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Narratives from Non-traditional Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of non-traditional university students in higher education. Recommendations from the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) have seen universities aiming to increase enrolments of school leavers, particularly those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Similar trends have occurred in other countries such as the United Kingdom, with mixed success. In addition to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, non-traditional students include those who are mature-age, have low achievement at secondary school, are from Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (in Australia), belong to minority ethnic groups, or come from rural or remote areas. Despite widening participation initiatives, enrolments of students from less advantaged groups have remained largely static in recent decades, both in Australia and elsewhere.

Research has shown that students attracted to university in the context of widening participation policies are clustered in some particular institutions, based on location, admission requirements and the extent to which the institution itself genuinely participates in the policy initiative. Likewise, such students are more likely to enrol in some degrees than others. They are likely to be the first generation from their family to attend university. Students from less advantaged groups also experience higher education differently from their more advantaged peers, and face additional challenges. There are exceptions, with some non-traditional students succeeding in HE, but little is known about the factors which facilitate such success.

This thesis presents a longitudinal study which combines a Bourdieuan theoretical framework with a narrative methodology. Non-traditional students with a range of background variables were followed into, through and sometimes beyond their enrolment at the campuses of a regional Australian university. After an initial survey with students in a first year teacher education course, interviews were conducted with 13 selected non-traditional students. Up to five interviews were conducted with each student: at the beginning of their first year at university, then at the end of that year and the following three years, as the students moved through university or onto different pathways. Data were then combined to create a single, chronological narrative for each student. Narratives were examined to determine those factors which affected student journeys, either positively or negatively. This included consideration of Bourdieu's theory of social

reproduction through his thinking tools of habitus, capital and field, as well as other themes raised in the literature on non-traditional student experiences.

This thesis demonstrates the resourcefulness of non-traditional students, which enabled the vast majority of students in this study to succeed in their endeavours at university. However, despite the success of those individuals, their stories present evidence of inequities which remain in the field of higher education. It is largely as a result of their own efforts and their sometimes ingenious use of limited resources that they have succeeded. There is much that could be done in policy and practice to facilitate a more equitable experience for students from under-represented backgrounds.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank
FE	Further Education
FG	First Generation
FiF	First in Family
Go8	Group of Eight
HE	Higher Education
PASS	Peer Assisted Student Support
SES	Socioeconomic status
TAFE	Tertiary and Further Education
TE	Teacher Education

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Defining the non-traditional student

This thesis examines the experiences of non-traditional students in Higher Education (HE). As such, it is necessary to explicate my use of the term 'non-traditional'. I use term 'non-traditional' to denote students from any group which has up until and including current times been under-represented in HE. Under-represented groups include (but are not restricted to) people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, people from particular ethnic groups such as those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) descent in Australia, those from rural or remote areas, people who did not complete or had low achievement in secondary school, those aged 25 years or over (mature-age) and people with disabilities (Gale & Parker, 2013). Many non-traditional students fit more than one of these equity groups, and they are often First in Family (FiF) (O'Shea, 2015b); that is, they are the first person in their immediate family to enter HE. A similar term, First Generation (FG), is used to denote students whose parents did not attend university but who have siblings who have enrolled. FiF or First Generation categories have been a focus of interest in the United States (Schmidt, 2010), while those from working class backgrounds have featured in literature from the United Kingdom (UK) (Reay, 2002a). Use of the term 'non-traditional' suggests that there is a 'traditional' university student. In previous centuries, most university students were male and from the middle or upper classes (Priest, 2009). They had completed high school, with high achievement, and their fathers had also most likely attended university. While females are no longer under-represented in HE, the middle and upper-classes remain over-represented. Current 'traditional' students, I would argue, are from the middle or upper classes, with at least one parent who had a university degree.

I have chosen to use the term 'non-traditional' rather than other options such as working class, low socio-economic background (low SES), FG, FiF or equity students, as the participants in this study fit a variety of those categories, and often more than one of them. All of these terms can be problematic in different ways. For example, SES can be notoriously difficult to measure accurately, as noted by researchers in various countries including Australia (Marks, 2011; Sealey, 2011) and the UK (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2011). Also, there is some conflation among categories, which is not always useful. For

example, while low SES status has often been linked to low educational outcomes, factors which are sometimes masked by SES such as prior academic achievement, cognitive abilities and broader familial situations, may hold more responsibility for differences in outcomes (Marks, 2017).

I contend that non-traditional students, regardless of the equity group they belong to, are likely to experience similar conditions in HE. They lack familiarity with HE institutions and practices and may not have been well-prepared for university education. I consider that 'non-traditional' does not imply deficit: it does not see such students as 'lesser', but rather as 'different'. In a broad sense, 'traditional' is sometimes used to denote that which is staid. Accordingly, non-traditional can be considered a positive characteristic, implying something different, new or fresh. Gale has called for a recognition of difference (2011) and has argued that a new 'sociological imagination' (2015, p. 257) is needed to redress inequalities and ensure freedom of choice regarding HE for disadvantaged groups. It is in this spirit that I use the term 'non-traditional'.

Non-traditional students may enter university in Australia via a range of pathways, rather than enrolling directly after high school on the basis of their academic results. Some Further Education (FE) courses offered at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, which mostly provide vocational courses, can be used to gain entry to and credit towards university programs. Enabling courses are offered at some universities, with variations to suit different groups of prospective students, and can lead to undergraduate entry. An examination, the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) can also provide entry. Mature age status can allow people who have left school to begin university studies with conditions varying among institutions. Some require completion of specified preparatory courses which are open to anyone, and some will consider work experience.

1.2 Context of the Study

In many countries including Australia there is a focus on preparing a suitably educated workforce to be competitive in our current globalised knowledge economy. Accordingly, there has been an emphasis in recent years on increasing the percentage of the population who pursue university level education. Initiatives to widen participation in university level studies, which also have an equity focus in Australia (Gale & Parker, 2013), have been instituted to address this. The initiatives, based largely on the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) have sought to

encourage people from social groups which have previously been under-represented in Higher Education (HE) to undertake study. Non-traditional students are more likely to attend particular types of HE institutions than others and enrol in some degrees more than others. For example, in the UK they are less likely to attend elite institutions (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009) or in Australia to enrol in degrees such as medicine or law (James et al., 2008).

It is one thing to encourage non-traditional students to enrol in university, and another thing entirely to provide equitable conditions for their success (Devlin, 2013). Non-traditional students experience HE differently from their more traditional colleagues, and may find it difficult to adapt to the unfamiliar field of university, its academic demands and often implicit expectations (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010). Universities provide various support services for students, but Australian research shows these are not always utilised by non-traditional students (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos, & Crosling, 2012), for a variety of reasons. Despite these less than optimal conditions, many non-traditional students succeed at university. This study investigates the experiences of non-traditional students in HE over a four year period, in order to determine factors across that time-frame which affected students' journeys, whether positively or negatively. The findings suggest ways that universities, families and communities might better support non-traditional students as they move into and through HE, providing improved outcomes for all stakeholders.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study began in an era of renewed interest in widening participation in Australia. The impact of the Bradley Review was filtering through to universities. Incentives were being provided to universities via the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP), encouraging institutions to undertake initiatives supporting the participation of students from low SES backgrounds in particular. The initiatives provided funding, and it was up to each institution to decide how best to invest those funds. Despite similar initiatives here and overseas (notably in, but not limited to, the UK) in recent decades, rates of participation from students with low SES or working class backgrounds have remained at around 17 per cent, while enrolments from middle class or traditional backgrounds have increased. Working as I was (and at the time of writing still am) in a teacher education program at a non-elite regional university, non-traditional students comprised a significant percentage of the students I taught on a daily basis. I was personally aware of the

challenges many of them faced in their home lives and as students. Having also been a non-traditional student myself (but not then knowing that there was such a category), I had a vested interest in learning how some non-traditional students thrived at university so that universities could use that understanding to help others do the same. Recognising that the university experience is a long journey rather than a short trip, I decided to research the entire term of enrolment for students. That is, my study collected data over the four years that a full-time student in a teacher education at Regional University would be enrolled if they did not have any interruptions or delays during their enrolment. This study is one of few longitudinal studies with non-traditional students, able to illuminate important factors in student journeys at every stage of their enrolment.

1.4 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify ways to support non-traditional students in successful HE study. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. How do non-traditional students experience Higher Education programs?
2. What factors contribute to success or attrition for these students, before, during and after university?

The first question provided a deliberately open research topic. This was selected so that I would hear the students' viewpoints and voices, rather than answers to questions I had structured on some pre-conceived basis. The second question built from the first. Having determined how non-traditional students experienced HE, I then wanted to be able to use that understanding to promote ways of supporting non-traditional students that would match their experiences and meet their actual needs.

1.5 The Study

The study design was predominantly qualitative, with an initial survey followed by interviews. Surveys were distributed in a subject which was compulsory for first year students in Primary and Secondary teacher education programs on three campuses of Regional University. The surveys gathered demographic information including age, gender, high school achievement, parental employment and education levels, living arrangements,

full time or part-time enrolment, self-perception of social class and who (if anyone) in their family had attended HE. It also asked students to provide their motivations for enrolling in university generally, the specific university and teacher education, and what they anticipated would be enjoyable or challenging about HE. At the end of the survey students were asked to indicate if they were interested in participating in a longitudinal study about student experiences at university.

From the students agreeing to participate in the longitudinal study, students with non-traditional indicators (such as FiF, entering university via an alternate pathway or other) but with a range of other variables (such as levels of perceived family support, and high school achievement) were selected. They were interviewed early in first year, then at the end of first, second, third and fourth year of their studies or other destinations. The study aimed to understand the students' perspectives – to hear their voices. To this end I employed narrative inquiry. The interviews began with a 'life story' question, and this was supplemented by optional follow-up questions which were only used where additional or clarifying information was sought. All interview data for each student were then compiled into one narrative, providing a sequential story of each student's experience. Close reading of the narratives uncovered critical events and factors in student journeys, with some similarities but also marked differences across experiences.

The narratives were analysed by examining them for important influences on the students' experiences. This examination was informed by issues raised in the literature on non-traditional students in HE. Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital and field also contributed to this analysis, prominent as they are in much of the literature, with regard to his theory of social reproduction. The analysis examines the experiences of non-traditional students, including factors which helped or hindered their success.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature. It begins by providing more detailed information about the current era of widening participation, outlining different approaches, policies and outcomes, predominantly in Australia, the UK and the US. It then presents findings from other studies related to non-traditional students in HE. This includes factors influencing their decisions regarding HE, and factors relating to retention, achievement and attrition.

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework. Bourdieu's thinking tools are defined, and a critical examination is presented of studies which have used them with regard to non-traditional students. I then indicate how the tools are used in this thesis.

The methodology applied in this study is presented in Chapter 4. It outlines my Bourdieuan approach, beginning with participant objectivation. Detail is provided about the study's method, setting, participants and instruments. I then outline my narrative approach to data collection and analysis.

Analysis and discussion of findings are incorporated in three chapters. Chapter 5 presents the narratives of three mature-age students, Chapter 6 illuminates the experiences of three 'delayed starters' – students who took a gap of one to five years between high school and university, and Chapter 7 considers the journeys of a number of school leavers in the study with a focus on three in particular. Each of these three analysis chapters takes a similar form. I present one student narrative followed by an analysis of it, do the same for the following students, then compare and contrast among those students.

Conclusions from the study are presented in Chapter 8. I synthesise salient findings from the analysis chapters, emphasising the specific contributions of this thesis to the literature on the non-traditional student experience. I also consider the limitations of this study and implications for further research.

This study demonstrates how non-traditional students with diverse characteristics are able to succeed at university despite what are often very challenging situations. They often do this using limited resources and small amounts of recognised cultural capital. For the most disadvantaged students, however, who enter university with few skills and little support, unsuccessful attempts in HE may lead to further hardship. The following chapter presents a synthesis of the literature on widening participation and non-traditional students in HE.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study examines the experiences of non-traditional university students using Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital and field. Recommendations from the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) have seen universities aiming to increase enrolments of school leavers, particularly those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Similar trends have occurred in other countries such as the United Kingdom, with mixed success. Enrolments of students from less advantaged groups have remained largely static in recent decades in Australia (Devlin, 2013; Gale, 2015), with slight increases seen in the UK recently (HEFCE, 2017) though this is tempered by lower completion rates. Research has shown that students attracted to university in the context of widening participation policies tend to cluster in some particular institutions, based on location, admission requirements and the extent to which the institution itself has genuinely engaged with the policy initiative (Gorard et al., 2007; Gale, 2011). Likewise, such students are more likely to enrol in some courses than others, for example, teaching and nursing rather than law and medicine (Abbott-Chapman, 2011). They are likely to be the first generation from their family to attend university (Southgate, Douglas, Rubin, Scevak, Macqueen & Lindell, 2014). Despite widening participation agendas, no significant change in access to higher education (HE) has occurred for non-traditional students in recent years. Students from less advantaged groups also experience higher education differently from their more advantaged peers, and face additional challenges (Devlin, 2010). There are exceptions, with some non-traditional students succeeding in HE (Pitman, 2013), but little is known about the factors which facilitate such success.

The competitive conditions of the global economy have put pressure on governments worldwide to increase participation rates in higher education in order to maintain a skilled workforce. Initiatives to widen participation in HE must of necessity aim to attract those who would otherwise be less likely to enrol. Educational outcomes for non-traditional students are affected by a number of variables, including background, financial, personal and institutional factors (Harvey & Szalkowicz, 2017; Willcoxson, Cotter & Joy, 2011). While traditional students often consider university as a natural progression from secondary

school, especially in the UK (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013) but also Australia, it requires more consideration on the part of many non-traditional students. Once the decision to attend HE is made, non-traditional students are more likely to attend a less prestigious institution (Gale & Parker, 2013; Marginson, 2016). Once enrolled, they are more likely than other students to struggle due to lack of institutional familiarity plus financial and other commitments. Academic skills may also provide challenges, partly due to limited preparation in high school (James et al., 2010). These multiple issues can lead to higher rates of attrition for non-traditional students. While much is known about reasons for student attrition, little is known about conditions for successful enrolment, progress and completion for non-traditional students in HE.

This chapter provides an overview of the recent history regarding widening participation policies in Australia and overseas, providing context for this study of non-traditional students' experiences in both HE generally and teacher education (TE) specifically. It also reviews the literature regarding factors impacting on non-traditional students' experiences. Particular attention is paid to the effects of widening participation on students targeted by the policies and practices.

2.2 Widening Participation and Neoliberalism

Concerns about who had access to higher education most likely developed as an area of concern in the UK a number of centuries ago with the evolution of early universities, increasing with a need for skilled workers in the early 1800s (Kettley, 2007). Later that century as the sector grew, concerns about inequitable access arose (Kettley, 2007). Entry for women became an issue, but this was specifically concerned with access for middle class females (Kettley, 2007). These concerns related more to increasing access rather than widening access. Access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds became a concern in the first half of the twentieth century (Jenkins & Jones, 1950) but related only to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who had exhibited high ability (Cole, 1955).

Government aims around increasing or widening access to HE have related mostly to improving global economic prospects, whether that occurred in nineteenth century Scotland (McPherson, 1973) or twenty-first century Australia (Gale, 2011). Likewise in UK policy and practice, the focus has been mainly on contributing human capital for the good of the economy (Walker, 2008). Examining the rhetoric, policy and literature around widening participation, Gale (2015) claimed that a 'limited sociological imagination' arising from

economic concerns which informed government policy had produced 'narrow conceptions of equity and aspiration' (Gale, 2015, p. 258). These conceptions had led to 'policy, research and practice that are largely system-driven and system-serving.

Much of the policy and practice in widening participation aligns with 'the oppressive effects of neoliberal policy discourse' (Walker, 2008, p. 268). Whilst purporting an agenda which also includes increased inclusion and social justice, at least in the UK and Australia (Gale & Parker, 2017) the reality is largely a skewed view of HE where all power remains with the status quo and none is transferred to the supposed beneficiary – the non-traditional student. Under neoliberalism, the individual student is entirely responsible for their success or failure (Southgate & Bennett, 2016). 'University students are expected to make the transition into HE while conforming to existing institutional requirements' with any changes to institutional practices limited to helping students 'navigate pre-existing and dominant structures and practices' (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 747). In this way, HE institutions have denied genuine freedom to disadvantaged groups (Gale, 2015; Walker, 2008), who are often considered to lack appropriate aspirations, rather than having aspirations which current systems do not meet (Gale, 2015). Much of the research in both the UK and Australia on under-represented groups in HE has listed reasons for difficulties faced by such groups, rather than providing a critical examination of the social and institutional conditions which lead to those difficulties (Kettley, 2007; Gale & Parker, 2017). Walker (2008, 2012) suggested that for widening participation to benefit society as a whole rather than just the economy, it would need to move towards a widening capability focus, wherein students would be 'educated to be critical and active participants in democratic life' (Walker, 2008, p. 277). This, she posited, could lead to increased social justice and a more equitable distribution of knowledge and skills. .

Generally speaking, widening participation policies indicate an acknowledgement that some groups are under-represented in HE and that an increase in HE participation is beneficial for both individuals and economies. Differences among some recent international approaches will be outlined briefly before the Australian specifics are discussed.

2.3 International Widening Participation Policies and Practices

In many European countries, North America, Australia and NZ, widening participation policies have created what some term 'mass higher education'. The definition of mass higher education varies broadly from 15 to 50 per cent of the relevant age group according

to research in such places as Europe (Osborne, 2003) and Hong Kong (Wan, 2011), and near universal participation is generally defined at over 50 per cent of an age group in the US (Trow, 1974, 2006).

Internationally, the engagement of greater proportions of the population in HE is supported both from a social justice standpoint and for economic purposes, as noted above. Academics in Australia and New Zealand (NZ) who are interested in the social justice aspect applaud attempts to improve HE accessibility for previously under-represented groups as an opportunity to redress social inequality (Devlin, 2013; Gale & Tranter, 2011; Leach, 2013; Sellar & Gale, 2011). Others may echo the sentiments of Dawkins (1988), Australia's former Education Minister (1987–92), whose rationale for increasing participation of low SES groups was primarily for economic benefit. An analysis by Leach (2013) of HE policies in Australia, England and NZ compared the varying policy foci since the 1960s, though in each case there is a longer history of HE equity concerns. She determined that equity policies in these nations had been less successful than anticipated, even in times of increasing participation. Leach argued that recent policy in England and NZ demonstrated an 'austerity' response to the post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC) economy that signalled a likely return to selectivism and elitism in HE. Data from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, n.d.) provides support for this claim, showing a five per cent drop in acceptances of undergraduate university places in 2012-13, the first year of a new undergraduate fee and funding regime. By comparison, Australia's policies (at least prior to the demise of the Labor government in 2013) demonstrated a different approach, maintaining a focus on expansion and deregulation of the sector. Leach (2013) suggested that if Australia's approach was successful, issues around resourcing HE while maintaining standards could arise. Gale and Parker (2017) have acknowledged that this has occurred, but claim it is an 'imagined crisis' (p. 91) perpetuated by the media and by elite institutions seeking to maintain their position in a stratified HE context. In this study, the focus will be mainly on widening participation policies, practices and outcomes from the last 20 years, as the topic of interest is factors contributing to, or inhibiting the success of non-traditional students in the current context.

In the UK, the former Labour government (1997-2010) was active in instigating widening participation initiatives. A target was set to have 50% of all 18 to 30 year olds entering HE by 2010 (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). Policies of the subsequent UK government suggested a move away from such initiatives, with support remaining in theory but financial support redirected in an era of austerity following the GFC of 2007-8. Participation of young people in England increased from 30 per cent in the late 1990s to 38 per cent by 2012, according to HEFCE (2013a), with most of the increase occurring post

2005. Growth appeared to slow after that time, with the annual increase for 2012-13 being half that of preceding years. Although participation of those from disadvantaged areas increased more than for those from advantaged areas, marked inequity remained, with young people from disadvantaged areas are a third as likely to attend HE as their advantaged peers (HEFCE, 2013a). Young people living in London are far more likely than those living outside London to enrol, with this gap also widening, due to an increase in participation from disadvantaged areas within London.

In the US, sentiments supporting the notion of widening participation have been voiced (Burke & Johnston, 2004), with some US HE institutions actively seeking non-traditional enrolments (Housel & Harvey, 2009; Schmidt, 2010). Such comments and actions, however, belong to isolated individuals and institutions, rather than being part of a systemic drive: for example, US policies relating to widening participation were evident after World War II. Walpole (2003) cited the G.I. Bill, designed for former US soldiers after World War II, as the turning point when low SES students became a policy focus. She noted that college education leading to social mobility as part of the American Dream was embedded in American culture. Despite inadequate attention to the plight of students from low SES backgrounds in US policy during the ensuing decades (Karen, 1991), ample research has investigated US students who are First Generation (FG) and/or First in Family (FiF) to enrol in HE. Definitions of FiF and FG vary (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliot & Pierce, 2012; McConnell, 2000). Students whose parents did not attain a college education are considered to be in the FG category (Billson & Terry, 1982) but they may have siblings who have entered HE before them, while FiF generally have neither. FG students in the US are more likely to belong to ethnic minority groups (Bui, 2002) or be African-American (Kim & Nunez, 2013). FiF and FG students in the US often belong to lower SES groups (Penrose, 2002; Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Wildhagen, 2015). In the UK, FG is considered an indicator of social class, as those from working-class backgrounds have historically been under-represented in HE (Walker, 2008). In Australia, it is often linked to low SES, as determined in a sample of 2422 first year students in nine universities (James, Krause & Jennings, 2010), but may not be true in every context. A study conducted in one regional Australian university found that FiF students in some programs were spread almost evenly across all SES categories (Southgate et al., 2014).

2.4 A goal of access or success?

When considering various attitudes and approaches to widening participation internationally, it must be noted that there is a distinct difference between talking about students *entering* HE and talking about them gaining qualifications through successful completion. Recognising this, the original UK target was modified to relate to students remaining enrolled in HE after six months (Gorard, Smith, May, Thomas, Adnett, & Slack, 2006), acknowledging that enrolment alone would not guarantee the desired outcome. This raised ethical concerns too, and the International Association of Universities (2008) stated that it was meaningless to provide access to HE for students without there being a reasonable chance of them succeeding. Implications arising from differences between enrolment and completion will be explored in the section on student attrition and retention (see pp. 23-27 of this chapter).

Another notable difference between international policies relates to the type of HE. In UK policy it is considered to be any type of post-compulsory school education that may lead to qualifications (Gorard et al., 2006), and rhetoric in the US has identified college graduations as the goal (though a hierarchy exists within that HE system and others). In Hong Kong, a large increase in HE enrolment pertains almost entirely to sub-degree programs (Wan, 2011). Regardless of the country, policy, or the initiatives instigated, little progress was made in increasing low SES participation in many HE systems over a number of decades (European Group for Research on Equity in Educational Systems, 2003; Gorard et al., 2006; Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2013), with most increases in enrolment coming from the middle classes (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). More recently, increased enrolments from previously under-represented groups have been evident in Australia (NSCEHE, 2017), but while there has been overall increase in HE participation rates in many countries, inequities remain, largely due to stratification in HE systems (Marginson, 2016). Further research is required to determine factors leading to successful HE outcomes for non-traditional students.

2.5 Widening Participation for Whom?

Efforts to widen participation in HE have focussed on different target groups depending on the time frame and country. In England, policy has over time mentioned working class men, young and older women, people of mature age, ethnic minority groups,

people with disabilities and migrant groups (Teaching and Learning Research Program, 2008). In NZ, some considered the HE system pre 1980 to be elite (McLaughlin, 2003). Since 2002, NZ policy documents have targeted Maori and Pacific peoples, migrants, refugees, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and at risk youth (Office of the Associate Minister of Education, 2002). In India HE policy has targeted the caste system (Burke, 2012). Osborne's (2003) earlier review of HE policies in Europe noted a focus in Sweden on adults over 25 years of age with work experience, in Ireland on low SES and people with disabilities, in Scotland on people in regional areas, in Germany on those without school-leaving qualifications and in France on pathways recognising prior learning. More recently, concerns around HE achievement have centred on social class in Norway, and ethnicity in the Netherlands (Bowes, Thomas, Peck & Nathwani, 2013). US research has highlighted difficulties faced by students from Hispanic (Schmidt, 2003), African-American and Latino cultures (The Education Resource Institute, 2004), other minority groups (Vargas, 2004), females and those from low income families (Choy, 2001; Schmidt, 2003; Thayer, 2000; The Education Resource Institute, 2004; Vargas, 2004). FG students generally in the US have also received much attention, as noted earlier, with this variable sometimes considered a proxy for working class (Schmidt, 2010).

In attempting to meet widening participation targets, some institutions have circumvented their own procedures. For example, entry criteria have been ignored in some institutions in the US (Spiegler, 1998) and Hong Kong (Wan, 2011). Such occurrences can lead to public distrust of some universities (Wan, 2011), a fact which underlines the importance of quality control in HE. This may be used as an argument by some in the HE sector as a reason not to widen participation. As Gorard et al. (2007) note, some resistance to change in the UK HE sector has come from those who wish to retain elitism. Gale (2011) likewise noted that in Australia, some Go8 members 'see equity as compatible with excellence whereas others see the two as antithetical' (p. 11). This argument may be fundamentally about the efforts of some institutions to maintain their positions in the field of HE in Australia and also in the UK (Naidoo, 2004; Gale & Sellar, 2017). Milem (2003), however, noted that students enrolled in and graduating from US universities with diverse populations are likely to achieve higher academic outcomes, and in the Australian context Gale (2012) noted the enhancement of HE to be gained from increased equity practices and claimed that 'the ideal place for equity is to be central to excellence' (Gale, 2011, p. 19).

2.6 Widening Participation in the current Australian Context

How does the current situation in Australia compare with international perspectives? Many changes are evident in the Australian HE landscape in recent years. Australia has quite a long history of equity initiatives (Gale & Tranter, 2011). My study focuses primarily on the current era as a pragmatic measure; I wish to examine the experiences of non-traditional students in the current era, therefore the current context is important, and the history less so. In 2007 the Australian Federal Labor Government (2007-2013) signalled an interest in HE equity when it announced that it would form the National Centre for Student Equity which opened in 2008. That same year, the *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Bradley et al., 2008) was published, including as two of its recommendations that the Australian Government set national targets for the year 2020 of 'at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds having attained a qualification at bachelor level or above' and '20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level are people from low socio-economic status backgrounds' (p. xviii). The percentage of low SES enrolments in Australian HE remained at around 15% for over 15 years (DEEWR, 2009), though more recent figures show a slight increase of 1.5 percentage points in low SES enrolment (Acil Allen Consulting, 2017) between 2005 and 2014. This is tempered by the same data set demonstrating a 4% drop in completion rates by low SES students. The difficulty in increasing the participation of this group reflects results internationally (James et al., 2008). In 2011, a year before this study began, students from low SES backgrounds comprised 16.8 per cent of all commencing domestic undergraduate students (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, 2012), an improvement of 0.7 per cent on 2001 figures. Since this group makes up 25 per cent of the general population, it remains clearly under-represented in HE.

Recommendations from the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) were accepted by the Australian Commonwealth Government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), though the target date for bachelor qualifications was pushed back from 2020 to 2025. So, Australian targets have focussed on completion of university rather than enrolment, related to bachelor level qualifications or above, and cited specific percentages of enrolments from low SES backgrounds. A journal editorial by Gale and Sellar (2011) accordingly suggested that the category of low SES was 'newly privileged in higher education policy discourse' (p. 2), and had subsumed concerns about gender, disability, Indigenous and rural communities. The focus on low SES was also evident in the establishment of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) in 2010, replacing the former Higher

Education Equity Support Program. The goal of HEPPP was to increase low SES participation and completion in HE by providing funding to universities working toward this goal and working with other institutions to raise the aspirations of low SES populations (DEEWR, n.d.). The policy focus on SES may be ascribed to research which showed that SES could be a strong predictor of educational success as well as broader opportunities in life in Australia (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2007; Marginson, 2016). Similar conditions also exist in other countries, with Baum, Ma and Payea (2013) suggesting that in the US, there has been an increase over time in differences in earnings based on level of education.

2.7 Measures of SES and class

Policy, practice and research around widening participation and non-traditional students often refer to the category of SES or class to which students belong. The emphasis placed on categories of SES (for example in Australian policy) and class (such as in the UK) necessitates careful consideration of how such categories are defined.

In Australia, SES is divided into four SES categories or quartiles. People in the lowest 25 per cent are considered to belong to the low SES category. Thus, if entry to HE was equitable in Australia, 25 per cent of all enrolments would be from low SES students. The US groupings are different. In the UK, quintiles, or categories of 20 per cent are used (Chowdry et al., 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), low income refers to the lowest 20 per cent of family incomes, high income is the top 20 percent, and the remaining 60 per cent between high and low are middle income. Such differences make direct comparison between countries difficult. Problems with accurately determining SES have been noted by researchers including some in Australia (Sealey, 2011) and the UK (Bathmaker et al., 2011). Sealey (2011) argued that the measures used to calculate SES in Australia lack sensitivity at the individual and household levels, so that the participation rates of low SES are not correctly determined. Perhaps the most highly contested aspect of the measure is use of the Socio-Economic Indicator for Areas (SEIFA), which relies on residential postcode. Postcode districts can cover socially diverse areas, leading to overestimation of low SES enrolment, and their use is particularly inappropriate for mature age students (James et al., 2008). Individual SES levels may be better indicated by levels of parental education and occupation, as those are strong predictors of school achievement, retention, and probably HE enrolment (James et al., 2008). Recent research by Marks (2017) suggested that in Australia the impact of SES is overstated, with prior

achievement and genetics more responsible for student achievement, though prior achievement is often affected by SES. The Australian government acknowledged concerns about SES measures, publishing discussion papers (Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, 2013) to encourage ideas for measuring SES more accurately, particularly for the HE community.

Nationally and internationally, parental occupation contributes to the determination of SES. Consideration of students' SES in the UK Paired Peers Project showed that even classification of parental occupation could be problematic (Bathmaker et al., 2011). The unique study paired working class and middle class students in one elite and one post-1992 UK university to compare their experiences over three years. In that study, student description of parental occupation sometimes led to an expectation of low income, but further investigation revealed that this was not always the case. They also found the issue of class category to be complicated by matters such as family breakdowns, parents who were over-qualified for their current occupation, students categorised as working class whose parents had high disposable incomes, students' self-definition of class not matching official categories, and families where one parent was differently educated and employed than the other leading to what was described in earlier research as contradictory class positions (Bradley, 1996; Reay, 1998a). As noted earlier, research in the US often uses the FiF category as a proxy for working class, and overlap between low-SES and FiF (or other measure of disadvantage) has also been identified in Australia (Zacharias, 2010 cited in Devlin, 2013, p. 940). The FiF category is a useful one in considering non-traditional students in the Australian context (Southgate et al., 2014; O'Shea, 2014) as it avoids the anomalies presented by use of residential postcodes (Marks, 1999) and focuses on social class rather than SES. Working class is a category often used in UK research, where Reay (1998a) noted, 'Class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological predispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture' (p. 272). Careful consideration of the complexities around SES and class is required for meaningful research using these variables.

2.8 Non-traditional Students' Decisions Regarding Higher Education

Not every school leaver will access further education, for a variety of reasons. Some have no desire to do so (Sellar & Gale, 2011) whilst others are prevented by various situational or institutional factors (Gorard et al., 2006). Historically, HE was the realm of able-bodied males from middle-class backgrounds who were independent learners,

unhindered by familial responsibilities or financial concerns (Ruddick, 1996). While this stereotype reflects the realities of previous centuries (Priest, 2009), ongoing discourse about HE as well as institutional practices suggest that the image has persisted in some quarters (Ruddick, 1996), though the gender imbalance has changed in HE generally. In recent years in Australia, for example, over 55 per cent of university students have been female (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

2.8.1 Influences on HE participation

Many countries including the UK and Australia have acknowledged continuing inequalities in post-compulsory education participation. UK research shows that social class and family culture continue to influence engagement with education (Allatt, 1996; Marginson, 2016). Those members of society least likely to participate in HE in the UK have one or more of the following characteristics: low SES, mature-age, low literacy, disability and those with criminal records (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1995). The type of school attended, parental occupation (DfEE, 1995), gender and race (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) are also predictors of HE participation. In Australia, Bradley et al. (2008) noted the under-representation in HE of Indigenous students, students from low SES backgrounds and those living in rural and remote areas. Indigenous students often belong to more than one of these groups (Abbott-Chapman, 2011). Barriers to participation include high school outcomes, aspirations, finances and support available at HE institutions (Australian Government, 2009; Brook, 2011; Polesel, 2009).

2.8.2 Impact of schooling and SES

Those who do not complete secondary education or who do so without achieving university entrance scores must seek alternate pathways if they wish to pursue HE. Analysis of data from a large survey of school leavers in the Australian state of Victoria found that a disproportionately high ratio of early school leavers came from non-metropolitan areas (Teese, Nicholas, Polesel & Mason, 2007). Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) data show that significantly fewer Australian students from low SES backgrounds complete secondary schooling (James et al., 2008). Data from the large scale Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) series show that fewer students from low SES backgrounds attain university entrance scores (Le & Miller, 2005; Cardak & Ryan, 2009). LSAY data is collected from a representative sample of Australian youth, surveying the participants first in high school aged 14-15 years, and following them annually to age 25 years. Gemici, Lim and Karmel (2013) also analysed LSAY data, and found that school attended had greater impact on low SES students than other groups. Students from high

SES backgrounds were able to complete high school education despite poor academic performance and low academic standard schools, while low SES students attending lower quality schools were disadvantaged in terms of school completion, grades and entry to HE. Le and Miller (2005) concluded that SES was the most important factor in the transition from secondary schooling to university in Australia, and recommended financial support for HE as a remedy. UK research similarly found that students from lower SES groups were less likely to attend HE due to lower high school achievement (Chowdry et al., 2013).

Cardak and Ryan (2009) determined that HE entrance rates in Australia were no different across SES groups once eligibility in terms of high school achievement had been controlled for, but acknowledged that University entry scores rose with SES level. Large studies in the UK also found that differences by SES on HE entry were very small once prior attainment was considered (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2008, 2013). Both sets of researchers suggested that earlier school achievement prohibited students from low SES backgrounds from participating in HE and should therefore be the focus of intervention. SES is often linked with postcode area, and by extension related to school attended, which supports claims from UK research that social class impacts on educational outcomes long before students approach HE (Galindo-Rueda, Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Vignoles, 2004; Chowdry et al., 2013). Based on Australian government statistics, James et al. (2008) found that urban students generally achieved higher outcomes than their remote counterparts, and urban students with low SES backgrounds had lower achievement than other SES groups. Underrepresentation in HE for students living in Australian rural areas was noted by Le and Miller (2005) who suggested this was affected by non-completion of high school.

For students from families where no member has previously attended university, the decision to enrol may not be seen as part of a normal or expected life pathway and may not be automatic. Bathmaker et al. (2013) found that working-class students in their UK study required much consideration and planning to decide on HE, while most middle-class students considered enrolment the norm. A study of over 3000 commencing students at three South Australian universities found that FIF students made the decision to enrol later in school or life than non-FIF students (Luzecy, King, Scutter, & Brinkworth, 2011). Likewise, potential HE students who fall into any of the categories considered as non-traditional (such as mature aged, those with disabilities and so on, as listed earlier) undertook a more in-depth process of decision-making about HE than their more traditional counterparts. Factors influencing such decisions included family and social support,

financial and health considerations plus earlier educational experiences and personal characteristics (Luzeckyj et al., 2011).

2.8.3 The role of family

Family can be central to non-traditional students' decisions to pursue HE. Much of the research on FiF students has focussed on the disadvantages for those students brought about by the lack of familial knowledge of HE. Despite this, family values and support for educational endeavours have been found to be important for FiF students. A study of 50 FG university students in Israel using in-depth interviews highlighted family input as allowing students to break the inter-generational education cycle (Gofen, 2009). Family influence operated through parental values, attitudes and actions regarding education, and could come from the family unit or an individual member. A qualitative Australian study into the HE experiences of 13 Social Work students from non-traditional backgrounds indicated that families' positive attitudes toward education were crucial in the decision-making process (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos & Crosling, 2010). Motivation for study is sometimes for the benefit of a group of people, such as a student's children, rather than just the individual who is enrolled (Longhurst, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Another recent Australian study showed that family members encouraged learning and also that reciprocal benefits occurred through knowledge sharing (O'Shea, 2016a). In a US study of students enrolled in a high school equivalency course, Goto and Martin (2009) found that some mature age students were influenced by their children, as they wanted to be good educational role models for the next generation. These are small scale studies but their consistent findings indicate an area worthy of further investigation. People other than family can also influence non-traditional students to enrol in HE. Core people, who act as role models, can come from families but also from school, friends or elsewhere (Benson et al., 2010). They may act as mentors, and can be especially effective if they have themselves succeeded through education (Goto & Martin, 2009).

2.8.4 Choice of institution

The HE prospects of non-traditional students are not only disadvantaged by their unfamiliarity with the practices of HE institutions; they are also more likely to attend less prestigious institutions, in Australia (Gale & Parker, 2013) and elsewhere (Marginson, 2016). A UK study found this could be related to lower entry requirements, limited financial capacity, geographical constraints and/or psychological comfort (Reay, Ball & David, 2005). The choice processes of prospective students from low SES backgrounds for college in the US have been considered unique by some researchers (Tinto, 1993; Paulsen & St John, 2002; Walpole, 2003). Students prefer to attend a university where they perceive there are other

people similar to themselves according to UK researchers (Reay et al., 2005). In the UK this has seen students from working-class and ethnic-minority backgrounds more likely to enrol in post-1992 universities; previously known as polytechnics, and designated universities by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992. Post-1992 universities tend to have less status than elite universities (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003), and often have fewer financial resources, leading to larger classes and lower staff/student ratios (Leathwood & Hayton, 2002).

Research with 310 students in a post 1992 UK university with a high proportion of working class and minority background students showed that students based their choice on the availability of courses, proximity to home, likelihood of acceptance and knowing other students there (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). A more recent study of UK students in the final year of high school found similar results (Dunnett, Moorhouse, Walsh & Barry, 2012). More traditional or middle-class students tend only to enrol at non-elite universities if their achievement levels preclude them from attending more prestigious institutions (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001). A large scale study by Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak and Terenzini (2004) analysed longitudinal data from 18 four-year colleges in the US. They determined that FiF students attended colleges that were less academically selective than did their non-FiF peers, even after controlling for other factors including students' high school achievement. In Australia, students from medium and low SES backgrounds have more commonly attended regional universities and those with less competitive selection processes (James et al., 2008).

Some UK universities have been more successful than others in attracting non-traditional enrolments. Those UK universities most successful in widening participation unfortunately also have listed the highest rates of student attrition (National Audit Office, 2007). According to a large study using US Department of Education data, FG students from low SES backgrounds were more likely to enrol in two year community colleges than in four year colleges or universities (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Institutions can provide disincentives for non-traditional students either intentionally or unintentionally. In a quantitative survey of third year students at four UK universities, Metcalf (2003) found more prestigious universities were less accommodating of students engaging in paid work than less prestigious universities. Accommodation for working students was evidenced through provision of online lectures and resources, and timetabling options. Metcalf suggested that this has reinforced a class divide in higher education, with students of limited financial support being less able to attend prestigious universities. In Australia, students from low SES backgrounds have been most under-represented in the elite Group of Eight (Go8)

universities (Priest, 2009), with some Go8 universities experiencing a decline in low SES student enrolments in recent decades (James et al., 2008). In fact, all equity groups are under-represented in Go* institutions (Gale & Parker, 2013). There is little doubt that current education systems retain aspects of 'past elite prejudices' (Reay, 2001, p. 334).

2.8.5 Choice of degree

Non-traditional students have also been more likely to enrol in some programs than others. Australian students from low SES backgrounds are often under-represented in some degrees including law, medicine and architecture (James et al., 2008), and over-represented in teaching, nursing and engineering degrees (Gale & Parker, 2013). Teacher education is a common choice due to familiarity with the profession, attainable entry requirements and the perception that it provides stable employment (Snell, 2008). Australia's 2009 Labor Government promoted this direction, signalling that it would reduce HE debts for those studying teaching and nursing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). This makes teacher education an appropriate setting in which to examine the experiences of non-traditional students, as there are many potential participants and this sector within HE has an established practice with non-traditional students. Accordingly, participants for this study were enlisted via a teacher education program, though some participants transferred to other degrees (see detail in Chapter 4). Non-traditional students may be disadvantaged by enrolling in teaching programs, as they may have lower staff/student ratios: Education (1:38) compared with the Natural and Physical Sciences (1:14) or Health (1:24) (AARE, 2011).

2.8.6 Financial concerns

Fear of debt has been found to deter HE entry in the UK (Bowers-Brown, 2006) and in the US (Somers, Woodhouse & Coffey, 2004). Students in the UK from low SES backgrounds have seemed to prefer local institutions, and FiF students often worried more about fees (Dunnett et al., 2012). In the US, students from low SES groups also worried more about debt and their financial situations (Bui, 2002). They considered this when choosing an institution, as did FG females and ethnic minority groups (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry & Kelly, 2008). In the US, this has seen marginalised students more often attending 'commuter' and two year community colleges (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000) in proximity to the family home. This has enabled them to avoid the costs involved with living away from home and to maintain familial responsibilities. Many non-traditional students work part-time during their studies, and this can have a negative impact on their progression (Metcalf, 2003; James et al., 2010).

Financial issues can be particularly concerning for mature students. Australian studies of mature female students report that they may need to cease or decrease paid work

in order to study (Stone, 2008), leading to a lowering of lifestyle. They may have dependants to support, and study can make financial survival difficult (Stone & O'Shea, 2013).

2.8.7 Influences of gender and maturity

Financial concerns are not the only consideration for mature females, and there are other issues related to gender and/or of age. It was earlier noted that non-traditional students are over-represented in degrees such as teaching and nursing (Gale & Parker, 2013), and this raises necessary consideration of gender issues relevant to this study. It was noted earlier that females have historically been under-represented in higher education enrolments, but enrolment figures show this is no longer the case in some places including the UK (Department for Education, 2017) and Australia (Department of Education, 2016), and there have long been some exceptions. Teaching and nursing have been two professions, and therefore university programs, where the usual gender imbalance is reversed. Blackmore (1999) noted the domination of teaching by women dating back to the nineteenth century, where it was one of few acceptable female occupations due to its focus on nurturing the young. Gender expectations of females as the 'caring' or 'nurturing' sex (Warin & Gannerud, 2014). have also contributed to this imbalance. Although the percentage of males in both professions has increased in recent decades, the vast majority remain female, though women are less well represented in school leadership roles. For teaching, this is particularly evident in the primary specialisation; therefore the current study presents results from a mainly female perspective, though one male participant was included. In addition to outnumbering males in HE currently, US research suggests that female students may achieve better results and can be more likely to complete their university degrees (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Goldin, Katz & Kuziemko, 2006).

