported on her research undertaken between 1987 and 1991, studying a small group of teachers' caring behaviours. From interviews and her observations of teachers' work with children and interactions with colleagues, Acker proposed that despite working in challenging teaching conditions the teachers were seen to develop "a caring, supportive teachers' workplace culture" (p. 33) Acker suggested that the caring culture was more likely to prevail in particular female-dominated work places as illustrated in the study and "that there are certain cultural scripts seen as suitable for women in a given place and time, the caring script among them" (ibid, p. 33). Acker ascertained a gendered pattern of caring was an enabling factor assisting the teachers to manage their teaching context.

Institutional Support

Researchers have emphasized education institutions' responsibilities to women students' learning needs (Karach, 1992; Garland, 1994; Morrison, 1996; Hipp, 1997; Asbee & Simpson, 1998; Home, 1998; von Prummer, 2000; Furste-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001).

Hipp's (1997) paper outlining her research on a group of women studying by distance education in South Australia distinguishes specific learning and support needs of women distance students. Undertaking group interviews with 16 women Hipp investigated students' preferences for institutional support. The findings, illustrated with examples from the interviews, emphasised approaches to assist women overcome isolation, including appropriate institutional assistance and interaction. Central to the women's perspectives was an evolving confidence in their ability to manage their studies. Belenky's (1986, cited in Hipp, 1997) concept pertaining to women 'finding a voice' is pivotal, both to the findings in Hipp's study, and also recognised generally in feminist literature.

Hipp pointed out that institutions need to "know more about their (women's) experiences. We need to know about their education and learning, self-image, personal changes and growth and relationships of importance to them. We also need to know their perceived catalysts for change and impediments to growth" (ibid, p. 48). As Hipp suggests, her study provides small insight into a specific education context, but the results match the essence of themes relating to supporting women addressed in other literature.

One perceived issue in supporting women students' learning is tailoring course design and delivery (Carnwell, 2000; Peters, 2000; von Prummer, 2000). In discussing women's learning patterns, von Prummer (2000) challenges institutional practices that promote autonomous and independent learners at the expense of interactive approaches. She suggests several "ways in which distance teaching systems could be made more women friendly" (ibid, p. 41), including systems that accommodate a range of learner needs and planned support for enhancing and sustaining learning.

Carnwell's (2000) study based on theories of learning styles and learning approaches highlights specific strategies used by women to manage their studies. Interviews with 20 women distance nursing students in the United Kingdom revealed they used a range of learning approaches and learning styles. The findings also illustrated the impact of women's socialised patterns of learning. Furthermore, a preference for interactive learning is clearly documented in the women's anecdotal accounts. Carnwell points out several ways for institutions' to address women students' diverse learning needs. The significance of Carnwell's findings in general affirms that guidance "therefore, should include different levels and types of student support, as well as material design features" (ibid, p. 139).

Asbee and Simpson's (1998) small-scale survey of distance education students at the Open University in the United Kingdom illustrates how an institution can ascertain and respond to stakeholder needs, including involving families. Asbee and Simpson's survey considered two questions: firstly, whether family was the most important source of support and secondly, as distance education providers, how could families link with the existing support systems? Although their questionnaire material did not elicit detailed responses from the participants, the findings indicated the significance of practical negotiated support from family and friends ahead of the institution. Their survey suggests implications for institutions pertinent to providing advanced information that would support families in preparing for study, including specific recommendations for documentation that could be shared with family members. As a follow-up to the survey, a leaflet was prepared and piloted with a group of students, to elicit feedback on its appropriateness. The authors dismiss any surprises regarding students' identification of needs, but their specific practical suggestions for supporting students and their families are worthy aspects. This study does not specifically address issues of gender or cultural considerations, but nevertheless considers necessary features of institutions' responsibilities to distance learners.

Despite the attention given to examining institutional practices, literature appears limited in its scope pertaining to aspects of face-to-face interaction between women students and with the institution at which they are studying. In one New Zealand paper addressing institutional practices, a review by Cull & Walker (1995) considers the advantages and issues for distance students of attending face-to-face

sessions, the role of the institution and desirable teaching approaches. Although Cull and Walker emphasize quality delivery issues for the general distance student population, they do not address issues specific to women learners.

Literature examining advantages of new learning opportunities, in contrast to addressing deficit models, advances knowledge of how women adjust to changes and developments in distance delivery. A small range of literature considers the impact of educational technologies on distance women students' learning (Burge, 1998; von Prummer, 2000; Furste-Bowe & Dittman, 2001), but technology is often considered in the wider context of distance provision than researched exclusively.

Furste-Bowe & Dittman's (2001) study of 40 returning students highlighted not only a range of needs expressed by students as essential to supporting their study, but also women's abilities in managing distance technologies. The focus on women's views of educational technologies provides useful insight into their reactions to contemporary delivery models. Data was obtained from guided student focus groups, both on-campus and via on-line processes. Consistent with other literature the results identified contextual and personal barriers for the women. The merit of this study is its insight into the issues pertaining to using on-line study. The findings identified a range of personal and study-related issues for women in managing educational technologies. Furste-Bowe & Dittman's suggestions for specific institutional practices that support adult women's learning needs could apply to institutions generally.

Although the literature is consistent in promoting the importance of assisting students, Tait (2000) considers there is still a dearth of literature pertinent to "the planning and management of student support" (p. 287), compared to the emphasis placed on suggestions for resources and methodologies. Tait's contemporary overview addresses inter-related student needs. However, Tait does not detail specific aspects beyond a proposed planning model. Basing his discussion on a model of three-fold function of cognitive, affective and systemic support for students Tait advocates a set of planning tools that institutions could use as a framework for planning support systems. Tait cautions institutions in adopting a 'blueprint' approach in providing support, and stresses the need for institutions to adopt approaches that meet their specific client needs.

McCahon's (2000) research confirms not only institutions' roles in supporting mature distance students' learning, but also emphasises contextual influences. This study focused on a small group of students, including some males, but predominantly female students who withdrew or completed a library-based distance study programme in a New Zealand tertiary setting. With the intention of ascertaining students' views on support, McCahon examined the pre-disposing characteristics, life changes and institutional factors relating to supporting students throughout the course of their studies. McCahon highlights the contextual factors that affected student retention, suggesting the smaller size and autonomy of the programme and the delivery model were contributing factors to students' success. McCahon also emphasizes the importance of providing early support to students as "a crucial factor in their ability to move beyond this initial barrier" (ibid, p. 29). Her findings confirmed that effective institutional support structures, including sound staff support were perceived to enhance students' chances of success in their studies. These enabled students to affiliate with the institution. McCahon concludes from her findings that, "no one form of support can be effective for all students, but that a package of suitable structural elements and support systems are essential" (p. 35).

In reviewing the literature on student support there is little evidence of studies addressing in detail, aspects of support groups for women studying by distance. Furthermore, the literature suggests there is more to be learned about aspects of institutional support, particularly with regard to the match of distance delivery models and women's learning needs.

Seeking Identity, Self-fulfilment and Self Esteem

The literature focusing on aspects of mature women students' identity transformation, growth and associated self-esteem is reviewed.

An outcome of women's education experiences considered in the literature is the development or transformation of identity and associated self-fulfilment and self-esteem (Taylor, 1995; Belenky et al, 1997; Flannery, 2000; Parr, 2000). Parr (2000) defines identity as "the characteristics by which individuals and groups recognise themselves and are recognised by others . . . . Clearly, there is no single characteristic which makes up our identity, but a multiplicity of elements which may be divided

broadly into biological and social influences" (p. 27). Parr's critical examination of these aspects, blending theoretical underpinnings and women's accounts of their identity provides a strong statement on the inter-relationship of education and identity for women students. Furthermore, James (1995) suggests women's self-confidence may, in fact, decline during a course of study, as women endeavour to match their expectations with the realities and demands of study.

Flannery's (2000) contemporary overview of women's identity also confirms that multiple factors interact with and affect women in their learning contexts. Sourcing definitions and perspectives on women's identity across several decades, Flannery summarises her views in a position statement addressing socio-political issues of gender, race and class as impacting on women's identity.

Taylor (1995) based her study of identity transformation on Kagan's constructive-developmental model (Kagan, 1982, 1994, cited in Taylor, 1995). Illustrating her findings with the women's anecdotes, Taylor describes the qualitative changes or transformations in re-entry women's self-identity as they progressed in their studies. She traces the women's differing perceptions of their self-identity, matching the identified phases of Kagan's model. Taylor identified a higher level of consciousness in the women's recognition of the changes encountered through the study experience. Although the theoretical model used to describe women's identity transformation is a useful framework, the lack of contextual information provided by Taylor is a limiting factor in the article.

Several authors examine women's identity re-shaping or transformation in the context of their study experience (Giles, 1990; Pascall & Cox, 1993b; Paase, 1998; Parr, 1998, 2000; Peters, 2000; Griffiths, 2002). The literature addressing gender-specific issues suggests mature women students may undergo transformation from their prescribed domestic identity (Pascall & Cox, 1993b). Pascall & Cox interviewed 43 married women students enrolled in two institutions of higher education to ascertain their views on the relationship between the family and education contexts. The findings indicated the education experience facilitated a re-evaluation of the women's identity as mothers, and in adjusting their domestic roles they were able to "destabilize traditional notions of femininity" (ibid, p. 17). Pascall and Cox challenge reproduction theory,

ascertaining that the women in their study viewed higher education as providing opportunity rather than "reproducing the structures that are oppressive to women" (ibid, p. 31).

An example of research investigating social influences on identity is that of Paase (1998) who studied the relationship between women's identity and class. Paase identified class as an issue evolving from initial interviews with a group of 17 women undertaking study in two Melbourne universities. Two case studies, drawn from the initial group of women highlight the impact of changes to students' self- identity as an outcome of their return to study. Paase questioned whether study manifests in women, new awareness or contradictions in aspects of their self-identity. The findings illustrated changes in the women's identities, described by one woman as a progression from ignorance to becoming an educated person. Paase suggests, "There is a shift in the ways they identify themselves in relation to those around them, and the ways others perceive them" (ibid, p. 104). Paase cautions however, that study may impact differently on women in regard to their identified class, suggesting their newly discovered identity creates class contradictions that can distance them from family and friends. Paase's case study is useful in its attention to detailing women's general views and direct perceptions of class as a contributing factor in their student experience.

Another aspect of identity addressed in the literature relates to forming a student or teacher identity (Duncan, 2000; Peters, 2000). In one of the few in-depth studies focusing on teacher trainees, Duncan (2000) considered the progressive socialization of women in their transition from parent to student, experienced through their teacher education course. Duncan identified the challenges faced by the women in adapting to a new role as a student teacher, despite already being experienced in classroom-based practices. Of interest in the findings was that the women experienced contradictory roles. For some women, their identity as a student teacher became more stable and less fluctuating, while others encountered antagonism because of conflict within their families.

As the literature suggests, the relationship between identity and learning is complex. However, limited material exists on the effect of teacher education distance

education on women's identity. It appears there is no known in-depth research in this area within the New Zealand tertiary education context.

Conclusion

This review of the literature positions and reveals the scope of issues relating to women's distance education contexts since women's education became a more widely recognised field worthy of investigation. Feminist viewpoints and methodologies have contributed to a holistic understanding of mature women students' heterogeneous study experiences. Examination of the literature confirms the diversity and complexity mature women's learning contexts, reflected in both international and New Zealand research.

The literature generally views gender as an influencing factor in women's educational experiences. Investigation of issues suggests women strive to overcome barriers and are simultaneously intrinsically motivated and determined to manage 'against the odds' to succeed in a course of study. Evidence illustrates how women manage competing aspects of their public and private contexts as distance students. The literature confirms women tend to engage in multiple roles and often re-evaluate their roles within family. Support from family, friends and the institution is shown to be crucial to study success. Furthermore, it is also apparent from international and New Zealand literature that mature women students may undergo identity transformation and gain in self-esteem as an outcome of their studies.

There are however, some limitations to existing studies. As identified in this review, the attention given to the complexities of women's experiences as distance learners is still relatively limited in some areas. Minimal insight is provided on mature women's experiences of distance teacher education courses. Despite these students being established learners in the education system, the attention given in the literature is still scant. Furthermore, the New Zealand literature does not provide detailed analysis of women's socio-cultural experiences in distance education. Another aspect for further study is analysis of women students' family contexts, a dimension essential to understanding more fully the dual realms of the woman distance learner.

Literature generally is still somewhat limited in its documentation of women's views of specific distance learning models. Considering the student population of mature women learners and the diversity of distance education models in this country, further study into these dimensions is considered worthwhile.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter backgrounds and discusses the research methodology used in the study, the procedures for selecting the participants, and the processes for obtaining and then analyzing the data. This chapter also examines the ethical considerations.

Qualitative methodology was applied in this study to interpret and explain the women's experiences. A qualitative approach permits scope for exploration, detail and divergence in analyzing findings. It is also recognised that "qualitative data analysis deals with meaningful talk and action" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 5). The diversity of approaches in theorizing, data collection and presentation of findings in qualitative research provides the researcher with choice to "employ a variety of strategies and methods to collect and analyze a variety of empirical materials" (ibid, p. 5). Using descriptive data gathering, the researcher can capture essential and complex details of an experience and portray the social context of the research. Descriptive accounts therefore, can convey the richness of people's experiences through the use of personal stories and quotations. Patton (2002) states, "Qualitative data describe. They take us, as readers into the time and place of the observation so that we know what it was like to have been there. They capture and communicate someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words" (p. 47). These perspectives underpin this study of the eight women's experiences.

Feminist Perspectives in Research

Many feminist researchers in the social sciences research arena questioned and challenged quantitative research ideologies and methodology. It has been argued from an epistemological perspective that quantitative research was typically androcentric, excluding women's perspectives, viewpoints or issues (Mies, 1996; Jayaratne, 1996). Jayaratne (1996) suggests, "Traditional research in the social sciences is used as a tool

for promoting sexist ideology and ignores issues of concern for women and feminists" (p. 109).

Quantitative methodology was applied in some earlier studies of mature women in education (Clayton & Smith, 1987; MacKinnon-Slaney, Barber & Slaney, 1988). However, application of qualitative research approaches provided a wider lens through which insight could be gained into the complexities of women's contexts. According to Parr (1998), a feminist underpinning ensured "the emphasis is on understanding the social and cultural context of events as well as the events themselves" (p. 89). Feminist based research emphasises and authenticates accounts of women's diverse experiences. This qualitative research study was based on a feminist epistemological framework I viewed as central to validating and valuing women's education experiences.

Feminist perspectives strengthened the scope and depth of issues studied by women and about women. Studies exposing women's public and private experiences have provided a sensitive political understanding of their situations. Ribbens & Edwards (1998) research into women's subjective experiences illustrates new insights and understandings of the complex worlds of the 'woman experience.' Feminist research also signalled new issues for women. Flannery & Hayes (2000) suggest that in contrast to earlier psychological feminist theories primarily addressing the equality of opportunities for women, there evolved a wider perspective that considered women as individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The contributions of feminist writers to the educational research arena has promoted, exposed and highlighted both girls' and women's differing educational experiences. Feminist enquiry in the 1970's and 1980's captured issues specific to women in adult education (McLaren, 1985; Harding, 1987). Research in this area facilitated a deeper understanding of the mature student as a 'whole' person in the learning context (McLaren, 1985; Kelly & Shapcott, 1987).

In the course of feminist interests, from the mid 1980's, literature provided new insight into women's experiences in distance education, albeit considered to be tentative steps (Faith, 1988a). Burge (1998) suggests the onset of the 'women focus' in distance education during the 1980's "helped reduce the assumed conceptual and practical

power of the key terms used by many male writers in distance education - independence and autonomy" (ibid, p. 30).

A Collaborative Approach

Although feminist research utilizes a range of approaches within social sciences, the selection of methodology is important if the researcher's intent is to portray women's lived experiences (Harding, 1987). Where women are the prime focus in feminist based research, the researcher typically engages collaboratively in a process with the participants that is sensitive to meaning, "open, inclusive, (and an) accessible creative dynamic process" (Hipp, 1997, p. 42). The subjective experiences of women are often conveyed through focused interviews, group discussions, narrative analysis or personal reflections (Edwards, 1990; Giles, 1990; Parr, 1998). Underpinning such collaborative interaction is an impression of mutual connectedness between researcher and participant, typically illustrated in a non-hierarchical relationship (Oakley, 1981, cited in Parr, 1998).

Feminist Perspectives as the Basis for the Study

It seemed only natural from the outset that this study focusing on women's educational experiences should be conceptualized within a feminist framework. This research draws on models used in other studies of women's education experiences (Edwards, 1993; Parr, 2000). There are aspects of feminist enquiry that I view as central to the context of this research. I tend to prescribe to some broad principles pertaining to feminist beliefs rather adhering to any specific feminist viewpoint.

This research analyses the experiences of a small group of mature women. The predominant themes in studying mature women students relate to valuing and affirming the female experience in context, whatever that may be for any woman or group of women. Essentially my intent was to conceptualise both the diversity and commonality of their experiences within a framework of understanding dimensions of women's learning and the particular differences for women who study by distance.

Case Study Methodology

This study uses qualitative case-study methodology suited to the study of people in social contexts, typified by the women in this study. Case study methodology is a

recognised model for in-depth investigation, insight and interpretation of the complexities of events and experiences. Moreover, it is suited to the identification of relationships, issues and patterns of influence in a setting (Merriam, 1988). The data may be compiled from a variety of sources, allowing for scope in information gathering. Furthermore, case study methodology enables the researcher to construct the information in such a manner as to describe the unique context of the case under study. Patton (2002) considers effective and well-constructed case studies as those that are "holistic and context sensitive" (p. 447). The case study researcher's role therefore is to be sensitive and "responsive to the context" (Merriam, 1988, p.19). The descriptions, explanations and analysis of the women's experiences in this study, illustrate the heuristic qualities suggested by Merriam (1988). I concentrated on learning about the perceptions and impressions of the women to gain new insight and to enhance existing knowledge and understanding of the woman student's study experience.

A case study investigation is not usually generalized to other instances although this study's findings may be of significance to other women students. However, the intention of the research was to position the study as a unique time-bound experience of a group of women, combining their individual stories into a case study as a group of distance learners. Although I identified a research framework for this study, the data from the interviews and analysis evolved as a journey of discovery of information.