Mature female students are often FiF and form a sub-group which requires particular attention in a study of non-traditional students. Mature students in Australia generally have a strong sense of purpose for their studies, have good study practices, enjoy the challenge of study and are highly satisfied (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). A recent study here found mature female students had greater satisfaction with regard to their studies than younger females or male students, and demonstrated more of a deep learning approach (Rubin, Scevak et al., 2016b). Studies in the UK have shown working class, mature female students to be motivated more by a passion for learning than for instrumental purposes (McCune, Hounsell, Christie, Cree & Tett, 2010; Reay, 2003). As well as negotiating the unfamiliar field of HE they may face greater challenges related to familial responsibilities than some other equity groups according to Australian researchers (Stone & O'Shea, 2013), though research from NZ shows that improving their children's lives can also provide

motivation for mothers (Longhurst et al., 2012). Mature students also often benefit from practical and emotional support from various family members, including children (Benson et al., 2012). Family responsibilities are also partly responsible for mature students in Australia developing fewer and less valuable friendships at university, which is important given the links between social inclusion, persistence and performance (Rubin & Wright, 2015). In the UK, working class mature female students were found to have greater risk of financial loss through undertaking HE studies (Egerton & Parry, 2001).

2.9 Student Retention, Attrition and Achievement

2.9.1 The importance of retention and attrition

Student retention and attrition rates are important from both moral and financial viewpoints. They impact and are impacted by widening participation initiatives. Researchers from the UK, the US and Australia agree that from a moral perspective, if non-traditional students are encouraged to participate in HE, they should then be given the support needed to succeed (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Devlin, 2013). Attrition and retention rates in HE are also important to institutions from a financial viewpoint, as they affect funding and therefore resourcing (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Additionally, attrition and retention rates contribute to ranking on league tables in countries which currently publish those, such as the UK (for example, University Guide 2012: Education, 2011), thereby affecting institutional status. Australia has followed the ranking trend, with THE Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) responsible for evaluating performance of HE institutions nationally, and many Australian universities using national and international rankings in their marketing campaigns. Student achievement, retention and attrition in HE can be linked to a range of variables. Factors linked to attrition/retention are rarely singular (National Audit Office, 2007), with research in Australia showing they can be related to personal and/or academic factors (Harvey & Szalkowicz, 2017) as well as institutional and financial reasons (Willcoxson et al., 2011). It is noted by Willcoxson et al. (2011) that reasons can differ according to institution of enrolment and year of study. The current study is interested in the factors affecting retention and success for non-traditional students specifically.

2.9.2 Risk factors for attrition

Students from underrepresented groups have been seen as at greater risk of attrition in many nations (Bowes, Thomas et al., 2013; Bowles, Jones et al., 2013; Hovdhaugen,

2009; Ulriksen, Madsen & Holmegaard 2010). In the US, FG students have come under particular scrutiny, as they have been shown to be at greater risk of attrition than subsequent generations (Martinez, Sher, Krull & Wood, 2009; Penrose, 2002), though the reasons are mostly the same as for other students. Students in their first year of HE have received particular research attention, as attrition rates have been highest in that phase both in the US (Tinto, 1993; Horn & Carrol, 1998) and Australia (McMillan, 2005). Student persistence in HE can be shaped by the type of experience they have in first year (Tinto, 1993). Low income, FG students in the US were found by Engle and Tinto (2008) to be almost four times more likely to leave HE after their first year than other students. In the UK, students from low HE participation areas were more likely to leave HE than others, regardless of age (HEFCE, 2013b).

In the Australian context, James et al. (2008) cautioned that factors affecting success in HE may be different from those affecting access. They reported that retention rates were only marginally lower for students from low SES backgrounds than for other students, with the lowest retention rates being for students with medium SES backgrounds from rural areas. Marks (2007) concluded from LSAY data that completion rates varied according to parental education and university entry level, and that there were higher completion rates for some courses including medicine, law and education than for others such as information technology. Overall, Marks (2007) estimated a general completion rate of 81 per cent and found that mature age students and males were less likely to complete. He found no regional differences in completion rates according to students' addresses during their school years. Most recently, Gale and Parker (2017) noted that retention rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been similar to their peers', so there seems to have been an improvement.

According to a study conducted with over 2000 school leavers entering the University of Western Australia, achievement levels in first year HE were affected by similar factors to attrition, including parental education and occupation, high school achievement and school attended (Win & Miller, 2005). Benefits were seen from attending urban (as opposed to rural), small, co-educational schools. Tinto (1993) found in the US that academic failure was less likely to cause attrition than was dissatisfaction with the university experience.

2.9.3 Institutional culture and support

Institutions can affect retention/attrition inadvertently. A review of the literature led Tinto to identify four institutional situations as the main causes of attrition, alongside personal commitment (1993). He named the institutional factors as: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation. These factors related to students' interactions with others in

the institution and student perceptions of how well these interactions met their needs. An experimental study in the US suggested that the way a university's culture was represented as either independent or interdependent could affect student performance (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson & Covarrubias, 2012). FG students were found to be disadvantaged by cultural norms of independence. This is supported by UK studies where working class students were dissatisfied with their institutions' expectations that they be independent learners from an early stage without adequate support (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Tinto (1993) found that attrition was significantly lower in the most selective institutions in the US, and the least selective institutions had the highest rates of attrition.

Despite the importance of retention rates, UK research found that institutes enrolling marginalised students may offer little effective support to bridge the cultural and academic gap experienced by these students (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead, 2008). It may be that universities feel they have done all they need to once non-traditional students are enrolled, or that institutions are unwilling or unable to change to suit the different cohort characteristics. Sellar and Gale (2011) in Australia suggest that students may be expected to change to suit the institution rather than the other way around. Certainly the neo-liberal stance suggests that as the individual will benefit from HE, it is up to the individual to ensure they succeed. An alternate view recommended by Devlin (2013), also in Australia, was to move away from the deficit view of either low SES students or HE institutions toward a joint venture to overcome socio-cultural incongruity and ensure HE achievement for low SES students. Universities offer varying levels of support for students, especially given links between funding and student completion. A questionnaire sent to Australian universities asking about support services for low SES or Indigenous students by James et al. (2008) revealed difficulties in evaluating the support programs' success. Accurate measurement of SES was one concern, and few institutions had completed formal quantitative assessment. Links between retention and student support have been found in various UK studies (Gorard et al., 2007). However, some programs specially designed to support non-traditional students have low success rates in the US (Burke & Johnston, 2004). Some studies from Australia show that non-traditional students make little use of university support services (Benson, et al., 2012), though others disagree (Southgate et al., 2014), so there are likely differences across institutions. Developmental support programs which might be construed as 'add-ons' should be avoided in favour of more integrated approaches where learning communities foster skills and belonging (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). In fact, while

non-elite support services are often generalised, those at elite UK universities tend to be tailored to the individual's needs (Crozier et al., 2008), and these are highly effective.

2.9.4 Personal factors and attrition

Personal factors related to attrition and retention include high school achievement, family commitments and paid outside work (Tinto, 1993; Burke & Johnston, 2004). Financial situations generally may also lead to attrition. Analysis of an LSAY data set provided information about this in the Australian context. James et al. (2008) found students from low SES backgrounds (as determined by parental education and occupation) were more likely to have financial difficulties and concerns and to consider ceasing study due to this (James et al., 2008). They were also more likely to miss classes for paid work. Mature age students in the UK were more likely than younger students to leave HE due to life circumstances (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998), with older females more likely to struggle due to the demands of juggling family commitments (Bamber & Tett, 2000), and older males more likely to cite financial reasons for departure from HE (Yorke, 1999). Little has been published as to how non-traditional students can overcome these problems. Not surprisingly, however, Australian research showed that material and emotional support from family, friends and peers can help non-traditional students succeed (Benson, et al., 2012). A US study found family support to be particularly important for female students (Cheng, Ickes & Verhofstadt, 2012). Unfortunately, FiF students and mature females in particular may face resistance to their HE enrolment from family members according to an Australian study (O'Shea, 2014).

2.9.5 Well-being of students

Student attrition can be caused by mental health issues. Stressors could include moving away from home and social networks, and new social and academic challenges (Tinto, 1993). Supporting this, an Australian study of 132 first year students found that health and well-being could 'be compromised through relocation and sense of loss felt when students no longer have easy access to friends and family' with 'implications for academic progress, success and retention' (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2013, p. 743). University students have a higher incidence of mental health problems than the general population as determined by studies in the USA (American College Health Association, 2015) and Australia (Stallman, 2010). A meta-analysis by Rubin (2012) found that working class students were less integrated in HE settings than middle class students. Social contact with university friends is beneficial for mental health according to US research (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009), and social integration benefits student academic achievement and retention in the UK (Thomas, 2012). Unfortunately, working class students have less social

contact within the university than students from middle or higher social classes (Rubin & Wright, 2015). A study of 376 students at a non-metropolitan university in Australia found that working class students had fewer and lower quality friendships than middle class students (Rubin & Wright, 2015). Rubin and other colleagues then investigated links between social contact, students' subjective social status and mental health. Their study of 749 first year undergraduate students determined that subjective social status predicted social contact, and both of these negatively predicted depression (Rubin, Evans & Wilkinson, 2016). Working class students then, can be at greater risk of depression at university. This is particularly concerning given that university enrolment can, over time, worsen both depression and anxiety according to UK research (Andrews & Wilding, 2004).

2.10 Academic Skills, Practices and Outcomes

Students arrive at HE with varying academic skills, and this is especially true for non-traditional students entering from various pathways. All students then hopefully develop these further during their enrolment, albeit from different starting points. As at any other level of education, prior knowledge can affect achievement, and this can affect success in HE. Academic outcomes can also be affected by teaching and learning practices employed by teaching staff and students themselves. Non-traditional students may be less well-prepared for the requirements and expectations of university due to a range of factors. Likewise there may be some teaching practices which are more suited to non-traditional students than others.

2.10.1 Academic literacy

Success in university education requires specific literacy skills including the ability to read long, complex texts, synthesise information and determine inferred meanings (Snell, 2008). Although an analysis of Australian LSAY data by Marks (2009) suggested that prolific readers had higher university entrance scores regardless of SES background, students from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds often struggled with the demands of academic literacy related to reading and writing, particularly those required by assessment tasks. Universities expect their students to be independent learners, but this is not true of many non-traditional students (Meuleman, Garrett, Wrench & King, 2015). In the US, Burke and Johnston (2004) claimed that marginalised students were poorly prepared for the demands of academic literacy by their high schools. This was supported by the First Year Experience study in Australia (James et al., 2010) which found that students from rural and low SES

backgrounds were less satisfied with their preparation for university study than other groups. UK research suggested that elite private schools tended to provide students with better preparation for HE than public schools (Bradley et al., 2013).

In the US, Snell (2008) apportioned blame for students struggling with university level literacy requirements to a decline in reading generally, as only 12 per cent of 19-24 year olds were found to be proficient readers (the level necessary for university) by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy in 2006. Literacy difficulties experienced by those from low SES backgrounds have been examined by Bourdieu, Passeron and Saint Martin (1994), who found that such students were more likely to find academic language unfamiliar. Reviewing literature from countries including France, Australia and the US on language and learning support needs of low SES students, Priest (2009) suggested that those students experienced a disconnect between their home/culture and academic discourses which could lead to a 'lack of interest in the concerns of the academic world' (p. A74). James et al. (2010) found that low SES students in Australia were more likely than their higher SES counterparts to report difficulty understanding material and adjusting to university teaching styles in their first year of enrolment. On a positive note, Penrose (2002) examined data from over 3000 US students and found that although first-generation students perceived their literacy skills differently from other students, their overall college performance was not different. It may be that these students were more aware of differences between their community and institutional literacy practices (Penrose, 2002) or that they studied more in order to avoid failure, as suggested by Bui (2002). Further investigation as to how non-traditional students overcome these obstacles is needed.

2.10.2 SES and academic performance

Some Australian and international studies have shown that students from low SES backgrounds generally do not perform as well in HE as other SES groups. These include meta-analyses of international data (for example Richardson, Abraham & Bond, 2012; Robbins et al., 2004) and a large scale study using American data (Walpole, 2003). Other studies have provided different perspectives. For example, various Australian studies have shown low SES students perform better, similarly, or less well than other groups. Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001) used data from over 13000 students entering a regional Australian university and found no difference in academic achievement across SES groups, though students entering through enabling pathways generally performed worse than those entering degree programs directly from high school. Grebennikov and Skaines (2009) examined data from over 8000 students at the University of Western Sydney and found that students from low SES backgrounds had lower outcomes than other groups. Referring to

2006 Department of Education, Science and Training data, James et al. (2008) found that urban and regional students across SES groupings had higher success rates than students from remote areas. There was no difference among regional students by SES, but for urban students, those from high SES backgrounds had slightly higher success rates than those from low SES backgrounds. In these data success was measured by units passed compared with units students were enrolled in. It remains unknown why this is the case or how the inequities can be overcome.

2.10.3 Institutional learning support

Literacy support programs are provided in many universities as one of many student support services. In the Australian context, Bradley et al. (2008) claimed that low SES students were heavy users of such services. Southgate et al. (2014) found FiF Australian students more likely to use support services, while Zipin and Brennan (2006), discussing Australian pre-service teachers, contradicted this. They claimed that such students were unlikely to follow advice to access literacy support programs. These contradictory views are difficult to reconcile, and of the three studies, only Southgate et al. (2014) offered empirical data to support their claims. Whilst it may seem logical to assume that low SES students would benefit more than their more advantaged peers from support services, there may be barriers to their uptake. For example, non-traditional students may be less able to navigate institutional services according to UK research (Penrose, 2002) and could therefore be unaware of support availability. Other UK research suggests they may find it difficult to avail themselves of such services due to other demands on their time such as paid work (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Finally, they may be disinclined to use these services as they may not wish to be seen as in need of additional help, just as some students with disabilities do not use services provided as this is contrary to the student identity they are constructing for themselves (Fuller et al., 2009). Non-traditional students may benefit from increased academic support at a course or program level, with teaching staff able to identify and refer students to institutional level support, according to Australian researchers (Benson et al., 2012).

A number of strategies for improving students' academic literacy have been put forward by US researchers. Burke and Johnston (2004) suggested taking a holistic view of learning, and recommend having students write in every class. Penrose (2002) advocated direct interventions to improve literacy skills, like those recommended by Rustick (2007) including explicit instruction, modelling and practice. Elbow's (1991) reflection on academic discourse proposed a focus in assessment on content, rather than mode of communication, at least in the early phases of HE programs, while students were becoming familiar with

university requirements, practices and standards. Elbow also agreed with others to a need for open discussion about different discourses, including academic texts, to raise student awareness of the power embodied by the discourses (see for example the Australian study - Zipin & Brennan, 2006).

2.10.4 Academic orientation

It is not just academic skills in entering university that affect outcomes, and James et al. (2010) found in Australia that academic orientation was independent of variables including SES, gender, and the number of hours of paid work a student undertakes. Researchers in the US studying academic success from an engagement perspective such as Bean (1985) and Tinto (1993) (both frequently cited) have emphasised the actions of individuals and institutions which can increase student involvement in HE. They suggested that academic engagement is reflected in student activities such as time management, help-seeking behaviour and interactions with teaching staff. Also in the US, a quantitative study by Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan and Towler (2005) found that college success was related to academic effort, as measured by class attendance, reading completion and studying. Defining college success according to program completion, time taken to complete and GPA outcomes, they found that student actions related to courses affected their success. Completion was not related to age, gender, race or entry level, but final GPA was. Engagement was shown to be a modifying factor on the influence of entry level.

2.10.5 Paid work and academic achievement

Although paid work does not affect students' academic orientation (James et al., 2008) it has been shown by many studies to affect academic performance. Researching students in Australian nursing programs, Salamonson and Andrew (2006) found this true even when students were employed in their field of study. They found a marked decline in performance for students working more than 16 hours per week. Similar findings have been reported for Australian medical students (Munro, 2011) and for HE students generally (James et al., 2010). Students from low SES backgrounds were more likely to work than those from higher SES groups In Walpole's (2003) US study, and to work more hours per week. Metcalf's (2003) UK study found that students' term time employment affected many aspects of their university experience including academic work, social activities and health.

2.11 Conclusion

This literature review has outlined approaches to widening participation in HE in various countries including Australia. Whereas other countries have focussed on particular

cultural or ethnic groups, the recent focus in Australia has been on people from low SES backgrounds. This chapter described the particular struggles faced by non-traditional students in HE related to institutional, personal and academic issues. Non-traditional students are often limited in their access to particular institutions, disadvantaged by financial constraints and familial responsibilities, and hindered by their academic skill levels. They can be supported in their educational endeavours by family values and intrinsic motivation. To date there has been scant research into how non-traditional students overcome these challenges to persist and succeed in HE: such research could inform practice and policy for stakeholders and is the focus for the current study. The following chapter examines the contributions of Bourdieu's thinking tools (habitus, capital and field) to studies of education, noting their use by other researchers in studies of non-traditional students, and outlines the way they have been considered in this study.

Chapter 3

Bourdieu and Higher Education

3.1 Introducing Bourdieu

This study examines the experiences of and outcomes for non-traditional students entering university via a teacher education program. It has been acknowledged that students entering tertiary education as a result of widening participation initiatives experience HE differently from more traditional students (Devlin, 2010). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1990a) have been used by many researchers to explain some of these differences (for example Brennan & Osborne, 2008; Crozier et al, 2008). Bourdieu's theoretical lens contributes to the methodological framework when examining data related to student experiences in this study.

Bourdieu's work spanned over fifty years, beginning with anthropological work in Algeria (for example, Bourdieu, 1962) and including such varied disciplines as literature, psychoanalysis, sociology, cultural and gender studies. He also contributed important work related to the French higher education system (Bourdieu, 1990a). Over his extensive research career Bourdieu employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. His most cited contribution has been the concepts of habitus, capital and field, which he termed 'thinking tools'. These concepts attempt to interpret relationships between social structures (universities in the case of this study) and everyday practices (what students do) (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). The concepts are interrelated as represented by the following formula: '[(habitus) (capital) + field = practice]' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 101).

Bourdieu's focus on education, educational sociology and policy making as specific fields make his work a suitable choice for this study. However, there are aspects which require critical consideration. As noted by Bourdieu and others, temporal and contextual factors must be considered in any application of the theoretical framework (Grenfell, 2008a). The work conducted by Bourdieu in the HE system of France occurred in a time and place quite different from the current research context, so any differences must be considered in the way they affect employment of the thinking tools or in comparing outcomes with those from other times and places. Bourdieu himself disliked definitions (Nash, 1999). It is necessary though that I include here definitions of Bourdieu's tools as I have interpreted

them for use in this study, and as compared with their use by other researchers in similar areas of study.

This chapter begins with an exploration of class, and its evolution in Australian society. This is followed by an examination of Bourdieu's three tools in turn: habitus, field and capital. In each case I define the tool in terms of Bourdieu's work. I then examine how each tool has been used in other research relating to non-traditional students, before outlining how it is used in the current study. I then consider how Bourdieu's framework intersects with the construct of gender, which is important in this study.

3.2 Social class in Australia

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, which is used throughout this thesis, is based on the social construct of class. The notion of class in Australia is a contested one, and is very different to the class /es around which much of Bourdieu's early work centred. Hence, it is important to consider the development of class in the Australian context. Two dominant approaches to class have arisen from the work of Weber and Marx. Weber's (1946) theory considered individuals' skills and attributes, wealth, and social prestige. Marx focussed on ownership related to production as a way of delineating workers and employers, leading to categories of class, being at the most broad, workers, those who are self-employed, and large employers (Marx, 1933). Numerous class schemas have been developed over the last century based on these two approaches, both in Australia and elsewhere, in an effort to provide useful categories of class relevant to the temporal and geographical contexts.

Australia's history with Britain might suggest that our class system would mirror theirs, however we developed as a British penal colony, so never possessed the upper echelon of royalty and its associated levels of class. The US also developed as a break-away nation from Britain, so we do share similarities with them in terms of social classes. In the mid twentieth century, US and Australian class was indicated by stratified prestige related to employment categories (Marks, 1999). Prestige was often related to income, though there were exceptions such as the clergy which had low income but high prestige. Sociologists, economists and feminist scholars view class in different ways, so it is difficult to find a singular, accepted definition of class (Savage, et al., 2013). Economic and social changes over recent centuries have seen class stratification change in many countries. Savage et al. (2013) developed a UK model with seven levels of class which acknowledge the complex

interplay of occupation, income, cultural and social activities. In this model the traditional singular working class has been replaced by a range of worker categories which better reflect the current context of social mobility and a de-industrialised society. These categories have resonance with the current Australian context, which is unsurprising given the global economy in which we now all co-exist. This is not to say that there is less social division, but rather that the divisions are differently organised than in the past. In Australia, for example, high incomes can be achieved by low-skilled workers if they are employed in the mining industry.

Bourdieu's approach to class, used in this thesis, is based on a mostly Marxist view, but is less structural (Marks, 1999). Bourdieu's model places less focus on employment inequalities, and more on interconnections between economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973).

3.3 Habitus

Bourdieu (1986) explained habitus as a person's background context and influences, and the outlook that these influence through ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Through socialisation these become embodied, becoming seemingly natural tendencies or 'dispositions', which then predict behaviours in any social situation. Habitus renders some practices unlikely or even unthinkable for an individual if they are based outside that person's cultural background (Bourdieu, 1993a, 1990b; Reay, 2004). Habitus has both individual and collective aspects. Whilst it is formed by a person's individual history, it is also influenced by the history of their family, social class and gender. The outcome of habitus generally is that the social structures which formed the habitus are reproduced, so that individuals born into a particular social class remain in that social class. Bourdieu suggested that 'when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as a fish in water", it does not feel the weight of the world and takes the world about it for granted' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 1).

Some of Bourdieu's critics (for example Cronin, 1996; Jenkins, 2002) have claimed that his theory is limited to the reproductive capacity of habitus. Other researchers including Reay (2004) have disagreed, considering that habitus provides an individual with a range of possible actions to use in any situation. Such actions allow agency, and can be either transformative or constraining. Within social groups, habitus differs to the extent that individuals' social trajectories are divergent. Bourdieu noted that habitus could be transformed through experiencing unfamiliar fields (Bourdieu, 1999), acknowledging its

potential to change and adapt (Bourdieu, 2005). While often suggesting that members of the same group or class will share a uniform habitus, Bourdieu at other times acknowledged that difference and diversity can exist among members of cultural groups, acknowledging the existence of individual habitus, whereby 'each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60). An individual's current social situation becomes internalised, so that habitus becomes multi-layered, synthesising the past with the present. He later stated that habitus 'constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world which only occasionally takes the form of radical conversion' (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 78). He considered that it could change, but that major change was an unlikely, though possible, outcome.

The employment of habitus allows the study of individual pathways (Nash, 1999). As an individual progresses through life, and various life experiences are assimilated into their habitus, a range of outcomes becomes possible (Reay, 2004). As a result of these options, there is 'a "messiness" about the concept of habitus that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world' (Reay, 1995, p. 357). Habitus 'adjusts aspirations and expectations according to the objective probabilities for success or failure common to the members of the same class for a particular behaviour' (Swartz, 2002, p. 655). It can be replicated or transformed 'by the action of the school' (Bourdieu, 1972, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 134), for example. This assumes that a person's living conditions may change over the course of a lifetime, depending on an individual's responses to situations encountered, including formal or informal education. Mills' (2008) study of secondary students in a disadvantaged community supported this idea. She theorised that an individual has the potential for either a predominantly reproductive habitus, whereby they 'recognise the constraint of social conditions and conditionings and tend to read the future that fits them' or a transformative habitus where they 'recognise the capacity for improvisation and tend to generate opportunities for action in the social field' (p. 108). Education can increase a tendency towards a cultured disposition, allowing initial social conditions to be transcended. The correlation between level of education and income (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) provides evidence of higher education's potential for transforming habitus.

Determining how habitus can be measured is challenging, especially since even within families, individual members may respond differently to the same situations (LiPuma, 1993). Some researchers have used a measure of social class or membership of an equity group as a proxy for habitus, stripping it of its inherent complexities and dynamism (Maton, 2008). Others have sought to determine a simple quantifiable measure, with questionable

success. Dumais (2002) asked eighth grade students in the US one question about their career aspirations within a longer questionnaire, and considered this a measurement of habitus. From this, she found a link between habitus and academic performance, though I argue that her determination of causality was flawed. A blunt measure such as her single question about aspirations would be particularly inappropriate in the current study as it can be presumed that most if not all participants considered teaching a possible future career. A different approach was used in Reay's (1995) study which attempted to employ habitus as method. In it she compared behaviours of primary students in two schools – one which was predominantly white middle class and the other working class. Through examination of student social interactions and responses to particular stimuli, Reay determined clear differences in the way students saw and protected their social positions, including embodied responses.

Bourdieu stated that practices are generated by a particular habitus. It stands to reason, then, that social practices can be analysed to determine habitus (Nash, 1999) as Reay (1995) did. In this thesis, therefore, I examine participants' narratives on their journeys to and through higher education for evidence of their practices related to family, finance, educational experiences and social relationships, thus determining individualised accounts of habitus. In this study, habitus is considered in terms of how the participants came to enrol at university and in teacher education, to gain understanding of students' dispositions as they entered HE, and considered in terms of how they reacted to various situations whilst enrolled. In selecting as participants non-traditional students who all enrolled at university in a teacher education program, it was anticipated that some similarities in habitus would exist between participants, though as a matter of course there would also be considerable differences. These may have evolved from the type of community the student grew up in, their family make-up and the school they attended. For mature students, it was necessary to consider the experiences between school and university which would also have shaped habitus. As participants progressed through university, the ways in which habitus influenced behaviours is examined. Simultaneously, possible changes to habitus influenced by the HE experience are monitored. Student actions are examined for agency as evidence of transformative or constraining influences related to the HE experience.

Many HE studies about widening participation and non-traditional or first-in-family students have utilised habitus as part of their methodologies. The premise is that the habitus of non-traditional students would not be a good fit with university, so that they would feel as 'fish out of water' (Reay et al., 2010, p. 117). Reay's UK studies related to habitus have focussed on: the links between habitus, class, ethnicity and gender in primary schools

(1995); social class and associated dispositions as evident in mothers' involvement in their children's education (1998a); class influence on HE choices generally (1998b) and for mature students (2002); working class relationships to education at various levels (2001); and issues for mature working-class women in accessing HE (2003). Her research collaborations with others have also examined: HE choices of non-traditional students (Reay et al., 2001); mature FE student access to and choices around HE (Reay, Ball & David, 2005); and the experiences of middle- and working-class students in different HE institutions (Crozier et al., 2008; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009, 2010). Her study in primary schools demonstrated the embedded differences in behaviours and attitudes as determined by students' habituses. Working class children tended to be more helpful and caring, while middle-class students were more competitive and prejudiced, and actively cultivated 'social distinction' (Reay, 1995 p. 367). Working-class mothers in Reay's (1998) study demonstrated a powerlessness with regard to their children's education which was quite different from the attitude of middle-class mothers who had expectations to be met. Familial habitus was found to differentiate students' HE choices, with working-class students far less certain and more constrained than their middle-class colleagues (Reay, 1998b). Mature working-class students were less focussed on 'rankings and standards' than were their middle-class fellows when discussing educational choices (Reay, 2002a, p. 406), and mature working-class women attempt HE with greater 'costs and risks' than males or the middle classes (Reay, 2003, p. 314). She has also written about the 'lack of a valued place within education for the working classes' generally (Reay, 2001, p. 344). In a study of working class students at an elite university, Reay et al. (2009) noted that students undertook 'processes of re-fashioning' (p. 1116) of the self which nevertheless maintained the integrity of a working class habitus. The students were seen to be aware of both benefits and costs of their experiences. Reay is always careful to note the complexities of interplay among class, race and gender in these studies.

The Paired Peers project in the UK (detailed on page 12) found that student trajectory, choice of university and selection processes were all closely linked to class (Bathmaker et al., 2011). Crozier et al. (2008) found that working class students have fewer opportunities than middle class students to learn how to fit in at university, and that while they may succeed, their lives 'were often fragile and subject to disruption' (p. 176) in ways that middle class students did not experience.

Diane Reay claimed in 1995 that Bourdieu's concept of habitus was used in far fewer studies than was his concept of cultural capital. By 2004 her concern was that researchers were often 'overlaying research analyses with Bourdieu's concepts, including habitus, rather

than making the concepts work in the context of the data' (Reay, 2004, p. 431). I have endeavoured in this study to move beyond such practice, and have taken Bourdieu's advice to work *with* the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1993b), rather than adopting it as a simple measure.

3.4 Field

Bourdieu's development of the concept of field followed his other key concepts of habitus and capital and is inextricably linked to both. He suggested that individuals operate within social settings, with the structure of a social setting termed the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Fields may be considered as structured social spaces built around certain forms or combinations of capital. They contain dominant and subordinate positions which are determined by an unequal distribution of such capital, wherein the personal attributes of those involved are irrelevant.

Bourdieu (1977) argued that fields are structured to form what we know and how it is that we come to know it, thereby limiting knowledge production. In any field, one set of ideas is likely to be dominant over any others. Fields can only operate when there are agents with appropriate habitus investing in the field. Those wishing to enter the field must acknowledge the importance of the field and have the requisite knowledge to engage in it. Through this system, the existing social order (or power relations) in the field is maintained (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Agents in a field usually act to maintain the existing status of the field, while challengers more often employ subversive strategies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), requiring those established in the field to defend the existing order. All those acting in a field share implicit knowledge that the struggle is worth engaging in, and the field's structure requires particular types of struggle (Bourdieu, 1991). In all fields there exist tensions between groups struggling to gain or maintain control over the capital in that field (McNay, 1999). A 'misery of position' (Bourdieu, 1999) results when a person's habitus does not align with the field in which they seek to act, as might be the case for non-traditional students entering the field of HE.

Bourdieu's fields 'often involved four semi-autonomous levels: the field of power, the broad field under consideration, the specific field, and social agents in the field as a field in themselves' (Thomson, 2008, p. 79). In this study the broad field is HE generally. The specific field is a teacher education program in a regional university with a long standing commitment to equity and above average proportion of students from low SES backgrounds. The ways in which non-traditional students (as agents) engage in the field are examined in

this study, though academics and administrators (as well as more traditional students) are also agents.

Much of the research on habitus (and capital) and HE also relates to field, due to the inextricable relationship of these concepts as indicated by the formula presented early in this chapter. Habitus exists in relation to a field. Accordingly, when Reay et al. (2009) studied working class students in an elite institution, the field was also of concern. They noted, as did Archer and Leathwood (2003), that it was the non-traditional student who was expected to adapt to the field. The fairly recent notion that the field (HE institutions) should accommodate the diverse students who enrol has been supported by a number of researchers using Bourdieuan methodologies including, but not limited to Devlin (2013), Gale and Parker (2015), O'Shea (2015b, 2016a) and Reay (2001). Devlin (2013), for example, noted the need for changes to both policies and practices to bridge 'socio-cultural incongruity' (p. 947) for students from low SES backgrounds.

Pitman (2013) in his study of under-represented groups in HE using autobiography suggested that universities should provide more flexible admission processes. Reay (2003) likewise noted the need for change in admission processes in her study of mature working class females in HE access courses. She considered that the field (HE generally) had policies which encouraged the enrolment of diverse students while making all change and transformation the responsibility of the individual. O'Shea (2016a, b) stated that HE institutions should find ways to 'recognise and nurture' (p. 34) the resources brought to HE by FiF students. Meuleman et al. (2015) suggested that a 'cultural change' (p. 503) was needed in universities to ease the transition to university for non-traditional students. Working class students' sense of belonging at university should be nurtured by agents in the field such as educators and other staff (Soria & Stebleton, 2013).

Some research has focussed on differences in the field, by considering elite and non-elite universities. The aforementioned Paired Peers project included students in one elite and one post-1992 institution (Bathmaker et al., 2011), while Crozier et al. (2008) studied the experiences of students from a range of backgrounds in four HE institutions ranging from elite to a Further Education institutions with links to a university. They noted that fields included 'the university, disciplines, social milieux and the field of national higher education and how these are engaged with, or "played out" by students' (Crozier et al., 2008, p. 168). They described those fields as the 'context of scarce resources' including 'access to tutor time, materials, knowledge sources' (p. 168) and also claimed that the different institutions were 'complexly differentiated, hierarchical' (p. 172). The institutions had different ways of utilising resources to support students, with the elite universities having more individualised

approaches. Even at the non-elite institutions though, working class students often found 'requirements and expectations ... mysterious' (p. 174).

HE institutions may be less easily transformed than the non-traditional students who enter them. Burke (2002) and Reay (2002) noted an 'impenetrable level' (Reay, 2002a, p. 415) at which change appears untenable. It largely remains that individuals are constrained by the structure of HE and the positions they occupy within that structure (Bourdieu, 1998).

3.5 Capital

Bourdieu's use of the term capital was based on a broadening of the word as it is used in the economic arena (Moore, 2008). In his framework, it refers to the resources or assets possessed by an individual or institution that have value in a particular field. Capital is a form of power, in that its possession confers advantage on the owner. Given that capital is unevenly distributed among social classes, it facilitates social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu considered that capital could take both economic and symbolic forms, the main forms of the latter being cultural and social capital. While economic capital exists as tangible resources, including money, cultural and social capital exist as advantages possessed because of one's family and/or societal position (Bourdieu, 1986). Those without capital are therefore disadvantaged:

Those who are deprived of capital are either physically or symbolically held at a distance from goods that are the rarest socially. They are forced to stick with the most undesirable. Their lack of capital intensifies the experience of finitude; it chains one to a place. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127)

Formal education was seen by Bourdieu as an institutionalised form of capital, with education systems being the main conduit for transmitting and rewarding the capital of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1984). It favours a particular habitus which is capable of agency. Groups lacking economic capital often also lack the cultural capital required in schooling (Lingard, 2010). In the context of higher education, cultural capital encapsulates knowledge about and skills relevant to the practices and processes of the institution. Currently this includes, for example, navigation of online resources and academic writing skills. The linguistic and cultural competence which forms the cultural capital required by educational institutions is less evident among disadvantaged groups (Dumais, 2002). Bourdieu (1973) claimed that academic success depended on one's cultural capital and willingness to invest in 'the academic market' (p. 96). Such investment could take the form

of hours engaged in study activities. He also considered cultural capital to include knowledge of the 'market in academic qualifications' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 142). Capital begins to have an effect before students enrol in HE, as student considerations and choices regarding institutions are affected by economic, social and cultural capital. Examining the HE choices of UK students, Reay (1998b) found that middle class students were well aware of the academic market and made decisions accordingly, while ethnic minority and working class students were unaware of the differences among HE institutes and the resulting effects on degree marketability.

Cultural capital is possibly the most often applied of Bourdieu's thinking tools, having been used extensively during the last 30 years in educational research, according to Winkle-Wagner (2010). Her detailed analysis of educational research employing cultural capital noted its application in studies of primary, secondary and higher education. In the HE area alone, she noted its use in exploring college choice, HE access and success, transition and retention. Winkle-Wagner's (2010) analysis of Bourdieu's writings on cultural capital, plus selected studies which employed the concept, determined four categories of research using cultural capital. The first focussed on 'highbrow' cultural capital, seen as belonging to elite groups. This was the model employed by Dumais (2002) who asked how often students engaged in cultural activities such as museum or library visits and at lessons or music performances. The second was 'contextually valued' cultural capital – knowledge valued in a particular setting. The third was 'otherised' cultural capital employed with studies of under-represented populations. The fourth was 'Bourdieuian framework' cultural capital which combined relationships among concepts of habitus, social capital and field. I am unsure how Winkle-Wagner would categorise the current study, though certainly it does not use 'highbrow' cultural capital. I concur that capital has value in a specific field, so it is my intention to define different forms of capital according to the field of higher education, matching the 'contextually valued' model. The focus of the study is non-traditional students, thereby also matching 'otherised' cultural capital, though whether non-traditional students are in fact 'other' in the institution which provides context in this study has yet to be argued. Economic, cultural and social forms of capital are all relevant to this study, as is habitus, so the framework model (considered desirable by Winkle-Wagner) might be appropriate.

Previous studies in HE have used varying ways of determining cultural capital at institutional and individual levels. Pascarella et al.'s (2004) study on First Generation (FG) students used levels of parental education to determine background cultural capital, but applied more complex measures for student outcomes, including openness to diversity and critical thinking. They found that background cultural capital influenced choice of institution

and college experience, with FG students disadvantaged. Goyette and Mullen (2006) used parental education level and income to measure background cultural capital, but factors including writing skills and knowledge of fields including politics and culture to determine cultural capital gained in college. Their analysis of datasets determined that low SES students were more likely to select college courses related to vocational outcomes. Winkle-Wagner (2010) categorised both studies as using a 'highbrow' interpretation of cultural capital, and noted its limitations including its devaluation of the cultural capital of those in marginalised groups. If an argument can be made that the field or institutions in which the studies take place value highbrow cultural capital, then their use may be justified. She also noted that the measures used in determining background cultural capital assume that students from low SES backgrounds (or other equity groups) have not experienced highbrow cultural activities, although she presented no evidence for this claim.

As one form of cultural capital, academic capital refers to 'the power of control over academic resources' (Mendoza, Kuntz & Berger, 2012, p. 561). Bourdieu used the term as follows:

Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family). (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 23)

Pitman (2013) stated that succeeding at university was reliant on an individual's ability to convert whatever economic, social and cultural capital they possessed into academic capital. Reay et al. (2005) suggested that cultural capital could be embodied in students' dress, demeanour, attitudes towards learning and confidence as well as a sense of entitlement with regard to academic knowledge (Reay et al., 2009). Dumais and Ward (2010) found that cultural capital, while important for 'initial access to college' (p. 262) for first generation students, had less effect on GPA or program completion. Bathmaker et al. (2011) found that students from middle-class backgrounds were better able to activate and increase their cultural capital throughout HE studies in order to improve their social outcomes. Working-class students were aware of the need to do this but were often unable due to financial or social constraints, so that despite educational equivalence, equity for graduates remained a challenge. Both Reay (2001) and O'Shea (2016a, b) noted the importance of acknowledging that non-traditional students do not enter HE without cultural capital, but rather that it is cultural capital in a different form to that which is traditionally valued in the field of HE. First generation students should be helped to master the student role expectations which traditional students find natural by virtue of their cultural capital

(Collier & Morgan, 2008). Gale (2011) has extolled the need for institutions to value the qualities (or capitals) that under-represented groups can bring to HE, and Bathmaker et al. (2013) suggested a need for universities to provide non-traditional students with opportunities extending beyond the academic basics in order to redress persisting inequities.

Social capital is the benefit one receives as a result of their 'durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 119). Such social networks allow individuals to maintain advantages including social position. For university students this may include relationships both within and outside the university. Students may arrive at university already knowing other students. Within the institution students may develop beneficial relationships with academics, other staff and fellow students (consider study groups). Families and friends can offer advice if they have attended university, and choice of institution can be impacted by knowledge of institutional status as well as the economic means to attend more prestigious institutions (Reay, 1998b). Reay (1995) noted how a working-class student in a middle-class school, where she was excluded by classmates, was able to develop social and cultural capital through relationships with teachers in order to progress in that subversively hostile environment.

Outside the university, family and friends may provide encouragement and other forms of support (such as taking on home duties) which indirectly assist the student in attending to their studies. Bourdieu (1979, 1980 cited in Lesser, 2000, p. 4), however, considered relationships with family members as part of cultural rather than social capital. Some researchers have developed further ideas based on conceptions of capital outlined by Bourdieu and others. Yosso (2005) used Critical Race Theory to challenge a deficit view of cultural wealth for African American communities and students. Her work also drew on research about other minority or disadvantaged groups such as Mexican Americans and people of Japanese descent placed in American internment camps. She described six forms of capital which 'Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom' (p. 82), being: aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant and familial capital. Yosso asserted that such capitals have been developed through the historical and contemporary struggles by people of colour to survive and succeed as an oppressed group. Aspirational capital is a resilience enabling one to maintain 'hopes and dreams' despite 'real and perceived barriers' (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Linguistic capital refers to 'intellectual and social skills' (p. 78) developed through multilingual experiences and providing enhanced social and other literacy. Familial capital is cultural knowledge and care

through an extended network of community bonds which minimises social isolation. Social capital refers to contact networks which emotionally and practically provide support for those navigating institutions, such as universities. Navigational capital is the skill 'to manoeuvre through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind' (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Finally, resistant capital is comprised of 'knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality' (p. 80). Its knowledge base includes the transmission of community cultural wealth. Believing that Yosso's work had relevance for additional disadvantaged groups, O'Shea (2016b) developed the idea of experiential capital which is gained through paid employment and life experience. She saw this as a useful resource possessed by mature students in her study of FiF students.

As noted by Allard (2005), Bourdieu's concept of field is useful in 'examining social contexts in which young people are positioned as agential ... and or disempowered' (p. 67). In the current study, the effect of economic capital in terms of HE funding and the impact of students' financial situations on their studies is considered. Cultural capital here relates to the knowledge, attitudes and skills brought to HE by the students, and valued by the institution (including academic staff as its representatives). The use and gain of cultural capital by students during their university experience is also considered in terms of study practices and academic skills. In this study, students' relationships with each other, academics, friends and family are relevant to consideration of social capital. The interplay of all is examined through narratives constructed of participants' HE journeys.

3.6 Bourdieu and Gender

This study invited participants through a teacher education course. The predominance of females in this study and in the teaching profession generally (especially for the teaching of younger children) therefore requires consideration of gender with regard to Bourdieu's framework. His focus on social inequality makes his framework suitable for the consideration of gender inequality also. Bourdieu acknowledged hierarchies of gender in modern western society (Bourdieu, 1992). He noted that women occupied dominated social positions, such that the feminine habitus signified subjection (Bourdieu, 2001), though he considered genders as status groups rather than classes (Lovell, 2004). Despite significant change in recent decades in terms of women's education levels and women's roles in the workforce, differences remain. Women remain under-represented in particular professions and over-represented in others, including teaching and nursing. This is an example of social reproduction and the endurance of habitus. Norms of female occupations

and educational expectations have changed, but not totally ruptured: Bourdieu may consider this evidence of the potential for change over time within the reproductive nature of society (Bourdieu, 1992). An interesting question is whether acquiring capital through higher education for non-traditional students produces the same or different experiences and effects for females and males.