Participants

The eight women participants in this study were aged over 25 years. All were parenting and involved in a range of family and community responsibilities. In this country tertiary education information tends to consider mature students as those who enter tertiary study beyond age 24 years (Ministry of Education, 2001). All the women had lived in smaller town or rural situations since childhood, or as adults. The eight women cared for dependents during their study period. Some of the women had prior experience of tertiary education, but none had been previously enrolled in degree level qualifications. Their enrolment in the study programme was in a full time (three year equivalent) course of study for a degree qualification. At the time of interview some women were still completing their qualification beyond the prescribed three-year time period.

Ethical Procedures

An application was made to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for approval to proceed with the project. Following Massey University's approval to commence the study, an application was also made to the Ethics Approval Committee at the tertiary institution where the research was administered. Granting of approval by this institution specified the procedures for accessing data on students aged 25 years or older, as institutional policy controlled access to information on specific student demographics. As institutional policy prevented my access to student records, an independent person was asked to distribute a letter to all the students enrolled in the cohort. The letter invited students aged 25 years or older to participate in an audiotaped semi-structured interview (Appendix A).

The students who met the age related criteria were invited to indicate their interest in the research by contacting me directly. Following the initial contact from interested students, a participant information sheet (Appendix B) was distributed, detailing the purpose of the research, the expectations of participants, and methods of obtaining information. Participants were also informed of the identifiable risks, including limitations of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were advised that their anonymity and that of the institution could not be assured because their identity as a group of women students could be deduced from descriptive information relevant to specific features of the stated delivery model. Participants were assured of confidentiality. Written informed consent to participate in the interview was obtained from each participant who elected to be involved in the research (Appendix C).

The person who transcribed the interview material signed a confidentiality clause. All interview information remained confidential to the interviewer, the transcriber, and each participant. Each participant chose a pseudonym for the purposes of transcription, analysis, discussion and publication of the findings. In choosing to participate in this research project the participants were advised of their right to decline participation or to terminate the interview at any stage of the study. Some weeks after the completion of the interviews and transcription, each woman's interview transcript was distributed to her for viewing and validation.

Ethical Considerations

Issues in Researching Women's Experiences.

Inherent in a subjective analysis of women's experiences is the potential for issues to arise. In eliciting personal knowledge through the interview process the researcher must consider the participant's protection and the ethical implications of publishing data. Morse (1994) considers the participant's willingness to accept the intrusion of the researcher into the aspects under study is crucial. Ribbens and Edwards (1998) identify a tenuous shift between living the experience as a researcher participant, observer and listener who then sculptures the information into public knowledge. Moreover, they suggest the researcher should constantly question the nature and assumptions of knowledge produced and the ideological framework within which it fits. Ribbens and Edwards also caution against exposing features of women's private worlds in published academic research.

The Relationship with the Participants.

An ethical issue pertaining to my role as a researcher was the nature of my professional teaching relationship with the women. One aspect to consider was my assessment and pastoral responsibilities with the eight women. However, these initial associations with the women provided the catalyst for this research. For ethical reasons I chose to delay initiating the research until the completion of any assessment role with them. Prior to commencing the research I had ensured there was no further likelihood of engaging in a teaching or supervisory role with the women for the remaining time of their study in the qualification. A further reason for delaying the research was to minimize any potential power issues pertaining to the women's relationship with me as a researcher and tutor. This concern was refuted by the women's willingness to engage openly in the interviews.

Another ethical consideration relating to the women's personal contexts arose in the data analysis. All but one woman resided in either a small town or rural setting, and due to this specific teacher education model, the women risked individual identification. However, this did not appear to hinder the women from sharing some very personal accounts of their education, family and personal experiences.

Sensitivity to Bias

In utilising case study methodology, the researcher's subjective involvement with participants' highlights the potential for researcher bias (Merriam, 1988). As a researcher familiar with the subject I was mindful of the potential for my personal insight, knowledge and beliefs to infiltrate the analysis. However, within a framework of feminist perceptions, Parr (2000) suggests, "It is important for the researcher to locate herself in the research and acknowledge the inherent bias, which can be viewed as being positive as well as negative" (p. 4). Some perspectives shared by the women were of personal relevance but in my view, disassociation was neither appropriate nor necessary. I had already considered any likelihood of commonalities and connections between the women's views and my professional and personal knowledge.

Validity and Reliability

A systematic approach to data collection and processing aimed to ensure validity. As Anderson (1998) states, "The case study itself strives for internal validity, trying to understand what is going on in the studied situation" (p. 159). As a researcher I stated my position and reasons for selecting the study, followed by clear processes of data collection and analysis.

There is no intention to generalize this case study to other settings or contexts. However, some findings and insights arising from this study in relation to understanding the context of mature women students, and institutional outcomes and recommendations could be applied selectively to other distance education settings.

Analytical triangulation was achieved by providing the participants with their interview transcripts for verification.

Qualitative Measures

The research methodology involved administering semi-structured interview questions to each participant (Appendix D). Prior to the interviews the questions were forwarded to each woman, enabling her to review the proposed interview structure. During the interviews several women commented on how useful it was for them to have time to consider and prepare their responses. In preparing the questions I also constructed an interview framework, providing an overview of the initial references I

deemed relevant to each proposed question (Appendix E). This process enabled me to not only conceptualise concepts, but also validate the intent of the proposed questions.

Individual semi structured interviews were chosen in preference to a group interview. It was neither feasible nor appropriate to set up one group interview because of geographic distance between students. Another reason was that a group interview could restrict a woman's willingness to offer relevant personal information. Furthermore, in facilitating group interviews there is an inherent risk that participants may adjust their behaviour in response to the views of others and reduce the freedom of individual responses. Carey (1994) suggests, "Not only is it possible that group members could conform or censor their input to be socially acceptable, but also they may actually mentally reconstruct or 'cognitively reframe' their experience on the basis of the ongoing dialogue" (p. 237).

Applying semi-structured questioning ensured the objectives of the study were addressed. However, I considered it important to allow the woman being interviewed to respond as she chose to any of the questions. For example, if a woman preferred a different order in the questions, or offered additional information, I acknowledged and accommodated these variations.

I met with each of the eight women participants at venues in close proximity to their home or work settings. Each individual interview was scheduled for approximately 45 minutes. To establish a comfortable interview situation we engaged in a preliminary 'catch up' prior to commencement of the structured part of the interview. With agreement from all the participants but one, the interviews were audio taped. This method of recording enabled me to comfortably engage with the woman and attend to her comments in preference to focussing on scribing every nuance. Although I followed established questions I maintained a conversational approach in the interview and I also sustained appropriate non-verbal communication with the women. For the one woman who declined a taped interview, I recorded her interview in writing as precisely as possible. Subsequent verification of her interview ensured accuracy in my documentation of her views.

Prior to commencing the key questions I sought background biographic information from each woman. The interview questions were open-ended and although there was a pre-determined sequence of questions, based on the study objectives, each woman was informed of her right to amend or alter the order of questions.

I consider the interviews were strengthened by the ease of the woman-to-woman discussion and evidence of a trusting relationship between us. Finch (1993) suggests women are more used to the process of personal enquiry by virtue of their experiences of motherhood, and this may be a contributing factor in their apparent willingness to talk openly with other women about their experiences. Finch attributes a further dimension to women interviewers, "because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender. This creates the possibility that a particular kind of identification will develop" (ibid, p. 170).

Analysis of Data

Although the framework of questions provided a basic structure for analysis I discerned an emergence of themes in the interview data. Consideration was given to using a computer programme to assist with data analysis, but an initial review of the interview data suggested this was unnecessary. Another contributing factor was the small number of interviews to analyse. Furthermore, the women's responses generally followed the same order of questions, which assisted in a relatively straightforward presentation of the data for analysis.

My analytic strategy was to analyse the data in two stages. Initially I reviewed all the data to ascertain an overview of the findings. I then determined a number of themes predominating in the interview data. To manage the data I established a coding system. Coffey & Atkinson (1996) view coding as two-fold, "To break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and (is) used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation" (p. 30). Segmenting the data into identifiable categories using coloured stickers to code each theme facilitated visual indexing and representation of the patterns in the interview data.

The links between the data categories and key themes were presented initially as a visual matrix under the key reference points of 'opportunities, costs and compromises'

being the theoretical framework that underpinned the study (Appendix F) Coffey & Atkinson (1996) endorse a process whereby data is simultaneously reduced and complicated. Moreover, the visual representation provided a unifying structure to the data.

In shifting from coding to interpretation, I then identified similarities and differences in patterns of the women's responses to each question. Delamont (1992, cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) suggest, "One should be looking for patterns, themes and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities" (p. 47). Points of difference in the women's responses were as important as similarities in their views.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research underpinnings and the methodology. The participants were introduced and the process of obtaining participant consent described. Ethical considerations pertinent to the context in which this study was undertaken were outlined, and specific issues regarding the researcher's association with the participants addressed. The interview structure and interview processes were explained, followed by a description of the procedures for analyzing the data. The next chapter addresses the results according to the themes that emerged in the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results, commencing with an introduction to the eight women, outlining their personal, employment, education and community backgrounds. The ensuing section addresses the women's reasons for choosing study, including their aspirations and expectations. The results are then presented as the following themes: study and family, managing roles and study, support, connections and connectedness, use of time and space, institutional requirements, academic outcomes and identity.

The Women in the Study

Personal Backgrounds

To open the interview each woman was invited to share background information she viewed as relevant to this study. They all spoke about their family contexts and responsibilities. During the training period, four women were living in partnerships, and their male partners were in employment in the region. One woman parented alone, and by the end of the three years, two other women were also parenting without their partners. One woman moved in with her parents during her training and the other woman moved with her children out of the family home.

The women cared for dependents ranging from primary school age to young adults involved in tertiary study, and all eight women had more than one child living with them during their study period. The women resided in two different areas of the region, two women being required to travel some distance to the regional site for scheduled classes.

Education Experiences

The women spoke about their prior education experiences, from secondary schooling through to post-secondary study. Further to this, the women described their subsequent employment and their involvement in a range of community activities.

Involvement in early childhood services was most commonly identified as a catalyst for choosing to study an early childhood qualification.

Prior formal learning experiences varied amongst the women. Jo left school without any secondary qualification, upon turning 15 years of age. Trinity, Annabelle and Susan completed 5th form requirements. Jude and Linda finished school in the 6th form and Marian and Terri stayed on until the end of their 7th form year. Some women described perceptions of missed opportunities in the schooling system, which hindered their learning. Annabelle said, despite being an achiever in primary school, *"I stumbled through to the 5th form. I just went to annoy the teachers."* Similarly, *Jo's* perception of school was negative. She said, although her mother *"drummed into us education was very important, I left school when I was 15, the first day I walked out. I hated school with a passion. I'm a hands-on person and that's why I did not succeed, and now when I see children who do not succeed that way, there is another way . . . that's why I really enjoy special needs."*

Subsequent to their secondary schooling all the women pursued further education, enrolling in access courses, night classes, certificates, and diploma courses offered in the community or through correspondence delivery. Jude enrolled in correspondence courses because *"I always liked learning things . . . I did keep my hand in there doing something."* Terri enrolled at a local adult training centre and completed a retail wholesale course. Annabelle and Linda undertook Polytechnic training in secretarial work, and Linda later completed business papers within a diploma in business studies. Although Jo enrolled in some night school classes she talked of having *"flicked through a few things but (provided) nothing"* (in relation to expectations of her training). Trinity continued her education as a young adult, enrolling in health sciences and completing a diploma level qualification. Susan entered banking, became heavily involved in a voluntary association, and also completed an adult teaching certificate.

Influences on seeking post-secondary study differed. Jude's family encouraged her to consider tertiary study but Jude rejected their support, choosing to enter a trade. Linda was also encouraged by her family to *"study hard and get qualifications."* Despite her prior lack of commitment to schooling, Trinity returned to study as an adult student, completing 6th form certificate when she was 21 years of age: *"I was pleased*

that I did it, I think doing things as an adult, to me it's preferable, because of the grades I received on 6th form certificate."

Susan was influenced by her family's gender-prescribed perception of her destiny as the eldest daughter: *"Where would she be going (from school)? She'd probably just become a mother, she'd just get a job at the supermarket and go on from there and become a mother and stay home like her mother, and there was that thought that with a blue collar father why would she want tertiary education? In those days I think as it was for girls, girls were to stay and be mothers and that was where we were headed."*

Employment and Community Involvement

The women's employment patterns illustrated a variety of occupations, some linked to gender related vocations, including secretarial and reception work. Two women however, chose non-traditional occupations in heavy industry, business management and marketing. Marian completed a course and gained a certificate in heavy industry, prior to completing a playcentre qualification. Pregnancy prevented Terri from fulfilling her earlier ambition to enter teacher training as a younger woman, and although describing her status as a stay-at-home mum she later moved into a male dominated occupation in heavy industry.

The women talked of hands-on involvement in early childhood services and their associations with people who encouraged them to apply for teacher training. They considered their reasons for applying, and spoke of their aspirations and expectations when they commenced training.

The women shared similar backgrounds as parents, volunteers or paid employees in a range of early childhood educational settings. Their combined experience covered a breadth of early childhood services: playcentre, childcare, kindergarten, home-based care and playgroups. Linda, Jude and Marian were involved in playcentre during their earlier parenting years. Jude described this as a positive experience: *"I really liked that, I took on responsibilities and things."* Jude subsequently became involved in home-based care prior to commencing her teacher training. Similarly, Marian and Linda valued their involvement in playcentre. This experience provided Marian with a playcenter qualification.

Jo and Terri were actively involved in more than one early childhood service. Jo's involvement ran over a period of years: *"I was on the (kindergarten) committee for six years, I was secretary for three and then plunket when the children were born, and then I had playgroup and then everyone wanted to know why I was doing all these things."*

It was Trinity's involvement in her children's early childhood education that led her into teacher education: *"I used to spend hours (there). I was one of the parents that went to everything, so I spent most of my time doing that . . . and then when my child went to preschool, then I was always there."* Susan, Terri and Annabelle contributed to their local kindergartens. Susan recalled this being a positive experience: *"I enjoyed my children's early childhood and I was at kindergarten with them and I helped out with parent help and did probably my fair share there. I never got on a kindergarten committee because of course I had my other involvement in the community . . . . I really enjoyed what they did at kindergarten."*

The Background to Study

Influences and Motives

All the women spoke of people, their professional associations and other experiences influencing their return to study, including social or work-related contacts. Susan was encouraged by another student who said, *"You've got to keep going and try and get into it, but I (Susan) had no idea, not really."* A qualified colleague who motivated Jude said, *"You have to do this (degree). I saw it advertised in the paper."* Terri and Annabelle were both stimulated through their involvement in kindergarten. Terri said, *"I was sort of pushed into it by a kindergarten teacher that I knew at the time . . . she wrote me a reference, so that's kind of how I decided to do it."* Marian spoke of an ambition to further her theoretical knowledge: *"I wanted more. I didn't think the (other) training covered enough. The Bachelor (degree) really got onto that side of things."* Trinity considered her parenting affected her decision to pursue early childhood training: *". . . mainly having my own children . . . . . I don't honestly know if I never had my own children if I would have the interest."*

The women had different motives for applying for the qualification. Jude was intent on finding a *"secure job, if there was one, but at that stage that was a pie in the*

sky thing. There was not much around at that stage." Making a contribution to the teaching was important to Annabelle: *"I knew I could do better than that" (what I had experienced).* Trinity's reasons for applying related more directly to her personal philosophy: *"I've always had a change the world attitude if I can help that child . . . . Well then I'd like the opportunity to do it and that is one way of doing it."* For both Terri and Susan, acceptance into the qualification meant fulfilment of earlier teaching ambitions. Susan spoke of her earlier application to be a primary teacher: *"I wasn't accepted so they suggested that I do some form of tertiary type study, so I enrolled with the Open Polytech and started a human development paper which I didn't complete, and that took me down to kindergarten to do observations, and I stepped in there and thought, this is me, this is where I want to be. . . I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher when I was at school, but nobody said that I could go to college and learn how to be one, or nobody really encouraged me to go and do tertiary education."* Similarly, Terri viewed the opportunity to re-commence teacher education as fulfilling an earlier ambition when she applied successfully for a teacher education programme and was unable to take up the offer due to personal circumstances. Terri described her subsequent application as *"it sort of came up that they were offering this over here."*

Reasons for Choosing Flexible Learning

The women reported their reasons for applying for a flexible learning study programme. The convenience of studying without moving away from their home environments was a motivating factor. Referring to her family situation, Marian said, *"It was the only way I could do it. There was no question of shifting and when I saw that, that I could do it by correspondence so I jumped at the chance actually. I think it opens it up for people really, who would otherwise miss out. I just wouldn't have done it."* Linda viewed the flexible delivery programme as *"the opportunity to study (in) this at home without breaking up the family structure."* Terri had an additional motive for choosing flexible delivery: *"I didn't want to move the children away . . . and I had the support here that I knew I would need. I just thought it would fit in with my life style better."* Linda and Jude also considered flexible delivery as the only option for them to complete their desired qualification. Linda justified her choice: *"I wasn't prepared to pack up and move to (city). I prefer to bring up my children here where it's a slower quieter life style."* Similarly for Jude, *"flexible learning allowed me to be at home with my children (usually) while still achieving something for myself."*

Another reason given was that study requirements would fit with employment. Annabelle typifies this view: *"I thought I could slip into a job and have the holidays and spend time with the children."* The advertised delivery structure of the course appealed to the women for several reasons. Susan said flexible delivery provided the opportunity to *"work at my own pace . . . schedule around family commitments."* The advertising of the study programme influenced Linda: *"The way the course was advertised, it was 20 hours a week and I thought, yes, I can easily fit that in while the children are at school, but it didn't quite work like that."* Jude believed she *"would still be able to study and keep going with care as well, part time here and part time there."* Marian also continued with part time work into the second year, until she could no longer sustain the dual responsibilities.

Expectations and Aspirations

The women described the impact of previous education and personal experiences, their aspirations and expectations at the time of enrolment in the qualification.