While Bourdieu himself did not engage with feminist theory (Skeggs, 2004), many feminist researchers have engaged with his work. McCall (1992) for example, noted similarities between the two approaches in both epistemology and methodology. Bourdieu (2001) recognised in gender 'objective ... and cognitive structures' (p. vii) which tend to be hidden. He acknowledged the effect of gender domination in social institutions on social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990 in Dillabough, 2004, p. 490) and noted gender-based division of labour, describing practical and symbolic work which 'falls more particularly to women' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 68). Some of this work, involving relationship maintenance, was considered by Reay (2004) to be a gendered form of capital which she named 'emotional capital' (p. 57). Women are objectivised in much of Bourdieu's work, where they are seen as repositories of capital, responsible for converting a family's economic capital to symbolic capital (Lovell, 2000). Feminist scholars have argued against this, showing how women employ strategies for accumulating capital (for example Adkins, 2000; Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997), thereby demonstrating agency. Bourdieu's contribution regarding the effect of symbolic domination on 'the sociocultural conditions of gender equality' (Dillabough, 2004, p. 491) is relevant to this study.

Bourdieu's work around symbolic violence, while not gender specific, also requires consideration in this study. Symbolic violence refers to the domination caused by social hierarchy and domination (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and is no less brutal than physical violence. Having noted the domination by women of men in Western society (Bourdieu, 1990b), it follows that women will more often experience symbolic violence than men. Such violence can be 'exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). Reay (1995) noted symbolic violence in the gendered division of labour, and this has been seen in studies where female students have been required to undertake the bulk of domestic duties in addition to study (and sometimes part-time paid work as well. Wright (2013) noted that women in her UK study 'minimised dissonance' (p. 89) with their domestic situations by choosing to study child care. While some husbands were supportive of the women's study, others tolerated it, providing it did not inconvenience them. In Australia, O'Shea (2014) also noted that mature females in particular may face resistance to their HE enrolment from family members. Single mothers have no choice but

to carry the load of childcare, and often also feel guilty about taking time away from their children (Longhurst et al., 2012). For working class women returning to study, the risks often outweigh the advantages (Reay, 2003), especially if the gender pay gap is taken into consideration.

Bourdieu (1992) claimed that practices seen to resist social reproduction may have superficial effects rather than creating change at a deep level. Bourdieu was reserved in writing about feminism, noting a concern that struggles for women's equality were likely to bolster social reproduction by favouring women in the dominant social classes (Bourdieu, 2001). This idea was taken up by Fowler (2003) who suggested that we may 'become so mesmerized by stories of women's progress or its limits that we fail to notice the increasing polarization of class inequalities' (p. 482). Females from non-traditional backgrounds undertaking teacher education may be an example of such ongoing inequities. They maintain the well-established role of women as carers, but in a different context. The level of education is higher, but general levels of education in the whole population have increased too. They are entering a profession, but not one considered elite in Australian society.

Gender inequality means that habitus shapes the class-based capital possessed by men and women differently, leading to gendered forms of cultural capital. Hence some qualities and behaviours can be valued more in or expected more from women or men, or vice versa. In a UK study, despite university students claiming that gender had little impact on their experiences and achievement, comments demonstrated otherwise (Francis, Burke & Read, 2014). Male students were often described as 'irresponsible, lazy ... but also ...able, confident' (p. 14). By contrast, female students were depicted as 'diligent but dull'. Such different views may be the reason that despite generally performing better than males in schooling and further education, females with the same qualifications continue to earn less money than men (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017). In this study it is necessary to consider the 'complexities of gender identity in late capitalist society' (McNay, 1999, p. 108) given the over-representation of women in teaching degree programs.

3.7 Conclusion

It is, according to Bourdieu (1993a, 1990a), the relationship between an individual's habitus, dispositions and the structure of the social field that work together to shape their practices. The structure of the field determines the cultural capital which allows agents to succeed or not. These concepts help explain the social reproduction which Bourdieu

describes as facilitated by education. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field are used in this study to consider how they affect non-traditional students' experiences of HE. Of particular relevance for this study is the reproduction of social class, as widening participation initiatives are seen in part as an opportunity to redress such inequality. Temporal and contextual differences must be considered, however, as this study relates to an era of equity discourse in Australian HE. Rather than simply overlaying Bourdieu's thinking tools in examining narratives of student journeys through teacher education I have sought, as recommended by Bourdieu (1993b), to become 'immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality' (p. 271). The following chapter discusses the methodological considerations for the current study, including the influence of Bourdieu and the use of narrative inquiry. It specifies detail around participants, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4

Bourdieuian and Narrative Inquiry Methodological Considerations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study. It provides an account of my own history as a non-traditional student in Higher Education (HE) through which my position as a researcher with socially critical views has evolved, and which has led me to incorporate Bourdieu's work, both theoretically and methodologically. In addition, this chapter explains ethical considerations of the study, and presents detail of the context in which the study took place. The research methods and techniques applied are also outlined. The incorporation of narrative inquiry as method is explained and justified.

4.2 Bourdieu's Influence on Methodology and Reflexivity

4.2.1 Methodological choices

Central to the methodological choices in this study are the research questions it seeks to explore. This thesis seeks to better understand the experiences of non-traditional students in HE, with particular interest in the factors that facilitate success and by association the factors that hinder students' progress. From this, it is hoped to identify strategies which may be adopted and/or aspects which may be improved by non-traditional students and/or institutions to facilitate improved outcomes for non-traditional students in HE. It is my own history and context as student, academic and researcher which have led me both to this area of study and to the methodology I engage.

Education is a social endeavour, occurring in a social field, making sociological theories an obvious starting point for this study. In focussing on non-traditional students, the aspect of social class (a social construct) in society is directly and immediately engaged. It is largely class, though other social indicators may also contribute as discussed in the literature review, which categorises a student as 'non-traditional', especially in the context where this study was conducted. Hence, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction through education is particularly relevant. Having been a 'non-traditional' student myself, and teaching many non-traditional students, I am interested in what allows some to succeed where others do not. It is hoped that through uncovering factors which enhance the opportunity for success, this research can provide information for use by institutions or

individuals to reconsider their practices so that success for non-traditional students is better enabled. This approach deliberately avoids a deficit view of non-traditional students, and the goal of changing how societal institutions operate is aligned with critical social theory. Critical social theory generally aims to critique an aspect of society through considering historical specificity, and then to improve it (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). It values 'resistance, hope and freedom' (Denzin & Giardina, 2007, p. 35). Given my goal of determining factors which enable non-traditional students to succeed, with a view to improving the HE experiences of non-traditional students, a socially critical viewpoint is applied in this study. Within this socially critical approach the study incorporates clearly feminist concerns due to the gendered nature of teaching and teacher education, as noted in earlier chapters.

4.2.2 Bourdieu and reflexivity

Reflexivity is a much used but rarely well-defined term in the field of sociology (Pillow, 2003). Sociological studies in education have employed reflexivity in three ways, according to Kenway and McLeod (2004). The first relates to the construction of one's own identity in biographical work, the second to a methodological stance evident in some feminist and post-structural research and the third to Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (Kenway & McLeod, 2004). Bourdieu's ideas regarding 'reflexive sociology' call for 'the permanent sociological analysis and control of sociological practice', entailing 'the systematic exploration of the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought"' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 40). According to Bourdieu (2000), any field (in this case, sociology) produces its own intellectual dispositions. He considered that researchers should examine the dispositions of the field, along with its epistemic history and unconscious views (Bourdieu, 2000) as well as the researcher's own social origins and position within the field. Bourdieu's reflexivity suggests that a researcher's social location influences their theoretical model, embedding biases which should be examined (Smith & Riley, 2009). We should endeavour to understand our own presuppositions, seek to understand the research participants' perspectives and also consider the effects of the social structure in which the research takes place (Bourdieu, 1999).

4.2.3 Researcher participant objectivation

In the preceding chapter I outlined the extensive use of Bourdieu's ideas in educational research, particularly as they relate to widening participation. I now apply Bourdieu's (2003) idea of participant objectivation in order to activate my own reflexivity. Through this a circular path will evolve, using Bourdieu's constructs to outline how my own history and conditions have led me to adopt his thinking tools in my methodology. Bourdieu suggested that there are benefits for the researcher in 'mobilizing one's social past through

self-socio-analysis' (2003, p. 281), and that this reflexive analysis should include consideration of such aspects as the researcher's social origins, personal and professional demographics. Additionally, reasons for the choice of research topic should be examined. In doing so, values and biases might more readily be identified and considered. In light of this, I present here a selective thread of narrative from my own personal history as part of the objectivation process.

When I began this research I was a 50 year old white female academic. Like my study's participants, I had been (twice) a non-traditional student, being of the first generation in my family to attend university. My eldest brother (by nine years) attended what was at that time Teacher's College, but had left home some years before I finished high school. My parents both left school aged around 15 years, my father taking up a trade and my mother working in an unskilled position until her marriage, then staying at home. Having been a high achiever at school, on completing Year 12 I was encouraged by my parents to enrol in University. My choice of institution was limited geographically, financially and culturally. Although accepted into my preferred law degree at a prestigious Sydney university, I hadn't the first idea of how to establish moving there and I took the safer option of a degree in which I had little interest, at my local university. Marrying at 19 years of age, four days before my first year exams, and having worked 20 hours per week throughout the year as well as battling glandular fever, I failed most of my courses and dropped out to undertake unskilled work related to my husband's employment. Fifteen years later, unskilled, divorced with two young children and reliant on social service payments and part-time work in retail, I embarked on my second journey as a non-traditional student. I enrolled in a teaching degree as a pragmatic solution to my new status as a single parent: I would be available during school holidays and as a teacher would be financially secure. Fortunately I enjoyed both study and teaching, and achieved good results. However, I completed my degree with many others in a time when there were few permanent jobs offered, especially for those limited as I was by family commitments to the local area. I remarried while studying, worked as a casual teacher after graduating, and had another baby. These circumstances as well as a fortuitous social connection led me to work as a casual tutor back in the university within two years of graduating, and I soon enrolled in a Research Higher Degree to help me gain a full-time academic position. The topic of that degree led to a study involving, unintentionally, disadvantaged schools; this in turn led to an increased focus on issues of equity in education.

My own experiences as a non-traditional student, struggling with unfamiliar academic demands many years after completing high school, and combining study with single-

parenthood and part-time work to support my children and pay a mortgage made me empathetic to the plight of non-traditional students at university. Employed at a regional university with a proud history of equity initiatives, where many students entered via alternate pathways and with a high percentage of students from low SES backgrounds, I have seen first-hand the struggles non-traditional students endure, both personally and academically. This made me wonder what allowed some to succeed while others did not, and what could be done to improve success rates. Both as a student and an academic, seeing the range of attitudes and practices of students from both traditional and non-traditional backgrounds and every socioeconomic category led me to a concern for social justice in education which found a home in the study of widening participation (an emerging field of research in Australia at the time of my study's commencement): hence this thesis.

My goal in this study has been not to simply observe and record non-traditional students' experiences from an objective stance. Such an approach might be considered positivist, a view criticised as favouring privileged groups through covert acceptance of the status quo. Rather, by focusing on the inequity of access to and success in higher education for non-traditional students, I have acknowledged the privileging of some groups over others in society generally (Bourdieu, 1997) and HE specifically. In seeking ways to improve this situation through attention to practices which enable non-traditional students' success, I assumed a socially critical stance, aiming to demonstrate a positive regard for social difference, thereby promoting recognitive justice (Fraser, 1997; Gale & Densmore, 2000). Transformation of educational practices and outcomes has been a goal, whether through changes by institutions, staff or students, so it is examples of, or opportunities for, transformation that this thesis seeks to illuminate.

According to Bourdieu (2003), a researcher's pathway and experiences have the potential to blind them to some potential findings or lead them to see answers which may not exist in reality. It was important, therefore, that I examine my responses to data critically, both in constructing narratives and interpreting them. Specifically in my case, also being an organisational insider, there was a need to examine whether my responses reflected, with or without cause, the claims of the institution in which I was researching and teaching: namely that it provided excellent equity initiatives and was successful in its equity practices. Likewise, being part of the field of HE, I have needed to bring to this research 'detached scrutiny' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. xii). Being what might be considered a successful non-traditional student myself, having completed an undergraduate and a postgraduate degree, attained employment as an academic and having published by the time this PhD was undertaken, I also needed to be wary of lacking understanding of non-traditional students

who struggled with their studies (if I could do it, why couldn't they?). Detached scrutiny has been facilitated by undertaking my PhD study through a different university to the one where I worked and sourced participants. Discussions with my supervisors in a Go8 university, a very different context, provided me with assistance in distancing myself from the context in which I was daily immersed. Through their input, through multiple readings of the data in which I have actively looked for alternate interpretations, and through questioning participants in subsequent interviews, I have approached, if not reached, detached scrutiny.

Following Bourdieu's (2003) own advice, I have also considered what led me to use his thinking tools in my theoretical framework. In this I admit to having been somewhat uncritical, at least initially. My early reading on widening participation included work of many scholars such as Diane Reay (1995, 2004) who were applying Bourdieu in their own work, and so this seemed to me the logical choice. It should be acknowledged that just because other researchers were applying this framework did not guarantee its suitability for my own study or that it would provide the answers I sought. Other frameworks may have been equally or more suitable, and indeed my review of the literature included studies which used various frameworks including, for example, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which could have informed the methodology for this study. Likewise Foucault's (1982) work on power relations or Bernstein's (1964) ideas regarding the privileging of certain skills and knowledges over others could have been applied. It was research involving Bourdieu's tools, however, which resonated with me and which I have adopted and adapted here. Bourdieu's idea of habitus which allows for a range of behaviours (some more likely than others) by agents in response to certain situations provided a flexibility which I saw as desirable in explaining why some non-traditional students were able to succeed in a field where others did not. The importance of capital, such as cultural capital in the form of academic skills, for example, was something I observed every day in my teaching work and had examined in a small research project with colleagues. Coming from a background which did not include academia I had no trouble envisaging HE generally, TE specifically and TE in the particular institutional context of this study each as each field is governed by its own rules, practices and processes.

Having made the decision to employ Bourdieu's thinking tools, it was important, then, not to ascribe findings to a Bourdieuan framework when they were not warranted. Likewise it was important that I be aware of the limitations and weaknesses of Bourdieu's work when appropriate. A number of studies have applied Bourdieu's tools superficially, leading Reay (2004) to pen 'It's all becoming a habitus'. It was therefore also important to establish a rigorous methodology so as to avoid simply overlaying Bourdieu's framework on my data.

My approach to this is outlined in Section 4.5 *Constructing and analysing narratives* (beginning on p. 55), in conjunction with an outline of my analysis strategies.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Because it was the experiences of non-traditional students which interested me, and because I desired rich, detailed data about those experiences in order to tease out important underlying factors, it was clear to me that qualitative research methods incorporating interviews were required. I wanted to hear the students' own stories, in their own words, and this led to the use of interviews and narrative method, also to be explained later in this chapter (beginning p. 55). In order to select appropriate participants and consider broad trends, however, there was also a place for some data collection through surveys. The inclusion of data from one or more person in any study brings ethical considerations. My socially critical stance required that I approach my research with a consideration of ethics that 'is always/already concerned about power and oppression' (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011, p. 81). I felt this was particularly relevant given that I wanted non-traditional students to tell me their personal stories and that I held a position of power in the field.

In my background as a primary school teacher, my philosophy included the teacher as part of the class ecology. Perhaps because of this, in my academic work generally I have viewed myself as a colleague of the university students in some ways, considering that both their goal and mine was for them to have a successful experience at university and for them to emerge as skilled, caring professionals. I maintained this sense in my research: that the participants would share my goal of equitable HE experiences for all students, regardless of background. Hopefully their stories would assist me in illuminating ways to increase success for non-traditional students. In this way, and because of the nature of the qualitative data collection through regular interviews over a prolonged period, I considered that the research process was collaborative (Burke, 2002), with a relationship between researcher and participant established. I hoped also that the participants would find their involvement in the research process to be a positive experience: that they would benefit from the reflection they engaged in during the interviews and when checking transcripts for accuracy, and that they would feel they had in some small way been valued and that their voices had been given space within the field of HE. This view reflects the ideas of Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), who stated that being ethical requires that researchers should be open to people, act for

their good, and attempt to see others as they truly are without imposing ideas and biases on them. I have attempted to do this.

Regardless of my intentions, I must acknowledge that, perhaps especially in the eyes of the non-traditional first year students I hoped to engage in my study, my position could be viewed as one of power. While power plays are inevitable in interviews with the interviewer initiating both the situation and the topic (Kvale, 2004), this was exacerbated by my role as a lecturer in the university, while the participants were, initially, beginning students. Whilst I remain an Early Career Researcher, striving to position myself in a field where I see others as experts and myself as a novice, student participants may have viewed me differently. In order to avoid first year students feeling pressured to sign up for the project, all potential participants were first informed about the study via a course in which I had no involvement (in fact I taught no first year courses). If they wished to, they completed a survey which could remain anonymous. The final page of that survey included an optional section where they could provide contact details and indicate a willingness to participate further in the study through interviews over four years. In the case of those who agreed to participate further, and who met the criteria for my study (non-traditional indicators), I contacted them by email several days after the surveys were completed. At this time initial interviews were scheduled for those still happy to participate. Likewise emails were sent as the time for each subsequent interview approached. Not all students initially selected responded to the first interview request, which meant I looked for suitable replacements through the survey responses. Some participants completed the first interview, or more, then became unresponsive to emails and were therefore considered to have left the study from that point onwards. Data provided by them prior to that point in time were retained as they did not request otherwise.

By the time of the interviews conducted at the end of years two, three and four of both my data collection and the participants' degree program, I had been a course coordinator and in some cases tutor for all participants who remained in the primary teaching degree at one of the campuses. This insider role may have influenced those students' attitudes towards myself and the research project. Likewise, it may have affected their responses in interviews, making them feel either constrained, if they had a negative experience related to the course or program, or liberated in their responses if they had developed a further relationship with me and knew of my intimate knowledge of particular courses. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) have stated that interview subjectivity may be constructed rather than revealed during interviews, and this must also be considered in this study: given my insider role students may, for example, have wanted me to see them as 'good students' who were

conscientious about their studies. An option was available for the interviews to be conducted by a research assistant if participants preferred, but no participant requested this.

Qualitative researchers face the issue of wanting as much information as possible, which can mean probing for information which may trespass on private matters (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). During interviews it was sometimes the case that participants would relate events or personal situations that they would not want generally known. For this reason and in addition to standard ethical procedures such as providing each participant with a pseudonym and maintaining all data files securely, I undertook extra measures to ensure confidentiality as much as possible. When 'smoothing' narratives (a process on p. 59) I generalised incidents or situations where specific data of any nature was not crucial to my research questions. Names of specific staff members or courses mentioned were removed and replaced by general descriptions where useful. I also sent each interview transcript to the relevant participant for member checking (Poland, 2002) and so they could request removal or addition of any data. Despite this there remains the chance that participants may, through the rich data captured, be readily identifiable by themselves or others in the thesis or other reporting of this study. This was not my intention, and I hope that the measures taken in providing participants with the opportunity to review and edit data avoids any embarrassment or regret on the part of participants. A further dilemma for qualitative researchers is considering what is in the best interest of the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). In this study students sometimes related study practices that I considered less than optimal, but as I wanted to learn about their own decisions and practices, I did not try to convince them to change strategies during the interviews. Instead, I would promote 'good' study habits in more general forums such as course lectures. However, in cases where participants mentioned specific difficulties they were having and wanted to resolve, after the interview concluded, I suggested possible sources of assistance.

4.4 Research Method

A research method which is well-designed and rigorous is necessary if the results are to be valid and worthwhile. All research is affected by its context, and by historical and temporal factors (Blaikie, 2000). I now present detail related to the context of this study in order that those factors may be taken into account. In addition to detail of the context of the study and the participants who contributed data, I explicate the qualitative approach used

for data collection and analysis. Specifically, I outline the critical narrative approach which provides the majority of data in this study.

4.4.1 Context

This study, in terms of data collection, began in 2012, and hence much of the contextual data I refer to centres around this time frame. The study was conducted at a large university in regional Australia, referred to here as Regional University. The university offered undergraduate primary teaching degrees on three campuses. The main campus, referred to here as Central, was located in a regional city, and offered undergraduate and postgraduate programs in many disciplines including teaching, medicine, law and engineering. Two satellite campuses offering teacher education (and other degree programs) and therefore included in this study were situated on multi-sector campuses, shared with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions in towns 100-300 kilometres north and south of the main campus, to be referred to as Northern and Southern. In the first year of data collection in this study, Southern campus offered undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in early childhood, primary and secondary teaching as well as various degrees in areas including health, business and social sciences, while Northern campus offered undergraduate degrees in nursing, midwifery and primary teaching, plus an enabling program by distance. The selection of degrees offered at these satellite campuses reflected the needs of those areas as well as targeting the non-traditional student market. Both satellite campuses served substantial low SES populations.

Regional University has a history of several decades offering enabling courses as well as bonus entry points for some students. Students completing high school in certain rural or regional areas could receive additional entry points through the Regional and Rural Preference Scheme, so they could enter a program with an entry score up to four points (out of 100) lower than the usual minimum requirement. Similar considerations were made for students with disabilities or circumstances of hardship. Such practices can lead to a higher than average enrolment of non-traditional students which was certainly the case here. The university had three enabling courses with no tuition costs: one for anyone over 20 years of age seeking entry to university; one for students aged 17 to 20 years who did not complete their final high school assessment or whose marks did not allow them entry to university; and one for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 or over wanting to gain skills for entry into degrees. Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) accreditation could also be used to gain entry to Regional University, and to provide credit towards degree programs.

The percentage of low SES enrolments at Regional University had for many years surpassed Bradley Review targets (Bradley et al., 2008). In a media release published in

2012, the Vice Chancellor noted the enrolment of students from low SES backgrounds as above 25 per cent, while the sector average was less than 17 per cent. Low SES students are generally more likely to be enrolled in programs such as teaching and nursing than engineering and medicine, for example, and this was demonstrated in Regional University's figures for 2012, when the percentage of students in the School of Education from low SES backgrounds was approximately 32 per cent for Central campus, and approximately 38 per cent at both Southern and Northern campuses (Source: MIS Data at 23 April 2012). Around one third of primary teaching students at Regional University were of mature age.

Entry levels for teacher education programs have often been lower at Regional University than at many other institutions. In Australia, students completing high school who wish to apply for entry to higher education institutions apply for an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) which is provided as a score out of 100. Entry levels for the undergraduate primary teaching degree at Regional University had become lower in the years leading up to this study, decreasing to just over 60 in 2012. These were the lowest overall entry levels, there being some variation among campuses; for example in 2012 the ATAR was just over 60 at Southern, a few points higher at Central and higher again but still below 70 at Northern (University Admissions Centre, 2012). Whereas some institutions at the time of this data collection restricted entry to applicants with Band 4¹ or above in mathematics and English from their high school certification, at Regional University students were, at least until 2012, able to enrol without this requirement, but needed instead to demonstrate attainment before graduating. In 2012 there were over 1800 students enrolled across the four years of undergraduate primary teaching program (Source: MIS Data at 23 April 2012).

Entry levels for undergraduate primary teaching degrees across a range of Australian institutions in 2012 are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Entry levels for Primary teaching programs

Regional University	Charles Sturt University	Macquarie University	University of New England	University of Sydney
Below 65	70.00	75.25	77.10	90.00

Source: University Admissions Centre 2012

¹ In Higher School Certificate subjects for NSW students, academic performance is measured against performance bands. Band 1 is the lowest, and Band 6 the highest. Band 4 indicates an average performance and is equivalent to a performance of 70-79 out of 100.

The combination of enabling programs, opportunities for additional points and low entry requirements at Regional University provided wide scope for studying the experiences of non-traditional students in teacher education.

4.4.2 Data collection

Student participants. Students enrolled in a first year course in the undergraduate teacher education program on all campuses were sought to participate in the study. Primary teacher education (TE) students were selected as this career is widely recognised (along with nursing) as a vehicle for improvement in social class. Primary TE students were selected rather than TE students generally, as this provided a reduction in variables with regard to the students' motivations for study. Motivations for other teaching specialisations can be linked to interest in the subject area (such as mathematics) (Young, 1995; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Prospective primary teachers do not share this characteristic, as primary teachers tend to be generalists, hence simplifying motivational variables. Also, entry levels are often lower for primary teaching courses than secondary, making them more accessible for non-traditional students.

Students from all campuses who agreed to participate in the study were included in an initial survey, providing demographic and other initial data, and indicating willingness to participate in further research. With institutional approval, students were approached through a foundational education course which was compulsory for primary and secondary pre-service teachers. There were 329 primary students enrolled in the surveyed course at the Central campus, 202 at Southern, and 62 at Northern, giving a total of 593 in the year when initial data were collected (2012), but some of those students were not in the first year of the program. Surveys were completed by 174 primary students at Central, 157 at Southern and 26 at Northern: a total of 357 representing 60.2 per cent of the total primary enrolment for the course. These figures are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Initial survey respondents

	Central	Southern	Northern	Total
Number	174	157	26	357
Percentage of campus cohort	45%	78%	42%	60%

Student surveys. In the initial first year student survey, demographic and background data were collected about students including gender, age, entry pathway, SES (self-identified) and entry level (high school leaving results or equivalent). Additionally,

information about their attitudes towards university, motivations for enrolling in the program and expectations of university was gathered. Most demographic questions required students to tick the appropriate response as a way of making the survey efficient to complete, such as questions regarding university entry pathway. Other questions were left for open responses. Kennet, Reed and Lam (2011), studying Canadian university students' reasons for attending university, stated that giving students a list of reasons to respond to 'based on theoretical perspectives may not tap what students themselves are thinking' (p. 70) and also that reasons may change over time, rendering earlier instruments or theories outdated. My decision to use some open questions in this survey was based on a desire to avoid limiting possible responses to personal or theoretical expectations and to avoid prompting student responses in particular directions.

Student survey data were analysed to provide a picture of the cohort as a whole, to indicate some general trends and to ascertain how well the ongoing participants represented the cohort in various aspects. This allowed me to select on-going participants who presented with a variety of ages, employment, prior academic attainment, motivations for enrolment and family characteristics. The aim of this selection was to cover a number of variables, and to allow comparison among such variables.

Survey respondents were mostly female (266 female, 91 male). The majority were aged 17-19 years (193 students), but ranged up to over 45 years. As would be expected based on the age of the students, they had mostly (190 students) attained entry using their high school results. A significant 92 entered via enabling programs, 35 used their mature age status to gain entry, 22 completed the STAT (Special Tertiary Admissions Test) and 13 used TAFE study as a pathway. Students reported a range of ATARs from 50 to over 90, with 41.5 per cent being in the 70-80 range. The vast majority were enrolled in full time study (95.8%) and worked part-time (73.3%). There were similar numbers of respondents by FiF status; 176 were FiF and 183 were not.

Student interviews. Surveys were examined. Respondents with non-traditional indicators who agreed to participate in the longitudinal study were contacted and asked to participate in an interview. All students were of the first generation (FG) in their immediate family to enrol in university, and most were also FiF. Many had one or both parents who had not completed high school education, and many were from regional or rural areas. Purposeful sampling aimed to provide for a range of entry levels, pathways and motivations, with age and gender ratios reflective of the primary teacher education cohort overall, but participation was ultimately determined by those students agreeing to participate. Some students who indicated agreement to participate did not respond to follow-up email contact.

Fifteen first year students were initially interviewed. Where possible, they were followed throughout the ensuing years of their program (the program duration is four years full time) or into other paths in the case of those students not completing the teaching degree. One student left the university after the first year of the study and was not contactable after that point and so I have not included her limited data. Another student was interviewed over the four years, however, she was not at any point a teacher education student, so her data are also not used in this thesis. This left 13 participants whose stories are incorporated in this thesis. After the initial interview early in their first semester, ongoing participants were interviewed at the end of that year and then each subsequent year for a further three years about their journeys as students, academic progress, difficulties experienced, study habits and changes in motivation. This enabled factors affecting them during the full four years of the program to be evident.

In the initial interviews, students were asked to provide a life-story outlining what had brought them to the point of beginning their teacher education programs. This relates to the research method termed 'narrative inquiry' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 155) and provides a useful way of studying experience (see detail on the following page). Supplementary questions were included to prompt participants should they have difficulty in providing comprehensive narrative responses and to ensure that factors related to non-traditional status were covered. These included aspects related to Bourdieu's constructs of habitus, capital and field but also to other factors identified in previous literature related to non-traditional students, for example the influence of a mentor or significant person who may have encouraged the student towards HE or a teaching career. In the subsequent interviews held at the end of each year for four years, students were asked to provide a life-story with regard to their studies for the intervening period, and questioned about their progress and study habits at university, changes to work or family commitments, whether they had considered changing programs or dropping out and why, what support they had sought if any, and satisfaction regarding the program and institution.

The life-story and additional questions took the form of semi-structured interviews. Using semi-structured interviews it was possible to ensure that concepts pertinent to the research were explored, while allowing for adjustment of questions during the course of the interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Having one initial and then annual interviews meant that most participants completed five interviews in total, adhering to Seidman's (1998) thesis that research based on interview data should involve more than one interview. Each interview focussed on a particular period of time. The first interview covered influences which had brought the participants to their HE enrolment, and the experiences of their first weeks at

university. Subsequent interviews related to the participants' experiences over the previous year. In this way, interview data built to provide rich data over the four year period. Data from one interview could also suggest focus areas for subsequent interviews as recommended by Kvale (1996). An interview schedule provided reminders to question the participant regarding aspects of their experiences seen as important in the literature which were not brought up by the participant in the initial 'life story' question at the start of each interview.

Achievement for each course undertaken in the program was checked on student transcripts, recorded in the form of marks out of 100, and final GPAs were noted. All interviews in the study were conducted individually to avoid the possibility of students not feeling comfortable disclosing some information (regarding background or difficulties, for example) in group settings. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and sent to participants for checking.

The following table (Table 4.3) provides an overview of characteristics of the students featured in this study, demonstrating a range in variables. Of the 13 participants, 12 were female and one male, reflecting the predominance of females in primary teaching and associated university programs, and three were aged over 25 years in their first year of university enrolment.

Table 4.3 Descriptors for participants

Participant	Campus	Gender	Age	Pathway to HE	ATAR or equivalent
David	Northern	Male	40	Mature	N/A
Ellie	Northern	Female	37	Mature	N/A
Karen	Central	Female	19	Enabling	81
Anna	Central	Female	19	School	76.5
Ebony	Central	Female	18	School	76
Jane	Central	Female	18	Enabling	56>83 ²
Lacey	Central	Female	19	School	70
Briony	Central	Female	18	School	60
Lani	Central	Female	19	School	63
Lenore	Central	Female	19	School	78
Jessica	Central	Female	24	Mature	70
Simone	Central	Female	20	Entry exam (STAT)	61
Rosie	Southern	Female	40	Mature	N/A

² Jane's high school ATAR was 56. She then undertook an enabling course and received an ATAR equivalent of 83.

4.5 Constructing and analysing narratives

The data collection as outlined in the preceding sections demonstrates a qualitative approach, through semi-structured interviews. Processes used in designing the interview schedules and analysing the data obtained, however, require consideration of narrative inquiry. Clandinin describes narrative inquiry as an 'old practice' (2006, p. 44) originating in the humanities. Since the 1960s it has become more common there and in other disciplines (Reissman & Speedy, 2006). Narrative inquiry is applied in an increasing variety of ways, and has been described as still 'evolving' and 'a field in the making' (Chase, 2011, p. 421).

4.5.1 A narrative approach

Narrative inquiry has been applied to feminist, critical, postmodern and constructionist studies and more, with scholars from different fields disagreeing on the origins of the method and its definition (Reissman & Speedy, 2006). While some researchers use narrative as their only methodological framework, I have chosen to apply narrative inquiry as method or technique, within a Bourdieuan theoretical and methodological framework. I consider the two to be complementary: both are social theories and share a focus on social interactions. Narrative inquiry emphasises temporal and social structures (Mishler, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as do Bourdieuan studies (Grenfell, 2008a). Both also consider research, especially that involving interviews, as a collaborative activity, and both acknowledge that data can be obtained from what is said or not said as well as the demeanour of the interviewee. I am not alone in seeing congruence between these two frameworks; other studies have applied Bourdieuan thinking tools in narrative studies, including Allard (2005) researching marginalised young women, Gutting (1996) examining residential history and Lawler (1999) looking at social mobility. Souto-Manning (2014) has suggested that if 'we are to engage in positive social change, we must start by listening to and analysing the everyday stories people tell' (p. 177). That is what I sought to do in this study. She termed the combination of critical social research (in her own case through discourse analysis) and narrative inquiry as 'critical narrative analysis' (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 159).

Leiblich, Tural-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) defined narrative research broadly, as 'any study that uses or analyses narrative materials' (p. 2). According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2006), all narrative inquiry approaches have in common the study of experiences. What distinguishes narrative inquiry from other forms of qualitative research is that rather than focussing on themes found across interviews, its first concern is with the voices to be found within individual narratives (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). For this reason, narrative chapters in this study do not always refer to analyses of every participant's narrative, but

rather focus on specific narratives in which participant voices elucidate particular aspects of non-traditional students' HE experiences. I have organised three analysis chapters which examine, in turn, the experiences of: mature age students; students who have had a gap of one to five years between school and university; and those who enrolled at university directly after high school. My approach to narrative analysis is a combination of holistic-content and categorical-content approaches (Leiblich et al., 1998). The holistic-content approach focuses on the content presented in a life story. That is, I am interested in what happened, why, and who was involved, from each teller's perspective. I do this, but then also take a categorical-content approach, considering similarities and differences among participants.

The theory behind narrative inquiry can be traced back to Dewey (1938), who considered experience, life and education as interwoven. He considered that experience was a continuum, as experiences develop from and lead to further experiences. This is evident in the current study, as non-traditional students' life experiences impact on and are affected by their university experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that when a child's learning, a school or policy is considered, there is always a history which will continue to evolve and needs to be considered. This is also true for the university students, the institution and HE context examined here. I have therefore considered in this study the history of non-traditional students and policies related to their access to HE, as well as incorporating data about participants' personal histories related to their journeys to and through HE.

4.5.2 Constructing narratives

Most studies applying narrative inquiry obtain data through interviews which may be unstructured or semi structured, and may be conducted only once or a number of times. My study incorporated multiple interviews over the course of four years (the duration of an undergraduate teaching degree undertaken as a full-time student) in order to capture experiences through all stages of university study. This allowed me to cover the entire university experience, and possibly to obtain more detail than if I had asked about the entire experience only at the end of the four years, whereas many previous studies have explored only the first year experience. It also allowed me to follow some participants as they moved out of the teaching degree and onto other pathways. Narrative researchers can consider not only what is said by narrators, or not said, but also *how* they speak (Chase, 2011) - for example whether they present confidently, openly or hesitantly. In this way the narrative environment and its impact on participants can be better understood. This aligns with Bourdieuan concerns regarding the influence on interviews of the habitus of both the interviewer and interviewee (Bourdieu, 1999), leading some researchers to include their

reflections of interviews as data. For example, Lingard, Sellar and Baroutsis (2015) analysed data from interviews and their reflections on the interviews when studying the 'habitus of global policy actors' (p. 25). This included participants' manner and dress. Accordingly I have also considered how participants presented themselves, not in terms of dress, but with regards to confidence and comportment as part of data collection. It is also important to consider that participants may be limited in the extent to which they can accurately reflect on their own experiences (Jenkins, 2002). By considering how individual aspects of habitus and capital interact with the field with its context of time and space I have sought to address this.

Non-traditional students may be considered a marginalised group, and marginalised groups have sometimes been treated in research as objects of inquiry, an approach which can be dehumanising (Phillips, 2014). I have sought to avoid this by employing a narrative method whereby participants have had the opportunity to tell their stories during multiple in-depth individual interviews. When students provide their stories of university education, narrative is 'both phenomena under study and method of study' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). Narrative inquiry can provide data which are rich in detail and provide insight into the complexity that is human life (Josselson, 2006). This makes it suitable for the study presented here.

Narrative data are not always presented in sequence, especially when gathered over multiple occasions. Repetition and moving across timeframes can obscure consequences and issues. Because of this I treated each participant's data in two ways. As with most narrative analysis I began by reading each transcript multiple times, in order to facilitate deep reflection and identify and confirm 'connections or relationships' within the texts and search for other possible interpretations (O'Shea, 2014, p. 145).

In addition to examining each transcript through close reading for evidence of the effects of students' non-traditional status, I began creating one overall narrative for each participant. This involved multiple readings of each transcript and then constructing one account of events for each participant which synthesised data in a way which was chronological and omitted unnecessary repetitions. I adopted the role of narrator. Since I was creating one combined narrative rather than including all of the participants' words from each interview, it would have been presumptuous to take on the participant voice. The narrator voice indicates clearly that I am retelling each story, hence acknowledging that there may be some element of interpretation involved. I did, however, include many of the participants' own words, even when not indicated by quotation marks. This was done in order to maximise the flow of the narratives and avoid too many changes of tense. Direct

quotes are used at times when the language used provided a representation of the participant and their habitus or state of mind, and when language was used which I would not normally use, particularly in an academic text. After each subsequent interview with a participant I revised and added to their narrative. Once all interviews had been completed and all interview data had been added to the narrative, I read back through each narrative, deleting repetitions and synthesising similar content. For example if a student had stated every year that they had received support from a certain source, I indicated that in one place, rather than stating it four times throughout the narrative. If a participant related a scenario in subsequent interviews, I ensured it was only included in the narrative once, in the year during which it occurred. I did not include, in the final narratives, aspects the participants related during interviews which had no bearing on their experiences as non-traditional students.

My process was similar to one used by Hodgson (2007) and based on earlier sociological researchers where interview data were structured into a 'narrative analysis framework' (p. 45) with sections of abstract, orientation, complicating action, result and coda. According to Hodgson (2007) this process can both enrich the analysis and confirm the inductive analysis approach. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have noted that care must be taken with such an approach, termed narrative smoothing (Spence, 1986), as it may lead to omission or misinterpretation by the researcher. To guard against this I used the smoothed narrative in addition to, rather than instead of, the original transcripts. Each interview transcript provided rich data, embedded in participants' own language choices, and direct quotes from these have been used to illustrate points in the analysis chapters. By following this process I hope that each participant's perspective, voice and experience are evident, providing a sense of each individual along with the changes they encountered and encompassed as part of their HE journey.

4.5.3 Analysing narratives

Narrative analysis 'refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form' (Reissman, 2008, p. 11). The narrative inquirer may look for overarching, repeated or common stories which may differ in individual detail but follow common or established patterns. For example narratives of social mobility may fit a 'rags to riches' or 'poor boy made good' framework, or present a 'social improvement through marriage' storyline (as in Lawler, 1999). Narrative analysis studies rarely outline specific processes of interpretation and analysis (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2014), and there are a number of approaches which researchers can take in doing this (Smith, 2000). I outline my process here.

While narrative inquiry begins with an individual's experience, it also explores 'the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 42) because 'personal narratives are constructed and situated in social and institutional realms' (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163). In this case, through close, multiple readings of all smoothed narratives and raw interview data, I searched for evidence of the effects of non-traditional status in each of the participants' stories, and also considered the existence of common and/or contradictory stories.

Smoothed narratives were examined again for issues related to non-traditional status, including habitus, capital and field, and other emerging influences. Coding was conducted a number of times – once for aspects related to habitus, capital and field, and again to consider other aspects deemed important in the literature such as academic skills and the existence of mentors in influencing students to attend university. Overlapping or intersecting themes were also sought (for example how/did capital intersect with support from family?). Narratives were then compared with each other so that similarities and differences in factors relating to the students' experiences of HE could be considered. Riessman (2008) noted that 'stories that ... diverge from established "truth" can sometimes be the most interesting, indicating silenced voices and subjugated knowledge' (p. 186) and so I have attempted to ensure that such stories, where evident, have not been omitted from this thesis simply because they did not fit my initial considerations.

The relatively large number of participants combined with the style of narrative constructed from the data meant that it was not possible to include every participant's narrative in this thesis. Narratives were selected for inclusion based on considerations both for presenting common stories and for illuminating uncommon experiences. After examining all narratives for both common and unique themes, nine were selected for detailed inclusion in this thesis. Examples are included which demonstrate the range of student experience from the extremely challenging through to the 'ordinary'. I did not want to suggest that all non-traditional students had a traumatic time trying to navigate through university if that were not the case, and it was not. The narratives which were not included often shared some aspects of the stories which are included, but did not demonstrate any unique themes or understandings.

4.6 Conclusion

This study applied a qualitative approach to data production. Survey data were collected from 357 first year primary teacher education students. Purposeful sampling was used to select 15 first year students from the 357 who contributed surveys, and 13 of these participants were ultimately interviewed up to five times each in total over four years as they completed their programs or moved onto different pathways. A narrative inquiry method was applied to the student data, within a Bourdieuan theoretical and methodological framework. The following chapter presents the narratives of three mature age students, and analyses their stories for factors and influences which impeded or assisted them in their HE journeys.

Chapter 5

Mature Students

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the narratives of three mature-age students. These three shared some striking similarities in terms of habitus and also demographic details, yet there were three different endings to their higher education (HE) stories. I present each of their chronological stories followed by analysis in turn, utilising Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital and field before discussing similarities and differences among their experiences. There is no specific point at which students are designated to be mature-age, as far as the research literature is concerned (Rubin, Scevak et al., 2016). A number of researchers have considered 23 years of age to be an appropriate boundary (for example Andreou, Vlachos & Andreou, 2006), while O'Shea (2016b) reported on students aged 25 years or more. I have no specific preference, but the students discussed in this chapter are well above these points, all being well over 30 years of age.

In examining the stories of mature-age students it is particularly interesting to consider aspects of habitus due to the history of experiences and diverse social and cultural and capitals they have to draw upon when they enter Higher Education (HE). They have complex and hybridised habituses developed through childhood, school, personal relationships and professional experiences over many years that together form habitus. They have already moved across many different fields in their lives when they begin HE as mature students. Theoretically then, the focus on mature-age students offers an opportunity to problematize the degree to which habitus can be considered stabilised and sedimented as opposed to malleable and adaptable. Through consideration of habitus it can be seen how the mature body, with its history of experiences, wrinkles, scars, accents and habits traverses the field of HE.

Ellie, Rosie and David were all aged between 37 and 40 years of age when they began their university studies. All had moved from Sydney to smaller towns and were studying at the satellite campuses of Regional University: Northern for Ellie and David, and Southern for Rosie. All had children, and were the only participants in this study who did. All had completed post-secondary courses related to employment. Their stories illustrate

particular challenges faced by mature age students engaging in study, and illuminate important sources of support.

5.2 David's Story

The journey to university

In high school David had no particular career aspirations. Both his parents had left school in Year 10, but a sibling had studied at university. David applied to the police force in Year 12, spending the next 20 years as a policeman in Sydney. His role included teaching junior officers, which he enjoyed. Eventually David wanted to move his family back to his home town. Disappointed to be denied a transfer, he resigned, and the family relocated. He worked in retail but was retrenched, and felt a need to re-skill. Four years after the move, aged 40, he enrolled in a teaching degree. His wife already had university degrees and was very supportive of his enrolment, saying 'If you don't do it, I'll do it'. She worked to support the family. To David, university represented 'an achievement ... something that will open doors'. Having completed post-secondary studies in the police force he knew it would be 'a task', but 'worthwhile'. David felt his life and work experience would help him succeed at university, but thought he would need to improve time management. Not knowing any other students or what to expect, he was excited and nervous to be starting university.