Terri talked of dispositional and situational barriers affecting her aspirations and expectations: *"I just didn't think I could do anything, so I was really at quite a low point in my life, so I didn't really know what to expect and whether or not I'd be able to do it, but I also thought that I've got this idea in my mind of what I really want, what I'd like to do eventually, when my children get older, and I thought this was a good stepping stone."* Despite her desire to fulfill a long-term ambition, Susan recalled, *"When I went for the interview I really had no idea of what I was getting into . . . . I don't know what aspirations and expectations I had in mind. I think I went in thinking I had to have a qualification if I want to get out and work with these children, that was it, and to get that I had to go through what I had to go through to get it. But I didn't know what that was."* Similarly Trinity had reservations about whether she could manage the academic requirements of study: *"I remember before I started, sort of worrying because before I started, you used to see other teachers and just thinking oh, do they know all that . . . and how am I going to find all that, am I going to know how to do all this stuff they're doing?"* For Jo, acceptance into a tertiary study programme was significant: *"They accepted me, and great! I've actually got it, I'm going to put it in a frame, the*

acceptance, not the fact that I've got a degree, but the fact that I was actually accepted for something."

The teacher education opportunity was a chance encounter for some women. Jude indicated that she just *"fell into FLO. . . (after talking with a lecturer) . . . and oh it might be what I am looking for and the next thing you know, there's all these books plonked on my knee and I said ohhh, I don't know if I like this. Three years, it sounds so much, but I turned the first page, yeah, keep going."* Similarly, a friend's passing comment took Jo from shop work into teacher education.

Study and Family

The women described how the study experience impacted on their families in different ways. They spoke specifically of the new learning affecting their parenting and family life.

Impact on Parenting

The women spoke of the learning gained from study. Jude, Annabelle and Linda talked explicitly about their parenting skills. Linda said, *"It (study) has given me a lot of self confidence that what I was doing with the children was backed up by literature and teaching methods and things . . . what I was doing was right."* Yet she also identified conflict between new knowledge and managing her family: *"It's really scary that we study all these things that we shouldn't do, go out on placements and deal with children, and then go home and yell at your own children and not manage them properly."* Annabelle also talked of the confidence she gained from her studies: *"The course gave me a new understanding of schooling, what I could speak up at school for my own children, when I decided or was aware this isn't right."*

Susan, Linda and Jo spoke of being role models for their children. This was important to Susan in preparing her daughter for tertiary study: *"I'm hoping that she's (daughter) more prepared for tertiary because she's seen how much I had to do, and what I had to do, so I'm hoping that she's got an understanding of what she wants to do with tertiary. I hope she understands her need to be prepared for assignments by due dates, because she's seen me go through it . . . . But I also believe that she's listening to*

what I'm saying when I'm giving her advice because she knows I've done it. I've got experience in it."

Linda commented, *"I also wanted to set a good example to my children because I don't know whether I've read or what, or heard, or where I gained the information, but children whose parents are more qualified as well . . . I wanted to set a good example to her (daughter), for studying, achieving . . . so she realizes the importance of actually spending some time studying to get better grades."*

Similarly, Jo could envisage the outcome of her study experience for her family: *"My children will benefit from seeing me educated, the way I should've been years ago, and they look at education differently too now."* She considered, *"It (study) has impacted on the children, and I'm sure they benefit from it. Doesn't matter if it's early childhood that I've trained in, the same strategies work, I've got the power pack on me, it's great."*

Impact on Relationships

The women described study as impacting most profoundly on their children. Jude spoke of restricting family events: *"I think it was hard on them really, not all the time, sometimes they knew we can't go here, we can't go there like they're used to, to pick up and go somewhere, had to plan in advance. They'd say, let's go to (city) for a week and I'm going, no, got things to do; I'll have to take it with me. It became a big thing."* Marian was in a similar situation: *"While it was happening there was a lot of guilt, cos it wasn't easy on the children, I couldn't have them in the holidays, they were sent away a lot, and they made relationships with other family members."* Marian stressed this point later in the interview in relation to her changed involvement with family: *"Oh guilt, because I wasn't always there for them . . . I wouldn't get too involved in it (their music lessons), cos I was thinking too much about getting assignments done, or even doing assignments at the same time."*
Annabelle had seen a change in her family relationships, describing that during the stressful final year of study she was *"not the warm nurturing mother. I turned into a monster, I am still not."*

Financial Concerns

The financial concerns associated with study impacted on the women and their families. To alleviate immediate and unanticipated financial pressures, some women accessed student loans. Terri said, *"It's been an expensive exercise to do my study, because I've had to get a student loan, and WINZ haven't paid a single cent towards my course . . . there's always that big financial thing that I've got hanging over my head. But I mean, if I didn't have one (loan) there'd just be no way I could've done my study. I mean, I had to give up work to do it."*

Trinity had rationalized the effect of a loan on her future earning capacity and financial situation: *"I had to get a student loan, . . . and everyone else does it, and I just thought, well, I'll just go and get one too . . . hadn't really acknowledged it until I heard someone mentioning the fact that the three years you're studying you're actually losing three years of income."*

Although Annabelle managed to save funds for her first year of study, ultimately a change in her personal situation meant a reduction in disposable income. She also needed to access a student loan: *"The financial cost was huge. It was difficult for me to have a part time job. I had a student debt, loan. I had put aside the first year's fees, had two year's invested, but I had to use it for other things."* Marian had considered embarking on further study but considered her financial situation, *"I just wouldn't do it, it's too hard on them (children). It's too hard not being able to bring money in"*

Despite receiving financial support, Terri was philosophical about the outcome of the student loan scheme: *"I've got a student loan which will continue to increase until I've managed to pay it off, however long. There's always been that big financial thing hanging over my head, but if I didn't have one (loan) there'd be just no way I could have done any study."* Similarly Jo described the bittersweet outcome of study costs: *"I have a piece of paper to say who I am and a student loan to tell how much I owe."* Jude described the residual effect of carrying a student loan: *"Having a student loan's hard, it's always in the back of your mind."*

In addition to the fees associated with study, additional financial outlay for teaching practice placements was required if the women chose or felt the necessity to

move out of their home region for a teaching experience. The pressure of additional living away costs was only supplemented in part by a living away entitlement, but this did not meet all associated costs required for the teaching placement.

Managing Roles and Study

The women talked of shaping their roles as students alongside those of parent, partner or family member. They described the dynamics, challenges and conflicts inherent in these intersecting roles, and how they adjusted their parenting responsibilities and domestic arrangements.

The Student and Parent Roles

The women's involvement in study necessitated role adjustments within their families. Although Trinity shared parenting responsibilities with her family, she recognised the shift in her involvement: *"I suppose it's a barrier of how I feel about it, I don't like seeing a parent that doesn't participate . . . I used to go along to school outings, now I go to none, but I do send others."* The extent of family support did little to allay Trinity's feelings: *"I feel very guilty because of my children, I feel they've missed out on so much while I've been studying, I sort of feel they've been put at the bottom."*

Jude recalled how her family had to *"redefine our roles. J. had to step up and take on a lot more responsibility, and I had to hand over that responsibility, that was hard."* This meant a change in Jude's expectations: *"Not so much letting J be the parent, just backing off, you haven't got as much, I'll say control as you used to, but that's probably a good thing that the dad should be in there boots and all."* Her children were affected by these changes: *"It's still there, which is great and because the boys are older now they want their dad more now too, it's worked out really well."* However, Jude talked about the strain of change as she learned to balance roles and counter emotional pressures: *"Going from a housewife and a parent and a mother to student was a hard one for people to accept, because as a student you've got your own things that you have to do and sometimes if it's important, if it's really a nutty problem that you've got to sort out then you took away the mother (and) parent relationships and you focus on just the academic ones. Sometimes that was hard because the expectations of other people still wanted you to be housewife or mother which is fair enough, but like*

I was important, I was the important thing and that was a big change, switching that role."

The women indicated the mounting pressure of assignment requirements generated conflicting pressures on their parent and student roles. This was particularly significant for Terri who said, *"I think I get stressed, especially times when I'd get all my assignments and deadlines and things done, small arguments that they (children) have might have annoy me."* Terri enlisted the support of friends to share the responsibility of her children, yet still felt strongly her responsibilities as a parent: *"I sort of feel I haven't got time to do their homework, I hate homework, I can't deal with it any more. I had to get outside help for one of them. I sent him to a friend's to do his homework . . . . I don't want him (son) to think, to not enjoy study; I don't want to put him off."* Terri elaborated on these conflicting demands: *"Now that I've done my teaching, (that) my children should behave in a certain way. I should be able to deal with all those behaviour things that have come up, but I don't and that's really frustrating, cos my kids are normal, they're just like anybody else's. But I should know how to deal with them and people must think, gosh she's a teacher, she looks after other people's children and look at her own."*

Similarly, Jude outlined the conflict in her roles as a parent and student when working with other people's children: *"It was hard studying because often your own children were on the back burner. You'd go out teaching and spend time with other people's children and your own children have to wait until you're ready"*
To sustain the student role and family responsibilities, Trinity planned her study requirements around her children. She described meeting with another student to discuss assignment requirements: *"We had to get to the level of trying to meet to do an assignment together in a kids playground . . . I remember sitting there trying to have this discussion. Because we both had children we'd have to meet somewhere that suited our children."*

Domestic Roles and Responsibilities

The women recalled changes in their domestic roles. Shedding established patterns did not come easily, and for some women domestic tasks remained a necessary daily ritual. Susan viewed housework as a motivating factor: *"I'd get into my household*

jobs and things that actually got me down if your housework wasn't done." When Susan travelled away for her teaching practice placements she needed to change her family's domestic patterns: *"I prepared them and when I went away I actually pre-cooked meals. I taught them how to buy groceries, and I taught them how to cook quick meals . . . so I don't think it's done them any harm to learn how to do these sorts of things, they're skills for life."* Similarly, Annabelle established a daily schedule of completing her household tasks before settling down to study: *"As soon as the children were out the door I did the domestics, and then got on with it (work) until 2.30 pm. I tried to stick to that."*

Only Trinity spoke of maintaining an exceptionally high level of domestic responsibility as a coping mechanism. Her strategy was to address one key domestic task each day. She commented, *"So everything got done, and then I might think to myself, when I've cooked tea I might race off to the bathroom and clean it at 10 o'clock at night. So it would take me 15 minutes, so I'd just do things like that. But my day was always spent in mind that, today I always gave myself a job . . . so I would do one job a day amongst everything else."*

Several women spoke of adjustments in roles when they travelled away for teaching experience. Marian accepted the re-allocation of roles in her family: *"They had given their best and he did cook . . . in some ways it was quite good for them. They've come out of it doing dishes and things like that."* Jude relinquished some domestic responsibility to her partner, but in doing this she learnt, *"You gotta keep your mouth shut because it doesn't matter how it's done as long as it's done."* Jo said, *"When I went on section I must say we all had a holiday, we even employed a cleaner."* This was a financial cost but nevertheless compensation for many hours spent travelling daily for a period of 4 weeks to an out-of-area placement.

Support, Connections and Connectedness

The women most commonly spoke of family support, but also that of friends and associates. The extent to which the women supported each other was significant in terms of meeting both their professional and personal needs.

Family and Support

All the women talked about positive support provided by family members, typically to alleviate domestic and parenting responsibilities, enabling the women to focus on study requirements. Trinity acknowledged the on-going support of her family: *"My mum has done everything. We discussed it before I applied that she would be fully participating."* This was a consistent pattern during Trinity's studies: *"My mum did all the washing and everything, so I mean I never had to do anything, so if I ever had an assignment my mum would go and get the girls from school."*

Similarly, Jude appreciated her partner and daughter who *"just picked up the slack, and that was great, cause I could go and bury myself away and I'd know everything else was carrying on."* Marian acknowledged friends and wider family who took her children for periods of time during term breaks: *"Friends were really, really good, they were always offering to have the kids on Sunday . . . it was great when they did go to other people's places on Sundays and I could study. I think without the wide family support I don't know how I would have done it. I was very dependent on that."*

The practical support provided by Susan's partner was crucial: *"He was the main breadwinner so I didn't work very much, so there's been that (support). Plus, just giving me the time to do my studies at times when the pressure was on he would take over the housework, or look after the girls, or take them to this or that so that I could have that break. He also took over most of the homework focus. I did a lot of that at 3 o'clock, but he took over the evening one."*

Children were also mentioned as supporting their mothers. Linda talked of the encouragement of her children, who *"always supported me, they always said keep going, how was the study going, and well done with the grades."* Jo described the day she was tempted to give up on her studies: *"When I had a really bad day, they (children) were great, they would drag you on. I remember one day I spat the dummy really badly and I said I am never ever going to pick up a book, and I threw them down. B wrote me a card and said 'we can get through this."* Susan's children also actively encouraged her to continue during those darker moments: *"There were some stages where the girls', especially near the end said, well, no, come on mum, you've got to do it, cos you've got to finish it."*

Teaching experience requirements meant changes in daily and weekly schedules. The women talked of family providing essential caregiving support during the full-time teaching experience weeks. Linda recalled, *"My parents were non-committal about it (my grades), they were always good when I left to go to (city) for placements, because they would look after the girls. They were quite keen on that."* Annabelle valued the support of her family during these times: *"I relied on my mother when on teaching practice. The children go after school. The older child gets attention, (and) my mother would have him."* Terri described an occasion when two family members took leave from their jobs to assist with caring for the children during one teaching experience. She spoke about the commitment of her family: *"I just walked out the door and she (mother) did everything. But I couldn't have done it (the study) without her and because I knew that she could do it, she could take annual leave from work, so they could be here for the children after school. I could (go away) that's why I said I can go, I knew the others couldn't."*

Expectations of Institutional Support

The women spoke of the support they expected from the institution, but Linda recounted prior experiences impacting on her confidence and motivation to seek support: *"I'd built a barrier from my schooling days and I've probably still got it to a certain degree, that you could be made to feel only so tall, you know you're stupid, why did you ask that question, that is very, very high on your priorities, but always that barrier that you know, you're stupid, why did you ask that question? I don't know, I just have this sort of barrier to authority, there's something there from my schooling days. It's only over the last (final) year that I've actually come forward."*

During the early phase of her study Susan felt the effect of prior experiences: *"My thing from school where I had this approaching other people for help, and the fact that I also felt I was not an academic person to be writing my assignments, but even so, after the first year of getting rewards and passes, and probably reasonably good passes that still didn't tell me well, hey, I was okay. I still put all my effort into it because there was always going to be a time when things were going to come back and (I would) be told to do them better."* She spoke also of needing particular institutional support at the commencement of her study, suggesting an *"on-campus course, on-campus initiation*

perhaps, that possibly would have helped us, although we did have some here (region) but it wasn't the same as access to the library."

Several women viewed institutional support as necessary for assignment requirements. It was important that their queries were answered promptly. Terri described her expectations: *"Trying to get hold of some lecturers, like leaving messages and they're not answering them back or you know you need to know something now, so you always had to be aware that you sometimes need to be quite organized and you know you might not be able to get hold of them at this time because they'll be doing something else . . . so that was challenging every now and then."* If feedback was not as timely as expected, Terri said, *"You had to keep asking for it and you had to ask the right questions to get any support, and it's very hard over the phone to say, well is this the assignment, this is what I've done? But if you can't explain it correctly they either miss the point or the information you get is not quite right . . . so that was really quite difficult too, but that's just the way it's done."*

Jo needed to talk through assignment requirements to conceptualize the expectations, and often turned to the other students: *"I needed someone to tell me through my ears, not written on a bit of paper because I don't learn that way. I was better with my hands. I used to ring up one of the other girls who was just the other way and I'd say to her, explain it to me in my language, and she'd just say it's this, and I'd say fine, and I'd go to my sister and I'd say explain this to me in my language and they'd both say the same. Then I knew I was on the right track. But I had to have it. I needed someone on the end of the telephone to tell me that."*

Support of Women

The women described the intensity of support through their associations as a group, and talked of the encouragement that simultaneously sustained their momentum for study, and generated lasting friendships.

Six of the women living in the same area established an informal study group during their first year. The other two women living some distance away connected with each other on a needs basis. Due to geographic distance there was less opportunity for regular interface, yet they maintained some contact with other women in the group via

e-mail and phone contact. Marian described the importance of connecting with other students: *"They (other women) were a huge help throughout the course actually, we had a lot of contact, internet, and occasionally by phoning so that helped me, you know the moral support you got, it was good to know other people in the same boat. It was quite there from the start, in fact there was a need, a need for the support to get through, it was quite obvious from early on that it was going to be hard to get through it, and hard to get through the work."*

The study group developed into a strong support network. Annabelle outlined the group's focus: *"It was really good to get together, we shared ideas, interpreted course work. Sometimes we would have a chat. The contact was really important and if we didn't meet we would phone each other. We were like a little family."*
Despite the self-directed features of flexible delivery, an emphasis of the study group was on shared learning, fulfilling the women's need for academic, practical and psychological support. Jude talked about how this assistance operated: *'I'd ring them (the other students) up and say 'help', we'd all get together and talk it over and we'd thrash it around, and you still have your own ideas, but it seems to come clearer once you've all talked about it . . . everyone can talk to everyone. We'd bring in all our problems and our books and we'd go through things that were hard for us at the time, and we'd go through different sections or modules."*

In this context the women were willing to collaborate on their assignment planning and share their assessments and associated issues. Jo described the strategies they used to alleviate assignment stress: *"I said to them, come to our house, and they all came. I said, everybody who's got a problem with the thing, come. So they all came and we nutted it out. Nobody left not knowing what they were doing."* Susan recalled strategies being used in lieu of approaching the institution for assistance: *"There were phone calls, e-mails, grumps and perhaps support on how to do an assignment, what did it really mean. I think there was a lot of that went on before we actually got to the lecturer as to what we were required to do."*

The extent of camaraderie between the women was also such that they felt they could share what may be viewed as private assessment matters. Jo spoke of a telephone tree operating when assignments were returned: "*We used to ring up and say, did you*

get an A, well done, we were proud, we're all proud you know . . . but it didn't matter whether it was an A or a B (grade)." If further assignment work was required of a student, other women in the group willingly provided guidance and clarification. Terri talked of this openness: *"We had a lot of sharing assignments, if someone would get a resubmit and someone would pass it and say, well, this is how we did it, this is how we passed, and this is how you need to fix what you did, and that was really good."*

The study group also fulfilled personal needs. For example, the group support complemented that of family members, as was identified by Jude: *"They both were . . . (student and family support), if I had to do it on my own without the other talk to the other students, I would have done it, but it would have been harder."* Linda spoke about the women *"sounding ideas off each other, although it might not be ideas about what we were studying, but how to deal with our own children even."* Jude identified a commonality of issues: *"We all had the same kind of problems"* Jo endorsed, *"We took it all on board, we do fit in each other's lives, like sitting there and you think, but you all knew what was going on. If you wanted to dig deeper that was your business, everybody knew when someone was having separation time, when children were grieving and something else was happening that was significant in their life, it might not have been major, but it was significant . . . you just get over the hurdle and onto the next one."*

There was intense personal support shared within the group and evolving friendships were significant for several of the women. Susan expected the established friendships would remain: *"I believe that now we'll make better friendships because we've got the time."* Linda said, *"I think as a group we always encouraged each other because usually you'd find that there was one person or the whole group would be feeling bad about it and want to give up but we'd get in there and support each other and that would motivate you to keep going and get on with it."*

Annabelle talked of the impact on family dynamics when her partner challenged her new friendships: *"I had a new relationship with people outside his crowd he knew nothing about . . . the bond formed with the other students prompted me to keep going."* Study demands also impacted on Terri's relationships with personal friends. She identified that over the course of her study, personal contacts waned, because of a need

to sustain the momentum of study: *"Some of my friendships with my other friends who aren't studying, I think, gosh, all I'm talking to them contains what I've got to do. I don't have a lot of regular contact probably like I used to, but we've all got our own lives now. We sort of get together every now and then, so I don't really speak to them or see them a lot so that's sort of been a change since I've been studying."*

Time and Space

The dimension of time was a revealing aspect in the interviews. The women talked of juggling both time and space for study, structuring and managing their study schedules alongside their responsibilities to family.

Creating a physical workspace enabled some women to define their student role in the home environment. Jo fashioned a defined area: *"I had the whole area (of the lounge); the children weren't allowed to go over. I drew a line because I was paranoid they would go and touch my books. For three years those children knew . . . because I couldn't cope with them being near my work."* Jo was unable separate physically from her family responsibilities: *"I would've been isolating myself (from family) and I wouldn't have liked that."*

Susan worked at the family dining table but considered it a less than desirable arrangement: *"The dining table became my study desk which needed to be cleared for family meals, so my dining table became study, meals, family, everything all at once, and I couldn't get away from it, and I would recommend everybody had a separate table for doing their work if possible, in a position that is conducive to study, because I think there were times where you tended not to clear the table for the family meal and that it's important to keep up that family contact when you're studying because at the time all the things are melded out."*

Linda set up a designated workspace in her bedroom, choosing to work away from the hub of family life. After family responsibilities were met this space became hers: *"I set up a table in my bedroom and that was my study area and I'd ensure that I'd done the work with the children and done their homework before I studied if I needed to study at night."*

The women spoke of the strategies they developed to manage their study and family time. Study was usually a set routine, broken by requirements to collect children from school and switching into family mode at the end of the day. Trinity outlined her prescribed daily schedule: *"Generally what I'd do was drop children at school, zoom home and make the first of twenty coffees a day, sit in front of the computer from 9 to 12, then I'd just go and make a toasted sandwich or some toast, go back to the computer with the food and just keep going until 2.45, and that's how I would do it."*

Similarly Susan talked about her need for routine: "*Yes, definitely a pattern. I always studied Monday to Friday 9 till 3, and it was always a pattern at 3 o'clock, I'd stop because the girls would be coming home from school, it was time for them. If they went out, when they went out, it was back to the books sneakily."* Jo structured her study time concisely by setting tasks at hourly intervals, to quell her family's demands for her time as a parent: "*They knew that when I was finished this (study) I would take them here, or we would go bush walking or we would do what we were doing as a unit as a family. I said, you need to leave me alone for an hour, so I can do that, and they'd sit there and they'd watch the clock."*

Jude recalled the importance of establishing routines: *"You had to have a routine really, finding time to study, during the day, you could, at night I could go back up there and do some more, and at the weekends I'd try and have a Saturday or Sunday to myself so that I could give it a block of time, rather than be interrupted every five minutes. I could fit it in."* Similarly, Terri identified the necessity of structuring time as one of the factors that affected her daily life: *"I'd take them (children) to school in the morning, I'd try and sit down at 9 o'clock and go right through until 3, till they got home, that was my study time. Then I'd try and get everything else done, like the homework and the meals and then they'd go to bed, and then I'd start again, sort of half past eight, 9 o'clock to do my study, so it was a big thing trying to fit everything in."*

Terri reacted to the study deadlines: "*I think having a deadline for me, knowing that I have to have this assignment done by such and such a date, even if I leave it until the last minute which I usually do, cos that's the way I work. I know it has to be done, so I'll make sure it's finished on time, that's what I've needed."*

Several women spoke of managing study around other commitments. Jude anticipated scheduling daily blocks of time when her children were at school, but needed to respond to other commitments: *"When you were at home studying, friends and rellies (relations) think that's easy peasy, and that you won't mind if you have visitors for half the day and things like that, that was hard. You know, you can put it off and think, oh cripes, this is really important, I need to get this done. (The) time factor was hard, especially when the kids were at school, cos even though you might think I've got six hours straight that I can work here, it wouldn't be like three, and you've got to go back when they're in bed and study at night."*

For Linda, the extent of time studying meant she could not deal with some of the personal issues that arose for her. On reflection she said, *"I'm having to correct a few things now and iron out a few problems that may not have arisen if I'd had more time to deal with them then" (during the training period).*

The women described the impact of study requirements on their personal time. Jude explained, *"Being able to read a book that you like, that was a cost, you didn't have time for that."* Similarly Susan identified the most significant factor that affected her was *"the robbing of my time . . . the sacrifice of my personal time, time to smell the roses, my social time had to go by."* Terri said, *"I don't have a social life, I don't have time for anything other than study and children, basically that's it."*

In contrast to maximizing study time during the week, Marian spoke of her need to minimize study over the weekends, and generally *"tried to stay away from it (study) completely and I was usually pretty good at that."* Jude captured opportunities for support from her partner during weekends, commenting, *"The weekends were good, cos I had the weekends."* Linda saw the outcome of study for herself and family: *"I have improved my time management skills . . . I think I can manage my time really well, incorporating the children and teaching them to mange their time with the possibility of me going into full-time work is really important."*

Although some women commented on the intense pressures of full time study, none of the women chose to reduce to part time study. Being granted an extension to the study period by the institution was important to Terri: *"I've limited the amount of family*

time we've had together. I had to decide to extend my study last year, just because of everything that happened there was no way I could've fitted in a trip away and get my assignments done . . . I just couldn't do it, and I knew, so that's why I decided, I'm not going to put any more pressure on me, I'll just extend it out, so that was a big compromise I had to deal with."

Institutional Requirements

The women reported on their experiences of course delivery, including their management of teaching placement requirements. They also described the academic outcomes of their study experiences.

Course Delivery

A few women commented on prescribed study requirements or aspects of course delivery, such as written materials. Jude endorsed the value of using the course readings booklets to support her learning: *"It was like Christmas time when my books arrived at the beginning of the year. It was scary to open them and see what was required of you, but then as the year moved on each of those scary assignments were tackled and completed, and it wasn't as bad as (I) first thought. To have our readings books was such a great help. I was able to go over and over the modules that were confusing. The course and readings books also allowed me to learn at my own pace in my particular style. The books were also great for revision."* However, Jude also considered course materials needed to keep pace with the review of content at the face-to-face sessions. When changes to course timetables were made, these affected her study. Similarly, Terri was affected by the provision of written resources: *"We had trouble accessing information cos we could not go into the institution or the library and look up things off the shelf, we had to ring up. They were . . . well a lot of them were quite supportive, you'd just ring up and say I need some information on this and they'd usually get it to us, but then it would take three or four days."*

The scheduled face-to-face sessions were intended to provide additional structural support. However, the attendance requirements placed pressure on women who had to travel some distance to attend the sessions. Although Trinity said, *"I really enjoyed it"* (the study sessions), the requirement to travel some distance was a strain, both emotionally and for her family. Marian was in a similar situation.

During the third year of the qualification, the introduction of new information technology requirements in some assignments provided new challenges for the women in meeting requirements. Jude described her challenges with technology: *"It was some computers didn't bring up the information they should have, and because the institution had different systems they'd bring up their information and it would be there and they didn't understand why you couldn't. I didn't realize this until I went to a friend's house and turned on her computer and here's this whole different set-up on her screen which was not on my screen. Just wee things like that; just all hiccups and it'd drive you mad."*

Learning data base search skills was also problematic. Terri described what the new process meant to her: *"Searching databases was a nightmare. It's put me off research; it's been a total nightmare. I just had so much trouble trying to find articles, and you'd find all the articles and abstracts and that would be fine and then you couldn't access them. You'd have to send away for them and that would take more time."* Susan also described the frustration of managing the internet: *"I found it difficult because of course to understand the internet nine times out of ten I would be doing it at night when my brain was dead and I'd done other work during the day, and of course that's when everybody uses the internet, and the pace of it . . . . We were also hindered by storms that you couldn't use the Internet, and we had those frequently."* In contrast to Terri's view, Marian spoke enthusiastically of research providing her with opportunities for further study: *"I've got access to all that research that comes out, so I can get that on going . . . and things all up to date and later and I can get a wide range . . . I feel quite set up."* These new skills were significant to Marian's learning and she envisaged future engagement with research: *"I was interested in research though and using other people's research, definitely."*

Teaching Experience Requirements

The women described the pressures they encountered in meeting the teaching practice requirements. They spoke about their strategies to manage family during the periods away.

The institution's requirement for students' to experience a range of early childhood centre settings necessitated most women undertaking at least one teaching

practice experience outside of their home area. This meant leaving home for periods of several weeks at a time. Terri chose to travel away on two occasions, once with her children and the next time using family support to manage the household in her absence. Terri said, *"But if I didn't have that (family support) I certainly wouldn't have been volunteering to go away. And I mean I could, that's why I said I could go, cos I knew that others (students) couldn't."* Taking her children created upheaval as it meant changing the children's schooling for a few weeks. She talked about the impact on her family: *"I spent five weeks living in a bedroom with them in a tiny little townhouse with my niece, three children in a two bedroom house, it was very challenging. The centre I went to was very good, because my youngest was five and he was having trouble settling and he would cry, and I would have to take him to school and try and settle him, and then be back at the kindergarten for sessions."* Terri described how her children looked back on this experience: *"They thoroughly enjoyed it, because they still talk of going to S. school, and that's their school, and if we go to (town) that's their school. I don't think it affected them too much."*

Linda said, *"It was a compromise, but when I went over there (location), and even now I would say hey, you've got to go outside the square a little bit sometimes, outside your comfort zone, and so going to (location) was certainly by no means any loss to me as far as my professionalism was concerned because I gained such a lot from going somewhere else. I think in terms of leaving home, it was hard, but it probably didn't do the family any harm, other than having a major clean-up when I came home."*

Similarly for Jude, travelling away for teaching practice was a positive experience, despite the personal pressures and financial difficulties this caused: *"It was absolutely enjoyable from my perspective cos it was just me, and I didn't have to worry about domestic things at all, cos I stayed with my aunty and uncle, and so I got fussed over, so it was the only time I had my assignments in before time."* Jude spoke about the impact on her family: *"It was a worry, because I had to let go of worrying about them and just keep my fingers crossed that everything was going to be ok, cos it was a long time, and to have the finances for me to go over there was a concern."*

To minimize disruption to family during one teaching practice placement, Jo chose to travel some considerable distance on a daily basis: *"I travelled three hours*

every day for five weeks because I had to be home with the children. . . . I couldn't bear if they stayed with someone, that would be so terrible but they were great . . . we all survived."

Marian needed to travel away from home for all her teaching practice placements, although not as far as the other women. For three placements, Marian prepared to live away for the working week, travelling home to her family at weekends. Marian spoke of this as being *"hard on the children, harder on the children than me cos I got, again I got quite stressed before it happened, but while it was happening I just got completely into it and you don't have time to think about the children missing you."*

Academic Outcomes

Experiencing academic success was a motivator for the women and a contributing factor was receiving feedback on assignments. Trinity said, *"I mean, to get your first assignment and have it back and you actually did well was a relief. Because you think you know, do I even know how to do an assignment to do with early childhood"?* Similarly Terri said, *"I think getting a good mark, not getting a resubmit . . . it makes you feel so much better if you know that you've put in so much to everything and got this grade . . . it's a good way of getting support."*

Susan was more hesitant: *"I was probably very fortunate that the work I put in came back as passed assignments. And that's all I ever strived to do was pass. I wasn't worried whether it was A, as long as it was a C pass, but I tended to get higher marks. How that happened I don't know because I'm not academic, but I think probably the time I put in meant that I got passes so that kept my motivation going."*

Annabelle recalled a lecturer saying, *"You can do it"* when she felt discouraged at the end of her first year of study. Jo spoke of the trepidation associated with receiving an assessed assignment: *"I never opened it (assignment) when they used to bring them. I'd be panicking. Oh, if got a resubmit I would try and wait till I got home to do it."*

The Importance of Academic Knowledge

Several women talked of enhancing their knowledge, understanding, and their awareness of the wider world beyond that of their immediate social contexts.

Jude pursued her interest in cultural issues and Maori language, and spoke of her interests and passions being reflected in her course grades. Similarly, Linda said training had "*opened my eyes to a lot of things around me, for example all things Maori which having been brought up racist opened my eyes and made me think about why I thought things, and questioned things rather than just accepting what I was told . . . not to carry down the path and not really think about things, but it's given me the confidence to realise that there's so much research out there and if I want to find out something I can go and get it.*" Susan also commented that the knowledge gained provided her with a "*wider outlook on life, the papers I have done certainly opened up the thoughts, taught me lots of things.*"

Study successes encouraged some of the women to set long term goals for further study. Linda described, "*I might have gone further if there's been a flexible option, but living here there's not a flexible option to do an honours degree or anything.*" Similarly, Jo, who initially identified no other expectations than being accepted for training, on completion of her degree enrolled in a postgraduate paper: "*Look it's endless, I could do my Masters. I never thought I'd be doing this trick, even in a million years.*" Trinity also talked of plans for further study: "*I know how to do a degree. Before I didn't, so to me if I mean to be honest, in comparison, because I didn't have the knowledge before, I think doing a Masters degree would be a lot easier.*"

Identity

The final theme evident in the findings was recognised by the women as a dynamic process of self-transformation of identity. The women described not only the emergence of teacher identity, but also the transformation of their self-identity.

Developing a Teacher Identity

The women talked of the shaping of their teacher identity as they progressed through training. Annabelle talked about the transformation from student to teacher: "*I had always been a student and had someone to go to. Now I'm it. The disposition of the teacher can impact me.*" Terri spoke of a similar transformation: "*I just feel that now I can contribute to discussions with the other staff . . . maybe I am on the same level, whereas that's been one of my issues because I am a student and I'm not up to what they know . . . as you go on you sort of, that becomes less of a focus. Once I get that*

piece of paper maybe I'll feel like, yes I am (a teacher)." For Terri, the new status was significant: *"Once I've finished and I have this degree, I sort of think I'm not just someone's mother, I'm actually a person."*

Jo reflected on change: *"I feel I can contribute to this world, not that it's not important being a wife, being important for me, myself, I can contribute something that is valuable to somebody else, besides from a mother's point of view or a wife's point of view. I'm talking from my point of view as a teacher."* For Jo however, her confidence as a qualified teacher was still emerging with experience: *"The parents look at me because I've got a degree now, this teacher . . . my child's doing this, my child's doing that and the parents are saying, what can we do about this, and I'm thinking it's on my shoulders . . . I ask somebody else, because maybe I'm just not in there yet."* In coming to terms with her teacher identity Jo said, *"I've got confidence, when people ask a straight question, you think, gosh, they actually want to know what I think."*

In recognizing her development as a teacher Jude reflected on her teaching: *"I thought I would be a much more malleable teacher than what I am, I thought I'd bend over quite a lot accommodate people's different styles and take on more of their ideas, but I've been working since the beginning of the year and I'm not a pushover. I thought I might be, I've got very definite ideas."*

Annabelle however, felt differently about her confidence as a teacher, compared to some skills she had prior to training. The expectations placed on her as a qualified teacher meant, *"I am more worried about what to say."* Trinity viewed the contribution of teaching knowledge on her skills as a parent: *"I think I'm a lot better at parenting than I was because I have the skills now to actually do things. And obviously the fact that you're now in a profession, that you're now looked on as a professional."*

Linda described how the experiences of meeting new people and fulfilling the practical requirements in a range of settings enhanced her self-confidence: "*I think having to go to the different centres that we went to, and interact with the teaching staff and the parents of the children because it was important.*" Jude acquired teacher identity through experience: "*I have adopted some practices I admired from other teachers . . . . I have learnt (that) hard and scary doesn't mean it is a bad thing for you*

to tackle . . . . I know and admit my short comings as a teacher." Furthermore, she recognised her abilities: *"I have recognizable and valued skills, for which I hung in and completed the hard yards to achieve. I am taken more seriously by other professionals. I'm not scared of a challenge anymore."*

Finally, some of the women identified a developing political awareness of early childhood issues. Linda spoke of society's views of early childhood work: *"I guess society's attitude to early childhood teachers or people being in childcare (is) that they shouldn't be there and that the teacher isn't valued for what they're doing . . . it made me think well, am I doing the right thing?"* Despite some hesitancy, the knowledge and confidence gained from training was important to Linda: *"Only up to a point until I could actually give them a satisfactory answer, especially the first year I thought, well, maybe they're right, but then the more we learnt, the more we read and understood ourselves the value and importance and the fact that even though a lot of society didn't value it, as you were told that they didn't and reading that they didn't . . . . but I could give them answers that I couldn't give before."*

Identity Transformation

It is fitting to conclude this chapter by presenting the women's views on their transformation of identity. The women described growth and changes in identity as a result of the teacher education experience.