First year

Students in David's cohort of fewer than 50 students quickly became a supportive group. The small campus helped students be 'particularly focused on the task at hand'. He felt Northern campus had 'a very post-graduate feel ... which has taken the fun out of university'. He would have liked to study at a bigger campus with more of a social life. David found it 'pretty easy' to work out what he needed to do at university. The hardest thing was finding how to apply for an extension online. It was 'frustrating' and he was 'disappointed' it was so hard to work out but figured 'they're not going to make it easy'. The easiest thing was completing readings, 'because I love reading'. David knew the university offered 'loans' and 'worry services', and had met the office staff. He did not expect to use those services because 'I tend to go back to my wife, don't I?' She was 'academic and has just completed a Masters' and

he 'probably wouldn't be starting this without her'. He thought the lecturers were 'great' and 'very approachable'. Early in first year he felt 'quietly' but 'not overly' confident.

Semester 1 was 'quite a challenge' and 'quite an eye-opener' but overall 'it's been good'. While not worried about fitting in at university, David wondered whether he could 'actually do this', but received two Distinction grades in Semester 1 courses. He was getting used to late nights due to his 'commitments' and hoped to be 'more organised' in future. David learnt that leaving assignments, 'to the last week isn't going to work, is it?' In Semester 1 he struggled with putting ideas in his 'own words', so relied too heavily on text books for assignments and then needed time to 'tweak' his work to avoid plagiarism matches. David enjoyed 'face to face' classes and attended them all as it suited his 'way of learning'. It was 'a bit of a social thing as well' and 'not a chore'. Having a second child during first year, it was 'beneficial to get out of the house'. He used the library 'more and more'.

David struggled a little with a maths course, and sought help from the lecturer who was available for extra study. It was 'great, talking to other students and nutting things out', and he 'couldn't fault' the lecturing or administrative staff. David was 'quite comfortable' with the direction he was taking. He felt having small children had 'worked in my favour with study' as he was at home most of the time and could go between study and the children. He became more adept at navigating the university's website and felt that the 'system is probably fine' and he just needed to 'spend time playing' with it. David found that non-university friends could hinder his studies, noting one friend he would previously meet up with regularly for coffee and a chat. That had gone by the wayside and the 'tradie' friend was not at all understanding, telling David 'You're never going to learn anything at university'. Other relationships changed somewhat because of his enrolment in teacher education. He noted that 'I've actually met some people that I know through Surf Club and had no idea they were Primary teachers. So I do see them down the beach but wouldn't say hardly two words to them. So through my association with Surf Club and now that my teaching, it's – now I've got a different relationship with some people that I know.'

David's wife was less able to help now, with two children and preparing to return to work. He was volunteering at a local school which had been 'a great eye-opener' and now felt 'really comfortable' after getting 'a bit too wound up' about 'trying to do well' earlier in the year. David and his wife were keen to do major renovations on

their house but he couldn't 'see it happening' with 'two children and uni'. He was concerned about maintaining internet connection though he hadn't had a problem to date. David began part-time work over the university break. The family had lived on savings for some weeks after his wife's maternity leave finished, but they were 'comfortable'.

Second year

David's second year began well. In first semester he 'passed everything, no problems at all'. He was 'really happy' to receive a Credit in Ed Psych and considered himself 'a sort of pass, credit student'. He had 'a whole different attitude this year' compared with first year when he 'got really swept up in' one course which 'reflected' in another course, which he failed. In second semester David dropped a course because he would be away for over two weeks on a family trip. Dropping the course was an easy process and the 'best thing'. He knew people who were 'just doing two courses' and 'cruising along' but he had completed four in Semester 1 and three in Semester 2. Even while enrolled in just two face to face and one online course in Semester 2, David was spending a lot more time on campus. He was 'dropping the kids off on non-uni days' and 'spending all day at uni, like a work day'. He felt 'miles in front' because 'two or three hours here is like six hours at home' and he could be 'nutting out stuff with other people' and asking staff questions. David found the social aspect enjoyable, having connected with other mature students he termed 'a core group of the elders'.

In between semesters David had his first practicum which was 'an awful, awful experience'. He was paired with another student who found the placement quite easy, while David 'didn't find it easy at all'. The teacher was 'not very nice' to David and expected him to know how to do things that he didn't. She had 'not even looked at the [practicum] book' when the students started. He felt ignored by the teacher and they 'never had those sit-downs at the end of the day' to discuss things. David thought this must be the expectation and 'for an ungraded pass' he 'certainly wasn't going to be too worried'. The students were assessed by a supervisor from the university in their third week, and David was placed at risk, mainly due to classroom management, but he didn't think he would fail. Despite this he wrote to his course coordinator that the teacher didn't like him and he 'had a bad feeling' about the placement. He'd 'had to move the kids around' in order to undertake professional experience and couldn't 'afford to fail this'. The classroom teacher was absent in the

final week of the practicum, and unbeknownst to David, had written his report before she left, failing him. The placement experience was like 'when you go to a new workplace'. He 'didn't know what I was doing really' and 'sat back and listened and tried not to get too involved'. The student he was paired with 'let me down big time because she was so good'. He was 'just left in the dark' and didn't understand terms that were being used. He didn't think that being given a Fail grade would 'be the right thing', and was 'really disappointed in the school'. He felt the university staff 'weren't going to push it any further, because they want to keep a good relationship with the school'. It was 'a really, really sad end to the semester'. As soon as professional experience finished, second semester began. By the end of the year David was 'just exhausted'. He tried to put the professional experience 'aside'. Despite his difficulty with professional experience David did not 'ever once think of pulling out' of the degree, and he felt 'quite comfortable' as a teacher education student. At the end of Year 2 David was 'more keen than ever'. He was 'really looking forward to' third year which was 'going to be exciting'.

Third year

In third year David enrolled in four courses including the professional experience course he had failed in second year, and failed that course again. He did well in other courses, and completed one more course in second semester of third year. He wrote in an email that 'third year has been awful and I may not be continuing'. David then decided to leave university and declined further interviews, though he did not ask to be removed from the study. His final comment about his university enrolment was 'Forget it, I'm done'.

5.3 Analysis of David's Story

Despite the fact that neither of David's parents had completed high school, David had an older sibling who had completed university and a wife with a postgraduate degree. Accordingly he was a First Generation student, but with some social capital. Despite this, university had seemingly never been on David's horizon, and he could be considered a non-traditional student by virtue of his working class upbringing and his mature age status. Having been accepted into the police force while still in Year 12, David could not remember his final school results, but he had completed some post-secondary studies required by his

career. David had moved back to his home town, then into the unfamiliar field of university. His social circle did not link with the field of university, as evidenced by his 'tradie' friend who suggested David would not learn anything at university. By contrast, having a brother and wife with university degrees suggests that while David's habitus may not be perfectly matched with the field of university, the field would also not be dramatically alien to him, as there was some 'hot' knowledge available (Smith, 2011). 'Hot' knowledge is informal knowledge, gained by 'word-of mouth' through social contacts such as relatives and friends, and is particularly important to students from low-SES backgrounds (Ball & Vincent, 1998). David had expectations of university life which were not met at Northern campus. For example, he would have liked the 'real' university experience with regards to social life and access to amenities such as bars. He considered that the field in this specific context was affected by the size of the campus, noting its 'postgraduate feel'. That he had a sense of what to expect, and what a postgraduate experience would be like suggests that the field of university was less alien to him than to other non-traditional students.

Although David did not know any other students when he enrolled, like other mature age students he soon became part of a close-knit support group of similar students which he termed a 'core group of the elders'. Friendships at university provide social capital and are highly beneficial (Rubin, 2012), and so it was for David. The group was a great support, meeting to discuss course content and assignments. In the early months of enrolment David also relied heavily on his university graduate wife for advice, until the birth of their second child and became very busy. In first year David volunteered in a school which improved his confidence, and changed his relationships with some social contacts, whom he hadn't previously known were teachers. In these ways social capital was utilised and developed.

David's wife provided economic support as well as help negotiating HE, working to support the family while David studied. Financially, they did not struggle. David had no paid work in his first year of enrolment but did in the following year, though the demands of this were not so high as to interfere with his studies as can happen with non-traditional students (James et al., 2008). He and his wife paid a cleaner, and were planning an extension to their home. David's comment that he could not 'afford' to fail the professional experience, as it had been difficult to organise the children for those four weeks, related to convenience rather than finances. David's wife also provided emotional support for his enrolment, and academic support (at least in the early days of his study) enabled by her own HE background. This placed David at a distinct advantage compared to most non-traditional students. Benson et al. (2012) found family support, whether it be emotional, practical or financial, to be of high importance to the success of students from diverse backgrounds. In

David's opinion his parents didn't 'care one way or another' about his enrolment, and were only mentioned when I asked about them. His children were too young to be of influence.

David achieved good results in most courses and did not mention specific academic struggles, although he barely passed one course and failed another in addition to the professional experience. He did mention two Distinction grades he achieved in first year, but later claimed to be more of 'a pass, credit student'. It is difficult, then, to assess his cultural capital in terms of academic skills. He discarded his first attempt at an assignment on the advice of his wife, indicating that like other FG students he was not immediately cognisant of the expectations of university assignments (Collier & Morgan, 2008). He spent many hours on campus attending all classes and studying, and enjoyed completing readings, indicating that he expended effort to develop or consolidate such capital. Greek and British mature teacher education students in Kaldi and Griffiths' (2011) study likewise 'paid remarkable attention to course demands' and 'succeeded academically' (p. 18).

David did not directly state that he had failed a course in his first semester. Rather, he made obscure references to it during interviews. He said that first semester had been 'quite a challenge' and 'an eye-opener', repeating that he would be 'more organised' in future. He reported being 'certainly a lot headspace-worried in first semester' with 'unnecessary worry because I had like two Distinctions. So I'm thinking I need to not worry too much about it and just let it be'. At the end of first year David felt:

'more comfortable than first semester ... I know it's not overly difficult and I think – I think there's a need for me, hopefully. No, what I mean is, I think that it's not something to be over analysed at times, and I think that's what happened in first semester; I got a bit too wound up in the whole thing and trying to do well. I think I just want to be a bit calmer this semester'.

A year later, in David's third interview, more vague references were made: 'I had a whole different attitude this year and I certainly in first year, I got really swept up in especially Course X and that reflected with Course Y'. Only through an additional data source was it determined that David failed a subject in his first semester. This reinforces the importance of confirming data where possible (Roulston, 2011). David may have been 'showing off (his) competence while minimising (his) insecurities' (Finlay, 2012, p. 321), providing insight into David's level of dis/comfort as a student.

Apart from that one course, David claimed not to find the transition to study too difficult, and found the readings 'quite enjoyable really'. He attended all face-to-face classes, as that suited his 'way of learning', which is often the case for non-traditional students (Cantwell, Scevak & Spray, 2014). David struck a hurdle when attempting the transition to

the field of schooling for his professional experience. He treated it, initially, as he might a new job, applying 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) from a different field, and that approach was unsuccessful. Collier and Morgan (2008) noted the struggle of non-traditional students in HE to understand the tacit expectations of university, and it seems David had similar difficulties in the field of the classroom. David's statement that he 'sat back and listened and tried not to get too involved' may be evidence of an attempt to make himself 'unnoticed ... in the everyday of someone else's culture' (Probyn, 2004, p. 328) as he struggled to adapt to the classroom. David blamed external sources for his difficulties with professional experience. He blamed the class teacher for being unprepared for the pre-service teachers, unsupportive of David and unethical in failing him ('I didn't think it would be the right thing'). He blamed the other pre-service teacher on the class for being 'too good' and making him appear inadequate by comparison; he blamed the school; and he blamed the university for not overturning the fail because (he considered) they valued their relationship with the school over him. David was told that his second attempt at professional experience would not involve a paired placement, so he would not then have been able to blame another pre-service teacher. It would be interesting to know what he attributed his lack of success to on that occasion, but we can infer that he remained unable to adapt to the additional field.

Another consideration here is the role of gender, with David the only male in this study. Teaching is a gendered field, dominated by females (Blackmore, 1999), and David had two females (the teacher and the second pre-service teacher) in his class alone. This differed from his previous field of work, the male-dominated police force, perhaps adding another layer of discomfort for David. Kaldi and Griffiths' (2011) study of mature teacher education students in Greece and the UK noted one mature male who managed academically (unsurprising as he was postgraduate) but struggled initially in school. He mentioned being unfamiliar with the classroom, like David, and not knowing how to seek support. Another male student in their study came from an armed services background, similar to David, but there was no mention of difficulties on his part. Britton and Baxter (1999) suggested that 'for men there are costs in rejecting dominant forms of masculinity because other forms of masculinity are subordinated and may be associated with feminisation' (p. 191). Perhaps this was the change which David could not make. While there is substantial literature on male teachers (see, for example, Skelton, 2012 and Mills, Haase & Charlton, 2008), mature males in HE generally have been less researched than mature women (Britton & Baxter, 1999). In particular mature males enrolled in traditionally female programs may not be well researched at this point.

David's attitude towards the unsuccessful placement was similar to his disillusionment when he was unable to obtain a transfer in the police force, from which he then resigned, prior to enrolling at university. Also similar was David's response to difficulty applying for an extension on a university assignment. Originally claiming that the university would deliberately not 'make this process easy' he later accepted that the system was fine – rather, he had not known how to use it. His responses indicate a sense of powerlessness in fields where David felt he had insufficient funds of the types of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) valued by the dominant classes (Yosso, 2005). Whereas David could adapt to facets of university he originally found challenging, the same could not be said of the teaching profession. In that field he recognised 'the constraint of social conditions' and bowed to it, indicating a reproductive habitus (Mills, 2008, p. 108) if only with regard to teaching.

I cannot state with certainty why David did not continue with university or the interviews for this study, but threads throughout David's narrative resonate with other research findings. Having decided to leave university, David's refusal to engage in further interviews may be illustrative of the desire to remove himself completely from the field, highlighting 'a schism' (as Probyn, 2004, p. 334, suggests Bourdieu would call it) between David's habitus and the field, of which I was part. Other participants who left the program or university altogether continued participating in the research, perhaps due to the more voluntary nature of their leaving. In David's case, while he never indicated that perhaps teaching was not the right career choice for him, the final choice was taken largely out of his control. Another possibility is that David did not want to continue with the interviews as he felt shame at not succeeding in his endeavours. Shame 'renders telling tales difficult' (Probyn, 2004, p. 330) and 'can bring silence' (Lawler, 1999, p. 20). This is also possibly why he did not tell me, after first year, that he had failed a subject. David's final comment, 'I'm done', is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1990b) remarks about the inevitability of outcomes prescribed, or at least predicted by habitus whereby one might recognise their 'impending future' as 'inevitable ... "I'm done for"' (p. 292). As comfortable as he claimed to become as a university student, the future David aspired to as a teacher was not to be. The field of teaching was one where David did not have 'a feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66) and ultimately did not 'fit'. His comments about the professional experience acknowledge his 'feeling of out-of-placeness' (Probyn, 2004, p. 334). Indeed school was, for David as a pre-service teacher, a field 'inscribed by rules that are, by and large, unstated' (Probyn, 2004 p. 334). He admitted that he 'didn't know what I was doing really', demonstrating that his knowledge was 'not up to the demands of the field', leaving him far from 'at ease' (Probyn,

2004, p. 334) in that space. David provides one example of Marks' (2007) findings regarding lower completion rates for mature age students and males.

5.4 Rosie's Story

The journey to university

For the first five years of her life, Rosie spoke no English. Her immigrant parents spoke little English, and struggled financially. They did, however, place a high value on education, working day jobs and cleaning jobs at night so they could send Rosie to good schools. Rosie had a wonderful kindergarten teacher who helped her learn English, and Rosie 'dreamt of being a teacher'.

In Year 4 Rosie was 'taken away' from her local school and sent to an all-girl Catholic school where she 'knew nobody'. Although claiming that she excelled, she was placed in ESL classes and lower graded classes for English and mathematics. Rosie had some excellent teachers who fostered her love of mathematics, but she felt alienated because of her ethnicity, and worked hard to prove herself. She did not enjoy school and left in Year 10. Her parents were unhappy about this, and her father said she would have to go to Year 12 'to become anything', but he allowed her to enrol in bookkeeping and business administration courses. She obtained a good job and 'worked her way up'. After marrying and having children, Rosie stayed at home, as her husband earned good money. A friend pointed out that Rosie 'was talking to adults as though they were children' so she enrolled in a TAFE course, and did well. After her marriage broke down, Rosie moved in with her parents. Deciding she was 'going to become something', but thinking she would be ineligible for university, she completed more TAFE courses. Later someone suggested she apply to university, and she did, 'just for fun', and without telling anyone. She was accepted and thought 'I have to do this' but attended orientation just to 'just see what it's all about'.

First year

Aged 40, and with four children, Rosie began her teaching degree. Her father was proud, but her mother still didn't 'quite get it', saying 'you still have to finish'. Rosie's teenage children were angry because Rosie had to give up full-time work, so they had less money. They felt studying was 'for young kids when they finish school ... not for mums'. Rosie worked 12 hours per week in vacation care and bookkeeping

while enrolled full time at university. She hoped her experience with children and computer skills would help her, but expected critical thinking to be a challenge. She hoped university would provide her with qualifications, employment stability and a better financial situation. She felt university put people 'in a different class' and she intended to become someone 'people are going to look up to'. She enrolled at the campus closest to her home, and studied full time so she could start working sooner.

Rosie was both proud and scared starting university, and initially found it 'overwhelming'. She was scared the young school leavers she saw would 'know how to do essays' whereas she was 'an old bat' and was 'not going to be able to do this'. She knew she was not questioning what she read, as that had not been encouraged in her employment, but she attended bridging courses and sought information online. She was aware of services provided by the university including counselling. The vast amounts of information presented in the first weeks made her feel her 'brain' had 'turned to mashed potato' and she worried about plagiarism which had been spoken about in some classes. Early on, Rosie established a network of five mature age students who met regularly to discuss their studies, and this group remained a strong support throughout her enrolment. At this point though, four years seemed like a long journey, and she feared failing which would extend that, as she would 'be on struggle street' until she finished her studies and gained employment.

Receiving her first essay back Rosie felt 'so proud' and said 'I've done good'. She felt she had underestimated the time university study required, and found full-time enrolment a struggle. She had already planned out her whole program, including elective subjects in summer and winter breaks so she would only have three subjects to complete in each semester. This limited her subject choices but would 'get me through and get my degree'. She also checked assignment weightings and allocated time accordingly. She found there was not enough time to delve deeply into content she found interesting and had difficulty working out what notes to take during lectures.

By the end of her first year Rosie felt more confident, though she would 'stop and pinch' herself and still questioned whether she was 'doing the right thing'. She attended all lectures and tutorials, used Learning Support classes and relied on her support network of other students. Although she 'felt like a local' because she now knew where everything was, she still struggled with essay writing and felt that 'my brain doesn't quite get it', but she did feel that university was 'achievable'. Assignments took more time than Rosie had expected, and she still struggled with

some concepts, and with referencing. She also found the readings hard to complete as 'academic journals have really difficult language'. She was very organised, but after taking an elective course over the mid-year break she had been 'pulling my hair out, crying non-stop', due to the increased workload and was finding university 'really, really hard'. She had little interaction with academic staff, as 'they're up there and we're down here', but library and administration staff were helpful.

Second year

Second year was 'quite fun' initially, and Rosie particularly enjoyed some courses. It was a long, tiring year though, with a four week professional experience in the mid-year break and a compressed course in the October mid-semester break. Again she attended most lectures and tutorials though she preferred to watch the mathematics lectures online so she could pause and rewind them, as she struggled with mathematics. She also skipped some Physical Education classes as she didn't 'feel comfortable being super-doooper active'. She didn't have time to do all the readings and found some 'too hard to even read. I don't understand them. The wording is too big, too hard.' Rosie attended support classes in two subjects. She did not enjoy group assignments because she had 'a really high standard of work ethic and some of the other people don't'. One lecturer was very disorganised and Rosie found this hard to cope with, though another was a great role model. The professional experience did not meet Rosie's expectations. She felt her colleague teacher was unprepared and unsupportive as well as unethical, but she found the children 'lovely' and thought 'you need me'. On the last day before Census³ in semester two Rosie was at her computer about to unenrol when her youngest daughter said 'You're going to be such a great teacher, Mum' and Rosie decided to 'just wait a little bit longer'. By the end of semester she was determined to finish what she had started, saying 'I know I can make a difference. I have to fight this battle to get there'. Financially things were tough despite working part time, and she moved in with another single parent to share costs and babysitting. There were also challenges with Rosie's children; one had moved out and another was dropping out of school. Rosie felt she didn't 'have a life' and had learned not to talk about university with her non-student friends, who wanted her to socialise during semester.

³ Students can withdraw from courses up until Census and not be required to pay for them.

Third year

Although university didn't get any easier for Rosie, by third year she was 'used to the stress of assignments and the timetables'. She had to take Band 4 exams (see p. 51) at the start of the year, but failed in maths so had to do a workshop then the exam again. She also had a mid-year course so had no break. Her study friends were accepted into a special program, but Rosie was ineligible as her GPA was 0.1 below the cut-off, and this was very disappointing. It also meant she had some classes without them. With children to care for, Rosie applied for and received exemption from the out-of-area placement requirement in third year. Then, through a leadership program which she was involved in, she heard about an opportunity to complete her placement overseas, and applied for it. This was refused on the basis that she had claimed she could not go out of area, and so she had already received special approval to stay local. This angered Rosie and she felt 'ripped off'. Her mother had agreed to stay with the children while Rosie went overseas – something she would not have done otherwise. Rosie was also disappointed that the degree was changing and future students would have an honours degree which she felt would give them an advantage in the employment market.

Whilst still attending or listening to lectures and going to tutorials, Rosie had given up on the readings. 'I find them so hard to read. I don't speak like the academic people speak, and I don't write like academics write. So I just don't think they're useful because I don't understand them'. She would borrow books from the library to try to understand some content better though. Her professional experience at the end of third year was very challenging as she was placed with a class for children with autism. It was 'draining' and 'really daunting' and Rosie 'felt like giving up every day' as it was 'too hard'. She was exhausted, which she blamed on three years of study, but was then diagnosed with a chronic illness, and had to give up one part-time job. She had to find new rental accommodation which was difficult without employment. On a positive note her older children were now less critical of her studies and could see that she was 'going to graduate'. With only three subjects and then internship⁴ left to complete, there was 'no way' she was 'going to give up' although she was feeling nervous about the internship and felt she was 'maybe too old' for teaching.

⁴ Internship is the final Professional Experience. It is of 10 week duration. Preservice teachers are given more responsibility during internship, being allowed to teach without supervision. It is usually the final part of the teaching program.

Fourth year

Rosie began fourth year questioning whether she was 'doing the right thing'. She wanted to 'drop out completely' but university friends encouraged her to persevere. Although enrolled in only two courses in first semester, they were very demanding. She was 'completely overwhelmed'. When the census date arrived she 'just pulled out'. She stayed enrolled in a second semester elective involving overseas travel, and thought she might complete her remaining subjects the following year. Half way through the year she began work as a teacher's aide, and realised that was what she wanted to do. Teaching was 'too overwhelming, too much work' and she wanted to focus on her health and family. She completed the elective course then took an exit degree option which gave her a degree in education without teaching qualifications. Despite this she still tells 'people I'm a teacher, even all my friends'. She did not tell her children either as she would 'feel like a failure, I would feel like I didn't finish what I started'. She would still graduate and her children 'wouldn't know the difference'.

Rosie found her university experience rewarding, having 'learnt and grown from it'. She hoped to continue as a teacher's aide, despite only receiving a two week contract at a time and being unpaid during school holidays. Rosie felt that anyone wanting to go to university should try work experience in the study area first to make sure they were passionate about it, and take advantage of the plentiful support available.

5.5 Analysis of Rosie's Story

Growing up, Rosie saw that her working class, immigrant family placed a high value on education and were willing to make sacrifices to provide the best education they could for their daughter. Despite this, Rosie's schooling experience was not positive as she felt singled out due to her ethnicity. Her experience in an all-girl Catholic school is reminiscent of Reay's (1995) account of Temi, a Black student from a poor background attending a predominantly white, middle class school. In both cases the established students demonstrated disdain of the newcomers, engaging in 'practices of social and cultural exclusion' (Reay, 1995, p. 368) in order to perpetuate 'the system of difference and distinction' which Bourdieu (1993b, p. 274) attributed to middle-class habitus. Like Temi, Rosie developed attachments to teachers in the school, as it was not possible to do this with other students, whose habitus included prejudice (Reay, 1995). Both Temi and Rosie

worked hard academically, transforming habitus (Reay, 1995) and developing capital in ways very different from their fellow students. Like some working-class students in Crozier and Reay's (2011) study, Rosie's 'previous experience of education had been negative and undermining' (p. 14). The early experiences in school appear to have affected Rosie for many years, invoking Bourdieu's (1972) suggestion that habitus, 'transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn the basis of all subsequent experiences' (cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 134). Rosie's educational history was, like Reay's (2002) working class mature students, 'frequently disrupted' so that there was 'no easy union of the academic with personal satisfaction and achievement' (p. 411) in her story. Many years after leaving school Rosie still thought university was inaccessible for her, and it took a range of contributing factors including success in further education courses and encouragement from others for her to consider applying for enrolment. This is evidence of her habitus being continually, if slowly, modified by her experiences in the social world (Di Maggio, 1979).

A number of people encouraged Rosie to attempt university, but support from her family was inconsistent. While her parents had wanted her to persist with education in high school, they were ambivalent about her return as a mature student. Rosie's children also responded in a variety of ways, with her older children resenting it because of the financial restrictions it created. Her youngest child though, was proud and supportive, which encouraged Rosie to continue at one crucial point. O'Shea (2014) also found that family members may present resistance towards HE enrolment, especially for older women. This is unfortunate as the strong support of family for studies has been shown to benefit mature and FiF students (O'Shea, 2016a). Like the other mature students in this study, Rosie gained social capital through the formation of a tight-knit group of mature age study friends. She also used university to develop additional cultural capital through her selection of elective courses involving a trip to museums and other institutes in Canberra, and the overseas study trip.

Rosie's economic situation was challenging throughout the degree, with Rosie working part-time jobs to support her family. Stone and O'Shea (2013) noted that mature students found 'making ends meet was a daily challenge' (p. 106), and so it was for Rosie despite saving money before commencing her studies for just that purpose. Financial loss has a significant impact on mature students (Stone, 2008). For Rosie this also manifested in reduced domestic security for herself and her children, as her full-time student status made it difficult to secure rental accommodation. At times she shared a rental property with another mature student as a way of managing both finances and childcare. Unfortunately, while the degree Rosie attained gained her employment, it was on a tenuous, rather than

stable basis. She had no guarantee of work past two weeks, and was not paid during school holidays. In this way it was not an improvement on her situation before entering university, yet she now also had accumulated debt from studying.

University had been such a 'dream' for Rosie that at the end of first year she would still 'pinch' herself, and even when she was achieving well at university Rosie retained her view of academic staff as being in a different class. Reay (2002) noted the same reaction from a mature, working class, mixed race student. Mo would also 'pinch' him/herself during his/her FE enrolment, and had 'always been made to feel I wasn't up to it' (p. 402). Mo's attempt to transition to HE was not successful. Rosie experienced shame with regards to education, evident in her lack of disclosure on applying to university (in case she was rejected) and when her aspirations were amended and she decided not to complete the teaching degree. This is likely attributable to her habitus, whereby she did not ever feel worthy of the teaching degree to which she had aspired. Probyn (2004) speaks of shame whispering 'in the habitus: the body calling out its hopes and discomfort because it feels out of place' (p. 345), and this may be what Rosie was feeling. Women are more prone to the sort of lack of confidence which Rosie demonstrated, where the feeling of 'not being good enough appears to be deep-rooted and long-standing' (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003, p. 608). Bartky (1990) considered this 'shame' to be 'manifest in a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy' and 'profoundly disempowering' (p. 96). Reay et al. (2002) suggested that, for women, class tendencies are 'compounded by 'ethnicity' and by parenthood' (p. 16), and this was true for Rosie.

Rosie struggled with some academic skills, notably critical thinking, reading academic texts and writing (as well as mathematics), simply finding them 'too hard'. This is like some students in Crozier et al.'s (2008) UK study with long gaps between school and university, one of whom found that 'reading a book to gain meaning from it is difficult' (p. 170). Rosie did not give up entirely though, trying different library materials to understand concepts. While some students might acclimatise to the academic expectations of university, even in third year Rosie noted that 'I don't speak like academics speak, and I don't write like academics write'. Benson et al. (2012) also noted some disadvantaged, mature students reporting essay writing skills which were 'not up to par' (p. 20). This difficulty remained throughout Rosie's enrolment. As Vermunt (1998) stated, 'many students do not realise constructive, self-regulated, high-quality learning processes' (p. 167), and it is not a simple matter to change learning styles students have had for many years, as would be the case for many mature students like Rosie. Often throughout our interviews Rosie spoke of needing to 'get through' assignments, courses and the degree as a whole. She also had to

'struggle' to understand concepts, complete a course, write essays, give presentations and complete four courses in a semester. The regular use of these words indicates that Rosie was not comfortable in the university environment, but was rather a 'fish out of water' (Reay et al., 2009). HE is often experienced as a struggle by non-traditional students (Reay et al., 2002; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). Research by Britton and Baxter (1999) named a specific category of narrative 'Struggling Against the Odds' (p. 186) and ascribed this to working class women who did not complete high school, like Rosie, claiming that this group had the least cultural capital (of the kind valued by universities) in their study of mature students. However, Rosie did make an effort to develop her skills, taking advantage of bridging and other academic support classes. She had brought with her capital in the form of computer skills, work ethic, organisation and experience with children (through work and home). One strategy Rosie used for surviving full-time study, work and family life was to be extremely organised, as also seen in other studies where FiF mature females have battled 'levels of chaos' (O'Shea, 2014, p. 153).

University had appeared unattainable to Rosie for many years. Once enrolled though, she began passing assignments, and felt she could get through. She became very familiar with the campus, becoming a mentor to new students: this was perhaps a way to consolidate her position in the field and build a sense of belonging. She learned to navigate the online systems, and did not fail any courses (though she had to take the Band 4 mathematics test twice – see p. 51). Rosie had some conflicts with the field, firstly when she was deemed ineligible for the special program, then for the overseas professional experience. On another occasion she was marked harshly on a presentation, a tutor suggesting Rosie would never be able to teach due to her speech impediment: she had what I would describe as a very slight lisp which I had not noticed until she told me this story. She appealed this and her grade was revised by another staff member. During her enrolment she maintained her view of certain actors in the field (academics) as in another sphere, indicating that her 'fish out of water' (Reay et al., 2009) status did not change.

When she entered the field of schooling as a pre-service teacher Rosie encountered real difficulties. She struggled with the social and professional relationships in schools, taking incidents and feedback personally. She also struggled with the amount of work involved in teaching, and it was this, combined with ill health, which ultimately led her to leave the teaching degree. There are similarities here with another preservice teacher from this study, school-leaver Lani, who struggled with some courses but made the decision to change degrees after glimpsing the work involved in teaching during her first professional experience. Rosie completed a second professional experience but found it at least as

difficult as her first. Rosie's decision may also have been affected by her mature status, as students may feel they have already invested enough time and need to get (back) into the workforce. Reay et al. (2002) found that mature students who did not finish HE access courses in the minimum time were unlikely to complete their studies, as time and financial considerations are 'most pressing' for them (Reay et al. , 2002, p. 10). Interestingly, Rosie was very comfortable in the field of schooling once she was positioned as teacher's aide rather than teacher (yet she continued to tell people she was a teacher). This suggests she still craved that which was denied her due to the mismatch of habitus and field. Reay (2002) suggested that most mature working-class students 'opt for safety and comfort; a combination of achieving educationally and still being able to be themselves that stops short of transformation', avoiding 'all the risks of academic failure and shame many experienced in their early schooling' (p. 411). Perhaps that is why Rosie opted for the degree she did.

By enrolling in university, Rosie demonstrated what Yosso (2005) termed 'aspirational capital' which in her case 'took the form of retaining the dream of attending university through to encouraging family members to consider university as a viable option' (O'Shea, 2014, p. 71). Rosie's grip on aspirational capital seemed rather tenuous. As well as stopping just short of achieving her dream of a teaching degree, she said there was 'no way' her daughters (some of whom were in their late teens) 'would cope at university'. This is a curious response. Most parents expect (realistically or not) that their children will be able to achieve more than they themselves did, but in Rosie's case we see the opposite. I interpret this as stemming from Rosie's deeply embedded feeling of being a trespasser at university. She may be projecting her feelings onto her children, or trying to protect them from possible failure. HE for Rosie was not truly transformative. As a single mother from an ethnic, working-class background, accessing HE as a mature student was always likely to be 'difficult and risky' (Reay, 2003, p. 313) for Rosie. That she fought 'this battle' to graduate, albeit not with her originally planned degree, is testament to her determination.

5.6 Ellie's Story

The journey to university

Teaching was something Ellie had always considered doing. Her high school work experience was in pre- and primary schools, and she always enjoyed the school environment, but her high school results were insufficient for entry into a teaching degree. Ellie married young. Working in travel, she completed related part-time

TAFE courses before leaving work to have children. After the birth of her second child she applied to university but wasn't accepted. The idea was shelved with a third child on the way. Some years later Ellie again applied for teaching programs at a Sydney university, where she was living at the time, and a regional one. She was accepted by Regional University then had to wait until her family moved there to begin her studies. They had planned to move anyway as living in Sydney was too expensive.

To Ellie, university represented the 'chance of a good job', and it 'makes you feel like you're a bit of a level up'. Although she was not influenced by anyone in particular to undertake teaching, she recalled her mother studying at a College of Advanced Education as a single parent when Ellie was in primary school, and thought 'well if she can do it, I can do it'. Ellie's family was very supportive of her enrolment at university. Her husband remained working two jobs in Sydney until he could secure a transfer, while Ellie moved with their children to the regional town. Her mother had also moved there before Ellie, and would help with Ellie's children while she studied. She began her degree aged 37. Realising that life was going by, Ellie felt her determination would help her succeed at university: 'if you don't do it now, it's not going to happen'.

First year

Enrolled full time so it wouldn't 'take forever', Ellie expected to find achieving a balance between family and study challenging, but she looked forward to meeting people and learning new things. She realised she would need to develop critical thinking as she had a tendency to 'take things at face value'. She found university staff approachable. They were 'spelling things out for you' and she felt this was a benefit of a small campus. She had been told about various support services, but didn't think she would need them. She felt the hardest thing would be disciplining herself to complete assignments on time, having not worked since having her first child 12 years earlier. This meant that at times Ellie would have to study rather than spend time with her husband during his visits. She was not engaged in paid work. Ellie enjoyed the first weeks of university; it was 'nice and social', and there were 'quite a few old people like me'.

First year went well for Ellie. She didn't feel she had developed any particularly useful skills or practices to help her, finding that she could only concentrate on assignments

when she was under pressure at the last minute. While she hadn't known what to expect of university, it was less formal than she anticipated. She felt this was partly due to the small campus which meant students 'get to know the teachers' and made classes 'more intimate'. This also allowed her to feel more comfortable than expected. A self-confessed 'nerd', Ellie attended all lectures and tutorials. She spent more time on study than expected in first semester but less in second, due to differences in subjects and assessment. Ellie found chatting with other students useful when preparing assignments or studying for tests. Fellow students were 'really supportive' and not competitive, which surprised Ellie. Her results were good, so she 'must be doing something right'. She admitted to being 'anal...very particular about making sure questions are actually answered', and spent a lot of time re-reading. Having a son in Year 5 was useful when studying topics he was learning at school. Teaching staff were helpful, with some going way beyond expectations, offering to come in on weekends to provide additional support. Online systems were frustrating, requiring repeated log-ins. She was also annoyed that, having waited until her youngest child was at school to begin her studies, Ellie had lectures until 7 pm some nights.

Having recently moved to the area Ellie had no local friends outside university. Ellie's mother was a good support, picking the children up from school at times, but her grandmother was a little disappointed with the result of Ellie's move, as study meant she was not always available. Ellie's husband finally received a transfer, albeit to a location an hour north of campus. Finishing first year, Ellie felt good about her progress. It was fun, and good to 'finally be doing something'. It was 'nice to say you're a uni student'. The year had passed quickly. A lazy student who had done 'really badly' at school, Ellie was pleased with excellent university results.

Second year

Ellie had heard of 'second year blues' and hoped to avoid them, but she found second year 'hard' and 'pretty exhausting'. It incorporated a four week professional experience during the mid-year break and seemed 'really long'. Professional experience was 'harder than other people seemed to have found it', perhaps because 'it takes me so long to do anything'. Ellie found preparing lesson plans each night hard when she was 'asleep on the lounge by eight o'clock'. She was exhausted and would rise at 4 am to finish her lesson plans. Despite this she felt lucky, being in a 'fantastic school with a real good teacher'. Ellie felt more confident after the

professional experience because 'I'm always questioning whether I'm doing it right'. Being in the classroom was fun, but university 'almost felt like a holiday' by comparison. After second year Ellie felt comfortable at university and was 'just trotting through...without really thinking': 'it's just uni'. She was still challenged by her 'slowness to do anything'. Trying to write one major essay, she had sat 'in front of the computer for three days [to] write 300 words. It's painful'. But that was 'just' her. Ellie enjoyed the social life of university, with 'all the old married with children people. We all get together' both in and out of university. They would arrive on campus early and meet for coffee, or to work on group assignments. Ellie continued to attend all classes and complete all set readings, but not all recommended readings. She did not seek any help with her studies. With her last major assignment she had sat all day Monday to Friday to complete it. Being 'anal' was both a blessing and a curse – it made Ellie thorough, but perhaps 'too much of a perfectionist. It would be nice to pull back a bit'. At this stage Ellie felt teaching staff were 'here for you 100% unless you actually need something'. Her husband had moved to the area, but he still had three hours travelling each day on top of work. Other members of Ellie's family had also moved to the area, which was 'a little bit painful'. The only grandchild, she was expected to do a lot for her family and this left her with some guilt.

Third year

Ellie undertook a heavy study load in third year, completing two fourth year subjects so she could undertake a study abroad semester in fourth year. She coped by going 'into auto-pilot mode'. She did not 'have a life' during semester, when 'everything revolves around damn assignments' which seemed to take 'longer and longer every year'. It was also a hard year personally, with a 'big family fall-out early in the year'. Previously having a perfect attendance record, Ellie missed three sessions in one subject because 'it was boring as absolute bat poo' and she had big assignments due in the fourth year subjects. She still completed all set readings. Ellie was still surprised she was getting such good grades, thinking 'geez, if I can do it anybody can because I've sort of had uni up on a bit of a pedestal and you've got to be really smart to go to uni and I'm not really, really smart. So if I can do it, anyone can'. She still felt she could not manage without the 'awesome' support of fellow students. 'I could never have done this by distance' (yet she did complete a semester overseas). She had completed an online course which was 'probably one of my worst'. She found 'just discussing things' helpful and liked to choose groups for assignments:

there was a group of four other mature age students with 'similar standards and . . . work ethic'. The small cohort meant they got to speak with academic staff 'in an informal manner'. She felt she may not do so well 'sitting in a big lecture theatre ... too scared to put up your hand because there's a hundred other people there'. The administrative person was 'scary and we stay away'. Organisation for her study abroad was straightforward, possibly since 'there's a lot less people to deal with'. However she did think the small campus missed out on some things, saying 'the library up here is absolute rubbish' and 'it would be nice to have some more of the social stuff, like bars and that'.

Third year was Ellie's 'least academic year' due to family issues and she was unhappy to now have three Credit grades while the rest were Distinctions and High Distinctions. Professional experience in the November was 'really good' but a hectic time as Ellie and her family moved out of their home in preparation her study abroad semester.

Fourth year

Having not travelled much, Ellie was interested when she heard a talk about study abroad from a woman with a family. With her oldest child approaching Year 10 Ellie thought it might be a case of 'now or never'. It seemed 'all just too hard at times' but was also 'too good to pass up'. The main problem was that 'all the stuff on study exchange was very focussed on 20 year olds, and there was really no support at all for mature-aged people', especially those with 'baggage in terms of ... offspring'. At an information day on the main campus Ellie 'felt like a fish out of water' and 'the old hag in the corner'. She felt sorry for the 'poor 20 year old Swedish boy' with whom she was paired for discussion. The 'housing and everything is for single people' so with a family 'you're pretty much on your own'. Her husband took long service leave so they could go. On study exchange in Sweden, Ellie completed two elective courses which were taught in English. It 'was an awesome opportunity' and she thought everyone should do it, 'particularly the young ones'. She expected university there to be 'really fancy' compared to her small campus, but found herself in 'a tiny little classroom, smaller than here'. Also there were fewer mature age students, so she again felt a 'fish out of water'. There was no social aspect to university at all, group work was tricky, and courses were less structured with lecturers changing requirements as they chose. Ellie arrived back in early July and began Internship

nine days later. She found it 'pretty cruisey' only having Internship to complete in her final semester.

Internship was 'awesome – so much better than prac'. Ellie enjoyed the freedom of not being watched or needing to second-guess how the teacher would want things done. She was treated differently, 'like you were a colleague'. Having struggled with assignments over the years she found preparing lessons less time consuming through being familiar with websites. She also found that 'for assignments you're trying to get a mark', whereas teaching is 'a little bit of trial and error and you can change it as you go'. 'Assignments are just tedious, but when you're actually doing the ... real world stuff, like teaching the kids, it was more interesting'. She did not mind the time spent preparing lessons. She had one assignment due during internship and for once completed it quickly the night before it was due.

Ellie obtained two to three days per week of paid work at her Internship school in the term following Internship. Financially this was 'helpful' after having not worked for 16 years, and with her youngest child now 11 she hoped to work full time. With her 'over-thinking personality' Ellie was nervous of teaching full-time and the thought of programming 'freaked' her 'out'. She hoped not to 'screw up a year or two of small children' while she made sure she 'covered all the outcomes'. She understood though that 'it's a bit of a nightmare out there' in terms of gaining permanent employment. She had yet to compile a resume and did not look forward to casual employment, with uncertainty around what she would be doing the next day.