All the women spoke of developing confidence or self esteem. Annabelle said, *"I think I am more content with me, in tune with who I am."* Jude described the outcome of study as, *"self confidence, probably that you've done it and you did it and it was hard graft, but you kept going and take on all these ideas, through things you want to keep, all those little wee bits, they seem to stick on and change you a wee bit, make you more aware . . . I think basically it comes down to your confidence in you, and if someone wants to talk about something, wow, I might know all about it now. Knowing I'm good enough to be employable was great, getting paid for it was great, confidence, self confidence, probably that you've done it and you did it . . . It has given me the confidence to say, well if I don't like it here I can go there. I could still transfer anywhere else and still go out and apply for a job."* One of Jude's closing comments

was, *"I'm not who I used to be. The experiences I went through have had an influence on my thinking, behaviour, my tolerance and acceptance."*

Linda also considered confidence as the most significant gain from her study: *"Now I don't mind walking into a room full of people I don't know and starting a conversation with someone. It isn't easy but I can do it."* Marian considered her personal gains: *" It gives me more power, almost more control; well it makes you feel that way over your life actually. I really wish I had done it years ago."*

Jo summed up the significance of obtaining the qualification: *"I'm proud of myself, I wish I'd done it years ago."* Similarly, Terri spoke of the personal impact of training, *"It's also built up my self esteem in that I can actually think I can contribute something, just talking to people and I know that I can, I know where that's coming from and why . . . before I never probably, I'd stand back a bit and I've gained a bit of confidence, it's totally changing my personality cos I used to be so quiet and shy and never said anything, but now I always step out."* Furthermore, Terri talked of changing perceptions: *"I don't want to be classed as a single parent, with no education and you know, nothing, just on a benefit, that's not what I want to be. I want to be something more."*

For Linda the teacher education experience meant, *"I've got more focus in my life now than I ever had before, because I've had time to think and some things put in my mind made me think . . . . There's definitely a wider outlook on life, you know the papers I have done certainly opened up the thoughts, taught me lots of things, done a lot of soul searching into how I grew up, and why those things have made me like I am."*

Finally, Trinity spoke of her gains: *"By the third year it's a relief, cos you think oh I know all that and now I'm the same as them . . . I know how to do what I feel these other people are doing . . . and obviously the fact that you're now in a profession that you're now looked on as a professional."*

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results, illustrated through the women's narratives of their experiences. The key themes of study and family, managing roles and study, support, connections and connectedness, time and space, institutional requirements, academic outcomes, and identity were identified and addressed. In the next chapter I analyse these themes within the framework of costs, compromises and opportunities.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The organisation of this chapter involves an analysis of the results within the research framework of costs, compromises and opportunities. This framework provides an interlocking structure for the themes that emerged in the results. Costs are associated with sacrifices to self or to family. Compromises relate to the challenges of establishing a 'middle ground' between the needs of study and of family, usually to balance one or both domains. Opportunities relate to the direct and indirect outcomes, both immediate and long term for the women and other persons integral to their study contexts.

The chapter will begin with an examination of identified costs of study to family. Subsequent discussion will address the women's compromises in roles, study, time and space, and finances. The final section will analyse the identified opportunities. These pertain to fulfilment of ambitions, opportunities for family, academic success, connectedness, connections and support and identity transition and transformation. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the key findings in relation to costs, compromises, and opportunities.

Costs

Study and Family - At a Cost

The results suggest one notable cost in regard to factors impacting on the women's study experiences. The cost of study, particularly the emotional impact on family relationships was significant to the women. The student role was a temporary phase in the women's lives, yet demanded significant adjustment and re-organization. The findings indicate that distance education and family obligations are not necessarily consistent compatible partners for women.

The findings portray that varying facets of disruption to family life was a similar issue encountered by all the women. The women's initial expectations of successfully

blending distance study and family life were short-lived. Their existing established roles in family contexts contributed to their perceptions of parenting roles, and unanticipated changes in these roles were felt acutely. This finding is common to women students where even temporary modification of the 'mother' image counters their prescribed gender expectations and represents a major change to their daily lives (Griffiths, 2002). The women's reactions match to some extent what Ballmer & Cozby (1981) ascertained from their own study, suggesting women "encounter some unique complications when they enter the academic community. Many of these complications seem to centre on the re-structuring of family relationships" (p. 1025).

Costs were most pronounced in the reduced amount and organization of time the women traditionally spent with family. Although the women's personal situations differed, forfeiting family time for study commonly generated emotional tensions. The findings indicate these tensions predominated when study demands took precedence over regular family activities and events in which the women had usually been fully involved.

Although the results suggest generally that study was a cost to the women's relationships with family members, consistently the associated tension of meeting children's needs was a conspicuous outcome. This was reflected in the findings where some women felt pressured to comply with prescribed expectations in managing their own children's behaviours. Naturally, through forfeiting established patterns of commitment and involvement in their children's activities and education, the women considered relinquishing any responsibilities to children an emotional cost. Their expressions of guilt were understandable, considering societal and cultural expectations of women's roles as nurturers and carers within the family unit. The emotional impact of family and study pressures on the women is consistent with similar findings in the literature (Edwards, 1993; Delany & Wenmoth, 2000; Duncan, 2000; Parr, 2000). Duncan (2000) suggests contributing conditions show "when a conflict of interest occurs between a woman's work and the needs of her children, guilt is often the outcome" (p. 67).

Evidence of the costs for the women is confirmed by the literature suggesting many women students experience tension between the public and private spheres of

home and study. Edwards (1993) suggests these competing dimensions of "public and private worlds . . . in the form of education and family are not separate entities. They interact and impinge upon each other, with particular implications for the position of women within each" (p. 15). Similar to the findings of Edwards, the women in this study also experienced a constant tension between the needs of family and study and expressed similar views on associated guilt to the women in Edwards' study.

Compromises

The results of this study indicate the extent to which the women compromised in their commitments to their families in regard to their roles, managing their time and space, and in fulfilling their study requirements. These patterns of compromise appeared as a common finding.

A recurrent theme in the literature is that women students' involvement in higher education generates conflict between the two institutions of family and study, as they "are under pressure to succeed in each of the two greedy spheres" (Edwards, 1993, p. 63). These findings indicate the women compromised their roles to minimize and manage aspects of the conflicting obligations to study and family.

Managing Roles - Compromise or Cost?

The results show that converging family and study contexts reminded the women of their dual obligations to family and study. Their approach to managing these obligations was to employ strategies that matched their personal family situations. This most commonly involved re-negotiating aspects of the parenting role and compromising in the domestic arena.

Consistent in the findings was a pattern of striving to balance the concurrent roles of student, parent and worker, considered to be a complex and challenging undertaking for the women. These pressures and commitments are recognized as affecting women students more so than men (Kirkup & von Prummer, 1990). Consistent with White's (1997) results, the women's initial expectations of integrating study comfortably into their daily lives changed over time. White considers the pressure of integrating study and daily life to be "something of a two-edged sword since other

pressures can detract from focus and priorities" (p. 10). The results suggest the women were forced to shape their new student role around their existing roles as parents, or in some cases, also as the worker in part time employment. The results indicate that re-defining or re-shaping of roles was one way to manage the competing circumstances of study and family.

In contrast to the findings of Home (1998) who suggests that distance education decreases the likelihood of role conflict, the results show the women in this study experienced some difficulties in minimising role conflict. At times, separating their different roles or putting demands aside was not possible, and the findings indicate the resultant stress and compromise.

The women's reactions to managing a variety of roles reflected Clouder's (1997) strategies for managing role conflict: 'the must work harder challenge', 'compromise' or 'moving the goalposts.' Each of Clouder's suggested dimensions was represented in the women's management of their roles. The 'must work harder' challenge was most pronounced in the fulfilment of domestic responsibilities. Furthermore this behaviour could also be seen in the emphasis given to maintaining harmonious family relationships. Evidence of 'compromise' was apparent in altering behaviours, and 'moving the goalposts' was a strategy used by the women who re-framed their views and negotiated with family members to provide support. This compromise related to adjusting their roles, behaviour and expectations.

Commonly the women compromised on established patterns of active involvement in their children's education. Although the findings confirm they attached great importance to family, study commitments meant either relinquishing involvement or sharing the responsibilities associated with their children's education. This adjustment in the parenting role was considered necessary, yet not forfeited easily. These findings suggest that some women experienced role contagion in meeting their study needs and responsibilities to family. Role contagion is described by Home (1998) as when a woman "has difficulty performing one role while worrying about their other responsibilities" (p. 95).

The results match Edwards (1993) view that women students either consciously separate the two roles as students and parents or create a comfortable sense of connectedness between these two realms. The results therefore suggest the women compromised in separating from family life and choosing how and when to connect with family. One factor enabling the women to compromise their parenting roles was the minimal resistance by other family members to supporting their study. With only one exception the results indicate that the compromise in roles was generally tolerated or accepted within families, even when 'buy in' was necessary from family members. This finding was inconsistent with the extreme attitudes by family members recognised in Grace's (1994) study of women distance learners.

Another noticeable compromise in the findings related to management of domestic tasks. Commonly, the findings suggest the woman and her family reached some agreement on altering the balance of domestic responsibilities in the home. Although generally accepting of the necessity to adjust domestic responsibilities in order to find time for study, these changes created challenges. Where the results differed most strongly was in the women's individual preferred strategies in managing domestic roles. Whereas some women found it harder to forfeit domestic responsibilities, other women were more willing to reduce or minimize their domestic involvement. It made a difference when the women took advantage of the offers of assistance from family and friends. Such willing support from family members in sharing domestic responsibilities is shown to be in contrast to the findings of von Prummer (2000) where "many women distance students report an increase in the demands their partners and children make on them" (p. 57).

The findings also illustrate that completing domestic tasks was an essential daily psychological ritual for some women who needed to either complete tasks prior to commencing study, or intersperse these throughout the day. This type of behaviour is consistent with the view of von Prummer (1994) who illustrated that women students may "start setting higher standards in their domestic and mothering roles" (p. 9). Not a lot has changed since the earlier research by Martin (1988). Martin's findings stated, "many women however, let roles determine their actions, rather than acting to restructure roles for themselves, so that returning to study, but still remaining primarily in the home as the main organizer and domestic worker, can be seen as a means of

assuaging any feeling of guilt associated with taking an action to improve one's self image" (p. 132).

The results indicating women's attention to maintaining established domestic patterns are not surprising, considering their gendered roles. Moreover, domestic responsibilities were reinforced as a visible presence alongside study. This matches the view of Edwards (1993) who also found in her study that duty and commitment to domestic responsibilities are known to be a constant presence in the minds of mature women students. The situation was compounded for the women through the daily visible presence and reminder of their commitments to family.

The findings suggest certain circumstances generated different compromises in the families' domestic roles, as illustrated when the women went on teaching experience. Teaching experience requirements altered their daily timetables to a full-time teaching day, along with expectations to complete assignment requirements outside of those teaching periods. When the women needed to travel some distance to their placements some considerable changes in domestic roles were encountered. When the women relinquished their domestic responsibilities, allowing their partners and children to assume more domestic responsibility they matched Clouder's (1997) strategy of 'moving the goalposts.' Despite the personal issues these changes signaled for the women, re-arranged domestic responsibilities were generally considered by the women to have positive outcomes for themselves and their families.

Study Compromises

The results of this study indicate the women compromised in managing some course requirements. This occurred most commonly through creating alternative support structures to assist with assessments other than using the established systems of the institution.

These results indicate the women had specific expectations of institutional support for course requirements. However, the findings do not reveal any strong preferences by the women regarding institutional support for their personal needs. The women's views appear to match the findings of McLachlan-Smith (1998), revealing that distance education students are clear regarding the type of support they expect from the

institution. The results here suggest that support and guidance from the institution relating to assignments was compromised by some organizational factors, the women's perceptions about assignment information, and also the women's willingness and abilities to articulate their needs via distance mode. Some of these issues encountered by the women match Furste-Bowe and Dittmann's (2001) findings, suggesting women students become frustrated when communication with an institution does not meet their expectations or learning needs. Importantly, the study group fulfilled necessary study assistance, thereby sustaining the women's motivation in place of institutional guidance. Although the women sought advice from the institution, the support of other students was a workable compromise for institutional guidance.

One finding that stood out was the extent to which self-perceptions and internalized personal barriers can impact on a woman's willingness to engage with the institution. Mature women students may be reticent about seeking support for a number of reasons. Susan seldom chose to contact the institution with queries, despite recognizing the role of the institution in supporting her studies. Ambivalence about her academic ability was a contributing factor. Susan's perception is consistent with the findings of Garland (1994) who recognized the dilemma students face in managing a "social contradiction between the role of the student and the role of the adult" (p. 45). Susan's views illustrate the possible effect of dispositional characteristics and perceptions of self-efficacy on her willingness to seek support.

Sperling (1991) also suggests that mature women students are often hesitant to approach lecturers for what may be viewed as trivial matters. According to Sperling, the situation compounds if distance women students fail to engage regularly with academic staff. This study's findings suggest the study group fulfilled the institution's role for women who were at times ambivalent about approaching the institution's academic staff for advice or guidance.

The findings also illustrate that the flexible delivery methods were more suited to some women than others, suggesting some individual differences in women's preferred learning needs. Interpreting course written requirements challenged Jo and Terri in particular, who both considered they benefited most from an interactive delivery style. They compromised in managing their learning by using the network of

friends to assist in interpreting assignments. In Jo's case eliciting feedback from multiple sources provided a solution to her learning needs. This finding is consistent with the views of Carnwell (2000) who recognized that women students apply different preferred learning approaches when engaging with study materials. Furthermore, the women's need to enlist support from a range of sources matches Carnwell's view that particular forms of dialogue with the institution are more suited to some students than others.

A further finding associated with delivery approaches was the identified challenge for most of the women in managing technology, although the impact of this was experienced differently. Until their final year of study the women had been used to preparing assignments with minimal requirements to use electronic databases. The results suggest introducing a new technological tool that was generally unfamiliar was considered by most women to be psychologically and academically taxing. The results establish this was also a drain on the women's time and resources in their final year of study. With the exception of Marian, technology was considered by most of the women an essential tool necessary for completing assignments, rather than a potentially exciting new skill.

These results are consistent with the literature indicating that new developments in distance delivery, such as technology can challenge mature women students (Burge, 1998; Furste-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001). Similar issues relating to women students' management of technology to support their studies are also reported by Furste-Bowe & Dittmann (2001). Common to the women in this study and Furste-Bowe & Dittmann's findings were issues relating to technical glitches and mastering other technological requirements. Furthermore, the women's reactions to developing new technological skills are similar to the issues raised by Burge (1998). Burge highlights the application of technology in distance education, suggesting women have limited time to adjust to new skills. Where one woman differed from the others was her eagerness to overcome any technical frustrations in managing technology. Marian considered the positive outcomes of acquiring new skills that would provide future learning opportunities.

When Terri chose to extend her qualification deadline beyond the prescribed study period, the compromise was clearly made in regard to her studies. Sacrificing

study for family, as Terri chose so close to the end of the qualification did not curb the opportunity to eventually complete the qualification.

Compromises in Study Time and Study Space

The results suggest time is a precious commodity for mature women who usually need to juggle their time as parents, student teachers and employees. It arose in this study as a psychological barrier for most of the women, but they used compromising strategies to manage these demands. The results also indicate that the women's personal time was considered a compromise and a sacrifice. A further finding illustrated several women compromised in the use of study space.

The results show that the advertised course study requirements contributed to some women's decisions to apply for the course. However, findings also indicate the actual course requirements exceeded the women's initial expectations of the workload. Both this study and the research of Furste-Bowe and Ditmann (2001) ascertained that distance study was time-consuming for women students. The unprecedented study requirements subsequently impacted on the women's control and management of their studies around family needs. Finding time for family and study arose consistently in the results as a significant personal barrier for all the women. The findings suggest the women compromised in managing study, family and personal time, either through separating time spent in each domain, or forfeiting personal time. Similar to White's (1997) findings on the controlling aspects of the study context of distance learners, the women in this study also recognised factors they could or could not control. One aspect of study that the women could control more consistently was setting aside discrete periods of time for study, particularly when their children were at school. Griffiths (2002) considers this level of organisation by women as a pragmatic approach to managing studies, "blurring the boundaries of public and private life in a positive way" (p. 277).

However, when family returned home at the end of the day, in most situations the women resumed the parenting role. Study was therefore compromised for family needs. This finding is supported by Hayes' (2000) analysis of women students' social contexts. Hayes posited that women's difficulties in managing their study time lay in

"the social organisation of family and education and in the extent to which women's time is controlled by the demands of others" (p. 48).

In contrast, the results suggest family time was compromised when it was necessary for the women to resume study in the evenings. The findings also indicate some women's personal health and well-being were compromised due to the impact of studying late into the evening. This finding suggests that allocating personal time was an aspect of difficulty for the women. Their resolve to sacrifice social time was also a personal compromise. The literature also confirms that women tend to forfeit personal leisure time ahead of meeting the demands of family (Edwards, 1993). Although the encroachment of study on weekend family time exacerbated tensions for some women, this was a necessary compromise in enabling them to manage their assignment work.

The results suggest the women fulfilled socially constructed behaviours in managing their time. This implies the women held internalised expectations of their primary responsibility to family, consistent with similar views in the literature. As Edwards (1993) found, women's perceptions of managing time are "shot through with qualitative beliefs and assumptions about what it meant to be a mother/partner" (p. 64). Consistent with Edward's findings these results also portray how the women felt some unease in the decisions they made regarding prioritising their time.

Moreover, the results reveal that most women compromised on existing physical spaces in their homes by fitting their study areas around family living spaces. Commonly this was evident in the challenge of separating their study space from family living. They compromised by creating temporary study spaces around their family's daily living patterns. Here the findings revealed more similarities than differences in intent, although the women's space provisions differed. Where study space was consciously or physically separated from daily family life, this was by necessity, not a preferred choice. The issues pertaining to finding study space matches von Prummer's (2000) findings that women distance students are more adversely affected than males in claiming a study space in the home.

Financial Compromises

The financial cost of study emerged as a pattern in the results, and as a concern for several women. Accessing a student loan, although a common solution, provided only temporary relief for the financial burden associated with the women's study. The findings indicate student loans also alleviated employment pressures, creating a necessary security during the study period. This was a compromising factor for several women in forfeiting employment to meet family needs and study requirements. Evidence from other New Zealand studies (Ash, 2000; Barratt, 2001) confirms similar issues for mature students. The women's need for financial assistance from the student loan scheme to support study and family is consistent with the findings of Ash (2000) and Barratt (2001). Ash (2000) also found mature students' financial commitments created tensions in meeting demands of study and family and employment. Moreover, Barratt's (2001) findings match the women's relinquishment of part time employment as a strategy for managing their studies.

The results also illustrate the circumstances of meeting teaching experience requirements added to the financial burdens of some women. This was more pronounced for some women than for others, particularly the women who were parenting alone and whose obligations to family required additional travel commitments to support family members during these periods.

Generally the findings confirm the student loan, although a compromise, provided an immediate viable solution in meeting the women's study and family obligations, and the results suggest their pervading resolve regarding re-paying the loan over a long period of time.

Opportunities

An overall finding of this study was that the costs and compromises were outweighed by the opportunities anticipated and gained by the women from the three years of study and the resultant qualification. This section of the analysis introduces the opportunities the women envisaged for their study. The findings are then addressed as opportunities for family, enabling academic success, developing supportive relationships and lasting friendships, transforming identity, and experiencing personal fulfilment.

Consistently the results suggest a foremost reason for enrolling in a flexible learning programme was the women's perception of a convenient delivery model that complemented family needs and employment commitments. The women's views on study combining comfortably with existing lifestyles match similar findings in other studies (White, 1997; von Prummer, 2000; Furste-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001). White (1997) found that novice distance students considered "flexibility is primarily perceived in terms of their life-style rather than flexibility for themselves as learners in relation to the material" (p. 6). Similarly, von Prummer, (2000) and Furste-Bowe & Dittmann (2001) identified family orientation as being specific reasons for women's decisions to enrol in a distance education programme.

Initially the women considered distance study would not impact significantly on their existing family living patterns. A prevailing view in the findings was that they could comfortably manage their studies with ostensibly minimal disruption to family life. In all cases family circumstances meant none of the women could re-locate to study on-campus. In this respect the timely opportunity of a flexible learning programme in their region matches the findings of Delany and Wenmoth (1998). Their study indicated that students in a distance teacher education programme considered their reasons for enrolling to be an opportunity, "not an option" (p. 301).

Motivation and Fulfilling Ambitions

Overall the results show that the impetus for the women's return to study evolved from their experiences in early childhood education, coupled with strong personal motives. Consistently the findings point to prior experiences in early childhood settings as contributing to the women's decisions to apply for the teacher education programme. Although their involvement in early childhood settings differed in scope and experience, the women's motives were common. This finding matches evidence from other studies confirming prior involvement in education services is a catalyst for study in teacher education programmes (Duncan, 1999). Moreover, according to Edwards (1993), women's life experiences are considered "valuable academic assets" (p. 83), influencing their re-entry to study.

The findings also indicate that for all the women, returning to study was a high investment, illustrated clearly in the meanings they ascribed to realising unfulfilled

ambitions. Commonly, their motivation and intent to overcome dispositional barriers was noticeable. These findings support Davey's (2000) study on the intentions and motivations of returning women students. Davey suggests internal motivating factors prompt women's return to study, despite any mitigating situational factors that may have delayed these opportunities. Moreover, Britton & Baxter (1999) also suggest such motivation "involves the realization of those aspects of self which have been denied in the past" (p. 6).

The findings also suggest congruence between women's earlier formal education experiences and their personal perceptions of academic ability. Where the findings differed was in the women's individual responses to academic requirements. As the results show, mature women's earlier educational experiences as under-achievers can impact on how women view their educational ability. This reticence regarding academic ability is considered to be more profound for returning female students (Grace, 1994; von Prummer, 2000). Some of the women's initial hesitancies regarding their potential for academic study successes are consistent with Grace's (1994) and Bhalalusesa's (2001) findings. Bhalalusesa's (2001) findings revealed women might feel "scared, apprehensive and nervous about beginning their studies . . . . They do not believe that they are capable of excelling even when they are good" (p. 61). However, in the context of the opportunities gained, overcoming negative education experiences could be viewed as a significant opportunity for each woman. These findings are consistent with Flannery's (2000) view that "the negative effects of previous schooling, and hence feelings of low self-esteem can be diluted under some conditions" (p. 72).

Opportunities for Family

A consistent finding was the women's pronouncements of the opportunities study could and did provide for their families. One outcome of the study experience was the women's realization that new and meaningful academic knowledge did impact positively on family relationships and roles. The context and content of the teacher education course affirmed the women's existing parenting skills, as they gained practical and theoretical insights into education. These educational outcomes were enabling factors in understanding their own children's development and needs. Moreover, the findings also suggest the women became more confident in perceiving and articulating their children's educational needs. This finding matches similar views

of other mature women students (Martin, 1988; Edwards, 1993; von Prummer, 2000). Von Prummer (2000) suggests from a study of women distance education students, that in contrast to the men, "women with partners and children saw their course choice as serving their families, especially their children" (p. 184).

Another common finding was the women's recognition of aspirations and prospects for their children's education. It was not only the immediate effect of their modeling, but also the longer-term impact on children of the women's commitment to study that stood out as a finding. Noticeably, this outcome was important to the women who bore memories of failed schooling experiences. Edwards (1993) study also showed that the academic knowledge gained by women supported their children's learning and their personal child-rearing practices.

Experiencing Academic Success

The findings show that as the mature learner gains knowledge and understanding of course requirements she is undertaking a journey of academic and personal self-discovery. These results suggest the women overcame barriers, sustained motivation, recognised the intrinsic rewards of assessment and experienced academic fulfilment.

One overall finding that stood out was the women's determination and motivation to succeed academically, despite mitigating personal circumstances. Although their personal situations and issues differed, collectively the women maintained a focused commitment to succeeding in the qualification. One consistent coping mechanism was their level of organizational skills, but where the findings differed was each woman's resourcefulness in managing her personal situation. Contextual differences affected women's individual study patterns and motivations. This pattern of challenging personal circumstance and motivation operating together is consistent with the findings of Scott et al (1998).

Although the findings illustrate women's self-doubt and initial reticence about their academic ability, experiencing academic success proved to be an important motivator, particularly during the early phases of their study. Grace (1994) attributes gender-prescribed attitudes to women's hesitancies and anxieties about engaging in higher study, a finding that is matched in this study. Gender related factors are known to

impact on women's academic confidence particularly when perceptions of their academic ability are influenced by prior unsatisfactory educational experiences.

Previous research suggests the woman student goes through a process of adjustment during her first year of study (Duncan, 1999; Grace, 1994). The results show that the women's awareness of their developing academic competence complements Grace's (1994) findings illustrating that "anticipatory anxiety gave way to increasing confidence as the students progressed through their first year" (p. 19). The results in this study suggest initial assessment results were a key motivator for the women in affirming their academic abilities. The women's emphasis on achieving assignment success is identified as a common finding and is supported in the literature as a factor contributing to improved self esteem (Hipp, 1997; Gibson, 1998).

Furthermore, these results support Gibson's (1998) view that academic self-concept can be viewed as a dynamic process that "changes with time and experience" (p. 67). The women's study experiences illustrate three facets of developing an academic self-concept as described by Gibson, "The process of learning as an adult; the process of learning at a distance; and a content-specific aspect of academic self-concept" (ibid, p. 67). Gibson's process and content related factors match these findings, evident in enhancing the women's academic self-concept and their focus on achieving long-term goals. Encouragement and guidance from the institution's staff, gaining confidence and familiarity with the distance learning expectations and evolving self-confidence were contributing factors and enhancers for academic and personal success.

One further finding that stands out is the recognition by the women of the socio-cultural knowledge they acquired from their studies. The results suggest the teacher education programme broadened the women's horizons and insight into wider social issues they had not previously encountered. Furthermore, the results suggest an acceptance by some women of their academic journey as ongoing and providing opportunities to engage in further study. This was most pronounced for Jo who had initially considered that acceptance into a course of study to be more important than the study programme itself. Her ambition to pursue post-graduate study illustrates the

extent to which women can be powerful agents of change, given appropriate circumstances and opportunities.

Support, Connectedness and New Relationships

One of the most consistent findings was the importance ascribed by the women to the support provided by others. Further to the tangible support of family and friends, the results indicate a level of psychological support that evolved within the women's study group. These associations equate to the multi-faceted support structures Gibson (1998) describes as important in the distance learner's context. More specifically the findings illustrate the importance ascribed by the women to personal support and connectedness, providing opportunities for them to develop new and meaningful relationships, some of which evolved into friendships.

There is a link between the results of this study and Grace's (1994) findings. Both sets of results identify the impact of women students' personal contexts as contributing to their motivation. Grace describes this context as the "primary reality, the one from which they drew most of their motivations, and in terms of which they constructed their most potent meanings" (ibid, p. 14). The primary contexts in this study were those of family and the other women.

Family members performed a pivotal role in supporting the women, although in different ways. These results indicate that the most common family support was of practical and tangible assistance, primarily relating to domestic tasks and assisting with care of family members. With one exception, the results show that family members provided meaningful and consistent active and psychological encouragement in contrast to direct discouragement. This finding is inconsistent with the patterns in Barratt's (2001) study. Barratt found that although family members were a source of encouragement, they were also the greatest source of discouragement of mature students' involvement in study.

These results illustrate the extent to which immediate and wider family members assumed a range of practical roles to assist the women. In most situations these relieved the women of specific domestic tasks and parenting responsibilities. The extent to which the women's family members offered ranging practical support contrasts with the

findings of von Prummer, (2000). The women in von Prummer's study identified increasing rather than diminishing demands from family in relation to domestic responsibilities.

Providing practical support meant an adjustment for family members who needed to accommodate the women's study patterns into their own lives. This featured strongly when the women were required to travel away for teaching experience and family members picked up a range of domestic and care-giving responsibilities. Generally these tasks were undertaken willingly and provided the necessary assurance that family life would continue in spite of the woman's absence for extended periods of time. However, the psychological support of family did not feature strongly in the results. One exception was evident in the views of several women who considered their children to be significant encouragers. The patterns of contributing psychological and practical support by children were similar to the findings in Edwards' (1993) study of mature women students.

Another relevant finding was the level of institutional support recognised by the women. As the distance education student adjusts to the culture of the institution she needs to ascertain the systems important to guiding and supporting her studies. Appropriate support is considered to be a buffering mechanism that assists students in countering some academic stressors (Karach, 1992). The results indicate the women sought support from the institution, but this was most commonly of a practical source. One finding that stood out was the minimal reliance by the women on the institution to provide pastoral and personal support despite the women recognising the guidance roles of the institution. Although the institution established regular face-to-face sessions, minimal mention was made by the women of these timetabled sessions. More emphasis was given to the purposes and outcomes of the informal study group as impacting on their learning. McCahon (2000) considers regular face-to-face contact to be an important basis for establishing rapport with distance students. However, the results suggest affiliation of the informal study group was considered more significant at the time.

The support of other woman in the study programme was reported consistently and as a significant finding. The instrumental and psychological support shared in the

study group was a key motivator. Contributing factors were the non-competitive atmosphere, the meaningful guidance and encouragement, and evolving personal affiliations. Karach (1992) also found in her study of on-campus women that the support of other women was "the most crucial means by which they (the women) had survived the system were talking to their women friends and being part of a wider women's social network" (p. 315). The evidence supporting women's interest in connecting with other women match the findings of Kirkup and von Prummer (1990) Grace, (1994) and von Prummer (1994). Kirkup and von Prummer (1990) also found that women distance students in two different learning contexts were inclined to seek the contact of others with whom they could share their study needs.

This study's findings also illustrate aspects of women's social learning, reflecting gender-based differences in learning styles. Frustrations experienced through distance isolation were ameliorated by the shared learning and on-going support of the women. The study group fulfilled an important role in assisting with interpretation of assignment requirements and course content. The willingness of some women to share their academic results was evident in their relatively open discussions pertaining to assignment assessments. The results suggest sharing of assignment grades, academic challenges and successes with other women occurred in the context of mutual acceptance and trust. In the course of events this willingness to share constructive guidance and advice was shown to impact on the women's motivation, confidence and abilities as learners.

The two women who lived some distance from the other six women in the group met occasionally to share their study issues. In contrast to the other women, Trinity chose to use a more individual learning approach to her studies. Occasional contact with Marian who lived in her region met Trinity's expectations for support. Marian contacted the other six women more frequently, mainly through e-mail and phone calls. However, the results suggest that geographic separation from the other women was not a significant isolating factor for either Marian or Trinity.

These findings also suggest the women's common personal experiences contributed to the group camaraderie. Furthermore, the findings illustrate the women's willingness to openly share personal family issues. This illustrates the extent to which

they established trusting relationships within the group. Sharing aspects of their personal lives also illustrates the connecting elements of the public and private spheres. Evidence from other studies endorses the strength of the women's support, matching that of the 'closest kind' as described by Asbee and Simpson (1998). 'Connected knowing' is another way to describe this support (Belenky et al, 1997). Despite the restrictions of distance delivery structure, the quality of connectedness enabled this group to develop as a "collaborative enterprise" (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 120).

Acker's (1995) view is, "There are certain cultural scripts seen as suitable for women in a given place and time, the caring script among them" (p. 33). In this study these caring behaviours appeared to differ in intensity for each woman, yet featured as an important interactive feature of the study group. The caring concept was also illustrated in the women's consistent reference to 'we' when talking individually about the study experience.

Identity Transition and Transformation

One recurrent finding from this study is the women's recognition of their developing teacher identity and transformation of self-identity. The results of this study match other research suggesting women students' identities are re-shaped as an outcome of the study experience (Edwards, 1993; Flannery, 2000; Parr, 2000). Despite the challenges, problems and personal sacrifices of study, the women conceptualised their transition in identity through the process of becoming adult students, as developing teachers, but also as women who transformed or re-framed their personal identities.

If, as the literature suggests (Pascall & Cox, 1993b; Taylor, 1995; Paase 1998; Flannery, 2000; Parr, 2000) the education experience has the potential to re-shape and transform women's identity, then these patterns of transition are also evident in this study. The findings do not indicate whether identity transition was consciously recognised by the women at the commencement of their studies, but they all recognised personal aspects of identity transformation and self-growth as an outcome of the study experience. Moreover, the findings suggest evidence of 'finding their voices', albeit in differing intensity. Similar to the women in Hipp's (1997) study, this study also illustrates how the academic experience enhances a woman's confidence in her own knowledge and learning.

In the context of this study, the results show influences on the women's identity came from various social sources. Consistent was the effect of interactions with family, friends, teachers, the other women in the group and staff from the institution. These connections illustrate the relational view of identity described by Flannery (2000) that "women develop and gain a sense of identity in a context of connections with others rather than through individuation and separation from others" (p. 60). However, the personal effect of these influences was portrayed differently for each woman. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the women's heightened self-awareness and self-reflection also affected their identity transformation. These multiple factors influencing identity and self-esteem match the nonessentialist perspective of identity described by Flannery (2000), "A nonessentialist perspective considers many possible expressions of identity and self esteem and assumes multiple identities and types of self-esteem that change across time, and that may conflict with each other" (p. 57).

Some specific findings pertaining to identity development were noticeable. These suggest one of the significant opportunities considered by the women was the development and transformation of teacher identity. Both this study and that of Duncan (1999) consider the shaping of student identity for mature women students in teacher training. The training experience involves re-defining roles as parents and students. Duncan suggests that re-definition enhances the transformation of identity, as was the case for the women in this study. Overall the findings suggest the development of teacher identity was a process of positive transformation. Where the findings contrast is in the differing levels of developing teacher confidence expressed by some women.

One factor known to contribute to teacher identity is the opportunity to practise being a teacher. However, the results convey minimal reference by the women to aspects of their teaching experiences. Practical teaching experience enables students to integrate knowledge and teaching skills that contribute to developing a teacher identity. The findings suggest these skills were recognised by the women through the integration of teaching philosophy and knowledge rather than the specific identification of teaching experiences. Furthermore, the results confirm an association between identity and teacher status. However, where these results differed was in the women's perceptions of their teaching confidence. Some women had not accepted the permanency of their

newly ascribed teacher status. Although two women recognised their newly acquired teacher identity, some hesitancy about their confidence as teachers suggests their identity had not stabilized.

Whether identity change was a conscious or unconscious process for the women, the findings indicate some changes. New levels of awareness, the courage to engage in personal change, demonstrate independence, portray confidence and show resourcefulness featured in all the women's narratives. These findings are consistent with those of Taylor (1995), Parr (2000) and Peters (2000). The patterns in the results suggest the women's recognition of their "agency, authority and autonomy" (Taylor, 1995, p. 91). The findings also illustrate the constructive-development model of identity transformation described by Kegan (1994, cited in Taylor, 1995). Kegan's model supports mature women's progression toward a higher level of consciousness, coupled with reflection on self-identity. Taylor suggests this process results in change, "not only in the re-entry woman, but in the wider society of which she is now a more capable member " (ibid, p. 91). Consistent with Kegan's model and Taylor's findings these results also confirm the transforming influences of the educational experience for the women, albeit individually different.

Moreover, the results show a similarity to the findings of Parr (2000). The women in Parr's study experienced "fulfillment, an increasing confidence, a positive self-image and independence, all (of which I have put) under the umbrella term of identity" (p. 129). According to Parr, identity can be illustrated conceptually rather than being described directly as a feature of growth or change.

The findings suggest that identity transformation was a process of self-recognition and self-growth. One finding that stood out was the re-evaluation of gender-prescribed identity as a mother alongside that of the newly ascribed teacher identity, consistent with the findings of Pascall and Cox (1993b) and Peters (2000). Similarly, the women in Pascall and Cox's (1993b) study considered changes in perceptions of their mother identity as an outcome of the study experience. The women in Peters' (2000) study also ascribed meaning to "being someone with status in the eyes of family, children and society" (ibid, p. 45). This study's findings also suggest a meaningful and successful education experience provides another source of identity beyond that solely

of a mother. Such recognition was considered to be personally empowering and represented a significant self-transformation for some women. Developing self-esteem and self-confidence showed similar meaning in the findings with regard to personal gains. As self-esteem is about valuing one's self image and identity (Flannery, 2000), this was not an unexpected response.

Conclusion

The findings addressed in this chapter convey that the realities of distance study are likely to be far more complex and challenging for women students than initial ideals of comfortably fitting study around family life. Overall the results suggest a commonality in the women's perceptions of their experiences than noticeable differences.

The costs encountered primarily pertained to personal sacrifices made by the women in their family contexts. The most common pattern in the findings related to the ever-present demands on the women to balance the differing aspects of their lives as they reconciled the needs of family with their desire to gain a qualification.

The findings illustrate that all the women compromised in fulfilling aspects of their designated roles within the family, in managing their study requirements, and in using systems to relieve financial pressures. The women still fitted into the ideology of family, but adjusted the intensity of their roles in family. Overall, the compromises made by the women indicate, that when confronted with challenges they developed strategies to manage study requirements. Their resourcefulness illustrates the extent to which they compromised to manage the competing demands in their daily lives.