Ellie felt that taking university seriously had made her approach to it successful. Expecting the standard to be high had made it more stressful but also helped her get good marks, as had being older. 'I don't know that I could have done it straight out of school'. Her 'anal personality' had both helped and hindered. She felt university seemed easy in hindsight but remembered the stress and 'rushed feel'. She wished she had procrastinated less and enrolled sooner. Ellie had great support from her mother throughout her degree. She also appreciated her children's friends' parents who had her children over when she was busy without requiring reciprocity. Ellie would advise others like herself to enrol at university 'because it's not hard and four years goes so fast'. She tells her own children that if she had taken study seriously when she was younger they 'wouldn't have had to move out of Sydney', as she would 'have had a decent job earlier'. She felt she had wasted 20 years due to 'stuffing

around in high school'. She also felt her children were 'old enough to put up with the lack of attention' while she studied but it might be harder with younger children.

5.7 Analysis of Ellie's story

Ellie was brought up by a single parent who attained a tertiary qualification while raising her family. In this way she is similar to Reay's (1998b) newly middle class participants at least with respect to parental educational level. There was no mention of Ellie's mother guiding her with regard to university choice, enrolment or processes, despite having Further Education (FE) experience. Ellie did not apply herself in high school and was ineligible for university as a school leaver. Making the decision to begin university after her children were born was no small step. After being rejected by metropolitan institutions, accepting an offered position entailed moving her family, and this meant living apart from her husband while he waited to transfer with his job. Ellie had university on a pedestal by her own admission, and on a number of occasions felt like a 'fish out of water' (Reay et al., 2009) though she attributed this partly to her age. She considered herself not smart enough for university. These aspects combined to present a habitus which was non-traditional for HE, but also demonstrated aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and a determinedness which was of great benefit in her endeavours. Ellie considered that university enrolment provided an element of prestige, as it was 'nice to say you're a uni student'.

Poor high school results and a tendency to 'take things at face value' were evidence of cultural capital Ellie did not have with regard to HE, but she more than made up for this with work ethic and hours committed to study. Economic capital was not in abundance as evidenced by her husband's two jobs and their decision to move to a cheaper location. Despite this Ellie never mentioned finances as an issue during her studies, until her comment in the final interview that paid work was a benefit of graduation after years of not working. Ellie, like Rosie, took advantage of the opportunity to study overseas, and in Ellie's case this cultural experience was shared with her family. Social capital was evident in Ellie's story both in terms of family and fellow students, though the latter was mostly restricted to 'the old, married with children group'. Her mother provided much needed support in caring for Ellie's children, and her husband made sacrifices for Ellie's dream too. While other studies involving mature female students have noted 'the gradual renegotiation of roles within the domestic space' (O'Shea, 2014, p. 152), this was not evident for Ellie. Initially her husband worked in a different city, and after his relocation his work hours meant Ellie could

still not share responsibilities with him. That support role was played by her own mother and parents of her children's friends. The social network she developed at university was also highly supportive as has been found previously (Rubin, 2012).

Ellie was a very conscientious student. She attended almost all classes over her four year enrolment, completed all compulsory readings, and devoted many hours to assignments. Referring to herself as a 'nerd' and 'anal', she claimed this was her personality, but if so it had changed greatly since high school when she had been busy 'stuffing around'. She was careful to read and re-read detail about assignments to ensure she answered the questions being asked. Ellie commented that during semester she did not 'have a life' outside of university. Indeed she 'paid remarkable attention to course demands', like mature postgraduate students in Kaldi and Griffiths' (2011, p. 18) study.

Ellie was ambivalent about the field of HE generally and also the institution at which she was enrolled. Initially she felt it afforded some status ('it's nice to say you're a uni student') but university soon became normalised for her ('it's just uni'). It seemed to just exist in the background of her experience. She made few comments about it other than that some services were not great, which she blamed on the small campus (poor library, internet log-in issues, few social amenities), and after praising staff in first year, later felt that staff offered limited support. She also felt the field did not cater for mature age students (scheduling classes after 5 pm; overseas study opportunities structured for young, single students). The out-of-placeness stemming from her age was noted several times over the course of our interviews. Ellie made disparaging comments about 'old people like me', and referred to herself as 'the old hag in the corner'. O'Shea (2016a) noted similar stigma in her study of mature students. At the same time Ellie felt her age had allowed her to succeed, commenting, 'I feel sorry for those younger ones that juggle work and uni; I couldn't do it', yet she juggled study with the demands of a family. Like David, she had some sense of what university should be like. The institution did not meet her expectations in terms of spaces, which were not as modern or formal as she expected. Thinking that certain features related only to her own campus due to its size, she was surprised to find other campuses here and overseas were quite similar.

Ellie was influenced by the success of others in similar situations. Having a mother who studied as a single parent made Ellie think she could do it too, as was also the case for mature female students in Benson et al.'s (2010) study. Having heard about a study abroad experience by a woman with a family made Ellie think she could also do that. She found studying with like-minded mature students benefitted her. These role models with similar backgrounds increased Ellie's confidence, as Stone (2008) also found with mature students.

Gender was a strong theme in Ellie's story. Being a mother who did not work outside the home while raising young children kept Ellie away from HE for many years. Her own mother was an inspiration, as well as providing support for Ellie during her studies, and her grandmother also featured in the story of Ellie's journey. It is likely due to gender that Ellie was expected by extended family members to spend more time with her grandmother. The impact of study on the time mature female students had available for relationships with older family members has also been noted elsewhere (Stone & O'Shea, 2013). This highlights the intergenerational aspect of Ellie's journey, too. Engagement with study is sometimes about the effects for a group of people rather than just the individual who is enrolled (Longhurst et al., 2012), and positive outcomes are often linked, for students who are parents, with their children's lives (Reay et al., 2002; Tett, 2000). This was true for Ellie, as seen in the comment to her children that if she had studied harder at school the family would have been better off financially. Her children and husband also benefitted from the cultural experience of Ellie's study abroad semester. Ellie noted, though, that her children had to 'cope' with her being less available due to her enrolment, a sentiment shared by mature students in other studies (Kaldi & Griffiths, 2011; Tett, 2000).

5.8 Three Stories, Three Endings

5.8.1 Pathways

The stories of David, Rosie and Ellie illuminate the wide variation in mature students' experiences of HE. The variation in experiences and circumstances both during childhood and in the years between high school and university created variations in habitus which illustrate the complexity of that concept (Reay, 1995), and its interactions with capital and field, here applied to mature adults entering a new field. The factors which kept these mature participants away from HE for so long were varied. Different social trajectories brought them to the same point, beginning TE, then on to divergent outcomes. David chose to begin a career directly from school, and decisions he made later in life opened university up as an option. Ellie, although initially denied university due to poor grades, was then kept away by having a family. Rosie's situation was more complicated. Alienating experiences at school led her to leave early, so she was not initially eligible for HE, and these negative experiences affected her feelings and actions toward HE. She did not ever feel 'worthy' of university, so her route was more circuitous. After success in work and FE she (secretly) applied and was accepted, but feelings of 'out-of-placeness' followed her and were never entirely overcome.

Neither Ellie nor Rosie were eligible to attend university as school leavers, and that is unknown for David (as he could not remember). All three worried about fitting in at university, but also saw university enrolment as providing prestige. As mature students, David, Ellie and Rosie enrolled without needing to meet academic prerequisites required of school leavers. Crozier et al. (2008) found that students entering HE without high prior achievement often lacked confidence. O'Shea's (2016a) Australian study found that while FiF students generally found starting at university 'overwhelming' (p. 70), this was heightened for mature students, and Rosie used that exact term to describe her experience. Both Rosie and Ellie noted the incongruity of their age, like older students in O'Shea's (2016a) study who reported a 'stigma around their age' (p. 74). Also like O'Shea's mature students, David and Rosie acknowledged experiential capital (O'Shea, 2016b) from their lived experiences including previous employment which could benefit their studies. Rosie had computing skills and David had 'life experience' including mentoring younger officers. Ellie and Rosie lamented their academic skill levels, while David's attitude to this was slightly different. He claimed passing courses was 'no problem', although in some cases his grades indicated that he only just passed. This difference in attitude may be related to gender as mature female students have a deeper approach to learning (Rubin, Scevak et al., 2016) and are more likely to attribute any difficulties they experience in HE to themselves (O'Shea, 2014). For David, passing may have been the main goal.

Access to HE was unlocked for David, Rosie and Ellie by their mature status, despite that being a non-traditional identifier. Reay (1998b) noted that students making choices about HE had to 'negotiate increasingly complex, differentiated educational fields' (p. 520) and that some would be better placed to make such decisions than others. The complexity was increased, she suggested, for mature students, who were more likely to be from minority and/or working class backgrounds. In terms of the institutions these three students enrolled in, there were no strategic choices. Rather, like Reay's (1998b) working-class students, they were 'dealing with externally imposed criteria which restrict(ed) their choices' (p. 528). They did not seem aware of this restriction, or complete lack of choice, possibly as a result of their limited cultural capital with regard to HE. Ellie was the only student of these three to apply for more than one university, when she was living in Sydney, but she was only offered a place at Northern campus. For all three students, the satellite campus of Regional University they ultimately attended was the only option, due to geographical and entry constraints, but no-one noted any concerns around this. Other researchers have described decisions made by FiF students as self-restrictive, leading to enrolment in 'less prestigious subjects in less prestigious universities' (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013, p. 324). It is possible

that Ellie and David's decisions to relocate could be viewed this way, but that perspective assumes that educational choices are more important than lifestyle choices, and that may not be true, especially for students with families to consider. In their study with mature students, Reay et al. (2002) stated that 'Choice for a majority involved a process of finding out what you cannot have, what is not open for negotiation and then looking at the few options left' (p. 9).

Many working class students are reliant on schools for information about HE (Reay, 1998b), but mature students lack this support. David's wife and sibling had degrees, but possibly David was not around when they were enrolled – perhaps having left home in the sibling's case and perhaps not having met his wife when she was studying. Or perhaps he was too involved in establishing his career to take notice. Ellie's mother obtained post-secondary credentials when Ellie was in primary school. This is similar to a student in Reay's (1998b) study, where she noted the 'tenuousness of middle-class habitus for families with recent working-class histories' (p. 522). Reay found that a parent who obtained a teaching degree as a mature student was unable to guide her son effectively through the HE choice process. Indeed, Ellie, David and Rosie were in the first generation of their families to attend HE and all lived working-class lives for many years before enrolling at university, so that working-class habitus was well established for them all.

5.8.2 Destinations

David, Rosie and Ellie entered HE with similar backgrounds. All three had experienced success in some form of education after high school, as was the case for working-class mature students in Tett's (2000) study, in this case related to their careers. Ellie mostly flourished, while Rosie and David struggled and succumbed to a mismatch between habitus and field at different points in their journeys. This is a story of success though for Rosie as well as Ellie, because Rosie did obtain a university degree, and employment which she enjoyed and where she felt valued and valuable. Ellie and Rosie both value-added to their HE experiences through travel opportunities during their degrees. Undoubtedly for these two, university was positive and transforming. David, having both a sibling and wife with university degrees could have had higher expectations than Ellie or Rosie for success, given Swartz's (2002) comments on habitus and the 'adjustment of expectations according to ... success common to members of the same class' (p. 655). Though unable to complete his degree, or find a different HE pathway (as with students whose narratives are told in other chapters), David developed social capital through connections with fellow students and also teachers, and proved that he was capable of university study. It was the specific career path rather than HE generally which proved

impassable in his case. Unfortunately for him the programs offered at his local university were limited to two choices. If he was not interested in the other degree option, then he was effectively excluded from further university studies, at least via face-to face delivery, and he did not feel comfortable with online courses. David's life decisions regarding place of living restricted his study options. The fact that all three managed their academic courses reasonably well may be due to the fact that Regional University is not elite. Results from studies in the US (Walpole, 2003; Aries & Seider, 2005, 2007) and the UK (Sutton Trust, 2000; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009, 2010) suggest that non-traditional students find a 'better fit' at institutions like Regional rather than more elite institutions. David may have completed a degree had other options been available.

5.8.3 Impact of gender

While the three students shared mature-age status, that category can present differences for male and female students. A number of studies conducted over thirty years have reported that older students in general often have more of a deep learning approach than younger students (Richardson, 2013 provides a review), but men may have higher extrinsic and lower intrinsic motivation than women (Severiens & Ten Dam, 1994). Older women can also provide more intrinsic motivations for study (McCune et al., 2010). Recent research has linked these factors, finding that older female students more often have a deep learning approach than younger females or men of any age (Rubin, Scevak et al., 2016). Ellie and Rosie had a focus on wanting to learn and self-improvement, like mature female students in other studies (Reay, 2003; O'Shea, 2016a), to the point of it being 'an embodied desire to do something more than they were currently able or allowed to do' (O'Shea, 2014, p. 147). Ellie and Rosie were more concerned about their mature status than David, calling themselves 'an old bat' (Rosie) and 'the old hag' (Ellie).

Additional gender issues were evident in all three stories. David's habitus was, perhaps, shaped too much by twenty years of prior employment in a male dominated field, and perhaps as a mature student the change to the female dominated field of primary teaching was 'a bridge too far'. The only other degree offered at Northern campus was nursing, another female dominated profession. While all three mature students had to juggle the responsibilities of parenthood alongside their studies, this was most difficult for Rosie, as a single mother (Reay, 2003). She was heavily influenced by her children at various times, both positively and negatively (O'Shea, 2014). Her older children resented the financial constraints brought about by Rosie's decision to study, but her youngest child provided motivation, as also seen by Longhurst et al. (2012), such as when Rosie wanted to drop out but was told by one daughter what a wonderful teacher she was going to make.

With no partner to provide monetary support, finances and housing were more stressful considerations for Rosie than for Ellie or David, both of whom had spouses in employment. Family support may be more important for female than male students (Cheng et al., 2012). Ellie's family responsibilities were also greater than David's seemed, due to expectations around her role in the extended family, with some family members dismayed that Ellie's study prevented her devoting more time to her grandmother. Generations of women were active in Ellie's story. As in O'Shea's (2014) study, when mature females enrolled in HE it remained their responsibility to ensure that study did not impact on family life. Expectations for both Ellie and Rosie may have been different had they been male. Like mature female working class students in other studies, both Ellie and Rosie seemed more enmeshed in and restricted by familial relationships (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Stone & O'Shea, 2013) across generations than David did. Mothers undertaking HE studies often experience guilt over the reduced time and energy available for their familial responsibilities generally and children in particular (Reay et al., 2002; Stone, 2008), as did Ellie and Rosie.

5.8.4 Social structures and mature students

All three mature-age students discussed here drew substantial support from forming a group of like-minded mature-age students. Social support is well established in the research as contributing to HE success (Rubin & Wright, 2015), but not always in the way seen in this study. Ellie and Rosie especially, and David to a lesser degree, did not have social connections through their family, friends and community in their pre-university lives which could help them with decision making about university enrolment; nor did they enter university with friends from school who could provide 'hot knowledge' (Smith, 2011) and an element of familiarity to their new environs. Rather they each established, after enrolling, a small group of similar mature students who then supported each other throughout their studies. The importance of friendship groups to mature students has similarly been reported by Stone (2008). While all three mentioned the support from these groups on numerous occasions, and this support was without doubt a positive influence on their experiences as found in other studies (Rubin, 2012), it is also possible that these small, homogenous social groups were restrictive, through the reinforcing of 'low volume social capital' (Ball, 2003, p. 83). Experiences and support may have been increased with wider social circles (Crozier et al., 2008) including school leavers and non-FiF students, as they would have provided the opportunity to benefit from the cultural knowledge of the dominant classes in the field of HE (Bourdieu, 1984). Despite the positive support all three claimed to have received from their peers, mature students generally develop fewer and lower quality relationships than their younger peers because of family responsibilities (Rubin & Wright, 2015). This is

important as social integration is linked to achievement and retention, which could have affected David and Rosie. Ellie was the only one of these three students to note the unequivocal support of her mother (who was a single parent) for her studies.

David and Ellie had certain perceptions of university life which did not match the reality at Northern campus. Their visions of the field were not matched by the actual facilities provided. Both lamented at times the lack of social amenities at their campus— specifically that there was no bar. There was no bar at the larger Southern campus either, but Rosie did not mention this. Perhaps as a single parent or for other reasons this did not appeal to her. Given their family responsibilities, David and Ellie may not have availed themselves of a bar if it did exist, but it is interesting that both saw it as desirable and expected it as part of their university experience. This contrasts with earlier research showing that older students were less interested in the social aspects of HE due to time constraints and family commitments (Reay et al., 2002; McCune et al., 2010), though McCune et al. (2010) reported some mature students who looked forward to developing a social life at university. Having made the leap to enter university as mature students, it is disappointing that they were denied a pleasurable part of what is expected in the traditional university experience. Rubin and Wright (2015) noted the need for universities to organise social opportunities which are ‘age-appropriate and held at suitable times of the day in order to attract older working-class students’ (p. 10-11). Ellie also considered that the library facilities were inadequate. She had imagined, too, that university campuses other than Northern would have spacious, modern, formal learning spaces and was surprised to find, even on her study abroad, that this was not always the case. Where such images of universities originated is unknown. None of these students voiced any concerns or opinions regarding the quality, rigour or reputation of the degree they were obtaining from the specific university: they either did not understand or did not care that some degrees are more prestigious than others, and this is common for non-traditional students (Reay, 1998b). Crozier et al. (2008) noted that elite universities tended to be in towns with cultural resources such as bookshops and theatres, while less elite institutions, sometimes in disadvantaged areas, often lacked such ‘cultural attributes’ (p. 172). Certainly, universities serving less advantaged communities should consider this aspect which seems to be part of the ‘hidden curriculum’ of HE, whereby university students in disadvantaged communities cannot obtain the full benefits of HE conferred by elite institutions.

5.8.5 Motivational differences

Another factor differentiating Ellie from David and Rosie was that she had, for a long time, been looking towards a teaching degree. It was a goal for her, which just had to wait

for practical considerations related to children, relocation and university acceptance to be aligned with her study plans. By comparison, teaching was more of a 'dream' for Rosie – something she was just 'giving a go' when she applied but never truly believed would happen. Rosie's background placed her as the least suited of these three students to HE. For David, enrolment in teaching was more of a happy accident: he had moved and needed a new job, thought he wouldn't mind teaching, and it was available locally. This reflects other studies of mature students which found men were more likely to provide instrumental reasons for their study, whereas women referred more often to a desire for personal fulfilment (Osborn, Charnley & Withnall, 1987; Woodley, Wagner, Slowly, Hamilton & Fulton, 1987). Despite David's less apparent emotional investment in his studies, success in HE is clearly something he saw as desirable, since 'shame is dependent on a positive valuation of the behaviours, ideas or principles in question' (Sayer, 2005 p. 954). For these non-traditional students, mindset, as perhaps an aspect of disposition, appears to be important.

The mature students described here all presented concerns around accountability for their decisions to study. They, and or their various family members, made sacrifices to enable their HE enrolment, in terms of finances, disruption and support. It was therefore important to all that they succeeded, separate from any personal desire to gain a degree or become a teacher. Success would answer all critics and validate any struggles. This no doubt added a level of anxiety which school leavers may not experience. Mature students' experiences of HE are often 'a negotiation of the balance between safety, risk and challenge' (Reay, 2001, p. 340), and this is seen for Ellie, Rosie and David. For mature-age students, enrolment is often a last chance at HE and an imagined better life. This may in part explain the shame experienced by David and Rosie when their original goals were not met. The response of shame is reliant on a positive view of that which is lacking (Skeggs, 1997), and is 'an important mechanism in the production of social order' (Sayer, 2005, p. 955). Sacrifices made in the pursuit of HE may be seen as justifiable, dependant on a successful outcome. Probyn (2004) noted that 'aspirations are always severely tailored by the reality of daily life' (p. 337), and this is reflected in Rosie's and David's experiences.

Rosie and David sometimes demonstrated an external locus of control with regard to struggles in university situations, possibly to their habitus not being commensurate with the field of university. Reay (2002, p. 413 citing Reay, 1997 and Plummer, 2000) suggested that 'shame and the fear of shame haunts working-class relationships to education' and this appears true for David and Rosie. David's difficulties were more severe in terms of outcome, and gender may have played a role in his case. Habitus is both durable and transposable (Bourdieu, 1990b), initially acquired through socialisation in the early years and modified

through various life experiences. As 'an active residue of the past' (Schwarz, 2002, p. 635), it seems plausible that it may become less open to change if there are not experiences to challenge it. For an older student, then, transformation may be more difficult, depending on the sum total of their lived experiences.

5.8.6 Transformative opportunities

If habitus becomes less malleable with age for some adults, as considered above, further support may be needed for mature students to acclimatise to university, especially for those with additional non-traditional indicators such as low school achievement, or entering a discipline which is gendered with a bias against their own. Benson et al. (2012) agree, suggesting academic staff could take a broader role through facilitating student access to support services. Mature students can enter university without prior achievement criteria, but may not have a realistic image as to the realities of study as a mature student with family responsibilities, or of the career to be pursued. Again, Ellie moved through her degree with few difficulties, but perhaps she was a rarity. She had not succeeded at school, but was able to attribute this to lack of effort, something she could and did change at university. She had the full practical, financial and emotional support of her parent and husband for her studies. Ellie was also the only one of these three without paid work commitments, and may have been less successful had she been dealing with that load as well (James et al., 2008), though paid work was not the cause of David's struggles.

David, Ellie and Rosie all devoted considerable time to study. David spoke of spending more and more time on campus, and for Ellie and Rosie it seemed at times all-consuming, with both stating they did 'not have a life' during semester. Similar comments have been made by mature females in other studies such as 'Sesh' who said 'there's nothing else in my life' (Benson, et al., 2012, p. 20). All three mature students were pleased to pass courses and recount their successes. Failure of assignments or courses is a common fear for beginning FiF students (O'Shea, 2014). David, Rosie and Ellie attended the vast majority of face-to-face classes, though Rosie listened to some lectures online. David and Ellie completed the required readings, with David even enjoying that, while Rosie struggled with the literacy requirements of university. The academic aspects of university were not major issues for David, and were only part of the reason Rosie changed her pathway. Kaldi and Griffiths (2011) also noted that mature (postgraduate) teaching students in their study managed the academic demands of courses but many found school experiences challenging. Universities may put too much emphasis on the academic skill demands of universities when resourcing student support, when perhaps other elements may need more attention for some students (Benson et al., 2012). It is worth noting that learning styles are

fairly stable and not easily changed (Vermunt, 1998), which could prove an issue for some mature students. Rosie struggled with academic readings and writing, but could conceivably have completed all components of her teaching degree eventually, had health and personal choices (linked at least in part to dispositions born of her habitus) not combined to alter her pathway.

5.9 Conclusion

The stories of mature students told in this chapter hint at the diversity of situations and considerations which can challenge such students. There are issues for these students which are not applicable to school-leavers. With their school years a distant memory, and constrained by mortgages, childcare and a variety of other considerations, it is remarkable that these three have been successful to the extent they have, and no little wonder that at times the struggle seemed less than worthwhile.

The 'dream' of university alluded to by these students was quickly subsumed by reality, and while this reality may have been disappointing in (mostly) minor ways, for the most part these mature students grasped the challenges and forged ahead. Despite their original working class habituses, all brought with them enough resilience and capital, mostly aspirational (Yosso, 2005) and experiential (O'Shea, 2016b), to continue through levels of discomfort and difficulty. David continued studying for three semesters after his first traumatic experience, and only after failing the professional experience twice did he leave university. Rosie struggled through two difficult and disappointing professional experiences, compounded by serious health issues and left with a degree, while Ellie reached her original goal, in minimum time. The students utilised varying levels of familial support and developed social and other capitals in order to progress in a field (Pitman, 2013) which was from the outset foreign to them. Ellie, David and Rosie ended their journeys in different places, but all found that they could succeed academically and were no doubt changed in some way.

'Class is always mediated by ethnicity, marital status, and gender' (Reay et al., 2002, p. 17), and there is evidence of this in the mature students' stories presented here. Likewise, Reay (1995) stated that with regard to habitus there is 'a "messiness" about the concept that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world' (p. 357). Due to this messiness it is not easy, perhaps not even possible, to reconcile the different outcomes of the three mature HE student narratives presented in this chapter, or indeed others presented in this thesis. As Probyn (2004), referring to work by Bourdieu (1990b) and Mauss (1979), states,

'our bodies and their everyday biographies may be more complicated than we've given them credit for' (p. 345). There may be no simple way for the field of HE to cater for the individual circumstances brought about by such messiness. It does appear, however, that some of the challenges met by these mature students (and no doubt many others like them) could be mediated by approaches and processes in the field. Mature students are an important part of the widening participation agenda. Despite this, there seem to be few services or considerations made for this demographic group (Stone, 2008). HE remains, in the imaginary of the field, the domain of the school leaver.

The following chapter takes a similar format to this one. It presents and analyses the narratives of students who had a gap of between one and five years between high school and university. Individual stories are considered and then compared with others in the group.

Chapter 6

Delayed Starters

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the HE experiences of three FiF non-school leavers, and briefly looks at a fourth. Lacey, Simone, Jessica and Anna were considerably younger than the mature age students included in the previous chapter. Aged 19, 20 and 24 when they began their studies, they had delayed enrolment by a year or more for a variety of reasons. As noted in the previous chapter, 23 years of age is considered by some as the age above which students are designated to be mature age (Andreou et al., 2006). According to that measure, one student in this chapter is mature age, that being Jessica. The measure is, however, arbitrary (Rubin, Scevak et al., 2016), and so I have included this 24 year old student in a group which lies in between school leavers and the clearly mature age students of the previous chapter. As in the previous chapter I will present each story with analysis in turn before discussing similarities and differences among their experiences. Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital and field have been employed to analyse factors affecting the students' journeys. In this chapter the role of capital is of particular interest.

Again, there are striking similarities, intriguing twists and differing outcomes among the narratives. The students entered university via different pathways. All relocated various distances in the year/s between school and study, and all enrolled at Central campus. Lacey, Simone and Jessica were single or partnered, all without children. Their journeys included challenges, strategic decisions and practices as well as fortunate and unfortunate circumstances related to their studies and life in general as they managed and developed cultural, economic and social capital in progressing towards their goals. These narratives demonstrate how differing types of capital can influence non-traditional student experiences.

6.2 Lacey's story

The journey to university

Lacey grew up in a coastal town. Both parents had left school after Year 10 to undertake apprenticeships, and neither of her older siblings attended university. Her

father was a machinery operator with his own business, and her mother worked in an office. Lacey's family was somewhat supportive of her decision to enrol at university, but didn't believe you needed a university degree to be successful. She had a cousin who completed a degree and benefitted from it. Lacey's ambition was to study speech pathology in Sydney, thinking that was where to go to become the best professional, but illness and stress during her final school year affected her grades, and Sydney was no longer an option. Lacey did not receive an offer in speech pathology, but was accepted into a primary teaching degree. She could have enrolled in that degree at her local campus, but decided to move to Central campus which was 'closer to home' than Sydney, as she would have the option there of transferring into her preferred speech pathology degree down the line. Lacey saw university as a way to better herself and gain recognition from family and friends: 'You further yourself, getting a better degree and also just being recognised by family and friends I reckon as well.'

Because her parents owned a business, Lacey was not immediately eligible for financial support from the government during her studies. To counteract this, she deferred enrolment for a year, and undertook paid employment of 30 hours over 6 days per week in office and retail work. As well as saving money this proved her independence so she could qualify for Independent Youth Allowance when she began study the following year. She moved to on-campus accommodation. To supplement her government allowance she worked in retail for around 12 hours per week while studying full time.

Lacey was driven by her desire to help children: 'I've always wanted to be a teacher or do something that helps younger kids'. She also wanted to learn, but felt she would need to improve her study habits to succeed at university. She expected to struggle with some subjects such as maths, but looked forward to meeting new people and learning about teaching.

First year

Lacey found the hardest thing was finding her way around campus. She felt more comfortable than she'd expected, because she knew a lot of people from her home town. She was aware of some of the services available, like counselling and library workshops, and was keen to learn about the library which was 'so different to back home ... Coming here it's been a big shock – you've got to put in more work than you

do at school'. She found one course 'a bit confusing', enjoyed others, and, waiting on her first assignment results didn't 'know if I'm doing it right or if I'm doing it wrong'. University was different from Lacey's expectations but she had 'kind of learnt how it works ... you've got to do your own work, you've got to make sure you turn up to tutorials'.

First year went 'pretty well'. Having decided to try for a transfer into her preferred speech pathology degree, Lacey dropped a subject in second semester. She was finding it 'a bit challenging', and 'it wasn't going to count towards anything' in her new degree, but might lower her Grade Point Average and therefore her chance of receiving the transfer. She attended all lectures and tutorials in first semester, as well as completing all set readings. She also attended some workshops on exam techniques and essay writing. In second semester Lacey's father was ill, so she 'had to go home a fair bit'. She attended fewer lectures, and didn't complete any readings. She also stopped her retail work. Relationships with friends changed during the year too. The friends she had moved here with originally had 'all kind of gone our separate ways', but she'd made new friends. She felt this was part of 'growing up, you know, figuring out who people are'. She felt life was 'not about hanging out with your friends any more', and she planned to focus on working hard for a degree that would be better for her. Some non-university friends complained that she was 'doing another assignment' when she could be earning money.

I lost contact with Lacey after first year. She did not respond to emails at the end of second or third years, so I was pleasantly surprised when she did respond to my final request at the end of the fourth year. She was apologetic, and happy to participate in a final interview. The reason for the gap in responses soon became apparent. Due to this gap, I have less detail on the intervening years.

Second year

Lacey was successful in her bid to change programs. She found the new degree much harder. It was organised differently, it 'just felt very proper' and there were no males in the course. Having grown up surrounded by boys, she 'didn't really like the feel of it', and because of this she didn't attend many tutorials in second year. She later made friends she could go to class, discuss assignments and 'joke around with'. She took on a paid role as Residential Assistant (RA) in campus accommodation,

and 'just put too much effort into that', which she blamed for failing a subject that year 'which kind of sucked'.

Lacey's on-campus accommodation was shared with her boyfriend, his younger brother and another girl, plus two more roommates she rarely saw. Lacey felt 'really lucky that I got placed with all of them and we suffer through it together ... If I'm stressed out they'll kind of sit down and we'll do study sessions and things like that' despite them being enrolled in different degrees.

Third year

In her third year at University, Lacey attended most lectures and tutorials, and continued her RA work. She also completed her first clinical placement which she found 'really stressful'. The clinical educator she was placed with was 'very tough', but in hindsight Lacey saw the benefit in this. Both Lacey's parents were ill, and Lacey needed to provide care for her mother, as her father was too unwell to do so. She dropped a course that semester. At the end of that year she dropped the RA role, as the pay was halving and because of her parents' illnesses. Most of her Youth Allowance was spent on rent, but she had 'saved up from working last year so a lot of that's been going towards food and stuff'.

Fourth year

Fourth year brought more challenges. Lacey's mother required more surgery, with Lacey caring for her, and her father passed away halfway through first semester. Lacey's own health was poor during this time, and weeks after her father's death she was diagnosed with both Glandular and Ross River Fever. She cut back to one subject, and listened to most lectures online. Lacey had not accessed any of the University's support services through all this. She was soon to use the Counselling Service though, on the recommendation of her doctor, who felt she was 'so sick that it might be a bit of depression'. Some academic staff were very helpful, with one advising her how to apply for reimbursement of fees due to her circumstances, but one was annoyed when Lacey applied for extensions, saying 'we've got to 'meet deadlines'. Lacey felt she was 'just scraping by' in her studies but hoped to be 'a lot better' once she had more energy.

Interruptions to study due to Lacey's illnesses and those of her parents meant that she had another year of study to go when I spoke to her at the end of my four year study. Asked

about support for non-traditional students at university, she felt there were lots of support programs for them and they just needed to try their best: 'It doesn't matter if your parents went to uni or not' and there wasn't 'any special treatment they should get'. Lacey felt that living on campus had been an advantage as 'you meet so many more people'. All the students in her unit supported each other, despite being enrolled in different programs. She had met students enrolled in Occupational Therapy and Psychology degrees, and felt 'it's probably going to benefit me in the long run, knowing people like that'.

6.3 Analysing Lacey's Story

Lacey was a FiF university student from a regional area. Neither of Lacey's parents had completed high school, and no sibling had attended university, so HE was not a familiar field to the immediate family. Lacey's economic situation (and that of her family) made university study a challenge, as is often the case for non-traditional students (Reay, Ball & David, 2005). She found ways around this by taking a working gap year so she could save some money and qualify for government support, and also worked part time during her studies. When she had to give up her paid employment for health and family reasons, she was able to rely on savings for a period of time. Despite this Lacey did not find her financial situation to be of great concern – she just did what she needed to do to manage it. She could have enrolled in the teaching degree locally, living at home to ease the financial pressure, a choice often made by non-traditional students (Reay, Ball & David, 2005), but she was focussed on her preferred long-term goal of a degree in speech pathology. The illnesses Lacey's family suffered were not related to their economic status, but students from families with more economic capital might be less disadvantaged (Reay, 2003) by illnesses and the like, through being able to afford paid help (rather than Lacey being relied on, as was the case here). Alternately it would be less financial hardship for students from more wealthy families to pay for courses they could not complete due to illness, or to pay for accommodation for another year while extending their studies.

Before beginning university, Lacey knew a cousin who had benefitted from completing a degree, and who could provide some 'hot knowledge' (Smith, 2011). Lacey began university with some social capital – she knew lots of people from her home town who were studying at the same campus. She was able to adapt here too, though. She had a falling-out with her original group of friends from her home town who were also studying, and saw this as a natural, positive development. This may be a case of Lacey experiencing

a shift in her identity (Reay, 1997) or developing what some researchers have termed hybridity (Lucey, Melody & Walkerdine, 2003) as she moved from working-class background to HE. Lacey found new friends when she changed degrees, who could support her with her studies. The only student in this study who lived on campus, Lacey found this arrangement provided social capital (she wouldn't have met so many people otherwise), an idea supported by Rubin and Wright (2015). Lacey recognised that she could also bank social capital for the future by developing networks with future professionals in related fields.

Since illness probably prevented Lacey from obtaining an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) higher than she did attain, she had relatively high prior academic achievement for students reported in this study. This ATAR of 69.75 made her easily eligible for the primary teaching program at Regional University, but not for her preferred degree in speech pathology. Through her comments about aiming for a degree from a Sydney university, Lacey demonstrates an awareness of the 'market in academic qualifications' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 142), an unusual attribute in a non-traditional student (Reay, 1998b, 2002). Unfortunately Lacey's high school results did not allow her to secure this advantage, and even if they had, it may have been financially unviable. Such knowledge about the HE market is usually attributable to parental knowledge of HE (Reay, 1998b), but this was not the case for Lacey. Reay suggested that 'social networks and less tangible factors such as confidence, certainty and a sense of entitlement' (1998b, p. 522) could also contribute, but again, these were not part of Lacey's working-class habitus. Rather, she exhibited strategisation. Being unable to enrol at a prestigious Sydney university, Lacey accepted a position in teaching at Regional University's Central campus, then applied for a transfer, dropping a subject along the way that may have lowered her GPA and therefore chances of the transfer being approved. Being able to negotiate HE in this way is unusual in a non-traditional student (Reay 1998b), and demonstrates what Appadurai (2004) termed navigational capacity which is more often demonstrated by those from more privileged backgrounds, which have greater cultural capital (Gale & Parker, 2015). The term 'navigational capital', coined by Yosso (2005, p. 80) to denote skills of non-white students in 'manoeuvring' through institutions created without consideration of non-whites, also has resonance here. It requires individual agency, which Lacey demonstrated often during her journey.

By negotiating this pathway, Lacey built her cultural capital. She also maximised this by attending all classes (except when impacted by her parents' and later her own illnesses) and taking advantage of additional academic skill workshops. This attribute of self-regulation in learning is often present from an individual's childhood (Vermunt, 1998). Lacey

was aware that at university she would need to be 'self-disciplined and self-regulating' (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p. 149), and adapted to this style. In many ways, then, Lacey was more aware of the rules of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) than many other non-traditional students. The working-class attitude of being able to get ahead by working hard benefitted Lacey. She demonstrated traits of motivation, determination and perseverance as seen in other studies of FiF students (Benson et al., 2012; Devlin & O'Shea, 2011). Lacey did not complain about any of her challenges, whether related to her parents' inability to finance her studies, the government's criteria for financial support, illness lowering her ATAR from what she anticipated, time lost to her studies due to her parents' illnesses or lack of flexibility on the part of the university. She simply got on with it. This attitude is often demonstrated by mature female students (Reay, 2003) who 'largely attributed success or failure ... to the self and also took responsibility for various elements of their own and their family's life' (O'Shea, 2014, p. 153). In this way Lacey demonstrated a maturity beyond her age.

The illnesses suffered by Lacey's parents during her years at university, and her own health issues in later years added another level of difficulty to Lacey's progress. In fourth year her father succumbed to his illness, so there was also a funeral back home and grief to deal with. As well as needing extensions for assignments, her progress was delayed, and there was little support available to make any of this easier. Benson et al. (2012) noted that while more traditional students may also experience difficult situations, non-traditional students (such as Lacey) are less likely to 'have access to physical and emotional resources to assist them to cope with' these (p. 24). Regardless, Lacey continued on, making adjustments as necessary, and did not falter from her chosen path. Her successful journey seems quite remarkable.

6.4 Simone's Story

The journey to university

Simone was born in New Zealand, but her mother moved to Australia with her second husband and younger children when Simone was in high school. Neither parent had attended university, though Simone's mother had begun some studies before Simone's birth and had always pushed Simone to 'do higher things'. Simone's final high school years were spent living with her father. She missed a lot of days at school and received disappointing results. Having worked part-time at a fast-food franchise

while at school, she took a full-time position there afterwards, with duties including training and managing other staff. During that year Simone considered her future options, including further studies. She missed her mother and siblings, so moved to Australia to live with them. Here she again worked as a manager in the fast-food chain, and thought about what she really wanted to do. Knowing that she loved children, teaching people and having different experiences every day, she 'put them all together' and considered a course in childcare. Simone completed a Special Tertiary Admissions Test, attained an ATAR equivalent in the low 60s, listed teaching programs in her preferences and was accepted into the primary teaching program.

Simone had chosen to attend the 'closest' university, but it was still an hour away from her family home. A non-Australian citizen, Simone had to pay her university fees 'up front', hence she needed to work considerable hours each week in order to pay for her studies. She continued with part-time work at a fast-food franchise and obtained an additional part-time job in retail. While studying full-time Simone worked an average of 30 hours per week. She hoped university would improve her life and provide her with a secure, well-paid job that she would enjoy, rather than a job that 'anyone else could have gotten'. She worried about affordability, time management and assessment. Overall she found the idea of coming to university initially to be 'terrifying'. She wanted to prove she could do well, knew she needed to develop better study habits and was open to seeking help. Skills from her employment would benefit her: 'I don't like giving up'.

First year

Starting university was like 'moving to a new country all over again'. Simone didn't know anyone and found it 'very hard ... fitting in around here'. She had 'a full plate' and struggled with many aspects of university. She had to 'figure everything out' for herself and didn't know where to start. Leaving campus one night in the dark she got lost trying to find her car. There were bats flying overhead and it was 'overwhelming'. The sheer number of people on campus was also a shock. Lacking confidence in talking to others or expressing an opinion, Simone 'just wanted to hide'. The 'first month was the scariest' though, and things improved after a few weeks. Simone compressed her class timetable into two days. The days were long and tiring, and she did not get home until 8 pm some days, but even in the early weeks she was 'doing better than I thought I would do'.

Overall Simone enjoyed first year though there were some stressful moments, mainly to do with dysfunctional group work with people she didn't know. Simone's coping strategy was to just get on with it and do the work. She attended all tutorials, watched lectures online if they clashed with work or tutorials, and started assignments well ahead of the due dates. Her home situation was noisy, with siblings pestering her. Simone would sometimes stay late on campus to study, and sometimes go to her aunt's house. Her aunt had been a primary teacher, so that was useful, but it also was not always a quiet place. Simone found that assignments took quite a bit of time, but had not needed to stay up all night as she had heard others discuss. Assignments were also more fun than Simone had expected. After struggling through first semester she really enjoyed second semester. She knew her way around, felt she fitted in, and had made some friends with whom she found it useful to discuss assignments. She found one subject quite difficult, but her mother helped by 'testing' her on the content, and she did quite well. Overall Simone was happy with her first year results which included three Distinctions.

Second year

Second year was hectic for Simone, due to 'a combination of everything'. She compressed her classes into one or two days per week so that she could continue to work almost full time. This often meant watching lectures online, though she admitted 'I get distracted easily from the environment I'm in', and preferred to attend when possible. She had to pay her full university fees in advance, save to cover the weeks of Professional Experience when she wouldn't be able to work as much, and also save to attend a friend's wedding overseas. Some weeks she had 46 hours of paid employment. Second year courses were 'harder' and 'not as interesting', and she contemplated what it would be like 'not having a degree'. Simone persevered so that she could complete her first Professional Experience and make sure of what she wanted to do. Adding four weeks of Professional Experience into the middle of second year increased her fatigue. As well as being in school all day from Monday to Friday on Professional Experience, she spent nights preparing for the following day, and worked all weekend, but she 'loved it' and this motivated her to continue. She would have liked to return to the school to volunteer but paid work made this impossible.

Simone's biggest challenge was at home. A sibling developed a mental illness which led to violent outbursts and even police intervention. University had to 'take a back

foot in a lot of cases' and her grades suffered at times. One manifestation of the illness meant that Simone did not have internet access at home, making it difficult for her to complete her study since 'everything to do with university is on the internet'. As a result Simone began spending more time at her boyfriend's house. An added benefit of this was that he would help by reading her notes to her or finding information on the Internet.

Third year

Third year was no less challenging than second year. Simone changed jobs during third year so that she only had one job, and worked fewer days per week, but longer shifts. Overall she maintained the same number of hours and therefore pay, but felt like she had more days for study. She 'became I think really unhappy with my job and I was a lot more stressed working nights and days and the hours were messing up my body clock as well so then it was making it harder to focus sometimes during the day.' Due to her sister's ongoing issues, she also moved in with her boyfriend during the year. 'For my own sake I moved in with my partner so I had less stress there'. In both cases these were deliberate attempts to reduce Simone's stress.

Group assignments were difficult for Simone due to the distance she lived from campus and the number of hours she worked. It was hard to schedule meetings with fellow students. Simone felt 'a bit more isolated' at university towards the end of second year, as although she had made two friends in first year, she no longer shared any classes with them. They would, however, text each other late at night when working on assignments. Simone accessed the university's counselling service to help in dealing with her sibling's situation, and this helped her gain approval for special consideration if she couldn't submit an assignment on time or go out of area as was expected for the third year Professional Experience. She was upset to find out, after arriving for an appointment, that her counsellor had left the unit, and she had not been informed. It was a long year, with four weeks of Professional Experience at the end of second semester. Simone's fatigue possibly contributed to some minor illnesses and two car accidents during her study. On a positive note, she became engaged during third year.

Fourth year

By fourth year Simone was used to coping with full time studies and work, but there remained a few more challenges in store for her in this final year. As she described

it, 'Every year had its madness, and this year probably topped it!' Academically, Simone found the year no more difficult than those before, and she felt quite comfortable: 'probably knowing it's your last year helps!' She and her fiancé bought a house, began renovations, and started planning for their wedding. They took an overseas trip during the mid-semester break in April, and shortly after their return, her fiancé was diagnosed with a serious, chronic health condition requiring initial hospitalisation and permanent lifestyle changes. Still dealing with this, her fiancé was made redundant, they adopted a puppy, then her partner started a new job, and Simone began her final 10 week Internship. Simone's internship went well, and she 'really enjoyed it' despite being 'just shattered' from the exhaustion of teaching every day, planning at night then working weekends. Having to drop her weekday shifts, the reduction in pay made finances tight. Having seen her fiancé unemployed twice during her studies, Simone was keen to maintain her retail job even towards the end of the year when, having completed all her courses, she was obtaining almost full-time work as a casual teacher. Her retail work would also cover her financially over the summer school holidays and into the New Year as she didn't know how much work she would get then. She hoped to be able to afford a 'big honeymoon' in Europe.

Simone now said she 'would never consider not going to uni', and she promoted it to schoolgirls she worked with in retail, telling them that 'even if you don't get enough grades it's worth pushing to try to come in' to university. The key to success she felt was to 'want it enough', 'work hard enough' and be 'willing to fight for it'. Simone felt that in comparison to their friends, none of whom had been to university, she and her fiancé 'were going to be a lot better off in future' as they were 'not going to be working in retail'. Having her degree would 'create a lifestyle', where she could work two days per week after having children and still make the equivalent of a full-time retail wage. In fact Simone anticipated that for the foreseeable future they would live on her fiancé's wage and her retail pay, and any money from teaching would go into 'savings'.

Though she initially enrolled in teaching because she 'wanted to do something different ... was bored' with what she was doing and 'loved kids', Simone's love for learning had been truly ignited and she was considering enrolling in a Master's Degree 'in a couple of years'.

6.5 Analysing Simone's Story

Simone realised she needed to make an effort (what seemed a supreme effort at times) to succeed at university, and she was not averse to seeking help if needed. These may initially appear to be indications of a transformative *habitus*. There is, however, an alternate explanation. The willingness to struggle, or acceptance of struggle as the norm may in fact be a manifestation of her working class *habitus*. Other studies have similarly reported the success of determined, resilient students from non-traditional backgrounds (Benson, et al., 2012; Reay, et al., 2009). Simone was 'willing to fight for it' and did 'work hard enough' to overcome the difficulties she faced. Through these comments it appears that Simone (possibly like other non-traditional students) has accepted the neoliberal view that it is the individual who is entirely responsible for their success or failure (Southgate & Bennett, 2016). She did not expect the experience to be without challenge, and she just kept going when difficulties did arise. Simone attended classes, completed most readings and worked hard. She was skilled at finding ways to make her situation work despite the difficulties, and did indeed 'just get on with it'. Although Simone had worked in a management and training position, she initially lacked confidence talking to peers at university, indicating a clash of *habitus* and *field*. Simone felt, as did Rosie and Reay et al.'s (2009) working class students, 'a fish out of water', though this manifested differently for her than it did for some others in this study.

Interestingly, despite stating a need to prove she could succeed at university, it was not the academic rigour which Simone struggled with. Rather, it was dealing with the unfamiliar environment and the constraints of other aspects of her life regarding finances and personal situations which made her journey so difficult. Perhaps she experienced the same academic challenges as other non-traditional students but they did not seem as significant due to the severity of her other challenges. Even so, Simone's financial and familial problems cannot be simply ascribed to her working class *habitus*. Any student may find themselves struggling to maintain focus on their studies if dealing with mental and physical illnesses of loved ones. As with Lacey, Simone managed these difficult situations, in her case without prolonging her studies, despite the seemingly limited resources her non-traditional background provided (Benson et al., 2012). Students from a higher SES background may have chosen to drop some subjects and extend their studies in that case, relying on family financial support for longer. Reay (2003), writing about student mothers, noted that economic capital can be used to lessen the load on individuals, and this applies

to students from other non-traditional backgrounds too. Not having that option, Simone chose to push through because she wanted to get into the workforce sooner in order to lead a 'normal' life. She even took the step of removing herself from the family home, moving in with her partner when her sibling's illness became too distracting, in order to protect her progress as a student. Simone's financial situation was also more difficult than for many non-traditional students who might be from low SES backgrounds (such as Lacey) because her status as a non-citizen made the few usual avenues of financial support aimed at helping those students unavailable. This was not a direct result of *habitus* but compounded the difficulty created by mismatch with the field. These considerations serve to make Simone's success more impressive.

Despite having recently moved to Australia from NZ, and being first in her immediate family to attend university, Simone was able to activate useful social capital from a limited circle. Her mother and partner provided support by just sitting with her while she studied; her mother would further assist by testing Simone on concepts, and her partner would search the Internet for her. In the first year or so Simone's aunt (who did have teaching qualifications) would read over Simone's assignments to help with editing and suggestions. Towards the end of her degree, Simone's father paid course fees so she could complete a Trimester course which she could not otherwise afford. Perceived family support has been found to facilitate the success of HE students entering via diverse pathways (Benson et al., 2010) and may be more important for female than male students (Cheng et al., 2012).

Simone's narrative began as one of 'stranger in a foreign land' but evolved to a triumphant 'you can get anywhere with hard work'. Her achievements seem quite miraculous given her circumstances. She completed her degree in the shortest possible time, did not fail a single course, and managed all this while working full time and dealing with challenging family and personal situations. And amidst all that she found a partner, bought a house and had an overseas holiday. Despite this undeniable success in the field of HE and her personal life, Simone demonstrated the enduring influence of her non-traditional *habitus*. Simone's stated HE goal of obtaining 'secure, well-paid job' that she would enjoy is reflective of her working class *habitus*. Even as she described her improved financial and lifestyle future, her comparisons were to her original *habitus*: the standard against which she compared herself was to the friends she had made, not at university, but from the local area, none of whom had attended university. This seeming lack of transformation (at least in some ways) may be a result of the way Simone, as a non-traditional student, experienced HE. Finances meant that Simone spent more time in her home and work SES context than in the environs of HE. Influences from the one or two

days per week (during only 26 weeks per year) which she spent on campus did not override the five days per week she spent in her local environs working in retail and fast-food industries. Simone was unable to immerse in a university culture where students discuss ideas over coffee or in the library. She had little time (or probably energy) outside her work and study commitments to engage in other cultural activities associated with the university experience of traditional students, especially those in elite institutions (Crozier et al., 2008). While Central campus provided limited access to cultural activities (compared to the communities in which elite institutions are situated), the area where Simone lived and worked was even more disadvantaged. Even though one of the electives Simone selected was in the discipline of philosophy, she completed this course online, again preventing discussion with peers. As a result Simone's horizons appear to have been broadened by university study in a somewhat limited capacity.

Simone's time-restricted on-campus experience did not allow her to make friends with a variety of people from different backgrounds or even to imagine those backgrounds. They did not feature in her narrative in any way. The two friends she made at university were likely from a similar background to Simone, as they too worked long hours and completed their assignments late at night. This is another example of Ball's (2003, p. 83) 'low volume social capital' discussed in the previous chapter regarding mature students. Although Simone as a non-traditional student was able to access the field of HE and succeed in it, the field managed to reinforce disadvantage from her non-traditional habitus through the limitations of her experience as determined by financial constraints. As noted by Crozier et al. (2008), 'structural differences interweave with the middle class students' capitals to perpetuate privilege and advantage them further' (p. 175). Simone was not of the middle class and did not experience HE in the way that traditional students do, and her HE experience is therefore less likely to prove transformative in the fullest sense.

Despite Simone's incontrovertible success in HE, there was no evidence of a 'capacity for improvisation' which might 'tend to generate opportunities for action' (Mills, 2008, p. 108) and would suggest a transformative habitus. Rather, Simone exhibited through her determined efforts strategic ways of managing 'the constraint of social conditions' (Mills, 2008, p. 108) she faced. This does not make her journey any less remarkable than Lacey's, and it does demonstrate an ability to use the capital she did possess to work for her in the alien field of HE.

6.6 Jessica's story

The journey to university

Jessica grew up in regional Victoria. Neither parent had any education past high school. At school Jessica had 'always been an average student and not really that good at literacy but I always went under the radar'. Early in Year 12, Jessica thought 'This isn't for me. I can't do this anymore'. She was working hard but could not keep up, so she took 'a huge step' and left school. Jessica worked in retail before deciding to pursue a career in fitness. She completed Year 12 at TAFE, then worked overseas as a camp counsellor for a year. She enjoyed that, and on returning enrolled in an Outdoor Instructor TAFE course. Jessica's partner could not find a job so joined the Defence Force, which entailed relocating. Unable to continue her studies where they relocated, Jessica worked at a fast food franchise and taught swimming. Reflecting on her interests and jobs, she realised she enjoyed teaching children. For a year and a half, waiting for her partner's next move, all Jessica 'thought about was being a school teacher and going to uni.'

As soon as Jessica's partner was posted to a city with a university she applied and was accepted. She chose Primary teaching because 'primary kids are fun' and she was 'not smart enough to teach a secondary child'. Although her father had no formal education past Year 9, Jessica saw him as someone who was always learning and trying new things. Considered a low achiever at school, he received little attention, but had since taught himself many skills, and this inspired her. Jessica's parents had instilled in her the confidence to enrol in university through their focus on effort and a belief that 'we can do anything we want as long as we try'. They were proud of her university enrolment.

First year

Jessica attended 'all the bridging courses – very overwhelming' (about academic and computer skills and university lifestyle) before semester began. They were 'overwhelming' – there was 'so much to learn'. If she needed help at university, Jessica felt there was always someone willing to help, and she knew of several support services. She felt the counsellors might be useful if she became too stressed, as had happened in the past. Having moved a few times, Jessica was used to making new social connections but was shy and found it a slow process – 'you can't just walk

in and expect everyone to love you'. The hardest thing was her procrastination which created stress. Writing her first essay in years was 'tricky', but her tutor provided helpful tips on writing more formally. Jessica struggled with motivation in the first months of university, and felt that 'I don't think I have any skills' that were of benefit. She felt her literacy and numeracy skills needed improving as they had been weaknesses at school where she 'always went under the radar'. At university she found new interests and enjoyed putting her mind to something and achieving it.

In the early weeks of first year Jessica felt good about herself as a teacher education student. Jessica had already gotten 'a little bit slack' with completing readings. She found attending lectures a challenge – especially those lasting two hours. She found it better to watch them online at home so she could pause them to write notes and replay parts for clarification. She didn't always watch lectures though, but she attended all tutorials. She enjoyed the social aspects of university, though living a distance from campus she didn't know people well and wasn't involved in night life. 'I've moved so many times and I live far away as well, I'm quite isolated.' It was difficult to make friends in the large cohort as she rarely saw the same students in more than one class, and each class only lasted a semester. She enjoyed a night out the cohort had at the end of Year 1.

In first semester Jessica accessed Learning Support quite a bit for help with time management, note-taking, referencing and exam preparation. She attended PASS classes, which were particularly useful, but not provided for all courses. Tutors were available for the maths course but Jessica's partner could help her with that as he was 'a maths genius' and she felt he could explain things to her best because he understood her. In second semester she was 'quite lazy' and found she could pass the subjects 'with less effort' than in first semester. Jessica had worked out that she could 'learn the best learnt best just by talking', so talked about topics for hours before exams rather than making study notes. Jessica found other students could be both a help and a hindrance to her progress. When some students would say they hadn't started an assignment yet, she would be less worried about starting it. As she moved through first year she started spending more time with students 'who are really working really hard to get good marks and the attitude is rubbing off on me a little bit.' Teaching staff could be helpful or not depending on their approach. One was 'happy to spend sit down and talk to you about your assignment, how to do better.' Another would give multiple instructions then set the students to work leaving them confused.

Jessica felt students were treated as though they should know what to do, and were not encouraged to ask questions. Jessica found the institution as a whole and its processes fairly self-explanatory. She felt there was always someone there to help you, and email reminders 'telling you what's going on'. Friends were not a distraction from Jessica's studies. New to the area, she socialised with her partner's friends, but he kept them away if she was studying. Her family was interstate, and she phoned them if she wanted to 'whinge'. Her part time work was enough to get her 'out of the house' without affecting her studies. Jessica felt that no matter how hard university became, at her age she would not drop out. She was dedicated, had experienced life after school, and felt the need to achieve in order to be happy.

Jessica felt first year went 'really well'. She received good marks, passing everything. She had learnt more about herself, including that she was capable but also a 'little but lazy'. She felt like she fitted in, rather than feeling 'strange or alienated', and had made, if not friends, acquaintances she could 'say hi' to on campus. University was much as she had expected. She felt confident looking forward to second year.

Second year

Jessica found second year 'pretty stressful, a bit of an adjustment'. The predominant learning style, incorporating readings, lectures and writing, didn't suit her as she preferred to be hands-on. She was 'really struggling' and felt that perhaps she had coped with first year on adrenaline, but the excitement had worn off; 'the novelty's gone'. She loved her first professional experience though, which reminded her that she wanted to continue. In second year Jessica stopped attending lectures in all courses except one, where the lecturer was very high energy. She found face to face lectures stressful, trying to take notes while the lecturer moved on. She was happy that she 'could still pass with less effort' but realised it might not be a good thing. She watched most lectures in other courses except one, where she watched none. She would 'binge watch them' coming up to exams and 'breeze through' if she felt the information wasn't important for assignments. She attended tutorials if there was an attendance requirement, but otherwise thought she could use the time more effectively by studying. She began well with readings, then slackened off and did not complete any towards the end. In first year Jessica worked on each assignment over a couple of weeks, but with distractions and motivational problems in second year, found herself completing them at the last minute, and stressing because of it. Jessica felt she wasn't applying herself well but the work 'wasn't that hard' once she started.

Overall she devoted less time than she'd expected to for university, but felt that was a life pattern for her, 'doing the bare minimum' and achieving accordingly. She was not living up to her own expectations and wanted 'to be able to be the best I can be'. One motivation was to not disappoint her partner, plus she wanted to be a good teacher for her future children. She felt she was more likely to exert herself to help others than for self-improvement: she wrote 15 pages of exam notes to give friends who had helped her previously. She wanted to be proud and a goal for third year was to do the best she could. She hoped to put in 'a lot more effort and to get better marks'.

Jessica went to some PASS⁵ sessions in second year, then dropped them even though they were helpful. Friends at university were a positive support; completing group tasks, talking about assignments and being able to unwind were all useful. She realised now that fewer people had known each other in first year than she thought, and group work was a 'really, really good way to make friends', and that was 'where all my friends have come from'. This year she did not see some friends made in first year except for passing them in the hall, but she had met other students. Typical social events didn't work for her due to living 40 minutes from campus. Resources at university such as internet and short loans were good and easy to find. In second year Jessica organised her timetable into two days. She found it easier to 'get it all done' and try to get a day off. It also saved substantial money on fuel.

Second year had further challenges. Jessica was affected by traumatic personal situations of friends and family back home. This took a great deal of her time and energy for a few weeks, but she could not visit for months due to university commitments. Jessica's relationship became 'a little rocky' during the months when she was under stress. Seeing loved ones suffer made her lose some sense of purpose, and it was hard to apply herself. During this time she asked for extensions on assignments and used the counselling service. Support through that service obtained a refund on a course Jessica dropped. Still, Jessica felt that with two years left to go, she would 'put my head down and go through it'. She now felt 'pretty comfortable' at university. Jessica took on five subjects in Semester 2, and hoped to pass them all (she had some assignments outstanding when we spoke and this hope

⁵ Peer Assisted Student Support sessions are run by students who have successfully completed the course previously. They are additional, non-compulsory study sessions.

did not come to fruition), along with her three Semester 1 courses. She looked forward to re-gathering over the summer break.

Third year

Third year was not Jessica's 'best year'. Enrolled in eight courses, she passed three, though 'it could have been a lot worse'. Her difficulties were 'intrinsic'. She had 'really bad anxiety which led to depression', becoming a 'vicious, vicious cycle'. Jessica passed her practicum because 'the motivation behind it was greater' and she 'enjoyed that ... it reminds you why you want to be a teacher'. In other courses her performance was based on what she was 'willing to put effort into'. She had started struggling with the study load 'pretty much straight away', due to 'residual stuff' with from the previous year. Still, she remained enrolled full time. Jessica felt that apart from the situations in her personal life that had affected her, her 'intelligence is different to the intelligence that Uni wants' and this fuelled her anxiety. She found researching to write essays quite hard. 'I'm not that kind of person'. Despite this she felt that the university provided 'lots of support'. Jessica's attendance 'increased in some ways but declined in other ways'. She went to all the lectures for two courses, but otherwise 'just took to reading the lecture slides' or watched any she 'needed to finish assignments'. She 'reserved a lot of time for assignments but then it was just filled with anxiety attacks'. She felt more anxious hearing other students say they had completed an assignment in four hours when she had already spent six and still was not finished.

Jessica 'went to everyone' for support in third year: the program officer, 'doctors, the counselling service and then to the psychologist', and 'lecturers, all the lecturers knew my name'. Jessica asked for extensions, but the anxiety cycle continued, so some still didn't get done. She 'never really asked for academic help because I feel like that reflects upon me badly'. People she did approach were 'nicer than I thought they would be'. Some staff 'just kind of brushed it under the rug a little bit and give you an extension', when it might have been better to 'sit down and go through it with me and make it into bite size chunks'. In fact this help was available but Jessica was 'not aware unless someone tells me'. Help was 'really hard to – if you don't know what you're looking for - to find something'. One tutor gave contradictory and confusing information - 'I'm sorry if I've said the wrong thing' -, but others were 'amazing'.

Jessica returned to her home town to complete practicum, and loved both professional experience and being at home. Her mother now kept most family issues away from Jessica to avoid stressing her. Jessica's partner's expectations of her for university increased her stress and the relationship broke down. Jessica felt she had learnt a lot from her experiences in third year and was 'really excited' to enter fourth year. Jessica had been scared to talk about her issues with university friends as they would 'think I'm a failure', but they were 'really supportive' and helped her map out a plan that she could complete in 'bite size chunks'. She now felt 'quite confident and quite strong and that I can do it'.

Fourth year

Jessica described fourth year at university as 'better than' third year but 'still not as good as first and second year'. Improvements related to living arrangements and her 'ability to see what was wrong with' her 'and how to change it' and her reactions 'when it comes to uni and what's the best things to do for uni'. She now received government financial assistance, still worked part-time, and was annoyed to find she could have claimed a subsidy while living with her boyfriend. His employer, the Department of Defence, had a policy that no government payments be sought by partners, though this was probably a misunderstanding and may have been limited to unemployment benefits. Waiting 48 days for her initial claim to be processed was 'really hard' but her ex-partner helped her financially.

Jessica maintained full-time enrolment, though she 'probably shouldn't have done'. She struggled, but pressured herself to maintain the load. Jessica was now sharing a house with a fellow student. It was cheap and close to campus, and saved travel time. Jessica heard about things from this student that she hadn't heard elsewhere. She had 'four good friends from uni' who also helped, plus an old school friend who offered to edit her work. Financially things were a little harder, but she felt this was just part of playing 'the game'. Courses were harder in fourth year, which Jessica expected, but students were familiar with staff 'so you're a little bit more open to go see the tutors'. She felt staff 'kind of expect you to know what you're doing' but were 'still just as nice' when approached. Jessica felt 'a bit anxious' about university, but this was related to 'stuff going on' in her 'own mind and body'. The university psychologist was not available in her fourth year, so Jessica could only use the counselling service. The counsellors were good, but she had found the psychologist better, so now only used the doctors. The counsellors gave techniques to use, and

when she did not improve, she felt she ‘was disappointing them’. Jessica had stopped taking medication prescribed by the doctor in third year as she ‘didn’t feel like it was doing anything’. Instead she ‘did her own thing with meditation and healthy eating and free writing’ which she felt helped.

After four years Jessica had not completed her degree but was progressing. She hopefully had another part-time year to go, if she gained credit for assignments she had yet to submit. In the summer break she was going overseas to teach swimming and some school subjects. She was excited about this as she had ‘done really well’ in ‘all’ her practicums. She hoped to finish her degree, then teach in the UK for a couple of years before returning to Australia. She hoped to ‘walk into a job’ in the UK and get confidence and experience, whereas here jobs were hard to get and that would take her ‘confidence away’. She expected teaching in the UK to be hard, but she could ‘handle that sort of hard’, as she didn’t get anxious in a ‘room full of kids’. Jessica’s advice for non-traditional students was to ‘get out and live’, decide what they want to do, then not ‘put pressure’ on themselves. She felt the university had many supports in place but students were not always aware of the services. For example, when Jessica broke up with her boyfriend, she had to wait eight weeks for government payments. Attending the counsellor for a health check, Jessica admitted to living off two minute noodles. Only then was she told of \$100 emergency funding available. She felt such services should be very obvious on the university website, and publicised at orientation (though she knew not all students attended).

6.7 Analysing Jessica’s Story

Aged 24 years when she began her HE studies, Jessica would be considered a mature student by some standards (O’Shea, 2014). Jessica’s background and personal situation on entering university placed her at more of a disadvantage than most. She had moved a significant distance away from her family and home town, similar to Ellie and Simone, but had fewer resources to call on for support, given that her boyfriend was the only person she knew locally (Wrench et al., 2013). Her parents were supportive of her study, but too far away to offer practical support. Living still some distance from campus, social connections were difficult to establish. Social and emotional support is a concern for non-traditional students who relocate to study (Rubin & Wright, 2015). Her inability to progress through the degree at the standard rate compounded this problem. When Jessica did form

friendships in one year, those friends would move onto the next set of courses while Jessica had to repeat. Jessica's partner was supportive of her HE studies, but the only practical manifestation of that support was to ensure his friends did not interrupt her study.

Jessica entered HE with low academic skills, especially for university level. Year 12 had been 'too hard' for her (despite later gaining Year 12 accreditation through TAFE), and her TAFE studies did not seem to have improved her skills greatly. Jessica was well aware that her preferred learning style was a mismatch for that expected at university, as has been noted for other non-traditional students (Cantwell et al. 2014; Meuleman et al., 2015) and she was open about her inability to comprehend readings. Like mature student Rosie and students in Crozier et al.'s (2008) study, Jessica struggled to understand the readings to the point that she gave up, limiting herself to reading the abstracts and 'skimming'. Jessica preferred to learn by talking her ideas through or teaching others, but these strategies were difficult to implement due to her limited social connections and time spent on campus. Despite this she enjoyed learning. Jessica passed all first year courses, but failed one in first semester of second year, which was a traumatic time for her personally, two the following semester, and more in the following two years of her enrolment. Jessica stumbled where assessment was concerned: 'submitting the assignments was hard. Something to do with being graded'. She blamed this on anxiety, which increasingly infiltrated many aspects of her life.

Jessica compared herself with others at university, and was concerned with how others viewed her. The result of this was often negative. She worried that fellow students completed assignments more quickly and easily than she did, and was worried what they would think when they found out that she was having difficulty completing her courses. Jessica, like Rosie and David, seemed affected by the shame often felt by non-traditional students in HE (Reay, 1997, 2002; Plummer, 2000). Jessica felt her partner was better placed to assist her with mathematics because 'he understands me', suggesting that a university tutor would not. These concerns may stem from Jessica maintaining the feeling, like Rosie, that she was a 'fish out of water' (Reay et al., 2010; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) in HE. Indeed, Baxter's (1999) comments about working class women who did not complete high school having the least cultural capital also apply to Jessica. This cultural mismatch between habitus and field may be responsible for non-traditional students like Jessica feeling more different to their fellow students than they really are, especially when circumstances such as living arrangements prevent them making many social connections. Like working-class students at non-elite universities in the study by Reay et al. (2010), Jessica exhibited a 'fragile and unconfident' (p. 117) learner identity. Leathwood and Read

(2008) found women experienced such self-doubt and anxiety around learning more than men, accompanied by a sense that they were undeserving of a place in HE.

The most concerning aspect of Jessica's life during her HE experience was her mental health. While she seemed to manage the difficult initial transition to HE, passing all first year subjects, things changed quite dramatically in second year. Events in the lives of loved ones caused her significant anxiety, especially as she was unable to travel home to see the people involved (Wrench et al., 2013). In another study of FiF students, a number of participants also commented on the effects of stress on their physical and mental health (O'Shea, Stone, Delahunty & May, 2016). The depression Jessica developed was not new for her. In her very first interview she noted that:

'I know in my past I get stressed a lot. So I've been thinking that I might need it (the counselling service) down the track. I don't purposely sit there and stress but in the background of my mind I'm stressing and that gets me quite sick'.

The difficulty in dealing with these situations was no doubt compounded by her limited local support network. Students 'living without material, emotional and social support from friends and family presents further challenges that impact on the transition experience' (Meulemen et al., 2015, p. 505). People like Jessica who do not feel socially and emotionally connected to their community are at increased risk of stress and depression (Cacioppo & William, 2008). Jessica appears to be representative of the higher percentage of university students than the general population reporting mental health problems (Stallman, 2010). Students' anxiety and depression can worsen the longer they stay at university (Andrews & Wilding, 2004). Jessica's working class habitus, reflected in her subjective social status (how she ranked herself in comparison to others in the university community [Adler, Epel, Castellazzo & Ickovics, 2000]), and in her limited social contact with friends (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009) created a seemingly perfect storm for mental health issues. She was at university as a FiF student without a strong academic background, starting out with no social connections on campus, shy, and living too far from campus to create a social network easily. Many of these factors have been indicated as risks for student mental health (Wrench et al., 2013), so it is not surprising that depression affected Jessica's progress (Thomas, 2012).

Jessica felt pressure from her partner to achieve at university and blamed this for their relationship breakdown. Roland, Frenay and Boudrenghien (2016) found that 'support is seen by some students as pressure, sometimes guilt-inducing, to persist' (p. 183) and Jessica's situation seems similar. When her relationship ended, she had to make changes which were difficult in her isolated position. Anxious and under financial stress, she needed

to find a new place to live and organise financial support to continue her studies. She did this mainly through the help of her still-small network of university friends, and the goodwill of her ex-partner. At this point Jessica also learned of and accessed additional support mechanisms at the university. What is concerning is that despite all of her difficulties and the services she had accessed, there remained many that she did not find out about, as often happens (Benson et al., 2012), except through serendipitous ways. Over four years Jessica had used PASS, bridging courses, counselling, and Adverse Circumstances (a system through which students experiencing illness, for example, can apply for extensions and the like), but apart from the bridging courses she completed prior to beginning her degree, in many cases she found out about them accidentally. For example, after one of our interviews I asked if she had considered applying to register with a particular unit because of her ongoing mental health issues, but she did not know it existed. Likewise, only when she was seeing the counsellor due to her need for an extension did she find out about emergency cash provisions available for students in crisis. Benson et al. (2012) noted that non-traditional students made little use of support services, though recently Southgate et al. (2014) found that FiF students were more likely to seek support. When non-traditional students do not access services it may be because they are not obviously situated on the university website or are inadequately promoted. It is also possible that Jessica's habitus made it difficult for her to navigate the website (Penrose, 2002) or field as a whole. Even after four years, much of university life seemingly remained a mystery to Jessica.

6.8 A fourth gap-year student

There was a fourth student in the study who had a gap year. I have not included her story in full in this chapter because of space, but I do want to acknowledge her briefly. She had some points in common with Lacey, Simone and Jessica, showing that their issues were not isolated. Anna's ATAR was one of the highest in this study. Like Lacey, she took a gap year for financial reasons, saving for a car, as she had a 60 minute commute to university, like Simone and Jessica. Few young people from her home town went to university, like Jessica. She worked up to 35 hours per week, and had to spend time driving her younger siblings. She had one very close friend at university.

Anna's story has similarities with others reported in this thesis. Her prior academic achievement was relatively strong, like Lacey. Also like Lacey, Anna had the wherewithal to navigate the field to reach her goals in ways others did not (Reay, 1998b), including

applying for the scholarship which cemented her employment post-university. Family disruption meant that she left home to protect her student identity, like Simone (with whom she also shared a home town). Family did not provide any practical support with her studies, like Ellie (and also school-leaver Lani in the next chapter) and appeared to support her enrolment only through a financial scholarship fund set up at her birth. Non-university friends could be a distraction for Anna, as had been the case for Rosie. Again similar to Simone, Anna had one friend who was a mainstay of her enrolment, but this was enough. Anna and Simone both completed their degrees in the minimum time.

6.9 Manifestations of Habitus and Capital

As stated earlier, all students in this study demonstrated some level of transformative *habitus*. All aspired to and reached the goal of attending university, whether or not they completed their degrees. Lacey, Jessica and Simone shared habitus to a significant extent, based on their working class backgrounds and FiF status. It is somewhat unusual for the specific university context of this study that only Anna out of these four students had grown up locally. All attended Central campus, but one student was from a location approximately 240 kilometres away, one from interstate and one from another country. This made them a diverse group, by comparison with the general Education degree cohort and the majority of participants in this study. All had clear goals in terms of career, which for Simone and Jessica were based on work experience. Despite the similarities among these students, the capitals which each could activate in the field of HE varied greatly.

6.9.1 Academic skills

Lacey, Simone and Jessica provided different accounts of prior academic achievement. Lacey obtained a better academic outcome from high school than either Simone or Jessica reported, though Jessica had experience in further education and Simone's workplace skills may have compensated somewhat with regards to this aspect of capital. According to Bourdieu's formula of '[(habitus) (capital) + field = practice]' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 101) there could reasonably be some expectation that they would react similarly when faced with the challenges of HE. There were, however, some obvious differences. Lacey's performance in Year 12 was affected by health issues (but was still relatively strong), while Simone 'wagged a lot' and Jessica found it too hard and did not finish. Lacey's confidence in her academic ability as a form of cultural capital may have provided a buffer against the unfamiliar field of HE which neither Simone nor Jessica possessed. Lacey and

Simone noted the usual first year concerns about assignments but had adjusted by the end of first year, while Jessica's difficulties with academic readings, like Rosie, continued. Jessica was never fully aware of 'what to expect or what is expected of' a university student (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p. 148) and she was unable to make the shift to an independent learning style as is expected in the field of HE (Cantwell et al., 2014). The pressure of assessment affected her the most, heightening her anxiety. Jessica failed courses because often she did not submit assignments at all. This may have resulted from fearing being judged and found wanting in the alien field of HE. All students in this chapter believed in working hard to attain their goals, like working-class students in other studies (Benson et al., 2012; Reay et al., 2009). While this was successful for Lacey and Simone, it was not enough in Jessica's case, though perseverance may work for her eventually.

6.9.2 Issues of distance

Coming from various other locations, Lacey, Simone and Jessica were faced with the prospect of developing new social networks at university. Only Lacey moved specifically for university, yet she began HE with more social capital because she at least knew some people who were attending university from her home town, whereas Simone and Jessica had moved from further afield. Additionally, Lacey lived on campus with the advantages for social inclusion that afforded (Rubin & Wright, 2015), while the distance of Simone's and Jessica's residences from campus proved an additional barrier to after-hours social interaction with peers. Simone and Jessica also spent less time on campus because of the distance to their homes. Simone, having moved away from her father, now had support from her mother and aunt, then later her partner. Jessica, on the other hand, arrived in the region only knowing her partner, living some distance from campus, and then had that relationship break down during her studies. Social capital was a concern for Jessica also because of her shyness; she was slow to develop a small number of friendships with fellow students. Simone did not develop many university friendships either, but support from her family and partner seemed to compensate for this. Despite their lack of HE related experience they provided practical study support. Jessica's relationship with her partner did not provide this. His help was limited to financial support and preventing distractions for Jessica rather than assistance with study. Whether it was only in Jessica's mind, she felt the weight of his expectations for her as pressure which added to her stress levels, so that his support affected her negatively.

6.9.3 Financial constraints

Economic capital was an obvious issue for each of these students, and one they managed in quite different ways. For Lacey this meant delaying university for a year while

she saved money and qualified for government subsidy. Government subsidy was never an option for Simone, requiring her to work the equivalent of a full time job throughout her university enrolment. Jessica was financially dependent on her partner until that relationship broke down and she then applied for a government subsidy, scraping by while her application was processed. In the meantime all worked at least part time during their studies, the exception being a period when family crises and ill health caused Lacey to rely on savings instead. Interestingly, Simone exited university in the strongest financial position. She had no student debt, enjoyed an overseas trip during her enrolment and bought a house, though the latter events would likely not have happened without her fiancé's contribution. In retrospect, this was no doubt a positive economic outcome, but it is not a path most students could or would take voluntarily, and it could easily have ended less well. Paid work can negatively affect student outcomes in HE (Metcalf, 2003) and it would be a poor outcome for society if capable students were denied university qualifications on the basis of their economic situations.

6.9.4 From daring to despairing

Lacey, Anna and Simone were highly successful in their HE journeys, reaching their ultimate HE goals, despite experiencing many personal difficulties along the way. Anna and Simone could be considered 'turbo students', a term applied to students studying by distance in minimum time frames and with little institutional support (Prummer, 2000: O'Shea, 2014). It can be seen from these examples that there is more than one way for a FiF student to navigate and succeed in HE. Lacey was successful by way of her transformative habitus, whereby she borrowed, converted and grew capital in order to succeed. Simone's habitus was less transformative, but she utilised and adapted her working class capital in ways that made success possible. Both Lacey and Simone demonstrated coping strategies of 'self-governmental practices such as planning, being organised, working hard, staying committed, pushing through,' as also noted for non-traditional students in other studies (Reay et al., 2009: Wrench et al., 2013) study. By contrast, Jessica seemingly lacked the capacity to operationalise sufficient capital (especially social and academic) to successfully navigate HE, at least within norms of achievement such as course completion. She may yet complete her degree, but it will not have been without personal cost, as evidenced by her mental health struggles. Her economic disadvantage will also be compounded, at least in the short term, by additional student debt as a result of failing a number of courses during her degree. This financial burden illuminates the financial risk that HE provides for non-traditional students, especially those who are mature age (Reay, 2001; O'Shea, 2014). In middle class families, economic

capital can pay for support which is not available in poorer families (Reay, 2003) or for many non-traditional students as seen in this study. All four women in this chapter demonstrated the 'extraordinary strength and fortitude' noted by O'Shea (2014, p. 153) in her study of FiF females.

6.9.5 Stores of capital

It is evident that (at least some) non-traditional students have access to resources not generally valued by the field of HE but which can, nevertheless, be drawn on to facilitate success. O'Shea (2016b) used Yosso's (2005) concepts of wealth to provide a framework for consideration of the capitals brought to HE when she examined the experiences of mature FiF students. Particularly relevant in these cases is 'aspirational capital' whereby individuals nurture 'a culture of possibility' (Yosso, 2005, p. 9). Additionally, all students reported in this chapter had some experiential capital (O'Shea, 2016b) gained through paid employment and life experience, including Lacey's financially driven gap year. Simone is an example of a student using what would be considered in Bourdieuan terms very limited social capital to support her (two friends whom she mostly contacted via text messaging, who likely had no more cultural capital than she did), as well as family capital (Yosso, 2005) in terms of extended family (her aunt). Traditionally families have provided cultural capital for HE through knowledge and first-hand experience of HE systems and processes (Reay, 1998b), but perhaps advantage can be attained through activating smaller amounts of a number of capitals in a cumulative way for success. Cultural capital in its traditional form may not be as essential as previously thought for success in HE.

6.10 Conclusion

Complex and intertwining of aspects of life loom large in this chapter on four non-traditional students who, for various reasons, delayed enrolment at university for a year or more after leaving high school. The journeys were different in terms of starting points, pathways and outcomes, and education was only part of the life experience evident during the four years covered here. Their experiences of HE were at various times delayed, slowed, interrupted, enriched, enhanced and enabled by relationships, health issues and other non-university factors. There is an embodiedness to the students' struggles and triumphs, so that it is possible to sense the energy required for their journeys. With similar background factors regarding habitus, these students nevertheless acted in quite different

ways throughout their journeys, particularly as seen through their activations of capital in the field of HE.

It can be seen through these examples that while economic capital absolutely does matter, and makes HE success difficult for non-traditional students (James et al., 2008), some are adept at finding ways and means to afford their studies. However, there can be a long term economic impact which some students do not adequately consider. This is especially true if their degree takes longer than expected to complete, which can happen for a myriad of reasons, not all of which are in the students' control. Prior academic skill level also has an effect, but many skills can be improved during enrolment, and life experience can lessen this gap, for example through the development of resilience (O'Shea, 2015a). Likewise social capital seems less essential than some of the literature would suggest, and can be accessed in different ways with current technology.

Simone, Lacey and Anna would be called by some 'miraculous exceptions' – a term used by Bourdieu (Moi, 1991, p.1026) to describe people from disadvantaged groups who have succeeded in education, and more recently by Pitman (2013, p. 30) to describe university graduates from low SES backgrounds. Their successes, however, must not obscure the very difficult situation experienced by Jessica. Despite the number of services available to and accessed by her, there remained support she did not access. Perhaps of most concern is that there was no overseeing of her particular case. Support services appear to operate in isolation, so that while each does their best to support the student when they see them, no-one is monitoring the student's overall situation. For isolated students such as Jessica with little capital (cultural, academic, social, economic or otherwise) to draw on, regular monitoring should be undertaken to ensure her wellbeing and provide advice. It is, I suggest, unethical for an HE institution to continue accepting Jessica's enrolment and fees while her mental health is at risk and she acquires increasing debt. The lengths that these students had to go to in order to secure a university education suggest that as Reay (2001, p. 344) says, 'we still do not have a valued place within education for the working classes'.

The following chapter is the final analysis chapter. Following the same format as Chapters 5 and 6, it presents the stories of students who entered university directly after completing high school.

Chapter 7

School Leavers

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses in detail the experiences of three students who began university studies in some form immediately after leaving high school. One entered directly into a teaching program, one completed an enabling course before the teaching program, and another began a different degree, then transferred to teaching. As with the previous two chapters, I present, then analyse each narrative in turn, before considering the factors which unite and separate them.

In these stories youth brings different influences to student journeys. The childhood home and community remain the main influence on the students' lives and habituses, since habitus is largely structured through family upbringing and educational experiences (Bourdieu, 1990a). School has played a major role in the school-leavers' lives to date, yet the familiarity of high school education does not necessarily make the transition to the related field of university a seamless one. The transition into university has been acknowledged by many researchers as a crucial period for students (for example Tinto, 1993 through to Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010 and many others), and for school leavers it coincides with many other changes in life. They are gaining maturity, are expected to be more independent, and may crave increased autonomy and freedom. Their horizons are broadening and the experience of university may be perceived as challenge or stress.

The school leavers on whom this chapter focuses, like students detailed in other chapters, share some background factors but also differ in significant ways. All are First Generation university students (one had a sister already studying and one had a sibling who dropped out of university), and all had relatively low Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs), ranging from 55 to 63 out of a possible 100. There are three different endings to their four year journeys. Jane completed her original degree in the minimum time, Briony left university early in first year (but remained in this study), and Lani deferred her enrolment two years into the study, then returned to a different degree. The factors influencing the students' decisions provide evidence of issues which must be addressed by those committed to widening participation.

7.2 Lani's story

The journey to university

Lani came from a working class family in a working class suburb. Her parents had left school in Years Eight and Twelve. Of her two older siblings, one had begun university but dropped out. Lani was 'always pretty good at school', and loved children, so applied for primary teaching and another degree on finishing high school. Attaining an ATAR in the low 60s, she was accepted for her second preference, and completed six out of eight courses in first year before transferring to teaching. For Lani, university represented 'a pathway to a better future'. Lani's parents were somewhat supportive of her university enrolment, though her father occasionally commented that 'You need to be out working', and 'You're not going to learn anything at uni'. Living locally, she stayed at home while studying. She received government financial support due to her family's income level, supplementing this by 'babysitting on the odd occasion'.

A transition year – a year at university before the current study began

Lani's image of university, even after a year's enrolment, was that it is 'so hard and for really smart people'. Her year studying another degree helped familiarise her with university and essay writing, which was 'so different to high school'. It was useful 'practice', and a friend in second year helped her negotiate university. Lani found starting university 'pretty tricky', 'with all the websites it's pretty confusing'. She 'didn't have a clue', and felt she was 'a really dodgy student'. Lani felt some personal traits would provide challenges during her studies as she was 'a really bad studier and ... really bad at procrastinating' as well as being 'kind of unmotivated'. At school though, Lani had always 'managed to get things done' no matter how hard they were, so she felt that university 'shouldn't be too impossible'.

First year

After the first confusing weeks, Lani found first year in the teaching degree year 'pretty easy-breezy'. Lani 'passed all my classes in first semester so I was happy enough about that'. She found university 'social life is good...you don't have to do assignments by yourself'. She attended most tutorials but 'didn't attend many lectures'. 'I'd go when I could be bothered' because 'it's really inconvenient if you

just have to come for one lecture', so she would 'just look at the slides instead of listening ... wastes less time'. She 'heard from other people that you don't need to do the readings for the classes...' so she didn't, unless they were required for an assignment, and then she would 'just do them all at once'.

Lani established friendships at university, partly through joining a church group. Some friendships benefited her study but others did not. She had 'this slacker friend' with whom she would 'skip' classes, but also had friends who could 'catch you up' and 'help with things'. She found teaching staff were 'good with emailing or extensions or having a quick talk' and 'good at explaining everything in class.' By the end of first year she had 'a better idea' of how to go about assignments and she could 'always do it at the last minute.' She felt her practices were 'pretty standard really'. 'Everybody's doing it.' Towards the end of first year Lani was unwell and was 'stressing out' around the time of final assignments and exams. Nevertheless, she passed all eight first year courses, achieving mostly credit grades.

Second year

Second year began well for Lani. She continued with occasional childminding jobs but otherwise felt she didn't 'really have much time'. She found the coursework 'pretty standard – not too bad' and enjoyed 'tutorials and group work too'. Still, she found lectures 'boring so I struggle to attend ... I just read the lecture slides ... that's pretty effective for me.' She also found readings 'so draining, so boring'. She 'started assignments earlier – that was pretty helpful' and would 'work with friends for assignments or study'. She dropped a theoretical course in first semester because she 'hadn't kept up with the readings'. Her first professional experience, four weeks in a school at the end of first semester, left her 'unsure if I want to continue'. This 'threw' her 'around a bit' as she was 'so set on primary teaching' and had 'thought this was something' she'd 'be good at'. She 'had a lot of struggle with the planning and paperwork' and 'wanted to quit prac'. Deciding to finish the year before deferring her studies, Lani then found it 'hard to be motivated' in second semester. Again she dropped a theoretical course, and failed an elective. Lani thought that she might enrol in a Certificate III childcare course to 'see if that's any easier on me'. Lani's family were generally 'uninvolved' with her university life but were 'supportive enough'. They disagreed with her decision to defer, saying 'no don't quit uni – you won't go back'.