Overwhelmingly the findings indicate the women's capacity to consider the opportunities and longer-term benefits of study, not only for themselves, but also for their families. The opportunities addressed in the findings were synonymous with motivation and fulfilment of ambition. Despite the compromises and the costs to the women in undertaking study, ultimately they maintained a vision to gain a qualification, which, for some was initially considered unreachable.

Study was also perceived as providing opportunities and positive models for the women's families, particularly their children. One of the more revealing findings was the opportunity provided through the study programme to connect with other women and establish lasting friendships. This finding confirmed that the support of other women was a powerful factor in sustaining their motivation and achievement. Another revealing finding was the extent to which the women considered their study to be a transforming experience, particularly in the re-framing of identity.

Despite some of the women expressing ambivalence regarding their capabilities at the commencement of training, their motivation, achievements and accomplishments illustrated a powerful change event for the women, albeit in different ways. Accordingly the women in this study realized that completing the qualification would not only provide new opportunities for employment, but also prove their ability to succeed academically, and affirm the fulfilment of long-term career ambitions. That their intrinsic motivation and outward determination sustained the women in their studies is an important feature of the findings.

Chapter 6

Implications, Limitations and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will address the implications of this study in relation to the key research question and the findings. Some recommendations are suggested for institutions to consider regarding supporting mature women students' study experiences. The limitations of this study will also be discussed.

Implications

This research has provided an insight into the individual perspectives and experiences of a small group of mature women students. The chance encounter of a study programme advanced the women's education opportunities in an already familiar professional field. Nevertheless, the complexities and impact of the study experience on the women was not fully anticipated by them at the onset of the study programme. Their initial expectations of fitting study into existing life patterns structured around family underwent transformation during the course of three years.

One question raised in this research relates to how a flexible learning study programme impacts on mature women students. This study has illustrated that as the women's new professional responsibilities merged with their personal contexts, some complex factors affected the women in several ways.

Implications of the study experience reveal the costs and the compromises the women made in reconciling their roles and responsibilities as parents and partners with their commitments as students. This study reveals the women learnt to reconcile and adjust their student role around ever-present family responsibilities in their study environment. However, it also illustrates that women may choose to compromise on particular home-based responsibilities in order to achieve their long-term goals, thereby altering existing the structures, balance and designation of roles within families. Despite

their mixed reactions these changes can become an enabling factor for family members as they also learn to cope and adjust to change.

This study has also highlighted that the support of others is a pivotal influencing factor for a woman's successful study experience. The women elicited support from a range of sources, including those that suited them personally. The context of the informal study group illustrates the women's resourcefulness, demonstrating initiative, motivation and flexibility in taking responsibility for their learning needs. Moreover, the women chose to engage and collaborate in their studies because of the evolving climate of mutual trust, support and guidance and a manifest preference for shared learning. These patterns of behaviour provide a strong message about how some women choose to manage their distance study, given the right circumstances, such as geographic closeness and common motives. A particularly revealing outcome of the study was the way in which the study group fulfilled a cathartic role, evident in sharing of personal issues alongside meeting professional requirements. The personal associations provided an important source of encouragement to the women. In some respects the role of the study group also typifies an acceptable meaningful connectedness of the women's public and private realms.

The study illustrates a combination of private and public factors affected the women's study experiences as distance students. The intersecting public and private domains shaped the women's lives, affirming a conscious separation of public and private realms of study is not necessarily possible or essential. The connections of family and study reinforce how particular social contexts can shape and impact on women's educational experiences. Each woman's public and private worlds were connected in the physical presence of her study context. These women developed resourceful strategies enabling them to manage the competing dual realms of the 'greedy institutions' of study and family. However, the coping mechanisms used by the women differed according to each of their situations. Circumstances dictated whether roles were forfeited or re-allocated within families or whether only small adjustments could be made.

The women skilfully utilised available personal resources to manage competing study and family responsibilities. Each woman learnt to schedule and often adjust her

study time around family and to fit her study requirements into the physical spaces available to her. When a woman undertakes her study in less than desirable study conditions, including restrictive or temporary study spaces in the home environment, she compromises her own needs for the family.

Although the study experience enabled the women to fulfil their professional ambitions to become qualified teachers, one of the most revealing outcomes was that of achieving exceptional personal opportunities. Through overcoming internal barriers and devising strategies to manage the fluctuating external barriers the women managed 'against the odds' to succeed with their studies. The extent of personal change was for each woman, generally unanticipated, but of immense personal significance.

This research exemplifies how the study experience shaped and transformed the women's identities. Overcoming negative perceptions about their abilities as learners, perceptions of academic barriers, personal anxieties and hesitant attitudes to degree level study are influential factors in identity re-shaping or transformation. Although expressed differently according to their circumstances, each woman encountered these changing features in some form. However, the relational associations between the women appeared to contribute significantly to overcoming barriers and nurturing their evolving identities. Whether this was a conscious or unconscious process for the women it stands as a revealing outcome of their learning experience.

Another enlightening outcome of study was recognising an identity other than the gender-prescribed mother image. This outcome conveys a message about how women can re-structure their views of self, comfortably accept and celebrate a change in status in parallel with entrenched socially prescribed roles.

Recommendations

One further question raised in this study related to how this research could inform an institution's flexible learning (distance education) practices. Several aspects of relevance to institutional practices were highlighted. Although this study has revealed that women are capable of developing as confident and competent learners, their academic journey is not effortless. How can the institution recognise, support and respond to this important developmental process? This can be accomplished in several

ways. There are a number of recommendations for institutions to consider that would enhance mature women students' affinity with the institution, prior to and during their study period.

Ascertaining information about women's experiences, concerns and identified needs prior to commencing study would enhance the initial connections with women students. Moreover, returning students may be less aware of strategies to balance work and personal responsibilities. Therefore, if the institution provides opportunities for women to address initial concerns they are more likely to trust that their needs will be recognised and understood. Wherever possible, facilitating contact between students will provide further opportunities for connections to evolve between women students.

Despite mature women students' significant life experiences, they may still lack the confidence to manage certain aspects of study. Furthermore, if women are carrying a stigma of failed academic experiences, then they must be encouraged as potentially successful students early in the study period. During the initial stages of their study, as novice students, women may be solely focused on surviving the institution. This study has shown that mature women students may be hesitant to contact academic staff because of damaging prior educational experiences. Establishing a relationship with a distance student requires expertise on the part of the institution's staff, and tutors need to be skilled in reading students' cues and ascertaining their needs. Moreover, institutional support systems must be sufficiently flexible in adjusting and accommodating to student's individual needs as well as being effective for the majority.

Connecting with other women by engaging in informal study support groups should be recognised as providing meaningful support to women's learning. This model can be used to advantage by the institution in providing informal as well as formal feedback opportunities to sustain relationships between students and with the institution. If women are more likely to express feelings of personal stress and anxiety in close supportive contexts, then 'women friendly' processes for linking to the institution would strengthen the balance between enabling personal support networks and institutional systems.

To resource the study group, academic staff could link with the women as needed. If the study group is a meaningful addition to the formal scheduled face-to-face sessions then the institution may need to re-consider the design of course materials for students whose learning is enhanced in these learning contexts. For example, designing some study materials for group focus would enhance learner choice and interaction and accommodate a range of learning styles, including those that are conducive to women's epistemologies.

Is it possible that distance students do not receive early in their training, the same messages as on-campus students regarding expectations of increasing academic standards required at each level of study? Students can be assisted in developing strategies to manage the increasing academic requirements. This was an aspect commented on by most of the women in this study as they struggled with some new requirements in their final year of study. This appears significant for mature women students who are often anxious about their ability to cope with new teaching and learning methodologies. This study highlights the importance of introducing approaches that are not perceived as counter-productive to students' learning. Where there are opportunities to develop in novice women students the confidence and skills to use technology as a learning tool their stress will be minimized. Moreover, they are more likely to consider the long-term benefits and opportunities of acquiring new skills.

Teacher Education Requirements

In a distance delivered teacher education the professional teaching relationship between the student and tutors is an essential component of training that must support and guide students' development in the profession. Teacher education requirements mean students must undertake a range of placements in different early childhood settings. Although there is not necessarily a solution to requiring students' to travel some distance for teaching placements, the institution needs to be mindful of the pressures these requirements create for women and their families. This study illustrates how teaching practice placement requirements challenge the family life of the distance student, and it is during these times that closer contact with the support systems of the institution may be important.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations are identified in this research. As the study was undertaken at the conclusion of the three-year programme of study, the women's narratives were retrospective accounts. Drawing on retrospective data from the participants, in this case, some time after the end of the study programme has some drawbacks. It is possible that specific meaningful experiences become lost in a retrospective recall of the study experience. The women had to rely on memory recall of significant events and aspects of their studies over a period of three years. This raises an issue regarding the value of retrospective accounts. The clarity in the women's perceptions of their experiences may change with time, and it is also possible that one may recall only the significant occurrences rather than ascertain gradual patterns of change.

Another limitation was my reliance on drawing the information entirely from a one-off interview and I realized subsequently that there were some limitations in the structure of the interviewing. I could have elicited more information from the women, as in some cases the essence of material became evident in the process of data analysis. It would have been advantageous to obtain further background information, particularly in relation to the women's different family situations, culture, class and ethnicity. For example, there was potential to explore wider social issues of class as a feature of women's educational experiences. This aspect is highlighted in the literature and featured for some women in their interviews, and appears worthy of further investigation, particularly relevant in the unique distance study context. On reflection, analysis of these aspects would have enabled me to investigate links between gender, ethnicity and class as impacting on the education experience. Another aspect not addressed by me in the interviews, but worthy of insight, is that of influences, relationships and interactions operating in the immediate communities within which the women lived. I only identified this aspect as it emerged from the interviews.

Consideration of these dimensions would have broadened and enhanced knowledge of women's study experiences in a New Zealand socio-cultural context. Although some women made mention of aspects of gender and class in relation to their backgrounds, I did not gain sufficient data from all the women for effective analysis of these areas.

Structuring a one-off interview also limits the opportunity for considered reflection by the participant. I did consider this factor and ensured the women were given further opportunity to add to their transcripts when they were sent to them for verification.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research addressed a range of aspects of the study experience of mature women students in a particular context. It has also revealed some aspects worthy of further investigation as highlighted, although not addressed in depth, within the constraints of this study. The suggestions noted, while considered in the literature, are largely unexplored in New Zealand distance education contexts.

In addition to the existing aspects of family support, there is scope for further inquiry into the issues pertaining to changes in the respective roles and contributions of family members, including children in women's study experiences.

Another related area for research is an examination of the impact on women's family contexts of their evolving teaching and learning knowledge. This was raised in the study in regard to impacting on family, and closer investigation would provide insight into the intersecting influences and outcomes of these aspects.

One further aspect worthy of investigation is the patterns of women's caring behaviours as linked to their teaching roles, their family contexts and through their associations with other women in support roles as distance learners. In addition to the existing studies on women's caring behaviours, the combination of teaching contexts, teaching knowledge and behaviours and women's caring roles in family merged into distance education could provide further insight into socio-cultural contexts.

The specific dimensions of women's use of study time and study space while addressed in both this study and recognised in the literature also appear to be a limited feature of research on distance study. Closer examination would enhance insight into how women manage their study contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to enhance understanding of women's experiences as distance students undertaking early childhood teacher education. It provides a profile of a group of returning students at a particular time and place, highlighting the variety of factors in the distance learning context that impact on women's personal and professional outcomes. This study also conveys that women's experiences reflect gendered perspectives, but illustrates that women's gendered identity can be affirmed as a positive aspect of their being.

This study is about more than a particular educational experience. It is also about new learning, both personal and professional. What this study has shown is that for every cost and compromise in managing study and family, these are outweighed by the opportunities gained. Was there something liberating for all of the women in this study? It would appear so.

On reflection, as I wrote up the findings I chose to alter the initial order of descriptors in the title of this research, as it became clear to me that the strongest message conveyed by the women's stories related to opportunities. Although costs and compromises are significant aspects of the study, ultimately it is the opportunities gained through the study experience that are the hallmark of the women's experiences.

This closing comment from Susan sums up their journey.
"So any parent going out, any mother going out or woman going out into tertiary flexible learning, go for it, because they can teach their children things, ways of coping, there's the ups and downs, the good and the bad things."

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

8 November 2002

Dear

I am enrolled in the Master of Education programme at Massey University. In completing this qualification I am presently undertaking my MEd Thesis. The topic of my research is:
Opportunities, Costs and Compromises? Mature women students in flexible delivered early childhood teacher education: their perspectives on experiences that impact on their training.

You are invited to participate in this research project if you are aged 25 years or older. This is the criterion that has been established for selecting mature women students from your student cohort for this research. This research has received ethical approval by Massey University College of Education Ethics Committee and Delta College's Ethical Clearance Committee (real name withheld). The Director, (Early Childhood Education, Delta College) has approved a staff member to act as an intermediary in supplying this letter to you. The following information details the intended research.

I am interested in finding out about mature women's experiences of teacher training, and in particular, the experiences of women who are studying in the flexible learning option programme. This research intends to identify the range of factors that impact on the women's training experiences, making reference to the influences of aspects of women's personal situations and their teacher training experiences. The research will consider implications of the findings and how these might enhance understanding of the women's identified personal and professional needs. It will also focus on implications for institutions' practices, in order to ascertain how institutions respond to and cater for the needs of mature women students studying in a flexible learning option.

Participant involvement
If you agree to participate in the study you will be asked to meet with me for one interview lasting approximately 1 hour. I propose to audio tape each interview with your agreement. The interview would take place at a time and place convenient to you, and will be conducted in private. A further interview may be scheduled by mutual agreement. The interview will be transcribed by a nominated person, who will treat the information in confidence.

The questions I intend to ask of you are about factors that have affected you during training, including opportunities, issues, costs and compromises you may have made and any constraints that may have affected you.

Participant's rights
If you agree to participate in the study you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question in the interview situation.
- Decline an audio taped interview, (written notes would be recorded).
- Terminate the interview at any stage.
- Ask for the audiotape to be turned off.
- Be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to examine, amend, (if required) and validate.
- Ask any further questions about the study during your participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity
You can be assured of confidentiality with regard to your name being changed to a pseudonym for the purposes of discussing and for publishing findings. However, because of the unique nature of your group in training, your anonymity or that of the College cannot be assured. I will not identify the exact geographic location of your student group.

The thesis dissertation will be provided for assessment to Massey University. A copy of the final document may be housed in the Massey University library.

An Invitation to Participate
If you would like to participate in this research study please contact me by **18 November, 2002.** I will then provide you with a detailed information sheet outlining the project in more detail. A formal consent sheet will be included for you to sign and return to me by a nominated date.

Further Information
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at home on (withheld) or via e-mail – (withheld)

You may also contact my supervisors if you have any concerns about this research:

Mary Simpson at Massey University, phone (06) 356-9099, ext 8839, or by e-mail on m.g.simpson@massey.ac.nz.
Cushla Scrivens at Massey University, phone (06) 356-9099, ext 8831, or by e-mail on c.a.scrivens@massey.ac.nz

Yours sincerely

Alison Stevenson

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Title

Opportunities, Costs and Compromises?
Mature women students in flexible delivered early childhood teacher education: their perspectives on experiences that impact on their training.

Kia ora, I am undertaking this research topic as a thesis requirement for a Master of Education (M.Ed) degree at Massey University, Palmerston North.

1. ***Researcher Information***
   Researcher: Alison Stevenson.
   Supervisors: Mary Simpson
   Cushla Scrivens

2. ***Researcher/Supervisor Contact Details***
   Researcher: Alison Stevenson, c/- Delta College

   Supervisors: Mary Simpson
   Senior Lecturer, Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
   College of Education, Massey University
   Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.
   Ph: (06) 356-9099, ext 8839

   Cushla Scrivens
   Senior Lecturer, Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
   College of Education, Massey University
   Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.
   Ph: (06) 356-9099, ext 8831

3. ***The Nature and Purpose of the Study***
   This research intends to investigate the experiences of a selected group of mature women enrolled in an early childhood teacher training flexible delivery qualification that is offered by the School of Early Childhood Teacher Education at the Delta College (name withheld). For the purposes of this study a mature women is classified as being aged 25 years or older. From my experiences in tertiary education over a number of years I have noticed the increased visibility of mature women enrolling in early childhood qualifications. These women often undertake study at a significant personal cost to themselves and their families. I am particularly interested in the personal and professional experiences of the first

group of women enrolled in our flexible learning degree qualification, as this form of combined distance and face-to-face delivery has increased the training options for students who choose to study in different geographic regions.

My intention in this research is to address a range of factors that you believe impact on your training experiences. I believe this research may contribute a further dimension to existing research of mature women's tertiary education experiences. It should provide insight into contemporary social issues for mature women students enrolled in the flexible delivery option. I intend to focus on implications for our institution's existing practices, including how the institution addresses the personal and professional needs of mature women students.

4. ***Expectations of Participants***
Your participation is voluntary and should be viewed as independent of any study or assessment requirements expected of you in training.

I intend to interview each participant on at least one occasion, and a further interview may be scheduled by mutual agreement. The initial interview should last for 1 hour. The first interview will occur early in the 2003. I propose to audiotape each interview, with your consent. The interview will take place in a setting that is convenient to both of us, and participant privacy for the interview will be addressed.

The content of the interview questions are designed around the following themes:

- General introductory questions aimed to establish a picture of your experiences prior to enrolment in the teacher training qualification. For example, I am interested in your previous educational (formal and informal) experiences, e.g. schooling, other courses of study, relevant work experience and your reasons for applying for your present course of study.

- The focus questions are designed to address a range of issues relating to your experiences. The questions will be based on the following themes:
factors that you believe have affected your ability to undertake a course of teacher training, opportunities teacher training has provided, issues that have been raised for you, costs and compromises you may have made in relation to your personal and professional lives, and constraints that may have affected your teacher training experience.

  The questions are designed to address several focus areas. The intention of the questions is to provide a basic framework for the interview, but not to restrict you in sharing your perspective. It is your views that matter in this study.

5. ***Obtaining Information***
Information will be obtained from one or more face-to-face interviews, with the first interview undertaken early in 2003.

6. ***Use of the Information***
From your interview the information will be transcribed by a nominated person and written notes compiled. You will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to examine, amend, (if required) and validate.

The data will be organised into major descriptive themes, i.e. relationships between perspectives or viewpoints, commonalties and intersecting factors. I will consider points of commonality and contrast in viewpoints, linking these to similarities and differences in the women's backgrounds and experiences.

The data will be analysed and discussed in relation to other research on mature women students. Some theoretical conclusions may be drawn, for example, consideration will be given to theories and viewpoints about the place of women in education, their experiences of public and private lives and whether this study positions their perspectives in a wider social context.

5. ***Participant Confidentiality and Anonymity***
Your right to confidentiality is assured by your name being changed to a pseudonym for the purposes of discussing and publishing findings. Your interview tape and data will be coded, and the tapes/data kept separated from a list indicating your real name.

All initial interview information will remain confidential to the interviewer, the transcriber, and you, the participant, until you have read and validated the transcripts.

Although it is intended to protect your identity I am aware that in presenting personal, descriptive information about your experiences there are risks associated with this. You could be identified because of the particular nature of the training model, and also from the information you may choose to share about your personal situation. I will not reveal the exact geographic location of your group, or the name of the institution at which you are studying.

6. ***What will happen to the data on completion of the project***
The data will be stored in a research archive and destroyed after 5 years. You can request the audiotape of your interview at the conclusion of the study.

7. ***Your rights as a participant***
If you agree to participate in the study you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question in the interview situation.
- Terminate the interview at any stage.
- Be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to examine, amend (as required), and validate.
- Ask any further questions about the study during your participation.
- Ask for the tape to be turned off.
- Withdraw from the study up until the time of the final writing up.
- Provide information on the understanding that your real name will not be used.
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings prior to the final writing.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Research Title:

Opportunities, Costs and Compromises? Mature women students in flexible delivered early childhood teacher education: their perspectives on experiences that impact on their training.

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. I have had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about this study. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that my participation is voluntary; I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used. I understand the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I understand the information from any interview will only be available to the researcher and the transcriber. Excerpts from the interview may form part of the final report, which I consent to publication of, with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved as far as possible.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped. *(Please circle your choice)*

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview. I understand I can terminate the interview at any point.

I understand the research data will be retained in a research archive for 5 years, but I can request the audiotape of my interview at the end of the study. I will be provided with this option by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
Signed: .....

Name: .....
Date: .....

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the matter in which this project is conducted please contact me, or if you prefer to discuss an issue with an independent person you can contact either of the research supervisors:

Supervisors: Mary Simpson
Senior Lecturer, Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
College of Education, Massey University
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.
Ph: (06) 356-9099, ext 8839
m.g.simpson@massey.ac.nz

Cushla Scrivens
Senior Lecturer, Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
College of Education, Massey University
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.
Ph: (06) 356-9099, ext 8831
C.A.Scrivens@massey.ac.nz

Signed:

Appendix D

Interview questions

Opportunities, Costs and Compromises? Mature women students in flexible delivered early childhood teacher education: their perspectives on experiences that impact on their training.

Proposed Research Questions
Introductory Questions

- As background information, what can you tell me about your previous educational (formal and informal) experiences? , e.g. schooling, other courses of study?

- What other relevant work experience (paid and voluntary) have you experienced? (Any of particular relevance to ECE?)

- What other information would you like to share as relevant background information to this study other than what may be covered in the focus questions?

The following focus questions are designed to address a range of issues relating to your experiences. While there is a suggested structure, the questions can be addressed in any order and in a format that suits you.

- Why did you apply for this flexible learning degree course in early childhood teacher training? What expectations/aspirations did you have (e.g. of yourself) prior to commencing your study? (We will return to this later in the interview).

  What opportunities do you consider the flexible learning teacher training has provided you?

- What factors have affected you most in undertaking this course of early childhood teacher training?

- How have you experienced motivation and persistence in your studies? How have you been supported and encouraged/by whom?

- What barriers/constraints/'costs' have you encountered during your training?

- What compromises have you needed to make in order to complete your qualification? Follow-up: Any changes over the course of your study?

- What do you believe have been significant gains (personal/professional) for you as a result of your training?

- Are there any other aspects you would like to share?

- Return to expectations/aspirations question. Overall reflection: where do you see yourself (now in relation to those expectations and aspirations you expressed earlier?

Appendix E

Interview Framework

Invitation to talk about your previous educational (formal and informal) experiences? , e.g. schooling, other courses of study?

Themes: different life experiences & opportunities,
Meaning/Literature

Impact of previous education	Parr (2000, p.56)
Adult education courses as impetus to study.	Burns & Scott (1990)
Influence of schooling (eg impediment to learning)	Marie (1998)
Childhood experiences & education	
Family and education – meanings of	
Culture of the family.	Edwards (1993, p.36)
	Marie (1998) p. 199
Academic background/Qualifications	
(eg differences between single/married mothers)	Burns & Scott (1990)
Female experiences: barriers, gender prescribed expectations, learning.	Burge & Lenskji (1990)
	Britton & Baxter (1999)
	Pascall & Cox (1993)
Career development & maturity	Edwards (1993) - Ch 3
Schooling & motivation. Study approaches, educational outcomes, acceptance/rejection of school ethos.	Scott, et al (1998, p. 229)
	Taplin & Jegede (2001, p. 134
Previous study experience	

What other relevant work experience (paid and voluntary) have you experienced (prior to study and during study)?

Themes: caring roles, community involvement.
Meaning/ Literature

Links with voluntary involvement in ece- choice to study.	Burns, Scott et al (1993)
Education & domesticity	Parr (1998, p.34)
	Williams (1997)
Education & 'caring' occupations	
Gendered occupations.	
Valuing experiences.	

Why did you to apply for this flexible learning degree course in early childhood teacher education?

Themes: diversity, prescribed roles, potential.

Meaning/Literature

Professional: prior experience & knowledge of type of course- familiarity thru ece involvement. Career opportunity, Recognition of status/ work in ece.	Von Prummer (2000, p. 181), Duncan (2000, p.467), Miller (1993)
Socio-political: training in profession. Policy links: access to study, allowances,	Britton & Baxter (1999) Duncan (2000)
Credentialism Attaining a qualification, Requirements for quals. in ece. Proving one-self, gaining a public identity, status	Britton & Baxter (1999) Sperling (1991, p.3) Edwards (1993 p.57) Pascall & Cox (1993 p.30)
Geographic location: lack of mobility. Delivery model:	Paase (1998), Grace (1994), Scott et al (1998)
Personal: Motivation to study. Predictor of success, self esteem	Von Prummer, (2000, p. 181) Scott et al, (1998), Bhalalusesa (2001), Pascall & Cox (1993 p. 29),
Opportunities for self: life-cycle stage, change in situation	Parr (2000, p.11).
Financial /economic	
Gender: women's education, new horizons, gender prescribes/domesticity, reproduction theory. Reltn between gendered occupations & higher education. Link between career choice & family responsibility. Fit vocation alongside family, expectation of gender prescribed roles.	Bhalalusesa (1993), Britton & Baxter (1999), Pascall & Cox (1993), Parr (1998), Burns, et al (1993), Griffiths (2001), Edwards (1993).
Family: encouragement, opportunity to provide for /meet needs, investment in/for family, result of change in family situation, fit vocation alongside family situation.	Pascall & Cox (1993, p.26-28), Burns et al (1993).

What expectations/aspirations did you have (e.g. of yourself) prior to commencing your study? (We will return to this later in the interview).

Themes: academic confidence, gender-based expectations.

Meaning/ Literature

Identity	Parr (2000), Edwards, (1993, p.11)
Personal: Self-development, managing self-doubt. Link between personal development & learning, self-improvement & motivation, self-actualisation, self-concept	Home (1998, p. 85). Miller (1993, p. 102) Clayton & Smith (1987)
Role as mature student/ learner, contradictions in role eg parent/ student/family	Hipp (1997, p.43) Peters (2000, p. 40) Roehl (1980).
Academic ability/competence: management of study as mature student, anxieties	Miller (1993, p. 100) McLachlan-Smith (1998) Peters (2000)
Motivation: self-improvement, Career aspirations: ambitions, realisation of opportunities, vision.	Challis (1976) Garland (1993) McLaren (1985)
Predisposing characteristics: persistence/success	Peters (2000), Pascall & Cox (1993, p. 20) McLaren (1985), Maher (2001)

What factors have affected you most in undertaking this course of early childhood teacher training?

Follow up: How have these factors impacted on your study/self/family?
C/F obstacles and barriers

Themes: limitations, pressures of family and study.

Meaning/Literature

Culture/culture of family	Parr (1998, 2000) Marie (1998).
Family: needs, changing circumstances, marital status, impact of study on relationships, change in status.	Duncan (2000) Griffiths (2000, p. 277)
'greedy institutions' concept/questioning of.	
Roles: c/f barriers. Change in roles, balancing roles, ability to view positive aspects.	Acker (1984) Edwards (1993) Home (1998, p. 86), Hirsch & Rapkin (1986)
Public vs private identity & knowledge: changes/conflicts	Griffiths (2002)
Expectations as parent/mother: applying the 'mother' experience, applying and acceptance of existing knowledge, dislocation, tensions between public & private knowledge.	Griffiths (2000, p. 269, 280) Karrach (1992) Marie (1998).
Rites: transition to study, during study, coping strategies.	Redding & Dowling (1993) Carnwell (2000)
Institutional: learning, delivery methods, materials, psychological dimensions, learning styles, and adult education principles. Learning & gender: interactive needs and models.	McCahon (2000) McLachlan-Smith (1998) Richardson (1995) Cross (1980) Garland (1994)
Living & studying in the context.	Burge & Lenskyj (1990) Von Prummer (2000).
Defining acceptance/disparity as a student (identity)	Von Prummer (2000) Duncan (2000).

What opportunities do you consider the flexible learning option teacher training has offered you?

Themes: identity, qualification, and employment.

Meaning/Literature

Aspirations: Access to learning, academic confidence, career development confidence.	Home (1998, p. 87) Currie & Blacklock (1989) Lovell (1980), Hipp (1997)
Identity: development, self-direction, self-transformation, learner identity and 'finding a voice', valuing of experience.	Taylor (1995) Britten & Baxter (1999) Edwards (1990)
Roles: re-evaluation, strategies to manage, coping with demands of multiple roles.	Griffiths (2000) Hipp (1997).
Physical locus: management of study, childcare, meeting family needs alongside study.	Duncan (2000, p. 469) Griffiths (2000, p. 275)
Relationships: friendship of other students, esp,. women.	Delany & Wenmoth (1998, 2000)
Equity issues- response of institutions for provision.	Lockwood (1994) Faith (1998) Von Prummer (1994, 2000)

How have you experienced motivation and persistence in your studies?
How have you been supported and encouraged/by whom?
How has this developed/changed during the course of your study?
How/why has this been important to you?

What type of support has been most significant? (by whom and in what ways) - how did you seek support?

Themes: family and institution as supports, course structure, women as support.

Meaning/Literature

Institution: roles, systems, people, expectations, social and academic integration, personal needs vs institution provision. Culture of the institution.	Hipp (1997) Kember et al (1994) Kirkup & von Prummer (1990), Bhalalusesa (1993) NZ- McCahon (2000) Hayes & Flannery (2000, p. 33), Bhalalusesa (1993), Kirkup & von Prummer (1990)
Formal structures: face-to-face sessions, mixed-mode delivery, interaction & independence, regional delivery structure, tutor support/ accessibility, availability.	Von Prummer (1994, p. 82) Furste-Bowe et al (2001) Duncan (2000).
Informal structure: (self-initiated) eg study groups, informal communication, and preference for shared learning. Significant others: Family-dependent on family composition, type and value of support, maintenance of support, outcomes. Learning models: teaching/learning dialogue, models of intellectual development- shared learning, women's learning styles, and emotional support.	Home (1998, p. 87), Asbee & Simpson (1998), Burns et al (1993, p. 45), McLachlan-Smith (1998, p. 13), Kirkup & von Prummer (1990) Carnwell (2000) Mallinckrodt & Leong (1992), Bhalalusesa (2001), McCahon (2000, p. 33) Munir & Jackson (1997) Edwards (1993, p.96-98)
Gender: male/female support needs, social support of women, peer support. Shift in support over time	Grace (1994) Scott et al (1998) Taylor & Webster (1994)
Motivation: sustainability, link to course completion, driven by personal circumstances, predictors (relationships), link to personality. Persistence:	Kember (1994) Jacobs & Berkowitz-King (2002)

What compromises have you needed to make in order to complete your qualification?

Follow-up: Any changes over the course of your study?

Themes: family needs, roles, and differences in perceptions.

Meaning/Literature

Study habits: availability, use of time, study patterns.	Von Prummer (2000) Effeh (1991)
Family: time available to spend, needs of family. Connecting & separating family and work/study	Marsden (1996) Bhalalusesa (1993)
Roles: multiple roles and time, contagion, conflict, balancing roles,	Edwards (1993)
Achievement: eg modifying learning, making choices between study and family, dichotomy between family responsibility and that of institution requirements	Edwards (1993) Ch 4.

What barriers/constraints/'costs' have you experienced during your training experience?
Eg circumstances that may have restricted your study, may have changed over time/shifted in intensity because of situation.
Follow up: How have you been able to address these?
Reflection: How significant are these 'costs' to you now in comparison to earlier in/during your study? c/f opportunities.
Themes: tensions and resolution, distinctiveness, contradictions,
Meaning/Literature

Learning patterns/styles, women's learning, At 'odds' with institution delivery.	Von Prummer (2000) Garland (1994, p.192), Miller (1993).
Public vs private: 'greedy' institutions: 2 spheres, boundaries, guilt. Workload issues.	Edwards (1993, p. 63), Duncan (2000), Griffiths (2000, p. 274/5), Miller (1993)
Gender: socially prescribed roles. Costs to study: actual, ie material, travel, geographic.	Duncan (2000) Parr (1998, p. 40), Kirkup & von Prummer (1990, p. 19)
Situational: Time: to study, use of time, travel, time frames, context of time, multiple commitments, time in relation to others' needs, 'doing time', relationship issues addressed,, allocation of time & personal leisure.	Von Prummer (1990), Garland (1994), Redding & Dowling (1992, p. 230), Hayes & Flannery (2000, p. 48), Home (1998), Edwards, (1993, p. 64-70), Duncan (1999)
Social forces: Events: traumatic, unexpected.	Apps (1994)
Resources: eg technology Isolation: personal, geographic, initial & changes.	Effeh (1991), Furste-Bowe et al (2001)
Institutional: procedures, practices, design, quality aspects, technology	Apps (1994), Kelly & Shapcott (1987) Furste-Bowe & Dittman (2001), Garland (1993), Hanson et al (2000), Scott (2000)
Dispositions: psychosocial, self-esteem, personal costs, confidence, coping abilities.	Duncan (2000,p. 471), Garland (1993,p.189) Valentine & Darkenwold (1990)
Academic: study strategies, progress, epistemological, pre-requisite knowledge. Adult education principles, contradictions.	Kember et al (1994), Garland (1994) Graham & Donaldson (1999)
Family: domestic, attitudes, expectations	Bhalalusesa (1993), Taplin & Jedge (2001, p. 137), Griffiths (2000, p.276) Kirkup & von Prummer (1990, p. 19)
Roles: dual/ multiple roles, conflict, contagion, social and economic, competing, link to family situation. Conflict between student/adult roles.	Garland (1993), Home (1998) Redding & Dowling (1993, p. 231) Garland (1993) Ballmer & Cozby (1981), McBride (1990) Garland (1994)

Return to expectations/aspirations question. Overall reflection: where do you see yourself now (as a mature student) in relation to those expectations and aspirations you expressed earlier?

Themes: transformation, contradictions, gender prescribed, renewal, change.

Meaning/Literature

Change and adaptation	Duncan (2000), Hipp (1997), Paase (1998)
Identity shift or transformation/agency.	Taplin & Jedge (2001, p. 137)
Shift in self-perception	Cox & James (1980)
? of deficit model.	Taylor (1985)
	Parr (1998)
Second chance/second self	Giles (1990)
Finding a voice/confidence in the public sphere.	Hipp (1997) Taylor (1995), Edwards (1993, p.100)
Affirmation/ Ambiguities of being an adult student	McLaren (1985)
Ambitions- fulfilled	Taylor (1995)
	Peters (2000)
"I am not who I was" 'Realising what I am"	Paase (1998)
Discources: changes in.	
Rites of passage during a course of study, (adjustments and relationship to institutional support).	Redding & Dowling (1992)
Roles: affirmation, ability to manage competing outcomes, change in perception of roles over course of study.	Hirsch & Rapkin (1996) Peters (2000) Ballmer & Cozby (1981)
Issues of culture and class?	Paase (1998)
Reltn. With others, eg family, impact of education, power imbalance.	Edwards (1993, ch.6)
Identity as a teacher, (from that of a mother/student).	Duncan (1999.

Appendix F

Initial Framework for Analysis of Emerging Findings

Opportunities	Costs	Compromises
Family Ultimate growth Learning & modelling Role models Positive impact eg long term.	To time with family Financial impact Keeping family intact Relationships	In relationships In managing family time
Time & space (c/f family, institution) Making study work in relation to opportunities Study model allows to study from home/manage time	To family time	Strategies to manage. Trade-off between family & study. Changing use of time Physical space for study Seeking alternatives to no time for self- compromise with family.
Identity and self (significant) Growth, transformation, power, independence. Recognition of worth, confidence in ability and self Teacher identity		Learning to manage changes?
Roles/ Parent/student/teacher New roles, new knowledge, outcome as student, teacher, parent.	Cost to family as student, cost to relationships, parenting style and role, to domestic life. Conflict between roles.	Managing balance between roles, managing children, reducing some roles, changing features of roles. Domestic roles & responsibilities
Impact/ Outcome of study Fulfil professional ambition, intellectual achievement, broadening of knowledge, Personal/ professional development, knowledge		Balancing work/employment during training Student loan and high personal cost of study Needing to work Family employment Financial changes
Persistence & motivation C/F support To experience success To model to family (Likely to merge this theme with others as hard to keep it separate)		Trade-off with family
Institutional expectations/requirements Delivery mode Course content Academic knowledge Ultimate knowledge	Course delivery models, challenges eg technology.	Sharing ideas and support of others. Managing teaching experience expectations, managing family and being away.
Support (most significant) Significant others: family friends, study group, women. Different types of support as means to maintain motivation & persistence. Institution support	Support as a counter to costs.	Responding to different types of support.