Third year – a gap year

A few weeks after semester finished, Lani began employment in disability support and really enjoyed it. She worked with clients such as ‘elderly ladies’ in their homes, helping with their daily routines. This entailed more responsibility than university: whereas she could ‘easily skip a class at uni and not get into huge trouble for it’, with the job she needed to be on time. Despite this Lani found working ‘way less stressful than uni’. She liked ‘getting more money’ and ‘not doing assignments’ but really loved the actual job, and was glad not to be ‘working at Maccas’. Despite being happy in her job Lani re-enrolled at university the following year in a business degree. The process of re-enrolling was ‘really easy and simple’. Applying for credit though was ‘kind of confusing’ but was now ‘all organised’ for her. She hoped to maintain her job, perhaps working fewer hours, as it was ‘pretty flexible’. Lani’s boyfriend and his friends had business degrees. A close friend who was also enrolled in that program helped Lani with timetabling and course selection. Lani hoped to finish the three year degree in two years because of credits. She felt business offered ‘heaps of different opportunities’ so she could ‘still do whatever makes me happy in life’.

Skills learnt in her first years at university helped Lani in her job; her writing skills were useful for the paperwork involved. Returning to university, she felt her previous years there were a ‘huge advantage’. Acknowledging that she’d made similar claims previously, Lani claimed she would study the next year with ‘no slacking’. She had ‘grown up a lot in the past year’, so hopefully would ‘knuckle down and study harder’, and try to do her best. Lani said she would like to start her ‘own business eventually’ but her aim was to ‘get married and be a mum and stuff’. Her ‘main goal is happiness’.

Fourth year

The fourth year of the study saw Lani begin her business degree. She enjoyed it and felt it suited her more than teaching. Lani had been ‘hurt and disappointed’ that she had ‘failed with teaching’. This had left her feeling ‘let down’ and she had originally ‘put up a wall’, not wanting to try again. She had now had time to ‘get over that’ and was enjoying learning things that were practical rather than theoretical and applied directly to life. Lani now considered herself a ‘professional student’ and found university ‘a lot easier, easier to manage’ because she was ‘used to how everything works’. It was her ‘stomping ground’. At 23 years of age she felt ‘young again’, with

most fellow students being aged only 18. She was enjoying making new friends and having the 'esteem' afforded by university.

Lani continued living at home, working 20-30 hours per week in disability support. This mostly involved sleepover shifts which worked around her university hours. She could study and sleep while at work, and take time off during exams. The biggest challenge this year was assignments and exams. Teaching courses had mostly been assessed through assignments, while most business subjects had a 50% exam. She didn't mind though, as she had a 'pretty good memory' and would 'do okay in exams' as long as she knew what they covered. In first semester she 'was good at going to most of the lectures and tutorials because they were engaging'. She had even thought to herself that she'd report this to me and I'd be so proud. She liked second semester when most classes were two hour workshops, and her attendance was 'pretty good'. Prior to the workshops students were expected to 'watch videos and do homework'. She 'did all right' with watching the videos but not 'super well' with homework. Only one subject had a traditional lecture which she 'never' attended. They were 'just so boring' that 'you'd rather shoot yourself in the foot'. She felt that the 'hugest thing with the lecturer or teacher' was whether or not they were engaging. Some academic staff annoyed her, being 'like boring businessmen' with lots of 'knowledge in their field' but no teaching skills.

Lani spent less time on the 'much easier' Business degree assignments. In the past assignments would 'suck the life out of' her and she'd 'feel in despair'. They were now 'more structured' and 'not so much essay based' and were 'the kind of assignments that you can work with someone else on'. It was 'good working with friends' and made 'a huge difference'. She attended 'couple of PASS classes' in first semester and was planning to attend revision sessions coming up. She found these useful if they 'cemented' things she already knew, but not if she didn't know the content already. Lani felt her 'mindset' around study and time management had changed. 'It's like an assignment is a ticking time bomb and you've got to get it done as soon as you can' whereas in the past she would 'leave it until the last day'. She now found it 'horrific' to leave tasks until the last minute. She had formed 'a really good group of friends' who were 'good to hang out with' and with whom she did actually study. They were sometimes 'a little bit bad' and might 'go out for lunch instead' but it was good to 'take time to relax' and they always 'set time to work on assignments together'.

Despite leaving university previously, Lani 'knew that education was important' and 'a good path'. Whereas before she was 'still a bit of like a high school student at uni' she had now 'grown up' and her 'mentality' had changed. She was thinking about the long term. Lani's short term goal was to work at an outdoor activities camp for school students. She thought she would enjoy this and be good at it. She enjoyed her part-time work with youth and disability support, and hoped eventually to find a career that made her 'happy'. She would 'like to get rich of course'.

Lani now felt 'pretty good' about herself as a university student, though she could 'still make some improvements'. She felt 'pleased' with herself because she usually got 'pretty decent marks'. All the practice she had 'really helps with like assignments and structuring essays and just knowing how to do everything'. Her advice to future non-traditional students would be to make university friends who would 'understand the things that you're doing', otherwise 'no-one really understands some of the things that you have to do and like the stress that it can bring sometimes'. She also thought there could be more study help, but didn't think having a day for parents would help.

7.3 Analysing Lani's Story

Lani considered university was a 'pathway to a better future', indicating that she felt it was something outside her world to that point. It was then not within her existing habitus; 'not for the likes of us' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 129). Although Lani presented a relaxed demeanour towards university studies, it was 'so hard and for really smart people', and she struggled to negotiate the university landscape. Her attitudes and practices regarding study were not conducive to success, despite feeling that she had been 'a good student' at school.

The early attitude of Lani's father demonstrated a reproductive habitus also, in suggesting that she should get a job and would learn nothing at university. This represents the idea that 'the working class refuse what they are refused' (Sayer, 2005, p. 955 referring to Bourdieu, 1984). Despite this, once Lani expressed thoughts of leaving part-way through the program, both parents were keen for her to continue, so their attitude also was malleable, once success seemed possible. Other than these incidences, Lani's family do not appear in her story. They are not mentioned at any other time, either in terms of providing support for Lani's study or in influencing her decisions. As O'Shea (2015a) commented, 'if there is little understanding of higher education participation amongst family members then

conversations about learning may not occur' (p. 153). As noted previously, perceived family support is important for non-traditional HE students (Benson et al., 2010), especially females (Cheng et al., 2012). Her parents' later change in attitude may have been the support she needed to return and succeed.

The role of friends is seen differently in Lani's story than most others, as here the potential of friends to influence studies negatively is evident. Although Lani did not have trouble establishing friendships at university, and found that friends could help her with assignments and study (as could teaching and other staff), she was drawn to one friendship that undermined good study practice. While mature student Rosie had issues with non-university friends encouraging her to miss classes, Lani was affected in a worse way by a student friend. Being on campus, this friend convinced Lani to miss classes, though perhaps she did not have to try too hard. This friendship was seen as low quality in terms of supporting Lani's social integration at university, but did not arise from mature status as seen in Rubin and Wright's (2015) study. Rather, it may have been Lani gravitating to 'people like us' (Reay, 1998b) in order to feel comfortable in the foreign environment of university. On the other hand, Lani's decision, after deferring, to return to a different degree was influenced by other friends who were already studying or had graduated. Social integration is important for student success and retention (Thomas, 2012) so it is unsurprising that finding a supportive group of friends who were attentive to their studies was of benefit to Lani. Unlike Lacey, who was prepared to lose friendships she did not see as helpful to her, Lani was easily influenced by friends, rather than having a set path and pursuing it. Lani also did not demonstrate the urgency of mature students such as Ellie and Rosie who seemed to be making up for lost time in their enrolment. Lani seemingly had all the time in the world to decide on a vocation and complete her studies. This was no doubt in part because she lived with her parents and despite her apparent low SES status had no pressing financial needs. Having flexible part-time work which did not interfere with her studies was also a bonus. Another aspect though is that having relinquished her goal of teaching, there was no set career waiting for her to provide motivation as was the case for Ellie with teaching or Lacey with speech pathology.

Lani skipped classes and dropped difficult courses, though she did attend voluntary exam preparation workshops. She normalised her early poor study practices by claiming that 'everyone' was doing it, and she did little to develop academic skills. Lani presented herself at all times as finding university studies 'easy breezy', though this was contradicted by her need to drop some courses. By looking for an alternative to the teaching degree that would be 'easier' on her, she indicated a habitus that did not fit well at university. The need

to apply effort seemed to escape Lani; seemingly she felt university was 'not for the likes of us' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 129). The mismatch between habitus and field caused Lani to feel ambivalent, insecure and uncertain (Reay, 2005) in HE. As a result she positioned herself as without agency, as indicated in her comment about her poor study practices that 'everybody's doing it'. She did not seem to recognise that she could act to achieve a different outcome (Bourdieu, 1990a). It is, however, interesting to note that despite struggling with some courses, and dropping two in the second year of her teaching degree, the real turning point for Lani was not related to coursework but to the demands of professional experience. This related more to the actual job of the teacher than the role of a student, similar to David and Rosie. Lani could not see herself working as a teacher due to the workload, which was also a stumbling block for Rosie who found it 'exhausting'. Lani's narrative to this point said, 'It's too hard' and suggested 'It's not my fault'. When Lani dropped subjects and deferred enrolment to consider other pathways, it appeared that habitus would lead to reproduction, stemming from an apparent habitus of resignation, as her actions and attitudes depicted 'the resignation of the inevitable' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 372). Lani considered her life options at this time as either studying at university or 'working at Macca's' (a fast food chain). This indicates 'a less desirable place she may be returned to if she fails to achieve' as seen for the working class females in Reay's (2002, p. 409) study.

When Lani returned to university after a year working, however, her attitudes and behaviour had changed somewhat. The 'experiential capital' (O'Shea, 2016b) gained in the workforce improved her practices, and she had seen the benefit of skills gained at university to her work. She noted thinking I would 'be proud' that in her new degree she was attending class more often. By the end of my study Lani was coping with paid employment as well as full time study, and her study practices had improved. Lani often presented herself as confident about her ability to complete her studies, but her confidence was not always borne out. At the end of the four year study a degree of resignation was still observable: Lani lacked the 'self-certainty' of those with a more middle-class *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1884, p. 66). She did not pass every subject that year (and did not mention this at interview though perhaps she did not know then), but she continued her studies. An additional positive development was Lani's increased self-awareness. After her year off, she noted that 'before I was still a bit of a like high school student at uni, but now I kind of recognise like how important it is and to actually try and do well and just like also just thinking about long term, the future and stuff'. With time, like the women in Reay's (2002) study, Lani 'worked on herself and is now able to adapt more effectively to higher education culture' (p. 414). Like delayed starter Jessica (see Chapter 6 from p. 117), if she does attain a degree it will have

taken her longer than most students, but her narrative's final instalment shows signs of development that seemed unlikely early in the study.

Lani was not a 'turbo student' (von Prummer, 2000; O'Shea, 2014) as preferred by HE institutions, completing programs in the minimum time with little or no support. Despite her unpromising beginnings at university, by the time of writing this thesis Lani showed every likelihood of completing the third degree she enrolled in. She recovered and completed 'multiple transitions' (Reay, 2002a, p. 409), a more common experience for working class students for whom the transition to HE is 'both complex and difficult' (p. 409). It would seem that universities enrolling non-traditional students should be prepared to be patient with them and not consider them lost at the first stumble.

7.4 Jane's story

The journey to university

Jane always imagined she would attend university, mainly as a lifestyle choice. Her passion for teaching was developed through experiences volunteering with a disability group, teaching musical instruments, and seeing her mother help people as a foster carer. Jane was also influenced by some of her own teachers. Based on her high school performance, she expected an ATAR of 70-80, which would have gained entry to her desired teaching degree, but received 55 which made her ineligible. She then completed a year-long enabling course at Regional University, achieving an ATAR equivalent of 83, and enrolled in the teaching degree. Jane's parents, neither of whom had attended university, were proud and very supportive of her enrolment. Regional was the closest university to Jane's home, though still a ninety minute drive.

Jane felt her positive outlook, time management skills and capacity to work hard would help her at university. Her poor school results made her more determined, and she had completed bridging courses which were highly beneficial. An independent learner, she thought she might need to develop group work skills to succeed at university. She also felt that balancing work and study, and coping with sleep deprivation from catching an early train might be challenging, but she looked forward to studying teaching. Jane applied for financial support, but was unfortunately ineligible.

First year

Jane's enabling program influenced her approach to her studies, familiarising her with university expectations such as essay writing. From the start she took advantage of optional support classes, including one where students reviewed notes and readings and worked on assignments. She felt that investing an hour a week in the extra class was worthwhile if she gained 'a couple of marks'. She knew of other support services such as counselling, but was more likely to approach a family friend who was a counsellor. The hardest thing about university for Jane was travel. For family and financial reasons she commuted, and worked on weekends and one weekday. Jane's university timetable was quite spread out, so she used the breaks to study. She found university quite different from the strict environment of high school, and liked the 'self-guided' aspect of university, but wasn't sure she was 'doing well' with it. She felt more comfortable than expected, having thought age and other differences among students would create an 'us and them sort of thing', but that was not so. She enjoyed the diversity and social aspects of university.

A conscientious student, Jane attended all lectures, only missing two tutorials in first year. She spent less time than expected on readings and assignments, and continued with optional support classes, finding them 'really, really helpful'. She heard about the classes through Blackboard and emails, and recommended them to others. They provided strategies for exams, which she tended to stress about, and essay writing (including referencing), which was 'a challenge'. She had mistakenly enrolled in an extra subject, but managed that. Her first semester timetable, spread over four days, allowed her to get 'a lot done'. Her second semester timetable required attending only two days per week, but they were very full days. Despite having one less course, she liked the subjects less so found it harder. She completed most assignments before the due dates, except during a period when her grandmother was visiting and she had late nights finishing assignments. With 'a lot going on', Jane learnt to manage her time better. She was pleased to finish first year by doing well in her exams.

It was 'relatively easy' to develop friendships at university, and these were 'pretty helpful' for study-related discussions, though they could be distracting. Jane found group work with deadlines motivating. Having people rely on her was useful, whereas she might leave individual work until the last minute. Teaching staff were helpful, and

she used the Hubs⁶. She loved the libraries and spent a lot of time there studying. Jane's family were 'respectful' of her study and did not interrupt her. Jane planned to move closer to campus with friends before beginning second year to reduce travel.

Second year

Jane enjoyed second year, especially the four week Professional Experience. The school curriculum subjects she studied were interesting, and her study routine was more settled. Her timetable was over three days. She again completed five subjects in one semester, which she found 'okay'. The work was slightly harder, but Jane now felt more comfortable completing assignments. 'I know who to talk to now, which is good'. Time management was still challenging. Jane found it difficult returning to classes after the mid-year four week professional Experience. 'I didn't want to be here. I loved prac. I just wanted to stay there.' She continued visiting the class throughout the year, and it motivated her to work harder at university. She knew she needed good grades 'to get into full-time work'. Jane attended most classes (including lectures), only having one day off sick, and completed most readings, acknowledging that it got hard around 'week eight when everything starts getting due'. She still completed most work ahead of time, and attended optional study sessions, which motivated her to 'do a bit more', to help with a 'big essay' in sociology. Jane felt her approach to university was 'quite successful' and her grades were better than in first year. Jane could not afford to move out of home as planned, having booked an overseas trip. Family members remained supportive, and 'sort of stay away and let me do my thing'. Teaching staff were 'always helpful. I can ask them anything'.

Third year

Third year proved more challenging for Jane with higher workload and expectations. She again completed extra subjects, which did not impact much 'because you're just on top of it'. She now knew where to find things and what was expected of her. More subjects were related to the school curriculum, which she enjoyed, especially the hands-on activities in tutorials. Jane's professional experience at the end of third year with a young class was a 'huge learning curve'. After that, she felt a lot more confident. With an 18 month gap between practicums she had started to doubt herself, but found she had 'really improved'.

⁶ A central office area where most student services are located and students can gain assistance.

In third year Jane attended most lectures face to face, watching all others online. She attended most tutorials, missing some because she took a holiday in the mid-semester break – “silly idea” - which spilled over into semester, and missing some through illness. She completed fewer readings than previously, due to the additional and more challenging courses. She ‘just didn’t have time’, but spent more time completing ‘more demanding’ assignments. There were no extra support classes available this year and Jane did not need the learning support officer’s help. There was more group work which Jane found positive but challenging because she is ‘independent’ and found it hard to incorporate others’ ideas. Jane still caught up with non-university friends ‘at least fortnightly’. All in all her studies had been ‘pretty good and pretty cruisy’. Jane was starting to think about life after graduation, enquiring about teaching overseas for a year, then planned to work in a casual capacity, building up her resources, and hoped to secure a permanent job within five years.

Fourth year

Jane felt fourth year was ‘probably my best year’. She loved the ‘really relevant’ courses, and Internship was the ‘best two and a half months’. Having completed extra courses in previous years, she could devote more time to first semester subjects, which were ‘heavier in content’, and prepare for Internship. It was good to ‘pull everything together’ in final year subjects. Initially having a spread out timetable due to being at work when enrolments opened, Jane changed it so her classes were all on one day. She attended every lecture and tutorial, completed most readings, and spent longer on assignments because she had the time. With ‘the end in sight’ she ‘was a lot more diligent and a lot more motivated towards uni’.

University was quite different from Jane’s expectations. She thought it would be ‘more like school’, and had not anticipated the freedom to choose the days she attended and do more paid work. Jane’s employment varied during her studies. She often had more than one job, including childminding, restaurant work and tutoring, averaging 10-20 hours per week. Early in fourth year she was working 25 hours per week, to save for the Internship. During Internship she reduced her paid work. In school term four, having completed university requirements, she was getting casual teaching work but maintained another job to get through summer. Overall, university had been ‘a big adjustment’. By the end of fourth year Jane ‘knew a lot of people at uni’, but had felt comfortable since ‘towards the end of second year because I knew how to do assignments properly, I knew the expectations ... and I was sort of in the

groove of things'. Fellow students were a good support network, especially in group assignments. Jane utilised some university services in fourth year. She found the Careers office's interview training sessions 'brilliant, and loved the library', finding staff helpful and computer resources good. Despite earlier plans, Jane lived at home throughout her studies 'because it's so expensive to live out of home'. She found the long trip home from university useful for reflection, and often 'stayed with a friend' one night per week during semester to reduce travel. Her home situation remained unchanged, and she looked forward to helping her sister begin university the following year.

Jane had advice for non-traditional students like herself: 'Seek as much help as you can get, go to learning support, go to PASS, get things in early, all-nighters aren't fun. Just get as much support as you can'. Also, 'manage your time, like it's hard at the start to get into good patterns but if you get into good patterns early it's ... I thought it was going to be a huge financial burden but it really wasn't because I put a lot of my stuff on HECS. Just get a good support system as well is great'. She found having friends at university was best but also some who were not there so you could 'vent'. Her family 'were so helpful when I was stressed or needed them to comfort me in that sort of situation or they would purposely make the house quiet or leave the house for a couple of hours so I could get things done'.

Jane was considering further study: 'I'm sort of thinking at the moment ... like work for a couple of years and then come back and maybe do my masters in something. I haven't decided whether I want to ... I was thinking for a little while about doing high school education so that way I could go and teach musical history or ... specialising in special education. So hopefully somewhere down the line, I'll get that done'.

7.5 Analysing Jane's Story

Jane's story seems so straightforward, so ordinary, that initially I did not intend to feature it in this thesis. There are no extreme highs or lows as are evident in other cases, no dramas or traumas. And that is precisely why it needed to be included. Not all non-traditional journeys are fraught with challenges (Crozier et al., 2008) and this must be recognised. Jane lived furthest from campus, and was the only participant to enter via an enabling program. She appeared to take everything in her stride regarding university, despite being FiF and commuting that considerable distance. Originally ineligible to enrol

because of poor school results, she completed an additional year of preparatory work to access the teaching degree she desired, demonstrating navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). She found benefits in everything from the travel required (it provided time to reflect), to group work (which provided support and was a skill needed in the work place). Although her parents had not attended university, it seemed a 'taken for granted' progression in her life.

Jane utilised many services whilst at university, which is unusual for non-traditional students according to some studies (Benson et al., 2012) though others have found they used support more than other groups (Southgate et al., 2014). Despite managing her courses well, including an extra subject in many semesters, she attended supplementary classes in most semesters to optimise her academic outcomes. To my knowledge she did not ever request an extension on an assignment, nor did she fail a subject despite the extra load she often maintained. She did not ever complain about a staff member, a course, an assignment or any aspect of the university experience. Her grades were sound, rather than high, though there was substantial variance. Jane was proactive in her approach to university, doing everything in her power to ensure success and maintain wellbeing (Wrench et al., 2013). Her attendance was high and she completed most readings throughout her enrolment, which many students do not. This, together with supplementary courses, helped her maximise her academic skills.

Support from family was implicit in Jane's story. Whilst 'very supportive' of her studies, there was no hint of practical assistance, other than providing a home so that university was affordable. Connell's (1994) work referring to low SES students in schools noted that along with more academic resources, families could provide 'adequate food, physical security, attention' (p. 134), and this was provided for Jane. No family member assisted with her studies in any specific way, but the 'family support' which was 'emotional and embodied' (O'Shea, 2015a) seemed enough for Jane, along with their preparedness to 'get out of the way' so she could study in peace. This was no less effective for Jane than different types of assistance provided by families with more or different cultural capital. Unlike Simone and some students in O'Shea's (2015b) study, Jane had no-one in her 'extended family and community' (p. 514) network to assist her. There was no aunt or family friend who could assist academically. No-one read through her work or quizzed her, but perhaps she did not want them to. Jane found working with other students useful, 'for group assignments' but was otherwise independent, an attribute valued at university (Cantwell et al., 2014). She did have some friends from her home town who were also studying, including one whose home she stayed at on some nights during semester. This did not seem crucial, but rather a convenience that eased the load.

Jane did not hold university on a pedestal like some non-traditional students, but rather seemed 'a fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). She considered university staff helpful and approachable, and did not struggle to maintain connections with family, home town and friends as some research indicates (Steiha, 2010). Rather she stayed living there and maintained contact with non-university friends, ensuring she saw them 'at least fortnightly'. Jane's two worlds did not seem to clash or even overlap. This did not seem deliberate, but was likely a by-product of the distance between geographical locations of home and study. They co-existed side-by-side in Jane's world, like working class students attending non-elite universities in the study by Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos and Young (2008) who were able to maintain connections to their home communities. Further study was a possibility in Jane's future, and her sister was expected to begin university studies the year after Jane finished. Entry into HE appears to have occurred seamlessly for the family with Jane 'bridging' between home and university (O'Shea, 2015a).

7.6 Briony's Story

The journey to university

Briony began university aged 18. She did not consider teaching as a career until late in her final year of school. She wanted to study psychology, but knew her grades would not be good enough, so decided on teaching. Her high school result (an ATAR of just under 60) was enough to gain entry. Neither of Briony's parents had attended university, but they 'kind of just expected' her to follow her sister (only a year older) into study at Central campus. Two much older siblings had not attended university. Briony enrolled full-time and worked 15 to 20 hours per week. Regional was the closest university to home, being an hour away by train. The youngest of four children, Briony wanted to move out of home and be independent, but found university too expensive.

University would provide a career in teaching, 'a well-respected kind of job', and Briony hoped for a kindergarten class, because 'they're little'. She expected to find assignments and budgeting challenging, but looked forward to learning, and professional experience. Briony thought she would need to study more and procrastinate less to succeed. She had done well in primary and lower high school without 'much effort'. Although Years 11 and 12 were harder, she had not studied

more. If needing help at university Briony thought she would ask other students, then teachers. She could also ask her sister 'where to find things and what to do'.

First year

Initially Briony was happy at university. She felt teaching was a good choice for her, and she could 'understand the stuff better' than she might in psychology. The hardest thing in the first weeks was finding places. She knew about the counselling service but didn't expect to need it. Briony made 'an effort to try and talk to people and make friends' on campus. Many people from her high school were at university, but in other courses, so she had to make friends in her classes. She was organised and completed her first assignment ahead of time – a first for her. Briony was realising how much she needed to learn. Watching her own teachers, she hadn't realised how hard teaching was. She was looking forward to her first professional experience, but that would be over a year away.

About six weeks into first semester, Briony 'quit' university. It 'just got too hard, really' and she wasn't sure it was what she wanted to do. Travelling an hour each way was hard, especially managing that with paid work. Her timetable meant that she was on campus every day, but sometimes only for an hour. After leaving university, she worked until halfway through the year, then completed a Certificate III in Children's Services at a private college attached to childcare centres. She did well in her studies, having 'put more effort in' than at university, and felt she would be good at the job. Briony 'kind of' wished she had persevered longer at university, but enjoyed what she was doing. She felt that having worked in the industry, if she returned to university she would 'be more focussed' than having just left school. She was now considering an Early Childhood degree as she preferred working in child care centres to schools. It was more fun, less planning, and she preferred working with younger children. During her Certificate III she had procrastinated less due to the practical experience involved, which motivated her to work on the theory behind it. At university Briony had 'sought out old school friends' rather than making friends in her course, and felt that did not help her in attending classes. She knew no-one who could help with what she was doing. Next time she would be more proactive.

Second year

In the months following that first year, Briony was unable to secure employment in childcare, so she enrolled in a Diploma at the same college. It was 'something to do'

while unemployed, but should help her obtain a permanent job, as it was often a requirement for job applications. Usually a six month course, Briony completed it over a year, while working casually. Full time enrolment was two days per week – one day in classes and one practical day in the centre, which was a five minute drive from her home. Some assignments required her to complete activities with children at the centre, tasks which could not be completed at night or on weekends. The course was ‘a lot harder’ than she expected and she ‘struggled with it a lot’. Working at the centre where she was studying, Briony often planned a study day, then was called into work. Most weeks she worked there three to five days, then in retail on weekends.

Briony made friends at the centre where she was working and studying, but was the only student completing the Diploma, so she often helped other students rather than them helping her. Staff at the centre tried to help her with study though. She ‘probably spent more time with friends’ (who were not studying) during the year than she should have, but work was the main hindrance to study. Interestingly her closest friends were about to begin university studies. Briony’s home situation had not changed. She and her sister were both studying. She wanted to move out of home but needed full time employment first. At the end of the year and with her Diploma, Briony resumed applying for jobs, receiving interviews but no offers. She was ‘kind of over studying’, but would still consider returning to university to help gain employment. She remained interested in psychology, but realised she needed to decide what she wanted to do before applying for another course. In the meantime she felt she would ‘do okay’ in childcare, and it was ‘a good feeling’ to know what she was doing and enjoy the work.

Third year

Briony worked casually at centres owned by the training college for another six months, then obtained a permanent position in one. Briony again applied for university after encouragement from her employer. The company was expanding and would need more university qualified staff. She applied for a Bachelor of Early Childhood 1-5 degree (but was considering changing that to 1-12 for the option to work in schools) to be completed by distance, part time. She had not heard from the university, and had decided to defer if accepted, as she couldn’t afford it at that time. She thought she would work for a year before going ‘back to study’ to ‘buy a computer’ plus ‘books and things’. She would also ‘have to do pracs where I have to take time

off' and would not be paid. She hoped in a few years' time to have a university degree and be teaching. Briony moved out of home a few months after gaining permanent employment. She first shared with friends, but there was too much 'fighting'. She next moved out on her own. This was expensive, hence the decision to defer further study. Still, she was 'happier where I am now'. Briony's mother had died while Briony was in high school. Briony had taken on a lot of responsibility at home as her older sister claimed that she had more important studies to focus on. Briony found living by herself easier, with fewer distractions if she tried to study in future. She also expected to manage her time better. Maturity and work experience had made her more responsible, and she would be studying through choice, rather than having 'nothing else to do'.

Fourth year

By our final interview, Briony had enjoyed not studying for the past two years. It took 'the pressure off a lot', not having to study after work, and she had more time for 'organising craft things and stuff' for 'kids at my centre'. Briony expected her next attempt at university to be more successful. Having not applied herself at school, she had maintained those habits, and 'rarely did anything' while at university. She now realised the importance of study but still worried about studying by distance. Briony felt that a gap year after high school would have been good as 'no one coming straight out of Year 12 wants to go into study' but it was 'what I was expected to do'. This expectation came from her father, who left school after Year 9, because her sister had done so (had completed honours and was now working). The difference, Briony thought, was that her sister 'knew what she wanted to do'. Briony now also knew that her father didn't really care: he had thought she wanted to go to university.

7.7 Analysing Briony's Story

Briony self-identified as low SES, though she did not receive government financial support for her studies. Her widowed father, a truck driver, encouraged her to enrol at university, like her sister. She was FG then, but not FiF. Briony went along with the idea of university because she had no strong desire to do anything else. Her initial foray into university was short-lived, yet returning remained a possibility in her imagined future.

Support is noticeably lacking in Briony's narrative. While her father was keen for her to attend university, he did not feature elsewhere in her narrative. Like Lani's family, it seems

he provided no practical support, even in the limited ways demonstrated by other parents such as Simone's mother. Briony's sister, despite being a university student herself, appears to have provided little assistance with Briony's transition. In fact her sister may have inadvertently contributed to Briony leaving university by not contributing equally in the household. Position in the birth order played a role here, and gender should also be considered. As the eldest child still at home, Briony's sister reached 'important' milestones before Briony, and demanded preferential treatment so she could focus on her final school year, then university. This demonstrates that the family valued education, but Briony's sister appeared to have consumed the resources or family capital (Yosso, 2005) they had available, and similar allowances were not made for Briony at those points. Had Briony been the older child, she may have received the preferential treatment bestowed on her sister. What if she had been a boy? Would 'he' then have been expected to take on the majority of household work, or would it have fallen to the female regardless of age, as often happens for mature female students (O'Shea, 2014; Reay, 2002a, 2003)? Had Briony's mother still been alive, conditions would also have been different. Gender has again played a part, hindering Briony's HE experience. She is now employed in a gendered industry with low pay and no room for advancement without expensive HE. This was caused by a life situation out of Briony's control, as occurred for other students in this study, which may have been less debilitating for students from more advantaged backgrounds (Reay, 2003). It appears that Briony's family only had a combination of capitals or 'physical and emotional resources' (Benson et al., 2012, p. 24) sufficient to support one child through HE. Briony had friends enrolled in other degrees, but not in teaching. She was 'financially poor and time poor' (Rubin & Wright, 2017), so less likely to become socially integrated at university. She was also shy and did not stay long enough to develop new networks which could have provided social support.

For Briony, the demands of household responsibilities and paid work combined with the time required to commute made leaving university an easy decision. Her relatively low ATAR also suggests she may have struggled with the demands of university, or at least may not have had the discipline to apply herself, given her admission that she did not work hard at school (though even this may have been related to losing her mother). Students like Jane and Simone persevered despite their difficult conditions, but they had other factors in their favour. Both had more support from family initially (and fellow students eventually), and both had a strong desire to become a teacher. By contrast, in Briony's story there is little sense of motivation or agency, which Clegg (2011) has linked to educational success.

After her brief foray into university, Briony succeeded in studying for Certificates in childcare. There were struggles in this too, though. Again she had limited support, including few peers to discuss study with. Paid employment slowed her studies, but she escaped the commute required for university. At the end of this research, Briony had qualifications and a job she enjoyed, and was living independently. She remained open to the idea of university but was cognisant of the need to have adequate structures in place to manage it. If she did enrol in future it would be by distance, which worried her, to maintain employment. At the same time, childcare workers in Australia earn below-average wages. Money and time appear to be two challenges for Briony could endure into the foreseeable future, limiting her ability to change her path or horizons. In this way social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1997) is evident in her story.

Briony's story in relation to 'dropping out' does not exhibit the shame seen with David and Rosie (see Chapter 5). Briony had no strong desire to be a teacher, did not seem to hold HE on a pedestal, and left before forming any attachment to her student identity. She also did not have the chance to fail, leaving entirely by choice. Perhaps, though, this was another way of refusing that which was refused her (Bourdieu, 1984). Due to her sister's HE success, it cannot be said that Briony's family's habitus was reproductive but there did not seem sufficient capital in the family to be totally transformative either. Briony's dis/position led her to different choices than those of her sister.

7.8 Other School Leavers

Lani, Jane and Briony were not the only school leavers participants in this study. Others included: Karen who, after difficult years at high school, a mental health diagnosis, enrolment at a different university and degree, and a violent relationship, had four successful years at Regional, living independently then with her partner, graduated with a teaching degree; Lenore, also with a mental health diagnosis and partly estranged from her parents who enrolled in teaching but transferred to nursing, (after finding teacher education students 'cliquey'), supporting her partner's mentally ill brother, graduated within the expected time frame; Ebony, with an ATAR of 76 (one of the highest for participants in this study) who lived at home a forty minute drive from campus and worked 20 hours per week, completed the primary teaching degree in four years. Their stories are no less valid or compelling than the three presented in detail, but a thesis can only be so long, and I hope to write about these participants elsewhere. In every narrative there were one or more points which were

mirrored in one or more other narrative. For this chapter I selected students whose paths differed from any other shown in this thesis. Lani was the only student to change degrees twice and take a year off during the four years. Jane was the only student to enter via an enabling course, and commuted further than anyone else. Briony was the only student to leave university during the first year. That she remained in the study for four years was fortuitous as there has been little research on students who withdraw from HE (Harvey & Szalkowicz, 2017).

7.9 Issues of Maturity, Motivation and Support

7.9.1 Decisions about Higher Education

As school-leavers, these three students had the benefit of recent academic experience and the guidance schools can provide regarding HE, which is the main source of information for working class students (Reay, 1998b). Despite this, Jane's grades did not gain her access to the teaching degree directly from school, Lani began a degree which was not her first preference, and both Lani and Briony left within weeks. Advice provided by some schools may be overrated, or perhaps not all students take advantage of it. Regardless, this is evidence both that schools can do more to prepare students for university and that an emphasis on enlisting students directly from school may not be the best option. Alternately it might be up to universities to establish better partnerships with schools or provide a better transition for school-leavers.

7.9.2 Staying close to home

None of these three students had seemingly even considered attending a different university. Like many non-traditional students, they enrolled in low prestige courses in non-elite institutions (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013), seemingly unaware of the 'market in academic qualifications' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 142). Only Jane seemed cognisant of her transcript, once mentioning that attending extra classes would be worth it for one or two more marks. Passing seemed to be the goal, with little consideration for rank or prestige. While this is not unusual for non-traditional students with limited cultural capital in HE (Gale & Parker, 2015), it is perhaps also a reflection on the degrees in which they were enrolled. Teaching wages vary little, and are not based on university results. State and Catholic school systems employ the vast majority of teachers in Australia, with salaries linked only to years of service and promotion. Lani's business degree would be unlikely to provide a high-paying job at graduate level, whereas strong performance in a law degree, for example, might secure

prestigious employment. It is likely that, knowingly or not, these students chose the institution that was a 'better fit' for them (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009, 2010) than others would be.

Families are cited as being the highest source of support by 79% of Australian school-leavers (Wyn, 2011). Family support took different forms for the school-leavers in this chapter, and its importance can be seen through their examples. All stayed living at home during their studies, despite a lengthy commute for Jane. This provided familiarity, stability, and affordability. Although I have noted elsewhere the benefits of living on campus, that was unaffordable for these school-leavers, who likely did not have Lacey's navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Not every school leaver is mature enough to live independently and study, and none of these students' families applied pressure for them to leave home. Jane's family capital (Yosso, 2005) was strongest though not overt. Lani's was variable but improved, at least in terms of her parents' attitudes. All families allowed the students to make their own decisions regarding study and work. Jane and Lani had few responsibilities at home, so were able to focus on study, work and social lives. Briony had the least support, and a family that required more input from her than others did. Gap-year students Simone and Anna moved in with their partners when their home situations threatened their studies, but Briony lacked this option.

Social support through friends was mixed for these students. As Regional was the local university for all three school-leavers, they all knew others from their schools who were also studying there. None of the three had existing friends in their teaching courses though, so had to forge new connections. Briony did not remain enrolled long enough to establish such social capital on campus, and Lani's choices proved a mixed bag, providing some negative but eventually more positive influences. Jane was more successful, despite the distance she commuted, accommodating both friends from her home town and new colleagues. While she acknowledged the support fellow students could provide, this did not seem as important as the relationships noted by mature students and delayed starters in this thesis.

7.9.3 Academic investment

I have noted that Jane, Lani and Briony all had relatively low ATARs. Only Jane felt this was not a reliable indication of her achievement, and only Jane did not drop or fail a course; rather she completed extra courses at times. Jane was also the most confident, on enrolment, in her chosen path. Lani and Briony both claimed not to have put much effort into the last years of high school, and this pattern continued at university. Of the three, only Jane attended classes consistently, completed readings and listened to lectures. Academic

engagement affects short and long term outcomes at university, including retention and completion (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Briony's early departure means that little can be said about her academic performance, but Lani did manage to pass many courses despite her limited academic effort. Lani's grades were variable (mostly passes and credits), with some withdrawals from courses and a few fails along the way, but Jane passed every course, with grades also varying from passes to distinctions. Many participants in this study, including Lani, were initially apprehensive about university assignments, especially essays, but managed to adapt. Once first year had been completed, essays presented no significant concern. O'Shea (2014) also found that FiF female students increased in confidence after receiving their first academic results. Most university students seem able, regardless of their school achievement, to develop sufficient academic skills to meet university requirements.

7.9.4 Agency

The importance of agency is evident in this chapter, with Jane demonstrating it most clearly. Despite a poor ATAR, she believed in her academic ability, so undertook an enabling course to gain entry to HE and did not look back. Her life experiences gave her confidence that teaching was the right choice for her. Lani also had a year of study before transferring to teaching. She began her HE journey with little agency but developed it over time as she gained maturity and skills, both at university and in employment, hence acquiring experiential capital (O'Shea, 2014). Briony demonstrated the least agency regarding HE, except in her decision to leave. University is never the only option and may not be the best choice for an individual at a given time. Briony's family situation, which she could not change, was not compatible with HE for her, and perhaps she 'read the future' (Mills, 2008, p. 108) that was hers at the time. By determining 'what you cannot have ... and then looking at the options left' (Reay et al., 2002, p. 9) Briony found other study options that were manageable. She may yet return to HE as Lani did, when finances and personal factors allow. At least she is not burdened with huge HE debt.

7.10 Conclusion

While non-traditional school-leavers have fewer responsibilities than older students, they also have fewer resources of their own or recognised options, due to lower cultural and experiential capital. Financially they are dependent on their parents, and this places geographical restrictions on study choices. Academically, they have been highly supported at school. It can then be a shock to be treated as independent adults at university, especially

for those with low academic achievement. Some students are more ready, and supported, to make these changes than others, and the situation is compounded when there is a lack of certainty about career path or inability to access the preferred pathway.

Family support is perhaps more essential for school-leavers than other students, and for non-traditional school-leavers this can be limited with regard to HE. Provided that real family support is forthcoming, the form it takes seemingly matters little. Jane's family support was silent but solid. Briony's family support was so minimal that it could not sustain her, but she was contending also with low prior achievement, distance, motivation and responsibilities at home and work. Had just one of these burdens been lifted, or another strong support been in place, she may have persevered. It may be that the cumulative impact of multiple disadvantage made HE untenable. Lani stumbled on her HE journey, also having little support at home but she also had no responsibilities at home, no paid work initially and no distance to travel, and had the 'luxury' of being able to regroup and resume her studies successfully. She will have a much higher student debt than Jane, but is either unaware or unconcerned about it.

The situation in which non-traditional school-leavers find themselves leads me to consider whether entering HE immediately after school is the best option. The Bradley Review's goal of 'at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds' (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xviii) attaining a university degree may be misguided. Perhaps the age range should be lifted. A year or more spent exploring their new status as young adults and developing various capitals might improve the long term outcomes of non-traditional students, at least in the case of those with particular indicators such as low prior academic achievement or career uncertainty. Students like Jane and many others need no such considerations (though even Jane needed an alternate pathway) but could have benefitted from financial support to stay closer to campus during the week. For widening participation initiatives to be successful, adequately resourcing is required so that the "choices" of poorer students' can be less 'constrained' (Archer, 2007, p. 464).

Like mature students David and Rosie, Lani reached a turning point when she embarked on professional experience. If not for this component of the program, she may well have continued with the degree, though she would not have finished in the minimum time. Like Rosie but unlike David she was able to pass this component, but it brought home the reality of the teacher's job and she decided it was not for her. Being able to change direction through choice probably made returning to study easier. For the two school-leavers in this chapter who were ambivalent towards HE, we did not see life getting in the way of studies as was the case for delayed starters. Rather study seemed to be getting in

the way of life. It may be better for school-leavers to feel less expected or compelled to enrol in university directly from school in order to have a more fruitful experience at a later time.

The following chapter presents my conclusions from the study as a whole. Major findings are presented, along with limitations of the present study, and directions for further research arising from consideration of this thesis.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This thesis reports on a longitudinal study of non-traditional students' experiences at university. In order to produce rich data, a narrative inquiry approach was utilised. A Bourdieuan methodology was incorporated in order to consider the role social reproduction may play while examining the factors affecting non-traditional students' experiences. Interviews began in a first year teacher education subject and continued over four years of the students' enrolment or other pathways. Narratives compiled from interviews were analysed to determine the factors affecting the students' journeys. The analyses presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 provide evidence of the varied ways in which habitus, capital and field operate and interact, along with other factors, to affect the non-traditional student HE experience.

In this chapter I synthesise the analysis chapters to provide a focus on salient outcomes from the study. I begin by examining themes which emerged as important in affecting the progress of non-traditional students in this study. This is followed by a consideration of how influences affected students differently, depending on their individual circumstances or background factors. I then consider the findings of the study with regard to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field. Recommendations arising from this study are presented, followed by the limitations of the current study and further research suggested by it.

8.2 Crucial Factors Affecting Student Journeys

As outlined in Chapter 2, there are various themes which are prominent in the research on non-traditional student experiences in HE. Many of these affect students regardless of their age, prior academic achievement or other variables. In this section I present themes arising from my data analysis which were relevant for all groups – school leavers, delayed starters and mature students. The students followed in this study were, on the whole, highly successful in their HE journeys. Factors seen as important in facilitating that success included adaptation to university requirements, social and family support, and managing time and the financial demands of being a student. These factors have all featured in the

relevant literature, but with some different outcomes in this study, due in part to the specific context but also due to the longitudinal data collection.

8.2.1 Changes over time

The conditions which affected students, and the perceptions the students held, differed across the timeframe of their journeys. For example, Ellie's early perceptions (Chapter 5) changed so that a year or so into her enrolment she was no longer in awe of academic staff, but rather more realistic. What seemed important to students early in the first year of study was not so crucial a few months later. Likewise, new issues became critical in later years which were of no concern initially. Students seen to struggle at one time can succeed at another time. Lani (Chapter 7) may well have seemed a lost cause having dropped one degree and deferred another. She returned after a year in the workforce, however, and was more successful, also showing that workplace experience is capital-building.

One surprising factor which had not been prominent in the literature about non-traditional students was the impact of unexpected life events. Indeed, there has been little consideration of life events and their effect on student persistence generally (Roland et al., 2016). Students needed to cope with changing living arrangements, relationship developments and breakdowns, illnesses (their own and family members') and bereavement during the four year study.

8.2.2 Managing academic demands

An assumption feeding the deficit view held by some of non-traditional students is that they will struggle with the academic demands of university studies (Burke & Johnson, 2004; James et al., 2010). While some students in this study failed one subject or more during their enrolment, and two students acknowledged ongoing difficulty in understanding academic readings, academic performance was not the sole or even main cause of difficulty for any individual. Most participants in this study, regardless of prior academic achievement, were initially nervous about their ability to complete assessment tasks satisfactorily, especially essays. Such concerns had all but disappeared once the students had completed first year, suggesting that they adapted to university expectations. It may be that first year courses scaffolded students into the academic requirements or that learning support services were adequate. O'Shea (2014) wrote of the 'almost "mythic" qualities of the independent learner' (p. 137) who embodies the student desirable to HE institutions, and who can negotiate the HE system 'without support or additional assistance' (Read et al., 2003, p. 272): a 'turbo student' (Prummer, 2000; O'Shea, 2014, p. 155) completing their degree in the shortest timeframe possible. Against many odds, some non-traditional students achieve just that, as seen in this study and others (for example Pitman, 2013; Reay

et al., 2009; Walpole, 2003). Expecting or requiring such achievement though is unwise and unfair, given the complexity of everyday lives and the various starting points of diverse HE cohorts. In an era of HE massification, it should not be expected as the norm.

Neither pathway nor prior academic achievement were indicators of student success. Students in this study arrived at university via many pathways, with a wide range of prior academic achievements. Success was attained by those entering via school results, enabling courses, Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) backgrounds or mature age entry. For those participants possessing an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) the range was from below 60 (approximately the minimum result with which to enter a teaching degree) to over 80 (the maximum possible ATAR being 99.5). School leaver Briony (Chapter 7), who stayed at university for only a short time, was near the low end of that range, but students with similar rankings were successful. Of those without an ATAR, Jessica (Chapter 6) struggled in high school and did not complete her program. Mature student Rosie (Chapter 5) also left high school early, but did complete a university degree. Although high school achievement may restrict entry to HE (Le & Miller, 2005; Cardak & Ryan, 2009), it is not, then, a determining factor of HE success for those who attain access.

8.2.3 Complicating disadvantage

Some students in this study experienced extremely difficult situations, all of which could have been made more manageable with additional resources: that is, had they been less disadvantaged. Roland et al. (2016) noted that disruption to student journeys through life events had not been examined in earlier literature, but had a notable effect on student progress. Many of the students in this study experienced points in their journeys where additional difficulties or complications could easily have derailed their studies. None of this is surprising, and such events occur for traditional students too, but often with less impact than for non-traditional students. Harvey and Szalkowicz (2017) noted that personal reasons were often the cause of attrition for students, and that withdrawing students were 'typically young and from under-represented backgrounds' (p. 79). Of note is the fact that the difficult situations which could have, but mostly did not, lead to attrition, did not occur in first year. The first year of university has been considered a crucial time for transition, with a high attrition rate (Tinto, 1993; Horn & Carrol, 1998; McMillan, 2005). Accordingly, much research attention and support for students has been directed towards this phase of enrolment. While all students in this study acknowledged some apprehension early in their enrolment, only Briony (Chapter 7) left university within the first year, and that was after only a few weeks. For others, crucial points came during every year *other than* first year. Jessica's mental health, Ellie's father's death and her own illness (both in Chapter 6),

Rosie's health problem (Chapter 5), Simone's sibling's mental illness (Chapter 6), and David's struggles with professional experience (Chapter 5) all occurred after the much maligned first year.

The life event difficulties discussed above were not attributable to students' backgrounds. We can presume that the challenges faced by Jessica (Chapter 6) and Rosie (Chapter 5) were exacerbated by their difficulty in meeting the academic challenges provided by university, but they alone would likely not have impacted on the students' studies to the degree that occurred in combination with health issues. Again, the impact of these health issues alone may not have caused the disruption to study, but the two compounded to make continuation that much more difficult. Roland et al. (2016) also noted the negative impact of life events related to health and bereavement, finding that social support and student interest in their courses were factors that helped them persevere through these times. This view is supported by the current study for all but the most (multiply) disadvantaged students.

8.2.4 Personal qualities

Successful students from non-traditional backgrounds in this study shared characteristics of motivation and belief in their ability to succeed at university. It would have been easy to give up on the goal of a university degree, especially for those who experienced challenges such as Simone's need to work full time and family issues (Chapter 6), Jane's commuting distance and poor high school results (Chapter 7), and other challenges noted in analysis chapters. None of these students had an easy journey; rather, they tackled whatever difficulties arose, and progressed. There is not one single external factor to which this can be attributed, and this supports assertions by other researchers (Benson et al., 2012; Devlin & O'Shea, 2011) that students from disadvantaged groups rely on 'their own personal qualities' (Luzeckyj, McCann, Graham, King & McCann, 2017, p. 6) to succeed. A propensity to 'work and work extremely hard' (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1109) is a valuable attribute for non-traditional students to possess.

8.2.5 Sources of support

Support was a crucial factor for non-traditional students succeeding at university, in this study as in others (Benson et al., 2012; Cheng, et al., 2012). The student with least access to support, Jessica (Chapter 6), struggled the most with university and appeared unlikely to complete a degree when this study ended. For others, valuable support was seen to come from a number of sources. Mature students (Chapter 5) found that like-minded colleagues provided the most appreciated support. For school leavers (Chapter 7) and delayed starters (Chapter 6), friends from high school who also attended university were

valued, and this support was augmented by developing relationships with new colleagues. Support from family was also important, for all participants, regardless of how that support was manifested. Even the quality of social support was not crucial to these students, though increased quantity and quality of support may have been additionally beneficial (Rubin & Wright, 2015).

Relationships with academic staff were not crucial for participants in this study, though a range of experiences with staff were mentioned, and most were positive. Rosie (Chapter 5) alone demonstrated an extreme view of staff, where she considered them to be of a different realm. Most participants spoke of staff as being generally helpful, though some specific incidents were noted where that was not the case. Due to the context of Regional University, most staff would have extensive experience in teaching non-traditional students. Other researchers have suggested roles for academic staff in promoting social integration through activities both inside and outside the classroom (Thomas, 2012), with Benson et al. (2012) recommending 'support by academic staff that includes, but goes beyond, pedagogical assistance ... and responds to students' diverse experiences and backgrounds' (p. 13). My own interactions with the participants during the study support these suggestions.

8.3 Student Experiences are Always or Never the Same

In this section I present factors which affected student experiences differently, based on their different backgrounds or individual situations. Comparisons are made across age groups and other contributing factors.

8.3.1 Paid work

The number of hours spent in paid work did not affect student progress. Students with the equivalent of a full time job in addition to full time studies, such as Simone (Chapter 6), were no less successful than students with no or few hours in paid employment, such as Lani (Chapter 7). This differs from other studies where hours in paid employment lowered student outcomes (James et al., 2010). Various participants juggled different jobs and changed these at times for manageability, but none felt the need to give up work for the sake of their studies. Lacey's need to discontinue paid work for a period of time related to illness and her family crises. It is possible, however, that various aspects of their university experiences were affected, as Metcalf (2003) found. Despite this, mature students and those who had worked for a year or more before beginning university appear to have

benefitted from their workplace experiences, lending support to O'Shea's (2016b) concept of experiential capital. This includes Lani (Chapter 7) who took a year away from university part-way through her studies, worked, and returned with increased focus and improved study practices. Only David's (Chapter 5) extensive prior work experience did not appear to benefit him in the context of Primary schools, with regard to the role of teacher. This may, however, have been affected by other factors in David's life not investigated in this research.

8.3.2 Living arrangements

A single student in this study lived on campus. Lacey (Chapter 6) made a strategic choice to do this, and the benefits were multiple as suggested by Rubin and Wright (2015). It allowed her to transfer into her preferred degree, provided a buffer to the challenges unfolding at home, facilitated the development of a useful social network, and allowed immersion in university life. Whilst this was costly, she managed the expense with forethought and planning. A number of participants in this study commuted a moderate distance to university. These were school leavers (Chapter 7) or those who had taken a gap year after school (Chapter 6), and all lived with their parents, between forty and ninety minutes away from campus. For them, living at home made university affordable. They reduced transport costs by minimising the numbers of days they needed to be on campus, but in doing so sacrificed the social and cultural benefits of spending more time there. Choices are (and are perceived as) limited for students from non-traditional backgrounds (Cho et al., 2008; Dunnett et al., 2012; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). The mature students (Chapter 5) present a specific case. Having families made living on campus impossible for mature students, though it was in any case not an option at the satellite campuses where they studied. Their responsibilities as parents would have made even the aforementioned commuting difficult. The satellite campuses did not offer the activities and resources available at Central though, so that their experiences as university students were somewhat diminished. Being able to spend a reasonable amount of time on campus, they compensated somewhat through the formation of strong social networks. There is another single case which should be noted here. Delayed starter Jessica (Chapter 6) lived with her partner (no children) a moderate commute away from campus. Her partner's financial support was initially the reason she could afford to study, similar to the school leavers living with parents. Unlike them, and having moved from interstate, she did not have a broader social circle for support as did the school leavers or as formed by the mature students.

There is much to recommend living on campus, as shown through Lacey's story (Chapter 6). In addition to the various advantages including access to additional social and cultural capital which can be gained through that situation (Rubin & Wright, 2015), there are

ample other examples in this study showing disadvantages for students living at home – especially those commuting some distance. Despite the financial benefits of living at home, Simone and Anna (Chapter 6) removed themselves from their domestic situations in order to protect their progression as students due to family situations not conducive to their studies (something their mature counterparts may find more difficult). Even so, they remained living some distance from campus, limiting the time they could spend there, and retaining travel costs which more local students do not bear. This type of situation again demonstrates the complexities in decision-making faced by non-traditional students (Reay, 1998b). I have deliberately avoided using the word ‘choice’ as it denotes more freedom and options than non-traditional students may have or perceive. In past generations (and more commonly in countries other than Australia) traditional university students have typically lived on campus, effectively removed from the distractions of family life, enabling a focus on their student identity. This continues to be common in present times, especially for students attending more elite universities (Reay et al., 2010). For example, Crozier et al. (2008) noted one elite UK university where students were required to live on campus for at least their first year of study, and most continued to do so for the duration of their enrolment.

Whether or not maintaining the HE experience as a sphere separate from community and family life is advisable remains unclear, with some students in this study happily living at home and reaping the benefits of family support as noted later in this chapter. Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) noted that in the UK non-traditional students may prefer ‘the emotional security’ (p. 82) of living in the parental home, in their familiar community, during their studies. In one way the separation of HE from home life may propagate the concept of university as an elite field, but on the other hand it could help students focus on their studies and benefit from immersion in that culture for the period of time they are enrolled (Reay et al., 2009). I do not propose to argue for or against on-campus living here, as students are in the best position to determine what is manageable and preferable for them. It is clear, however, that on-campus living is impossible for some non-traditional students, and undesirable for others who need or wish to maintain their family/work commitments while studying, at least in the current context.

Given the age range of university students generally and those included in this study specifically, it is not surprising that some relationships and living arrangements change over a four year enrolment. Jessica’s relationship ended, and she moved in with another student (Chapter 6). This increased her social capital which may have benefitted her student journey had it transpired earlier. Simone and Anna (Chapter 6) moved out of their parents’ homes to live with partners. This is interesting because in both cases it was precipitated by

domestic upheaval rather than natural progression of the relationships. These two moved out of home, adding to their financial challenges, in order to safeguard their progress as students. Leaving the family home is a bold move for non-traditional students, leading to additional demands in terms of expense and responsibility for themselves (Meuleman et al., 2015).

8.3.3 Using support services

School leavers (Chapter 7) and delayed starters (Chapter 6) made greater use of support services at university than did mature students in this study. Those entering university directly from school or via enabling courses noted making use of additional classes to assist with course content and academic skills. Some students entering after gap years attended bridging courses to assist with their transitions, and utilised counselling services during times of crisis. Some studies have found that non-traditional students make little use of support services (Benson et al., 2012). In this thesis findings support claims by Southgate et al. (2014) that FiF students used support services more than their more traditional colleagues. The variance in findings may relate to different contexts or the types of support provided at each institution. Mature students (Chapter 5) tended to rely on their peer group for support rather than university services, though perhaps there were fewer services available at the satellite campuses.

8.3.4 Buffering factors

There are a number of factors which appeared to act as buffers for non-traditional students. For Ellie (Chapter 5), it was the belief that since her mother had attained Further Education qualifications (such as certificates, diplomas) as a single parent, she could succeed as a mature student. For Lacey and Anna (Chapter 6) it was the ability to navigate ways and means when the traditional pathways were unavailable. They, along with Jane (Chapter 7), were buoyed by confidence in their demonstrated academic skills. For others it seemed that determination to persevere in less than optimal circumstances (Simone needing to work full-time; Simone and Anna needing to leave home; various participants living some distance from campus and all making financial sacrifices to study) enabled their success. These students demonstrated inner resources which Lucey et al. (2003) also noted in working class female students and which are more often linked to working class (Reay et al., 2001; Reay et al., 2009) or FiF students (Benson et al., 2012; Devlin & O'Shea, 2011). Not all non-traditional students possess such buffers, and for them HE is particularly, and perhaps unnecessarily, difficult. Students entering with low academic skills, without a supportive social network, having little financial support and with mitigating personal situations (mental and physical health issues experienced by themselves or family

members) may find HE impassable. Yet the removal of one or more of these hindrances could make all the difference necessary to allow these students to succeed.

8.4 A Bourdieuan Consideration of Non-traditional Student Experiences

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field were used as thinking tools in this study. In this section I consider what they can tell us about the findings of this study, and what this study tells us about habitus, capital and field in the context of non-traditional students in Australian HE.

8.4.1 Habitus.

Students in this study enrolled at an institution where there were 'people like us' (Bourdieu, 1990b). All non-traditional in one way or more, they attended a non-elite university with a history of enrolling above average numbers of non-traditional students, where they were more likely to 'fit in' (Reay et al., 2009). For the students in this study, factors related to habitus made any other decision mostly impossible. They were, in many cases, chained 'to a place' (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127) by virtue of their financial and other background factors, limiting their choices to one campus of one university. As noted by Reay (1995, p. 358), 'structural constraints reduce some working-class individuals' options to one.'

Only Lacey (Chapter 6) aspired to study at any other university, in her case an elite institution, but illness affected her school results, curtailing her opportunity. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1979) notion of working-class students as 'fish out of water' in educational contexts is somewhat outdated, when considering the Australian HE context. Students here are able to attend, if they choose, universities where there are many 'people like us' (Bourdieu, 1990b). This may not be the case for more elite degrees though, regardless of the institution. For example, Southgate et al. (2017) found that FiF medical students experienced notable 'lack of "fit"' (p. 242) in their mainly middle class cohort.

Although school teaching in Australia requires University study, teaching is among the lower ranked degrees in some hierarchies. It has been argued that, as a profession, teaching has 'lesser autonomy, status and rewards' (Bolton & Muzio, 2008, p. 283) than others such as law. Three longitudinal participants in this study transferred into degrees other than teaching (and one transferred from Primary teaching to Early Childhood teaching). Lani moved to Business (Chapter 7), Lacey to Speech Pathology (Chapter 6) and Lenore to Nursing (Chapter 7). The latter two degrees are both typically undertaken by

females, both are 'caring' professions and both are non-elite degrees but with higher entry levels than Primary teaching. As noted in the literature review, teaching and nursing qualifications have long been seen as social mobility tools, and are not as significant a 'step up' for non-traditional students as some other degrees. Through their choice of institution and program these students have demonstrated how class, and therefore habitus, has shaped their consumption of education (Allatt, 1996; Reay, 1998a, b). As noted by Gale (2012, p. 246), for 'equity to have real teeth, proportional representation ... needs to apply across institutions and course types'. Through their choice of institution and program, students in the current study have demonstrated how class, and therefore habitus, has shaped their consumption of education (Allatt, 1996; Reay, 1998a, b). I also consider that in the current context, habitus is less likely to be affected by university study than in previous generations. Archer and Leathwood noted that some working class students 'go through university rather than university going through them' (p. 177). For students whose social connections and time spent on campus is limited, this is unsurprising.

Characteristics of habitus and the degree to which it is malleable or transformative over time and across different fields became of interest in this study in an unexpected way. Participants on the whole were able to find a comfortable space for themselves at university, with some thriving and taking great advantage of all that university had to offer, for their own benefit like some students in other studies (O'Shea, 2016; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009, 2010). The exceptions were school leaver Briony (Chapter 7) who left very early of her own accord, and Jessica who struggled to hang on without ever feeling she belonged. All others found a degree of 'fit' that sustained their enrolment. David's case (Chapter 5), however, brought to light issues around gender, habitus and field which can be glimpsed in other studies but had not been highlighted. David adapted to the field of university, similarly to others, but not to the field of Primary teaching. I make the qualification that it was 'Primary' teaching, as I consider that will have some different characteristics even to secondary teaching. Preservice teacher motivations are different for Primary and Secondary teaching (Manuel & Hughes, 2006), and the gender imbalance is higher in Primary schools. Researchers have noted that Primary teaching is considered to have a 'femaleness' and there is a perception among male preservice teachers that 'men make better secondary teachers' (Johnston, McKeown & McEwen, 1999, p. 198). There are even differences in perceptions from male preservice teachers regarding masculinity and teaching in either upper or lower Primary grades (Skelton, 2003). The disappointing aspect in David's case is that having taken the bold step of enrolling at university as a mature male, he was unsuccessful not because he could not pass courses, but because he did not match the field

of employment that his degree led to. I am unsettled about the effect this experience may have had on David. It seems a failure on the part of HE that further options were not available for David or suggested to him through counselling that would have allowed him to continue studying in a different program and realise success. The field of HE appears, in this narrative, uncaring, and willing to eject those not conforming to norms. This demonstrates ongoing social reproduction in action, supported by prevailing neoliberal views ascribing success or failure to the individual (Southgate & Bennett, 2016).

Other researchers have considered that non-traditional students who are successful in HE require a hybrid identity (Lucey et al., 2003; Reay, 2001) or cleft habitus as they need to shift from one identity for home, family and community to another in their university environs and subsequent destinations (Crozier & Reay, 2011; O'Shea, 2011). Baxter and Britton (2001) similarly considered the changing of habitus as working class students progressed through HE to be a 'painful dislocation' (p. 99). While such change may be necessary for some particular students/situations, and could be a useful skill, there are concerns that those students may end up feeling completely comfortable in neither context, with 'a habitus divided against itself' (Reay, 2002b, p. 223). Participants in this study such as Simone (Chapter 6) and Lani (Chapter 7) demonstrated the feasibility of maintaining original habitus and still successfully navigating HE and the careers its accreditation provides access to. Like working class students at elite universities studied by Reay et al. (2009), students in the current study achieved success through evident effort and focussed application (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

If Bourdieu's theory was truly limited to the reproductive capacity of habitus as is suggested by some of his critics (for example Cronin, 1996; Jenkins, 2002), then this thesis would have been very different. Rather than recurring examples of reproduction in social class through the field of HE, what has been presented here is a vast array of outcomes from agents with seemingly similar original habituses. This could not be explained by the afore-mentioned critics of Bourdieu's work. I argue, instead, that the narratives presented provide illuminating examples of Bourdieu's true explications of habitus and field. Certainly Bourdieu considered that habitus allows agents improvisation within limits (Bourdieu, 1992), but also that it '*goes hand in hand with vagueness and indeterminacy*' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 77, Bourdieu's italics). What is shown through the narratives presented here is a range of variance in the ability of non-traditional students to employ strategies which have emerged through processes of adjustment to unfamiliar fields (HE and in some cases schools) and which allow them to adapt, to varying degrees. Bourdieu has noted the propensity for the dispositions arising from habitus to allow for a limited range (Reay, 1995) of acceptable

choices in behaviour in particular circumstances. In this study that range appears quite broad. It has allowed for behaviours leading to decisions to leave university (temporarily for Lani [Chapter 7] and possibly permanently for David [Chapter 5]) and also to behaviours leading to successful completion of HE studies in the shortest possible time and with added value (such as Ellie [Chapter 5]) or in extremely challenging situations (Simone [Chapter 6]). Between these extremes on the continuum there are students moving to other avenues of further education (such as Briony [Chapter 7]), and students changing direction but on track to obtain a university degree (Lacey [Chapter 6], Lani [Chapter 7]). Indeed the narratives presented demonstrate the 'wide repertoire of possible actions' (Reay, 1995, p. 433) generated by the habitus.

8.4.2 Capital

Cultural capital has been seen as highly important in HE, as evidenced by the abundance of research related to it (for example Meuleman et al., 2015; O'Shea, 2016; Reay, 1995, 1998b). This study concurs with general findings as to the value of cultural capital for HE success. It provides particular support, however, for those studies which have moved beyond the traditional notion of cultural capital as espoused by Bourdieu (1990a). Like Yosso (2005) and O'Shea (2016b), this study provides evidence of the benefits afforded by family, aspirational and experiential capital, regardless of shape, form or perceived quality.

Cultural and social capital support proved important in this study, but could be manifest in forms not traditionally considered beneficial. 'Hot' knowledge about HE from friends and family who had attended previously (Smith, 2011) was not essential, though that is not to say it would not have been beneficial. Participants gained information from many sources including websites which were not available in previous times. Students without existing university social connections when they enrolled were able to gain adequate support from others in the same situation within the first year of study. Social circles did not need to be extensive, with just two friendships being enough to sustain Simone (Chapter 6), with most contact by phone text. Students preferred these sources of support and information to more official sources such as academic staff, though this is likely an artefact of their non-traditional habitus. It could be overcome, and perhaps should be in order to increase social integration and thereby academic capital. Smith (2011) suggested that school leavers from low SES backgrounds could benefit from university outreach involving informal conversations with university students of similar age and backgrounds. This idea could be extended to mature students also. Academic capital in this study appeared to be mostly developed during HE studies rather than in preparation for them.

Family capital likewise could come in various forms, few of which were conventional. A very small number of participants had relatives who had experienced some form of study after high school, but support from those sources seemed less forthcoming or influential than the incidental assistance provided by parents and partners who would, without specific background knowledge, support the students in whatever way they could (Yosso, 2005). A wide range of strategies, from testing students on content, reading over their work, helping find information online, and even 'staying out of the way' when students were studying, were useful.

Experiential capital was of great benefit to many participants in this study. In most cases the experiential capital was gained prior to university enrolment: for example Jane (Chapter 7) had provided music tuition and helped with foster children, and Simone (Chapter 6) had trained workers in her job and looked after much younger siblings. Their experience can be seen to link directly to their area of study and future employment, while other participants benefitted from more general workplace skills such as reliability and time management (O'Shea, 2016b). This even included Lani (Chapter 7) who had no such experience until her deferral year, partway through her studies. David (Chapter 5), too, had trained newer police, but his experiences alone seemed not to assist with schooling.

8.4.3 Field

This study covers a number of fields. University is the predominant field, followed by the sub-field of teacher education initially for all participants though others subsequently moved into different university degree programs. The field of schools was also important from the second year of the study on, for those participants who remained in the teaching degree after first year, as it presented another field they needed to negotiate in addition to HE. It is necessary to consider the 'social spaces, positions and relationships pertaining in a particular time and place' (Grenfell, 2008b, p. 220-221). In particular this single university, albeit with three campuses, has its own particular social context. It had an established focus on equity long before the current widening participation era, and a long history of facilitating the enrolment of non-traditional students. The support services Regional University provided, which are available to all students, were used and found effective by many of the participants. Regional University structured course and programs in such a way that students were able to organise their timetables to accommodate paid work and other activities, and in some cases spend little time on campus. While this flexibility is useful in allowing them to attend to their other responsibilities and in some cases support themselves, it does limit their experience of HE, both socially and academically.

This study covers a period in time when more people generally in Australia and various other countries are attaining higher levels of education. For example only 10 years or so prior to this study students were permitted to leave high school aged 14 years and nine months in NSW. At the time of writing students in this state must remain in school until 17 years of age unless they can prove that they have paid employment or are going into some other form of education or training. The percentage of people attaining degrees has increased. Perhaps at this time, attainment of a teaching or business degree is comparable with attaining a trade in a previous generation. Whether because of changes in the field or other contextual factors, I suggest that non-traditional students who succeed may well be extraordinary, as some in this study undoubtedly are. Earlier in this thesis I referred to the term 'miraculous exceptions' used by Bourdieu (Moi, 1991, p.1026) originally, and more recently by Pitman (2013), referring to those from disadvantaged groups who succeed in HE. While it may have been an apt term in the context of Bourdieu's work, as we approach 2020 I do not believe it appropriate for successful non-traditional students as a whole group. Considering the current context then, outcomes from this study suggest that social reproduction has mostly prevailed. Participants did not attend elite universities nor study elite degrees, though the context and sampling process for this research made major transformations like that unlikely. There is little evidence of the students changing in terms of social class or social circles. Rosie (Chapter 5) has employment of a tenuous nature, and Simone (Chapter 6) will be comparatively well off within her existing social group.

Of particular interest in this study was the way that participants can be seen moving and adjusting across multiple fields. Only Briony (Chapter 7) rejected university soon after enrolling, and only Jessica (Chapter 6) remained effectively an outsider seeking a place for herself in HE by the end of the study. Challenges arose for Lani (Chapter 7), David and Rosie (Chapter 5), though, in the field of school teaching. Professional Experience provided watershed moments for these participants, prompting changes in direction for all three. For David this meant the end of HE, for Lani a year-long break and change of direction, and for Rosie a change of degree. Suitability to field, especially for Lani, seems more about disposition in a general sense than being strongly related to disposition from habitus. Perhaps this is about personality traits as much as social class. In David's case the lack of adaptation to teaching may have been influenced by his extended immersion in the field of policing, but Lani was simply disinclined to undertake the effort required to do the job of teaching well. Rosie also found the sheer workload of teaching a barrier, but there is a sense in her case that she was simply more 'at home' in a role with fewer demands.

8.5 Gender

In this section I outline the important contribution of gender to this study. The gender ratio in this study reflects the gender imbalance which remains in teaching degree programs. With only one male in this study, it would be invalid to directly compare male and female experiences on that basis. Despite that limitation, gendered differences in experience are apparent throughout the narratives. Various female students of all ages felt pressure from family demands, variously from parents, siblings and children, which were not apparent for David. Many of the females utilised student support services, and while David would likely have benefitted from counselling after his failed professional experiences, there is no evidence he considered this. Gender may play a role here, with males less likely to access support services (Davis & Laker, 2004). Female students of all ages in this study value-added to their studies more than David did, demonstrating a different motivation for and approach to their studies. Despite female enrolment now being higher than male enrolment in many countries, there remain additional expectations on female students from their families.

Female participants in this study were supported by other females, who were friends, fellow students and mothers. At the same time, most female participants continued to bear family responsibilities while studying, as has been seen in many other studies (O'Shea, 2014; Reay, 2002a, 2003). For these non-traditional students, full time study had to be managed in addition to home duties and, in most cases, paid employment. Despite females now comprising the majority of university students, non-traditional female students continue to battle inequality on various fronts. This would most often occur for those with children such as single parent Rosie, but not exclusively so, as seen for gap-year student Anna with responsibility for siblings or school leaver Briony who filled the domestic gap left by her mother's death. Symbolic violence through gendered division of labour (Reay, 1995) was apparent in the lives of these women.

8.6 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations arising from this study which could improve the experiences of non-traditional students in HE. These include extending first year support through to subsequent years of enrolment, providing mentors for non-traditional students,

practices to encourage social integration and practices which are more inclusive of mature students.

8.6.1 Supporting diversity

Diversity needs to be better catered for by universities. Many current opportunities and services, including on-campus accommodation, operate on the assumption that students are single and independent. This causes discrimination against mature students, and others with family commitments. For example, if living on campus is advantageous for students, then opportunities should be provided for students of all demographic categories to have that option (Rubin & Wright, 2015). Likewise, regional campuses should make an effort to provide the cultural experiences available to students at city campuses.

Support from fellow students is clearly beneficial, and universities could structure classes and courses to enhance the opportunity for supportive groups to develop. This could occur through set timetables which keep groups of students together for more than one course, through year-long rather than semester-long courses, and through the inclusion in courses of carefully structured group tasks and assignments. Family support has also been shown as important, and can take many forms. Students could be informed about the ways their families could provide support.

8.6.2 Support services beyond a first year approach

It has been demonstrated in this study that critical incidents which negatively affected students occurred at all stages of enrolment, rather than being contained solely in the first year. Universities seeking to enrol non-traditional students need to support them at all stages of their enrolment, and sometimes past that.

Many participants in this study utilised and benefited from peer assisted study sessions. Firstly, as these were only available for certain courses, an expansion of that service is recommended. Secondly, it is clear that academic issues are not the only concern for non-traditional students. Issues also arise regarding physical and mental health, and dealing with difficult home and family situations. Perhaps peer assistance structures could go beyond the academic. Mentors from a similar demographic group (such as mature age) who are a year or two ahead and have been successful at university could provide guidance to services or a sounding board. Likewise academic staff (carefully selected) could act as mentors, bridging the gap to the alien field of university for non-traditional students. This would help the students see academics as approachable. Peer or staff mentors could meet with the students informally but regularly to discuss progress, study practices, assessment concerns and processes, give 'insider' tips and hints, and inform the students about services they may be able to access. Students could self-identify as wanting a mentor, or one could

be suggested to any students presenting as anxious, uncertain or struggling. Coordination of various services within universities is highly desirable. A system which flags students who are at risk in any way to ensure services are being used to best effect and can provide a 'one stop shop' would be beneficial. At risk students like Jessica need one person to oversee their case who is aware of the total situation – monetary, health and academic aspects.

In summary I would suggest that student journeys through HE are highly individual, and not predictable. Flexibility should be anticipated and accommodated by universities for the good of the students and ultimately the economy if a highly educated citizenry is seen to benefit society.

8.7 Further Research and Limitations

This study, like all studies, is limited in its scope. The limitations are outlined here, along with further research which is suggested by the current study's findings. The research presented here provides rich detail about non-traditional student experiences over the course of their university enrolment. The detailed qualitative nature of these data restricted the number of participants who could be included. Further research, then, could add to this by incorporating other settings including institutions here and overseas, with a variety of characteristics. Longitudinal studies of students enrolled in a wider range of degrees at regional and metropolitan universities, including elite institutions, are warranted. There is a growing number of studies such as this one which provide rich data on a small number of participants. A synthesis of this research, taking contexts into account, would add considerably to the existing knowledge base.

Widening the range of non-traditional students investigated would also be beneficial. Students with disabilities (and there are many different types to be considered) or suffering worse financial disadvantage than those included here also warrant study. At the same time, longitudinal studies of more traditional students could confirm whether traditional students experiencing life events such as those shown in this study during their studies, are similarly or differently affected in their ability to persevere with study.

Issues around gender which arose in this study need to be further explored. An obvious starting point is the inclusion of more males, including a focus on mature males to consider more deeply the impact of prior work and life experiences on later study. No young males were included here so that is also an obvious direction for future research.

The role of professional experience components in university programs could be a focus of further research specifically as to how it affects non-traditional students, as it was seen to provide a pivotal moment for three participants in this study.

This study targeted the student experience. Qualitative research is needed with a focus on the attitudes and practices of university staff when dealing with non-traditional students, especially those students experiencing difficulties or crises. Other researchers have suggested that academic staff could take a broader role in student wellbeing and support, so an investigation of academic response to this as well as the possible impact on workload would be valuable. I was intrigued (and dismayed) when Jessica's story led me to read of the prevalence of mental health issues in university students, and I consider that this is an important area for more research. The potential multiplication of disadvantage for non-traditional students through a depression – failure – depression spiral is not acceptable.

The data collected here could be enhanced by quantitative data. Rubin et al. (2016) have completed some research, which continues, looking at student academic achievement over a number of years. This has shown, contrary to other studies, that first year is not always the crucial transition period for non-traditional students that others have claimed. Further longitudinal quantitative studies at a range of institutions may shed more light on this.

Ongoing participants in this study volunteered (as is always necessary), possibly skewing the data in ways that cannot be defined. Pains were taken to present narratives from a variety of students in terms of age, pathway, prior academic achievement and other background factors, but the number of participants is not large. Despite attempts to minimise effects, it remains possible that my position as an insider (of benefit in other ways) influenced student responses in interviews in some way, and indeed there are examples considered in various narratives where this is likely the case. For that, and other reasons, participant responses may have been less than completely frank in some cases. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the narratives present powerful and authentic stories of lived experience.

8.8 Conclusion

This thesis provides a longitudinal view of non-traditional student experiences. Few studies are able to collect rich qualitative data from the same students over four years, and this is an important contribution of the study. Other studies have focussed on the first year

experience or final outcomes, but this study has captured both, as well as the intervening years. A further unique characteristic of this study is that some participants continued to contribute data even after they left university, either permanently or temporarily. There was no magic procedure for maintaining this continued contact – I emailed them every year using the contact details they had initially provided, with a very brief message that it was time to ‘catch-up’ for the study, and they responded. This study presents the stories of a small number of non-traditional students, all of whom enrolled, at the beginning of this study, in a Primary teaching degree. Other studies in this area have also reported on small numbers of students. For example Reay (1998) reported on ten HE applicants and twelve working class mature female students in the UK, while O’Shea studied the experiences of 17 FiF female students (2007), 13 FiF female first year students (2014), 23 FiF students (2016a) and 13 mature FiF students (2016b) in Australia, and Stone and O’Shea (2013) reported on 37 mature students by combining data from their individual studies. None of these studies, including my own, can make generalisations, due to the small numbers. My study does, however, add to this body of research, so that by considering similarities and differences accumulating across all similar studies, it may be possible to begin to make generalisations in cases where similar findings are reported by a number of researchers working within different contexts.

The students in this study, mostly female, came from diverse backgrounds, with several experiencing ‘more than one form of disadvantage, pointing to its cumulative nature’, as is often the case for non-traditional students (Benson et al., 2012, p. 24). Also like Benson et al. (2012), this thesis presents the stories of ‘mature, resilient students succeeding at study largely because of their own determination and organisation, and the support of friends and family’ (p. 24). The stories in this thesis show that non-traditional students are not ‘hapless victims or powerless in the higher education environment’ (O’Shea, 2014, p. 155). Female FiF students have not been broadly studied (O’Shea, 2016a), and this thesis adds to that literature.

While much has been made of the first year in HE as a period of transition, for non-traditional students, the ‘struggle, challenge and difficulty and crises of confidence’ (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p. 151) can endure throughout their entire enrolment. This was seen in terms of student or family members’ illnesses or deaths, and family breakdowns. In the case of Jessica, unfortunate circumstances saw her stumble from second year onwards, leading to an extended enrolment and burgeoning student debt. It seems unconscionable that the university continued to add to that debt in the face of ongoing difficulties, without intervening to, for example, require counselling prior to re-enrolment.

Non-traditional students are not only students and are not solely defined by their student identities. They are also parents, children, grandchildren, friends, lovers, citizens and employees. It is limiting and unrealistic to study the experiences of non-traditional students in isolation from these other roles and the situations that arise accordingly. The stories of HE experience presented in this thesis necessarily incorporate major (and minor) life events across generations. Perhaps this is the true value of research into non-traditional student experience – that it can guide HE toward a ‘life-friendly’ culture which acknowledges, accepts and welcomes students who are unwilling or unable to remove themselves from mainstream life with all its inherent messiness in order to maintain university student identities.

There are ‘real issues of social injustice’ which ‘remain entrenched’ (Reay, 1998b, p. 528) in systems of HE in Australia and elsewhere, despite widening participation initiatives. The stories presented, despite the success of individuals, demonstrate the difficulties faced by non-traditional students which might be overcome by those with greater financial resources or by amendments to processes and practices in the field. It is not amazing that the non-traditional students in this study were largely successful in HE, and we should not let them think that it is, for that is to engage with deficit views. What is amazing is that they persevered to be successful despite how unnecessarily hard their journeys were at times.

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Appendix A
Ethics Approval

6 March 2012

Ms Suzanne MacQueen
School of Education

S/N: 42450548
Email: s4245054@student.uq.edu.au

Ethical Clearance Number: 12-007

Dear Suzanne


I am pleased to advise that on the 01 March 2012 ethical clearance was granted for your project "Implications of widening participation for teacher education".

I would also like to remind you that any correspondence associated with your project (consent forms, information sheets etc.) must be printed on official UQ letterhead (available from the School of Education Enquiries Office).

If you have any questions regarding this matter please do not hesitate to contact me.

I wish you well with your studies.

Yours sincerely,



Christel Schoenberger
Senior Administrative Officer
(Postgraduate & Higher Degrees)

Appendix B

Data Collection Instruments

Initial Preservice Teacher Survey

Please tick boxes where appropriate and/or write in the spaces provided.

Gender: Male
 Female

Age: _____ years

Tick if you identify as

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 Non-English speaking background

Is this the first tertiary education program you have been enrolled in?

Yes No

If no, please provide details of previous enrolments (course, institution, year/s)

Why did you choose to study at *this* university?

How are you planning to study?

Full time Part time

Why?

Do you have a paying job? If so, indicate full or part time below.

No Yes - Full time Yes - Part time

Please indicate the average number of hours per week during semester that you expect to undertake paid work.

_____ hours per week.

Are you the recipient of a scholarship or other institutional financial support for your studies?

No. Yes. Please outline.

What was your University entry pathway? (please tick)

- ATAR Score: _____ STAT
 Newstep Mature Age
 Open Foundation Other: please outline _____

Please provide the following information regarding your parent/s:

Occupation of Parent 1: _____

Highest educational level of Parent 1: _____

Occupation of Parent 2: _____

Highest educational level of Parent 2: _____

Postcode of family home:

during most of your school years _____

during the past few years if different _____

Have you had to move away from home to study?

- No.
- Yes.

Please indicate your living arrangements during semester:

- at home with parents
 - with partner
 - with partner and child/ren
 - with child/ren
 - boarding
 - renting away from home (shared)
 - renting away from home (alone)
 - other: describe _____
-

What was your last completed year of secondary schooling?
(eg Year 12) _____

Teacher preparation program you are enrolled in:

- B.Teach/BA (Primary)
- B.Teach/B Early Childhood Studies
- B.Teach/BA (Secondary)

Are you the first in your family to enroll in a university degree?

- Yes.
- No.

If no, who, previous to you, has a university degree? (tick all applicable)

- Mother
- Father
- Grandparent/s
- Sibling/s
- Child

When was your last experience with schools, and when was it? (eg. as a student last year, as a parent currently, as a teacher's aide 2 yrs ago).

Why did you decide to undertake university study? (List as many reasons as you like, and tick the box indicating the level of importance of each reason. If you need more space, write on the back of this sheet).

	Level of importance
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
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_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low

Why did you choose a teacher education program? (List as many reasons as you like, and tick the box indicating the level of importance of each reason. If you need more space, write on the back of this sheet)

	Level of importance
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> high <input type="checkbox"/> med <input type="checkbox"/> low

What aspects of university do you expect to find challenging?

What aspects of university are you most looking forward to?

How supportive is your family of your university studies?

not supportive it varies somewhat supportive very supportive

How many hours do you expect to spend completing university work each week for the following?

Attending lectures _____

Attending tutorials _____

Completing set readings _____

Completing assignments _____

Where do you see yourself, career-wise, in 10 years?

Are there any other comments you'd like to make about beginning university study?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Would you be interested in taking part in further research about your journey through university?

Yes No

If so, please complete the following so that you can be contacted further:

I have been fully informed about the study and agree to take part in further interviews. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Student number: _____

Student Email address: _____

Alternate Email address (optional): _____

Contact phone number (optional): _____

First Preservice Teacher Interview

ID. _____

No information about specific courses or people is requested. If any such names are given, they will not be included in any transcripts or reports.

1. Tell me about your journey through life in terms of how you came to enroll in the teacher education program.

(The following questions may or may not be asked, depending on whether they have been covered by the participant's initial narrative responses.)

2. What does university education represent to you?

3. Was there a particular person in your life who influenced you to undertake university generally or teacher education specifically?

If yes, What is your relationship to that person, and how did they influence you?

4. How does your family feel about your university enrolment?

5. What skills or characteristics do you possess that will help you succeed at University?

How did you come to have these skills?

6. What skills will you need to develop to succeed at University?

Why do you think you don't yet have these skills?

7. If you find anything difficult at University, where or from whom will you seek help?

8. How easy or hard has it been working out all the things you needed to know and do to succeed at university?

What has been hardest?

What has been easiest?

9. What support services offered by the University are you aware of?

Do you think you may use any of these?

10. How do you feel about yourself as a teacher education student at this point in time?

11. Are there any other comments you'd like to make about your journey to teacher education at university?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview.

Subsequent Preservice Teacher Interview

ID: _____

1. Tell me about your journey as a university student since we last spoke.

The following questions relate specifically to the semester you have just completed. No information about specific courses or people is requested. If any such names are given, they will not be included in any transcripts or reports.

(The following questions may or may not be asked, depending on whether they have been covered by the participant's initial narrative response.)

2. Have you changed your enrolment status from full-time to part-time or vice versa?

If "yes": Why did you change?

3. How does university compare to the expectations you had before enrolling?

4. Have you felt more or less comfortable at university than you expected to? Why?

5. What aspects of university have you found challenging?

6. What aspects of university are you most enjoying?

7. How many hours on average have you spent completing university work each week for the following activities?

Attending lectures?

Attending tutorials?

Completing set readings?

Completing assignments?

Has that been more or less than you anticipated? Why was it different?

8. Have you sought any support to help you with your studies?

If "yes", Why you did seek help and from where? Was that successful?

If not: Why not?

9. In what way has your approach to university study been successful or unsuccessful?

10. What have the following groups done to assist or impede your progress as a university student:

Fellow students?

Teaching staff?

Administrative staff?

The Institution?

11. Have your career aspirations changed since entering university?

If "yes", In what way?

12. Has anything in your family or home situation changed since we last spoke? How has that affected your university study?

13. Has anything changed in relation to your paid work situation since we last spoke? How has that affected your university study?

14. How do you feel about yourself as a teacher education student at this point in time?

15. Are there any other comments you'd like to make about your ongoing university study?

What advice would you give to non-traditional students about to embark on university studies?

What advice would you give to families of non-traditional students?

What could the university do to better support non-traditional students?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview.