

What is the Role of Trust in the Experience of
Mature Students Participating in Learning
in Higher Education in Ireland?

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ABSTRACT

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TRUST IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MATURE STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND?

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Higher education is in a state of flux; the massification of the system has brought a diverse range of students, including mature students into HE, and the system is challenged to deliver education to this broad cohort in the context of diminished resources. These changes present challenges to the nature of the education relationship between the student and the education system which McElhinney (2007) suggests should be built on trust and the principle of mutual benefit. Meanwhile Ireland has been identified among the 'laggards' (Scheutze and Slowey 2002) in adapting to the demands of this non-traditional student cohort.

This constructivist grounded theory study focused on exploring mature students' understanding of the role of trust in their HE experience. The concept of trust which is at once complex and multidimensional (Tschannen-Moran 1997) contributes to the effectiveness of organisations (Kramer and Cook 2004) suggesting its relevance in HE at this time. My research was informed by McKnight's Trust Model (1998, 2001, 2002) and Tierney (2006) and Sztompka's (1999) cultural approach to exploring the mature students experience of trust. In addition to the traditional semi-structured interview my research incorporated a visual (Pink 2003) dimension using pre-existing photographs to assist with the research process.

The research has identified that HE is conceived as a place of risk for the mature students, and that the trust that is interwoven into the HE experience impacts significantly on their engagement in HE: it is fundamental to their decision to engage in HE, and plays an important role both in the relationships from which they embark on their HE journey and those that they create during their time in HE. The significant trust relationships for mature students are with others the same as them and, from a teaching and learning perspective, the trust relationship with the lecturer is very significant. The mature students were identified as 'vigilant social perceivers' (Sztompka 2006, p.33) accomplished in interpreting the clues as to the trustworthiness of their HE relationships.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This constructivist grounded theory study explores the role of trust in the mature student experience of Higher Education in Ireland and identifies why this is an important research area at this time. This chapter sets out the aims and objectives for the research and focuses on situating the research within the current policy discourse on the future of HE and the changing student demographic in HE. It locates the research within the literature on trust and mature student experience, finally identifying the key concepts to be employed in this research study.

Higher Education (HE) is at a critical juncture in Ireland, the number of full time undergraduate students currently in the system (2011-12) is 160,972, an increase of 14% from 119,000 in 2000 (HEA 2012). Within this overall figure, and the particular focus of my research, is the growth in the mature student cohort which has increased from 13.6% (5,342) of all full-time undergraduate new entrants in 2009-10, to 15% (5,944) in 2011-12, and is projected to increase to 20% of the total intake by 2013 (HEA 2012). This grouping now represents a significant and increasing 'educational demographic' within HE (O'Donnell & Tobbell 2007, p.313) and is reflective of a global movement towards the 'massification' and 'extensification' (Scheutze & Slowey 2002, p.309) of Higher Education. The mature student cluster represents one of a number of groupings (including ethnic minority and disability groups) within the non-traditional student category, which has been identified by the OECD (1987) and Davis (1995) as a key element in the widening participation (WP) agenda in HE.

Elsewhere, while the growth of this cohort has resulted in a developing research interest in the study of the experience of these students in HE (Schuetze and Slowey

2002, Leathwood and O'Connell 2003, Reay 2002; 2003), Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011, p.34) noted that

it is interesting, therefore to thoroughly analyse this type of student, upon whom the present university policies could have a paradoxical effect: on the one hand they encourage their enrolment in the university system, partly because of the emphasis on lifelong learning, but on the other hand they do not seem to be concerned about understanding their needs and circumstances, thereby maintaining an institutional system designed for a different type of student.

This position was supported by Fielding's (2004) and Keane's (2011, p.709) arguments that, in the context of WP and connotations of 'dumbing down' (Haggis 2006), there is relatively little known about these students' post-entry academic experiences.

My research is timely in the context of the changing demographics in Irish HE, and in the context of the current volatility in the HE system, which was precipitated by the publication of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA 2011) and the initiatives being undertaken in response to its publication. These changes are hastening debates on the nature and purpose of Higher Education, how it is to be resourced, and how the relationship between the university and students is to be managed - a relationship which according to McElhinney (2007, p.53) should be built on trust and the principle of mutual benefit. In the context of the anticipated policy changes it is important I believe to remember that the primary purpose of HE is to educate, to ensure the development of the full potential of the individual in order to facilitate him/her becoming full member of society including, but not exclusively to make his/her own economic contribution to the wellbeing of that society.

An examination of the role of trust is particularly relevant in the context of the growing managerialism, marketisation and accountability agendas in HE (De Boer *et al* 2009, Molesworth *et al* 2011), this increasing instrumentalism, Samier and Schmidt (2010)

argue, runs contrary to the creation of a climate of trust in HE, which the next chapter (**Chapter 2**) identifies as an important element in the effective operation of schools in the secondary school sector (Bryk and Schneider 2003, Goddard 2003, Tschannen-Moran 2004). To-date trust research in HE has focused on the relationship between trust and issues of governance and accountability (Stensaker & Görnitzka 2009, Hoecht 2006, Leveille 2006, Samier & Schmidt 2010, Vidovich & Currie 2011) while, at an operational level, Daly (2009) and Allen (2003) identify its positive impact in facilitating change, and Avis (2003) and Le Grange (2003) identify its positive impact on building research relationships.

In the context of student experience, Ghosh *et al* (2001) and Clouder (2009) employ the concept to explore how trust impacts on students perceptions of HE. My research, which adopts an integrative trust approach (Mayer *et al* 1995, Rousseau *et al* 1998, McKnight *et al* 1998), builds on this literature and contributes to the understanding of the experience of mature students in HE.

1.1.1. Aims and Objectives of the Study

My research explores the relevance of the trust construct as a framework for understanding the mature student experience in HE, and aims to identify its potential to contribute to how we conceptualise the purpose of HE, its contribution to society, its responsibility to students [focusing on mature students], and its potential to contribute to the accountability debate within HE. It draws particularly from the concept of trust, based on the work of Sztompka (1999) and Tierney (2006), which views trust as embedded within the culture of a system (Dasgupta 1988), and uses

McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) integrated trust building model to anchor the framework for the research.

My research aims to add to an understanding of how mature students experience HE and takes guidance from James (1995) who earlier advocated a shift in research into mature students, away from what he describes as the 'species' approach, towards an approach which aims to *understand* and explain the student experience of HE where O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007, p.314) propose that HE research moves 'beyond what adult students experience to an understanding of why and how they experience this'. Wilson (1997) had also pointed to the dearth of research on the subjective experience of mature students and proposed that a social constructivist approach would be appropriate to such research.

The adoption of a constructivist, and particularly a social constructivist approach to the research process has also been supported by Keane (2011) as a method designed to facilitate a better understanding of the complexities of the mature student relationships. The **purpose of** using this approach is to focus on understanding the process from the participants perspective, to access the factors which are unseen and unstated which have impact on the higher education experience for the learner, to access not only what Newton (2002) has described as the 'inner life' and 'inner workings' of being a mature student, but also to create an outcome which will have relevance and resonate within the governance and teaching and learning discourse which is currently underway in higher education. The importance of understanding the experiences and the perceptions of students about their learning environment is because these understandings impact on both their 'academic achievement' and their

'soft' results, such as student satisfaction, development of key skills etc. (Lizzio *et al* 2002).

The constructivist research approach also privileges the voice and perspective of mature students, motivated by a view of HE as an exercise in democracy, where the students are viewed as key stakeholders in the debate about the future of HE. The student perspective on the debate about the future of HE is generally absent (Fielding 2004; Seale 2010) despite the availability of formal tools that allow some limited student voice in the education experience, and Stensaker and Görnitzka (2009) have proposed that universities should address the challenge of including both students and parents as key stakeholders in discussions on the current and future effectiveness of higher education. The demand for inclusion of the student voice is part of a growing literature (Haggis 2004, Reay 2004, Crozier *et al* 2008, Crozier & Reay 2011) which challenges the hegemony of the instrumentalist tendency in higher education research. It is considered appropriate in exploring the experience of students and bringing the mature 'student voice' to the discourse on the future for Higher Education.

My research aims to give voice to the implicit/tacit processes by and through which students 'make sense of' or 'interpret' their experiences and also aims to identify the nature of the webs of relationships, interactions, and processes; the dynamics of trust which surround and support the educational experience of the mature student. In transforming the implicit factors to explicit factors it does so in order that they can be 'counted' in the accountable culture in which Higher Education is currently situated. In this way it can counter the instrumentalist and mechanistic tendencies currently

permeating HE, which have led to a devaluation of the relational and emotional elements of the higher education experience (Tierney 2004, Mälkki 2010).

The study also aims to show that in a period of limited resources it is important that, in the push for efficiencies, the system does not become driven by purely mechanistic approaches to teaching and learning to the detriment of the creating of educational 'spaces' (Broomfield 1993) which are essential to a successful mature student experience. In my research attention is given to the qualitative issues which make the higher education experience positive and effective for mature students, and thereby creates an understanding of what should be included in measures of 'student satisfaction with the quality of their teaching and learning' (Government of Ireland 2011, p.87) within Higher Education. It will provide guidance to our understanding of the core elements of the higher education experience from the mature student perspective and make recommendations as to the elements which should be maintained and developed in the changing landscape of Irish HE.

1.1.2. Research Question

The research question which is central to this study is:

What is the role of trust in the experience of mature students participating in learning in higher education in Ireland?

From a constructivist grounded theory perspective (Charmaz 2006), this core question gives rise to what are regarded as 'beginning' research questions, which in turn lead to other questions generated as the emerging concepts are constructed through the research process. Adopting this approach gives priority to the agenda and the significance created by the participants which is an important element in this research.

To address concerns about the potential paucity of a single question further guidance was taken from Creswell (2007) who suggests that research should concentrate on five questions to facilitate the creation of space in which the participant can articulate their own meaning from the question, leading to the identification of the following 'beginning' questions:

- How is trust manifested for mature students in higher education?
- What is the role and function of trust, and how does it impact on the experience of the mature student?
- What is the role and understanding of 'risk' in their HE experience?
- What is the role of socialisation and relationship building on the mature student experience? What are the factors which contribute to the enhancement or dissipation of these relationships?
- What theory of trust building (if any) explains how mature students experience trust in their higher education experience? In this regard does Tierney's (2006) or Sztompka's (1999) cultural approaches have resonance for the mature student and does McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001; 2002) model provides a useful tool for use in capturing an elusive concept?
- *From a methodological perspective*, the particular approach to employing photographs as a research tool aimed to identify (discussed in detail in **Chapter 4**) its potential contribution to researchers working on research focused on accessing the 'implicit' or 'tacit' processes which give meaning to lived experiences such as that which is the subject of this research.

1.1.3. Why this Research?

Higher education can currently be conceptualised as existing in the centre of tensions between diverse stakeholders - political, economic and social (Allen 2003; Enders 2004; Haggis 2006; Hoecht 2006) - within an increasing focus on issues of accountability (Stensaker & Görnitzka 2009), 'managerialism' (Teelken 2011) and governance issues (Tierney 2003; Vidovich & Currie 2011), where decisions about the future direction of HE are being made by 'unseen others' (Sztompka 1999). It appears therefore to be an opportune time to revisit some of the key factors which underpin the HE contract.

Irish HE policy and legislation is currently informed by an instrumentalist hegemony, epitomised by mechanistic accountability systems and approaches (Gleeson & Ó Donnabháin 2009) to determining the effectiveness of the system, the result of which has given rise to concerns that the role and contribution of the education process to society and not just the economy is being lost (Giroux 2010). The changes have resulted in the repositioning of the roles of the academic and changes in the understanding of the concepts of academic professionalism (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004), which suggests that this is an opportune time to assess the impact of these tensions on the educational experience of students, focusing specifically on mature students, and to consider the incorporation of what Haggis (2004; 2006) describes as the newer understandings of what should be considered significant in the HE process.

In the context of research in HE, there has been a focus of interest in the category of students defined as 'non-traditional' (James 1995, Schuetze & Slowey 2002), of which mature students are a particular sub-set. The mature students, who are an increasing demographic within HE, offer a unique perspective to the experience of HE having had

life and work experiences outside of HE, while early research on the non-traditional cohort concentrated on issues of disadvantage and social class (Lyn 2004), employing quantitative analyses to determine the characteristics of the 'mature student' (Woodley 1998), more recent research has focused on the specific experience of the mature student cohort, concentrating on issues of exclusion and access (Reay 2002; 2003, Lyn 2004). In research into the mature student experience James (1995, p.456) has proposed the adoption of approaches which capture 'the mutually dependant relationship between these two levels' to facilitate the avoidance of a 'structure/agency dualism', an approach which is reflected in more recent holistic research approaches by Kenny *et al* (2010), Sewell (2000) and Reay (2002), and has influenced the approach of this research.

In Ireland research interest into the mature student experience in HE (Darmody & Fleming 2009, Keane 2009; 2011, McCoy & Byrne 2011) was stimulated by Government policy focusing on widening participation, and is reflected in a range of reports informing the WP agenda including: *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning Green Paper on Adult Education* (Government of Ireland 1998), *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (Government of Ireland 2000) and the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (HEA, 2008). Despite this range of documents, Kenny *et al* (2010, p.8) note that 'research has rarely looked at the lived experience of these students, how they view HE'

The possibility of including the student perspective in the debate around the future shape of Irish HE has also motivated this research, through privileging the voice of the mature students, and the inclusion of the student perspective, my research will contribute to this debate. The inclusion of student voice is considered important in the

context of what Molesworth *et al* (2011), identify as, the impact of marketisation on the relationship between the HE institution and the student, however Seale (2010) notes, that the concept is not well-developed in HE. In the context of what Vidovich and Currie (2011, p.53) have described as the process of ‘rebuilding of trust in governance processes’ in HE, then ‘re-opening spaces for academic (and student) voices in governance’ is considered appropriate and increasing our understanding of the students’ perspective on the significant elements of a successful HE experience should be an important consideration.

As identified earlier, the concept of trust has previously been applied to research studies of HE institutions (Tierney 2003b; 2006, Hoecht 2006, Stensaker & Görnitzka 2009, Samier & Schmidt 2010, Bates 2010 and Vidovich & Currie 2011) and to trust and student experiences in education generally (Goddard 2003, Leveille 2006 Clouder 2009 and Cosner 2009). The concept has been underrepresented in the analysis of the mature student experience in HE (Haggis 2002, p.211) though it is implied in studies which focus on understanding the role of the affective in the *experience* of students in HE (Brooks 2007, Christie 2009). At this time of change and risk in HE, I propose that it is an appropriate concept with which to frame an understanding of the mature student experience.

1.2. Research Framework

Previous approaches to student trust research in an educational context have focused on identifying the elements of trust (Ghosh *et al* 2001) employing largely objectivist/positivistic approaches; the ontological stance of this research is constructivist and employs a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006)

framework to conduct this research. This fits with an interpretivist epistemological stance, which is considered appropriate for this study, since the aim is to explain the mature student experience and increase the understanding of the topic. The rationale for choosing the constructivist grounded theory framework is discussed further in **Chapter 4** below, but the choice is based on its potential to raise from the data a theoretical framework that will increase the understanding of the trust dynamics in Higher Education. My constructivist/interpretivist epistemological stance takes the view that the participants in the research (the mature students) are effective 'agents' in analysing their situation and in processing the diverse 'clues' in making 'bets of trust' (Sztompka 1999).

Creswell (2007) suggests that all research is influenced by the layers of perspectives which the researcher brings to the research, especially in qualitative research. There are pragmatist tendencies in this research, but of the type which incorporates a moralistic/ethical perspective, it is pragmatic to the extent that it is interested in what works, and in the context of this research gives credence to evidence which comes from alternative research paradigms - organisational behaviour (Gambetta 1988, Kramer & Cook 2004, Bachman & Zaheer 2006) - which may contribute to an understanding of the trust concept and its application in this HE context.

My personal perspective, is informed by my work within Higher Education in Ireland; my own institution has experienced a great deal of change over recent years, and although I 'lecture' (a term that I struggle with and prefer to describe myself as a facilitator of learning) at present, my earlier background is in the services industry and in development work. I have also worked within a collegiate, professional, self-directed team in the Centre for Education and Developing Human Potential, an experience

which has been influential in informing my concern for human development in an educational context. I am conscious of personally experiencing the changes which are prevalent in higher education, and the challenges that these changes bring to delivering the quality of teaching experience which I would aspire to for my own children.

The concept of trust permeates my consciousness at all levels within personal and professional relationships and into the community and society in general. I am interested in the factors that nurture, and those which destroy it, and especially the impact that its presence has in facilitating a better way of being at all levels: personal, work, community and society (at an economic as well as at a social level). The theme of trust has been of personal interest since, as the literature suggests (reference **Chapter 2**), it is a key component in facilitating effective relationships between individuals, organisations and society which has stimulated my interest in whether the concept of trust plays any role in the experience of the mature student cohort in HE.

My place of work has been very successful in attracting mature students into higher education, and in supporting them in successfully completing their programmes of study. Some of the reasons for this success are related to the support which students receive from all staff in the college. This support is explicit but much is, I believe, of an implicit nature and exists within and between the relationships built and networks created. In the inexorable move towards the 'audit explosion' (Power 1994) many of these implicit webs of relationships may be compromised, a factor which has contributed to my research interest in the topic.

1.3. Key Concepts

The key concepts employed in my research process are Trust, Mature Students and Higher Education. The research process itself raised additional concepts such as the concept of self, coping with change and uncertainty, and social capital as an enabling concept in understanding the relationships in HE. The key concepts are set out in this introduction and further elaborated in the Literature Review (**Chapters 2 and 3**), while the concepts that emerged from the process of analytical coding are discussed in **Chapters 5-7**.

1.3.1. *Mature Students in Higher Education*

The focus of my research is the mature student cohort who are studying for their undergraduate degree on a full-time basis in Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland. In line with the Higher Education Authority's (HEA 2008) approach to categorising mature students, the term is taken to refer to students who enter higher education after the age of 23 years. The term 'mature' is generally used to refer to students within a HE context while the term 'adult learner' is most commonly employed for mature participants outside the formal HE system (Hunt 2007, p.766). The numbers, however, hide the complexity of the 'mature student category', for example, it includes those who have postponed entry to higher education and are beginning at 23 years of age, those who have made family commitments and are now returning to education after completing these commitments, and those who have been employed and are returning to education in a quest for re-skilling/education to prepare for a new career (Lynch 1995, Osborne *et al* 2004).

The cohort is of interest because the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA 2011, p.10), commonly referred to as *the Hunt Report*, envisages that the WP agenda will increase both the diversity of the student cohort and specifically the number of mature students. The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (HEA 2008) sets out a target to increase the number of mature students participating in Higher Education to 20% by 2013. This is a trend mirrored in other OECD Countries (see **Appendix 1**) which shows that mature students (those over 25 years of age) constitute at least 32% of the student population in HE in the US, while the figure is 56% in Denmark, and illustrates why this study has broad relevance at this time.

My research sets out to examine how mature students make meaning of their lived educational experience of higher education in Ireland and whether the concept of trust has a role to play in this experience. The significance of the meaning making process is that, according to Haggis (2002, p.210), 'individuals act according to the meanings which they attribute to their experiences'; and that such meanings are continually created and recreated through interaction with the social context, and that 'meaning', at any moment in time, is unique to each individual'. She argues that there is a need for research to understand more about the 'situated' learning experiences which impact on retention and completion rates for students, the research challenge she suggests, is that 'many of these factors and influences operate at a level that is hidden from almost any kind of view' (ibid, p. 211). This analysis suggests that the task of understanding this experience is complex and was a key motivator for the adoption of the photograph stimulus method in this research where the photographs were

employed as a tool to facilitate an exploration of the student's understanding of their experiences.

The research also recognises the 'embedded' (Granovetter 1995) nature of the mature student experience and the impact of their 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1988) on their experience of HE. It also draws on the concept of social capital (Putnam 2000) exploring how these relationships and the 'networks of trust' which exist for mature students in Higher Education are resources from which they may draw in sustaining their engagement in HE (Goddard 2003, Farmer-Hinton 2008, Heath *et al* 2010).

1.3.2. Trust

The relevance of the trust concept in an analysis of the experience of mature students is underlined by recognising that one of the key factors underlying a requirement for trust is the presence of risk (Rousseau *et al* 1998); when there is no risk, there is no need for trust. Barnett (2007) has suggested that risk is inherent in the teaching/learning system in education since all learning requires a certain level of risk, he conceptualises this risk as being both ontological and epistemological, and occurs in the 'space' created in the interface between the teacher and the learner in which learning is enabled to occur.

A detailed examination of the research on trust is explored in the literature review (**Chapter 2**) but Lewicki *et al* (2006, p.993) note that the concept of trust in research is beset by complexity. The trust approach adopted in my research takes the view that trust is not to be viewed as atomistic, but is instead, contingent and context dependent, and is embedded in a network of social relations created within the culture of the organisation. This perspective is informed by Sztompka's (1999) conceptualisation of trust as operating in the crevices of relationships and society,

suggesting that the role of the implicit, the tacit, and the unstated, plays a significant role in the creation and sustenance of trust. The challenge presented to this research, therefore, is to understand the meaning that mature students attribute to individual and group processes and interactions, and an exploration of 'the ties that bind people to one another' (Tierney 2006, p.193).

To avoid becoming hogtied in the multiplexity of the trust concept, McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) model and Tierney's (2006) cultural perspective will be employed to anchor the research process. The typology (**Chapter 2**) represents an integration of research from the normative and behavioural traditions of trust research; it incorporates earlier integrative models (Mayer *et al* 1995, Rousseau 1998) and includes the concepts of interpersonal and institutional trust *referents* (Fukuyama 1995) as well as different *bases* of trust reflecting the multidimensional aspect of the trust construct.

1.4. The Policy Context: Irish Higher Education Sector - Challenges and Change

My research is situated in the Higher Education (HE) sector in Ireland, which consists of Universities and Institutes of Technology (IOT) along with a small number of private colleges. The sector has traditionally been publically-funded (€2bn in 2010) and provides undergraduate programmes leading to qualifications from level 6-10 of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications for 150,000 students. In a global education context, Irish higher education policy is influenced by Ireland's membership of the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD's) policy documents such as *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Pointers for policy development* (OECD 2011). It is also influenced

by EU education policy, focused on the creation of a 'Europe of Knowledge' initiated in the Lisbon Agenda (2007), along with the creation of the 'European Higher Education Area' through the Bologna Process Agreement (1999) and the more recent Budapest Vienna Declaration (2010) which together set out the EU education change agenda.

The themes of external accountability, relationships with the market, responsiveness, and flexibility are clear in these policy documents, as are the tensions related to funding which positions the state as the primary funder of education as problematic. The tensions between an ever increasing demand for provision, and continuous reductions in the availability of public funding, is accompanied by the tensions between more traditional views of the purpose of higher education as a provider of a public good (Tierney 2006) and the alternative view which suggests that higher education should be viewed as an engine of economic development (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004, Istance 2011, OECD 2011). In Ireland, Kenny (2009, p.28) also problematises the positioning of education in this model, related to its location as the third-side of the iron triangle of state, industry and society. These various tensions have driven an agenda for accountability in HE which has resulted in the introduction of instrumentalist accountability systems; this rationalist tendency for accountability in higher education is anathema to trust building. (Stensaker and Görnitzka 2009, Samier and Schmidt 2010 and Stensaker and Harvey 2011).

These agenda items present challenges as to how Higher Education is to be conceptualised in the future, including what role it should play, and how it should be governed in this changed environment. Policy directions are made visible in Ireland through the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA, 2011), produced by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Irish Government, which

identifies that the challenge for HE institutions to 'accommodate a diversity of institutional missions' within clear national policy expectations (HEA 2011 p.88). This *Strategy* wants a higher quality education for a diverse and increasing student cohort, and the capacity to flexibly deliver programmes designed to respond to the ever changing needs of society both at an economic and social level. The redesign of the Irish Higher Education sector, and the implementation of change, is being pursued with vigour by the incumbent Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn, TD, with the current financial crisis providing added impetus for such initiatives.

As a result of the significant governance and resourcing challenges facing higher education institutions in the 21st Century, it is important that the push for efficiencies in the system does not become driven by purely mechanistic approaches to teaching and learning, to the detriment of the creation of the educational 'spaces' which Barnett (2007) regards as essential for an effective learning experience. Within this policy context, my research gives attention to the qualitative issues which make the higher education experience positive and effective for mature students. Since trust is a key ingredient in making effective change happen then the concept and the role it plays in higher education is an appropriate topic for research at this time.

1.4.1. Policy on Mature Students in HE

The interest in engaging mature students in HE can be traced to the development of the concept of 'recurrent education' in the early 1970s (OECD 1973). This concept introduced the idea of intermittent education over the lifetime of individuals, and was followed by a second wave of international attention to lifelong learning in the 1990s along with EU initiatives on the theme (Istance 2011). The interest was motivated by the discovery from research findings that educational attainment enhances the health

and wellbeing of society and encourages levels of political interest, along with the need to engage more people in the workforce, all of which are of relevance to policy makers.

Irish policy development relating to mature students can be traced to initiatives in the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP 1991), which resulted in the 1992 Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World*, which gave recognition to the responsibility of education policy to provide opportunities for all adult learners, those who had left school early, and those who had never got a chance to participate in HE. This was followed in 1995, with the White Paper *Charting our Education Future*, which included recommendations regarding mature students within the higher education sector. The specific challenge of engaging mature students in higher education in Ireland was addressed most recently in the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (HEA 2008). As previously stated this plan set out a target of 20% participation in full-time higher education programmes by 2013, and 27% when participation in part-time higher education programmes are included. The target supports the trend which saw the numbers of mature students in HE growing from a base figure of 1.6% in 1986 (HEA 2010). Reviews of progress to date shows that the more recent targets have not been met: there were only 13.6% mature students in higher education by 2010, up from 12.8% in 2006 (HEA 2008, p.27), compared to the interim target of 17% (HEA 2010). Scheutze and Slowey (2002) have categorised Ireland among the 'laggards' in its response to meeting the challenge of effectively managing the engagement of the non-traditional cohort of students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Meanwhile the *HEA Interim Report* (2010) identifies very key challenges to achieving these targets, which relate to finance and the absence of

co-ordinated approaches across Government departments, to tackle these issues. The challenge has been made more complex as a result of the increase in unemployment and the consequent demand for re-skilling (*Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Statement of Activity 2011*, March 2012). While Keane (2009, p.85) has identified a 'paucity of research on the experience of such students in the Irish context, particularly in relation to the academic and relational realms', earlier work by Lynch (1995, 1998) and more recent work by Darmody and Fleming (2009), Kenny *et al* (2010), McCoy and Byrne (2011), and Keane (2011), have made contributions to our understanding of the non-traditional student experience in an Irish context focusing on the relationship between disadvantage and the student experience in HE. Through exploring the role of trust in the experience of mature students my research aims to provide guidance in relation to effective policies for higher education in the context of the mature student experience.

The overarching objective of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA 2011, p.86) is to ensure 'a higher education system with the highest quality of delivery of all aspects of the mission'. From the perspective of mature students it sets out an agenda for lifelong learning based on the following objectives

an excellent higher education system that will attract and respond to a wide range of potential students ... and will be fully accessible throughout their lives and changing circumstances ... relevant and responsive to their personal development and growth as fully engaged citizens within society (HEA 2011, p.89)

which is to be achieved through the improvement of *teaching and learning* to ensure an 'enhanced student experience' (Government of Ireland 2011).

These objectives provide an encouraging framework for the type of educational experience which mature students should expect in Higher Education. However,

according to the *Organisation and current issues: A brief for the information of the Minister for Education and Skills* (Government of Ireland 2011), the *Programme for Government 2011* estimates that student numbers in higher education will increase by 72% by 2030, and that funding per student (which is already in sharp decline) will need to be further reduced in order to achieve 'financial sustainability'. These proposed changes make my study relevant, by identifying the key elements which enable mature students to have a positive educational experience, and identifying the factors which should be maintained despite the pressures which are coming to bear on the system. From a resource perspective there is a real challenge to ensuring the quality of the third-level educational experience for this increasing number of students, many who will be mature, in the context of a reduction in staff numbers of 7% over the past three years, and a targeted further reduction in staff numbers over the next two years. An environment of such complexity may easily obscure objectives focused on a minority (albeit an increasing minority) of the HE student cohort.

The new landscape of HE and the changes envisaged, require a great deal of co-operation between the various stakeholders (students and teachers, but also managers, funders, educators, government and society in Ireland, and the broader globalised society) to ensure an effective outcome from these changes. Based on research in organisations, (Tyler and Kramer 1996 and Bachmann and Zaheer 2006) trust between the stakeholders will be a key element in ensuring the success of these processes. My research intends to contribute to understanding the student perspective of these relationships using the lens of trust to frame the discussion.

1.5. The contribution of my research

The research is relevant to those interested in the current debate surrounding the future shape of Irish HE and those interested in understanding the role of trust as understood and experienced by mature students in the culture of HE. It will contribute to an understanding how trust impacts on decisions of students to enter into and remain in HE. It will contribute to an understanding of the concept of organisational trust within the HE sector, and its impact on the student learning experiences as comprehended by one of its significant stakeholders. Through that understanding it will identify the factors which facilitate the effective participation of the mature student cohort in the quest to the creation of the 'Knowledge society' and will benefit academics and management interested in issues of student retention and specifically mature student retention.

It will contribute to the understanding of the role of the 'academy' as the agent responsible for the development of the potential of all its students, and in enabling that impact to ripple out to the layers of relationships from family, to community, and to society. In so doing it may contribute to the debate of the position of the Academics managing the dual expectations of teaching and research, in the current volatile governance, accountability, and management environment of HE. My research may assist the mature students themselves to understand their own experiences as reflected in the experiences of those students who participated in this research and finally it will contribute to Social science researchers interested in the potential of the 'adapted' use of the photo-stimulus method for research into the 'implicit' and the 'tacit' in a research context.

1.6. Overview of the Study

In the course of this study, the literature which has informed and set the context of this research is explored in two chapters.

The first of these chapters, **Chapter 2: Trust Literature**, explores the literature from the two main traditions of trust research and newer more integrated approaches to understanding the concept, finally identifying the approach to trust adopted in this research.

Chapter 3: Mature Students in HE identifies the key literature related to mature student participation in HE.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology sets out the rationale for the adoption of the Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006) approach to this research, the design of my research project, and the rationale for the adoption of the particular methodology employed, which incorporates a photographic dimension in my research. The analytical strategy drawn from the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach is discussed, and the methods utilised in interpreting the data gathered are identified. Finally, in this chapter, the ethical issues associated with my research, particularly related to the use of the photographs are discussed along with issues of trustworthiness in a qualitative research design such as this.

Chapters 5 to 7 represent the findings of my research study, and explore the meaning that mature students attribute to their experience in HE in Ireland in 2012. Linking to the academic literature, they address the *core question of the role of the Trust concept as a tool in understanding the meaning that the participants attach to that experience.*

Each of the three findings chapters encompasses a discussion of the Theoretical Concepts emerging from the categories identified earlier in the data analysis chapter (**Chapter 4**).

Chapter 5: At my age: The vulnerability and the risk taking of the students incorporating the following categories: My story, Self-concept, and Fears and Pressures

Chapter 6: Trusting Relationships incorporating the following categories: Us and Them, Being Mature, Engagement, and the Lecturers

Chapter 7: The promise of HE incorporating the following categories: Undiscovered potential, Leap of Faith and HE as a privilege.

To acknowledge the participatory nature of the research, these findings' chapters employ the language of the participants to tell the story of their experience, and it uses the photographs selected by the participants to 'anchor' their stories. The photographs were employed as tools to facilitate the participants process of exploring their own meanings, and acted as 'triggers' to facilitate identification of both the explicit and implicit meaning of their experience.

Finally, **Chapter 8: Emergent Conclusions** sets out the outcomes emerging from this research relating to the mature student experience, the relevance of the trust concept, and the photo methodology adopted, it concludes with guidance for further research and policy development.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The approach to the Literature Review

This literature review, reflective of the constructivist grounded theory methodology informing this study, has taken a dichotomous approach to addressing the relevant literature. In the following two chapters (**Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3**) an exploration of the literature which provides the context for my research is conducted, however, to ensure respect for the 'emergent' nature of the constructivist grounded approach, the literature which is reflective of the concepts and themes emerging from this research is deliberated in **Chapters 5-7**, along with the relevant participant data. This approach to the literature review acknowledges and builds on previous knowledge and clearly sets the context of the research while simultaneously, and in the spirit of a constructivist grounded theory, respect and due attention is given to the data emerging from the participants.

In this manner cognisance is given to the debate around the positioning of the literature review in grounded theory research where Glaser (1992) advocated the postponement of the literature review until the completion of the data collection and the concept creation stages, though Charmaz (2006) adopts a more benign view, balancing concerns (also in Corbin & Strauss 2008), that the researcher should be able to immerse themselves in the research topic before embarking on the research study.

2.2. Introduction

This first chapter of the literature review begins by setting out the foundations of the trust concept, drawing on literature rooted in two key traditions of trust research, the behavioural/cognitive (Kramer 1999, Hardin 2002) and the normative/psychological approaches (Fukuyama 1995, Sztompka 1997, Seligman 1997). It subsequently draws on literature which examines the application of more recent integrated approaches (Mayer 1995, Rousseau 1998, and McKnight *et al* 1998; 2001; 2002) to conceptualising trust. Finally, the discussion moves to examine the current status of trust research in education generally (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 1997) and particularly in the context of HE (Hoecht 2006, Tierney 2006, Stensaker 2009, Vidovich 2011). The review identifies a gap in the literature in applying the concept of trust to understanding the experience of mature students in HE, and the student relationship with the HE institution.

Following this, **Chapter 3** specifically focuses on how mature students are conceptualised in the literature and the role that trust plays in their teaching and learning experience.

2.2.1. Foundations of Research into the Concept of Trust

Trust is a complex concept which has been identified as playing a significant role in the relationships in which each of us operates, whether the relationship is at the level of the individual, the organisation or society. It has a long research tradition whose 'roots date back to Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) (Uslaner 2008a, p.289) while its sociological roots can be traced back to Durkheim (1933), through Parsons (1971), and onto George Simmel (1990). Möllering (2001, p.405), citing Simmel, conceptualised

trust as a 'force that works for and through individuals, but at the same time for and through human association more generally'.

The re-discovery of research interest in the concept is traced to Luhmann's (1979) discourse on the nature of trust and its alternative, distrust, while our understanding of the topic is informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives including; philosophical approaches: Baier (1986) and Buber (2000); organisational behaviour approaches: Rousseau (1998), Bachmann and Zaheer (2006), and Kramer (1999; 2002; 2010); political science: Uslaner (1998-99; 2000-07), Newton (1997; 2001-6) and Delhey (2001-07); and economics: Beugelsdijk (2004); all of whom acknowledge the significance of the concept to the effective operation of society and organisations.

Reviewing the trust literature, Hosmer (1995 p.380) observed that though there is

widespread agreement on the importance of trust in human conduct ... unfortunately there also appears to be equally widespread lack of agreement on a suitable definition of the construct.

The existence of these various trust research traditions has led to the generation of an array of *definitions* of trust, and the identification of various *dimensions* and *layers*, *antecedents* and *consequences* of trust, leading Lewicki *et al* (2006) to conclude 'that the semantic distinctions made about various indicators and types of trust are so intertwined that it was incredibly easy to become hogtied in the ball of yarn we were attempting to unravel' (Lewicki *et al* 2006, p.993). The limits of space do not allow a complete analysis of the various nuances of the trust literature however a review of the literature identifies two alternative research approaches which guide and inform the understanding of the concept. Stensaker and Gornitzka (2009, p.127) have described these approaches as the calculative/rational perspective and the alternative normative/cognitive perspectives, while Lewicki *et al* (2006) propose that the two

main traditions are the Behavioural, which echoes the calculative/rational perspective, or the Psychological, which resonates with the normative/cognitive approach.

2.3. Two traditions of trust research

The normative approach to understanding trust is conceptualised in Mayer's (1995) definition of trust as 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party' (Mayer *et al* 1995, p.712) and is visible in Seligman's (1997) analysis, proposing that this type of trust is based within a moral tradition, a faith in others. It suggests (Leveille 2006, p.87) that the decision to 'trust implies the belief that others act responsibly and for the common good' and has led to the conceptualisation of the trustors overall attitude towards others as one's *personal propensity to trust*. Uslaner (2008) describes it as akin to 'moralistic' trust which views trust as based on moral or ethical grounds, an approach 'as old as modernity itself' (Seligman 1997, p.14).

This perspective views the decision to trust as based on a *belief* about others, which Sztompka (1999; 2003) conceptualises as akin to making a *bet of trust* on another, based on 'personal idiosyncratic differences in applying certain cues' (Sztompka 1997, p.86). Tierney (2006) views these trust decisions as situated within a cultural context where individuals are understood to be able to process a diverse range of data in making decisions about trust. This approach has been criticised by researchers dissatisfied with its moralistic perspective and with its inability to provide guidance about how trust develops and the absence of detailed characteristics of the concept which led to the adoption of an alternative trust research tradition (Uslaner 2008).

The alternative behavioural/cognitive research tradition takes the view that trust is interaction dependent and is described by Kramer (1999) Ostrom (1998) and Lewicki *et al* (2006), as based on the 'behavioural' tradition. This approach views decisions to trust as a cognitive phenomenon, (Hardin 2002) based on the rational approach, where my decision to trust, is based on my calculation that you are likely to prove to be trustworthy in relation to a particular event/task. It has focused in the development of largely quantitative, 'atomistic' approaches to trust research that focus on disassembling elements of the concept into its constituent parts. This research tradition has contributed to clarifying the facets of trust, issues of antecedents and consequences of trust, factors which are discussed further in the context of McKnight *et al*'s Model in **Section 2.3.1**, (below). It adopts empirical tools such as game theory, and decision processes such as the 'prisoner's dilemma' to 'test' the interaction between the trustor and the trustee, generating empirical data to explain the process of trust development and identify the factors which influence decisions to trust (Deakin 2006).

The rational/calculus based (Rousseau *et al* 1998) approach has been challenged by researchers (Sztompka 1995) who argue that trust must go beyond some self-interested, predictable analysis of my decision whether or not to trust others. Other researchers (Dirks & Skarlicki 2004) point to the limitations associated with the static nature of such models which take an atomised approach to what is an interwoven dynamic concept. The result is that these models are limited in their capacity to explain the process of trust creation and its impact on the behaviour of individuals outside the laboratory setting where Buskens *et al* (2010) argue that individual decisions to trust in real life are based on limited strategic rationality because

complete knowledge is not available to the trustor, and especially so in new trust situations.

Despite its limitations, this approach has informed much of the empirical research conducted in business settings, where extensive research captured significantly in edited volumes by Gambetta (1988), Hardin (2002) Kramer and Cook (2004) leading to Bachmann and Zaheer's (2006) publication of the *Handbook of Trust Research* have been particularly influential. Business interest in trust is motivated by research that identifies trust as a significant contributor to organisational effectiveness, through improved communication and more organisational citizenship behaviours. It also shows that 'higher levels of trust and trustworthiness can reduce transaction costs by allowing the use of informal agreements instead of complex contracts and their costly enforcement' (Ermisch *et al* 2009, p.749). Given the broad mercantilist agenda operating in HE it was considered opportune to examine the learning from the extensive trust literature in organisational settings and explore its applicability in a HE context.

The limits of each of these approaches has resulted in more recent research interest in developing integrative approaches building on the contribution of each tradition and focused on an attempt to explain how trust operates in reality. These typologies reflect the 'complexity and multidimensionality of the concept' (Tschannen-Moran 1997, p.350) and are reflective of literature (Fukuyama 1995, Uslaner 2008) which adopts a holistic, integrationist approach to trust, focusing on understanding and explaining the concept as it appears in a particular context. These broader frameworks offered a larger canvas in which the emerging data from my research participants could be situated.

2.3.1. Trust Literature: Integrative Approaches to Trust Research

While there are many typologies that have been developed (for example, Mayer & Davis 1995, Lewicki & Tomlinson 2006, Schoorman & Mayer 2007), the following seminal trust frameworks of Mayer (1995), Fukuyama (1995) and Rousseau (1998), are adopted for this research because they illustrate the temporal development of the trust relationship, and the interrelationship between the various trust constructs. These typologies also recommend themselves because they were in turn informed by research from previous meta-analyses of trust by, for example, Lewis and Weigert (1985) Tschannen-Moran (2000) and Dirks and Ferrin (2002), thus integrating research from each of the research traditions. The discussion in this section concludes with a detailed examination of the McKnight *et al* (1998) Integrated Trust Model which is employed as the trust framework for this research.

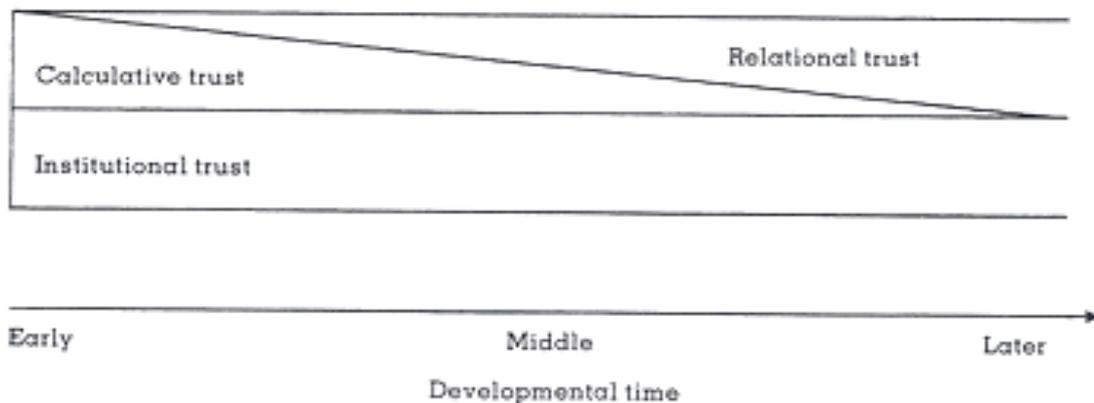


Figure 2.1: Rousseau's Trust Model (1998)

Rousseau's model (1998), in **Figure 2.1** above, integrates the two research traditions discussed earlier into a dynamic model that conceptualises trust development as a movement from calculus based (rational based) trust in the early stages of trust

development towards relational trust as relationships develop over time. This dynamic approach is reflective of Lewicki and Bunkers' earlier research (1996), which identified three stages of trust building in relationships moving from calculus-based trust (CBT), through knowledge-based trust (KBT), and finally identification based trust (IBT) as relationships are built. McAllister *et al* (2006, p6) later developed a concept called Affect Based Trust (ABT) which 'suggests a need to address the unique role of emotional bonds within trust development processes.' The model identifies the developing nature of trust and the significance of the role of emotions and perceptions as a key element in understanding trust processes. In a HE setting the model proposes that the nature of the trust decision made by the students deciding to enter HE will develop and change over time, suggesting that examining whether the trust experience of 'beginning' students is different to that of final year students would be a purposeful area of investigation for my research.

The Mayer and Davis (1995, p.715) model (**Figure 2.2**, below) further enhanced the integrative models by contributing to an understanding of the trust process through incorporating the dynamic of risk and its impact on trust taking decisions. It brings together the perceptual process in making trust decisions (i.e. ability, benevolence and integrity) together with the trustors propensity to trust into a dynamic decision making model and suggests that trust decisions are influenced by the participants analysis of the risk involved in such decision making. The model also introduced the iterative nature of the trust transaction, such that outcomes from one transaction impact on the perceptions of trustworthiness of the next transaction (Luhmann 1979, Granovetter 1985) or, as suggested by Kramer and Lewicki (2010, p.258), that 'trust

between interdependent actor's increases or decreases as a function of their cumulative history of personal interaction'.

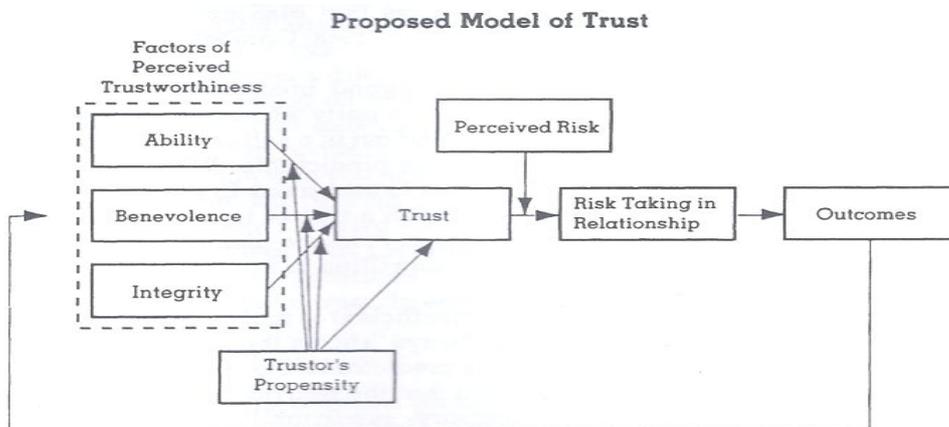


Figure 2.2: Proposed Model of Trust (Mayer et al 1995)

2.3.2. McKnight et al's Model

The elements of perceived trustworthiness from Mayer's model (as per **Figure 2.2**, above) are also reflected in the McKnight *et al* (1998) (see **Figure 2.3**, below) model of initial Formation of Trust - a framework developed for the purpose of exploring the dynamics of beginning relationships in an e-commerce context. The motivation for the development of the model according to McKnight and Chervany (2001a, pp.37-8) was the challenge to 'reconcile the various types of trust', which had not been addressed because 'of disciplinary perspectives' and because 'empirical research drives most definitions' leading to narrow conceptualisations of trust. The outcome of their deliberations was the creation of a comprehensive integrated model (**Figure 2.3** below) whose constructs have been empirically tested and validated in McKnight and Chervany (2001) and McKnight *et al* (2002a).

The model contributes to the understanding of the concept of trust by bringing together the constructs of: Disposition to trust, Institutional trust, Trusting beliefs and Cognitive process into intention to trust. The model is also dynamic and integrative and the constructs employed in this model have proven to be robust empirically. The model acts as a useful framework within which to situate my research because of its integrationist approach and its incorporation of various dimensions of the trust construct which recommends itself in the context of the Constructivist grounded approach of this research.

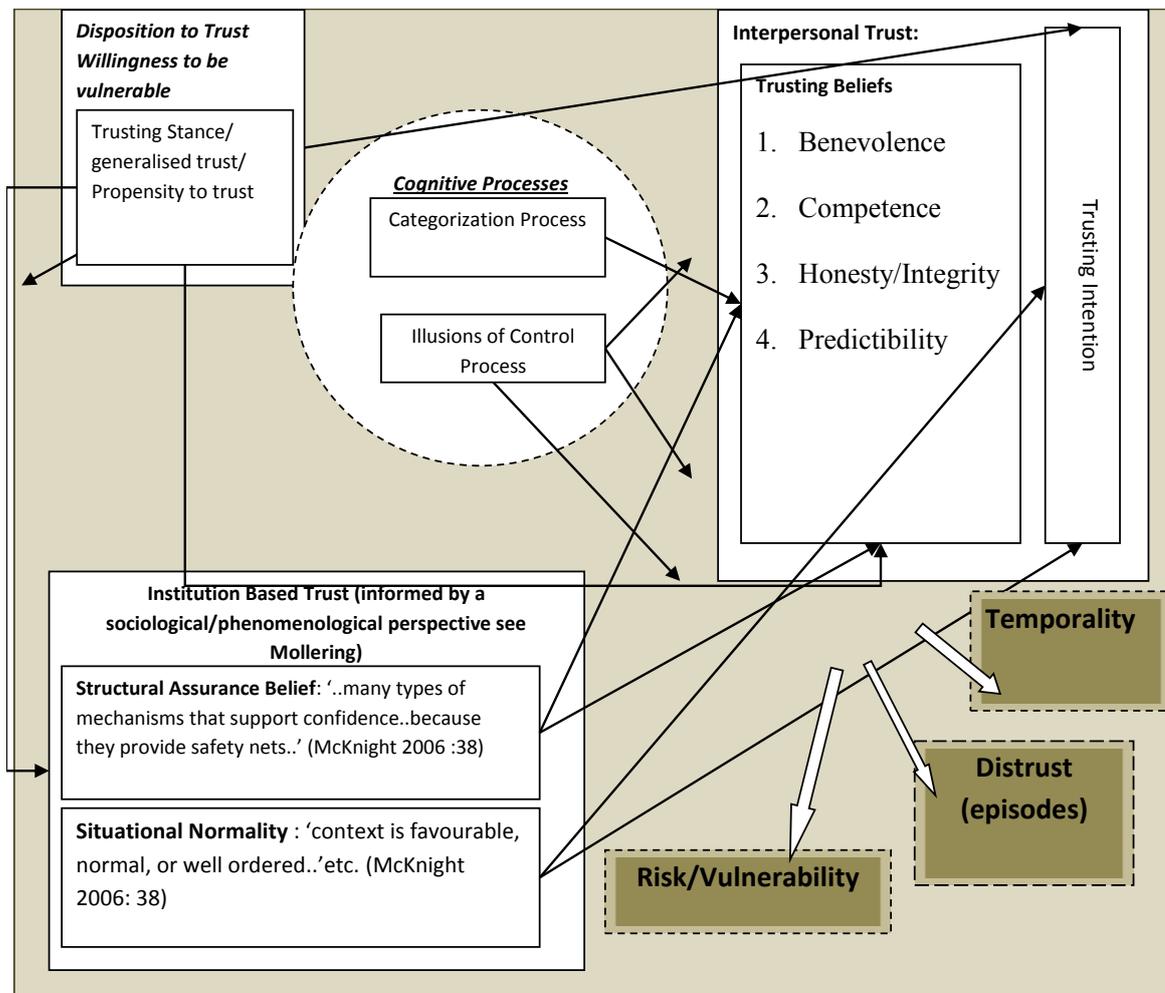


Figure 2.3: McKnight *et al*'s (1998, 2001a/b, 2002a/b) expanded* Integrated Trust Model. (*Shaded)

Figure 2.3, above, shows McKnight's (1998) model expanded to include clarifications developed under his subsequent research (2001 a/b, 2002 a/b) and with the implicit constructs (Risk, distrust and temporality) explicitly shown in the model in the shaded boxes. While it is beyond the scope of this literature review to fully explore the nuances of each of the constructs within this framework, a clear understanding of the key elements and debates within each of the constructs, is considered important in contextualising my research and are outlined below.

Disposition to trust: Propensity to trust

This disposition to trust element in McKnight *et al's* Model connects back to the normative tradition of trust research and is based on two constructs, *trusting stance* i.e.: one's general approach to trusting others, and secondly, a general *faith in humanity* (McKnight & Chervany 2001a, p.47). It is essentially a normative construct which in empirical research was first employed by Rotter (1967) who focused on identifying personality 'traits' associated with trusting behaviour. More recent empirical research has adopted the *generalised trust* question measured by the statistically aggregated responses to the question of *whether most people could be trusted, or rather whether one cannot be too careful dealing with others* (Sztompka, 2006) to measure this construct. The generalised trust question has been widely employed in research comparing the level of trust of entire countries (Delhey & Newton 2003, Delhey 2007), though its use has been criticised by Beugelsdijk (2006) and Sturgis (2010) because of the questions content and format. Nooteboom (2006, p.261) even suggests that the use of the question without context is 'useless', reflecting Hardin's (2002) view that a trust relationship should be presented as the

issue of whether X trusts Y, in the context of situation A, representing the idea that trust is a *situationally specific decision*.

Giddens (1991) Delhey *et al* (2005) and Sztompka (2006), propose that the disposition to trust construct is more accurately, related to personal psychological factors and learned experiences in family and education, and is influenced by the personality, identity and status of the individual, which is learned early in life, and is robust. The influence of this type of trust is particularly important according to McKnight *et al* (2001a; 2002b) in the context of new trust situations where the decision to trust is not based on any kind of previous experience of the person or organisation. This socio-psychological approach to trust is an important dimension for my research as it suggests that the 'personal propensity to trust', is relevant in understanding the decision making process of mature students entering higher education without any previous HE experience and with limited clues on which to base trust decisions. This connection is developed further in **Chapter 3** in discussing the role of social capital in the experience of mature students entering HE, and is reflected in the outcomes discussed in **Chapter 5**.

Trust referents

The question of trust referents refers to the issue of in whom or in what trust is placed which was relevant for my research as it raised the question of whom or what is the trust referent when it comes to mature student participation in HE. The existing trust literature recognises the possibility of different types of trust referents where it is possible to speak of Trust placed: *in specific others* - Dasgupta (1988), Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1997; 2000), Hoy *et al* (2006), and Lewicki *et al* (2006); *in groups* -

Serva *et al* (2005) and Delhey *et al* (2011); *in organisations* - Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) and Klein (2010) and *in society* - Burke and Stets (1999), Claibourn and Martin (2000), Alesina and La Ferrara (2002), and Sturgis (2009). The literature (Fukuyama 1995; Sztompka 1999, Frietag & Tranmüller 2009) differentiates between these various trust referents through the identification of *layers or spheres of trust*. This approach acknowledges the presence of different trust intensities, and Li (2008) suggests that the trustor discriminates between thin trust at the extremities and thick trust towards the centre, an approach which is echoed in Putnam (2000) who discriminates between weak and strong trust. Fukuyama (1995) models these discriminatory trust relationships through the concept of a 'Radius of Trust' (**Figure 2.4** below) conceptualising trust relationships as layered, with the most comprehensive primary trust relationships being close to the centre and then differentiated as one operates away from the centre, towards secondary relationships.

Conceptualising trust in this manner is not without its critics (Seligman 1997), because it raises concerns of whether in reality it is possible to distinguish between trusting the 'structure' of the organisation or the 'agents' who represent the face of the organisation though Sztompka (1999) asserts that trust is always in the person who represents the organisation.

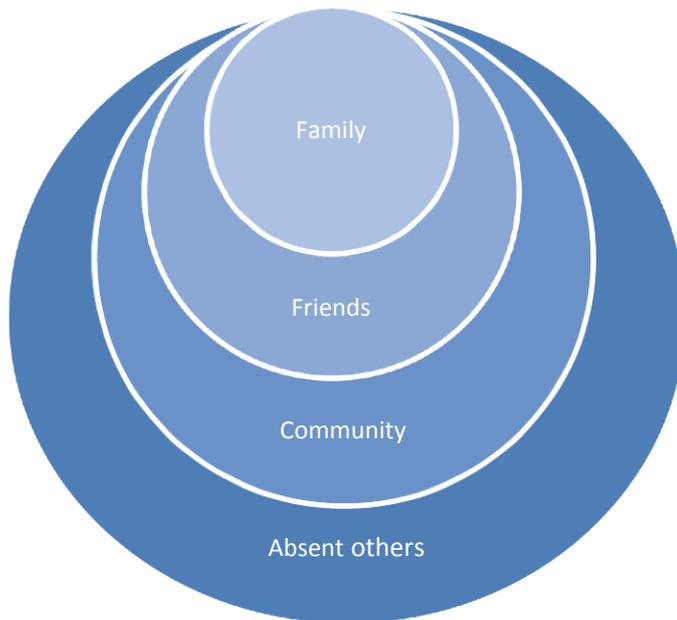


Figure 2.4: Fukuyama's (1995) Radius of Trust Model

This framework approach to trust referents indicates that exploring how mature students in HE conceptualise and negotiate their relationships and how these impact on them would prove purposeful in contributing to our understanding of their HE experience.

Institutional trust

Following from the discussion above on trust referents, McKnight *et al's* model (1998, 2001) (and Rousseau 1998 - **Figure 2.1** above) specifically includes the concept of *institutional trust*, which Luhmann (1988) and later Giddens (1991) refer to as systems trust. In McKnight's (1998; 2001) framework a decision to trust an institution is based on the perception of *situational normality* and *structural assurance*. Structural assurance 'means that one believes that protective structures – guarantees, contracts, regulations, promises, legal recourse, processes, or procedures are in place' (McKnight *et al* 2002, p.48). The presence of such assurances allows the trustee to believe in the

trustworthiness of the institution. Relating this to HEI's suggests that accrediting, accountability and quality control systems which exist to assure the student that their experience is indeed worthwhile facilitate the development of trust in the institution. The approach has been questioned by Rousseau (1998), who has suggested that the presence of these controls may in fact be limiting the potential for the development of interpersonal trust, a view reflective of concerns raised by Hoecht (2006, **Chapter 1**) Stensaker and Görnitzka (2009), Samier and Schmidt (2010), and Nootboom (2011). This possibility emerges from the tension between the implementation of instrumentalist mechanisms designed to control the system but which can result in inflexible responses to the needs of the clients, creating increased conflict and a decline in trust. My research explored the students understanding of the role or impact of such processes in their decision to participate in HE and their impact on the mature students' experience of HE.

The second factor in determining the level of trust in the institution relates to *Situational normality* which 'means that one believes that the situation in a venture is normal or favourable or conducive to situational success' (McKnight and Chervany 2001a, p.48). It is a concept borrowed from Garfinkle (1963) which suggests that when everything is normal then trust will exist but that when there are disruptions then trust will disappear. As discussed earlier (in **Section 1.4**) Irish HE is currently situated in a climate of uncertainty, stimulated by the economic climate but also the generation of change initiatives by the Department of Education. The impact of such an environment coupled with the unemployment situation where the Government strategy of re-skilling and re-education has encouraged greater numbers back into HE, contributes to

the creation of an abnormal situation. This uncertainty and its role in the students perception of the trustworthiness of the institution was explored in my research.

Trust beliefs

As suggested earlier the Trust beliefs construct is informed by a meta-analysis of earlier seminal research which identified a clustering of empirical evidence supporting the role of some core beliefs on trustors decisions to trust others. These core beliefs, which are construed to have both affective and cognitive elements are incorporated in McKnight's (1998; 2001; 2002) model as; benevolence, competence, honesty and predictability and have been further affirmed in McKnight and Chervany (2006). These beliefs (with the exception of predictability) are conceptualised as meta constructs incorporating other elements from research. *Competence* belief therefore refers to issues of competence, expertise and dynamism, while *Benevolence* incorporates the concepts of good will, morality, caring and responsiveness, and *Integrity* encompasses issues of honesty, reliability, dependability and credibility. These beliefs lead the trustor to take a stance or a position in relation to their intention to trust the other person, which subsequently is reflected in their trusting intention and perhaps their trust behaviour. It is important to point out that although risk is not explicitly identified as an element in this model the authors recognised it as an underlying principle in the application of the model.

The beliefs which the mature students have about their educational experience is core to my research which is interested in exploring the beliefs which the participants have about HE and how this impacts on their trusting intentions and their subsequent behaviour in HE. The inclusion of the affective or emotional element in this construct

enables a link to be made with existing affective based research into the experience of mature students in HE explored further in **Chapter 3**.

The Cognitive Perspective

This final construct reflects what Lewis and Weigert (1985, p.970) define as the process by which ‘We cognitively choose whom we will trust in which respects and under which circumstances, and we base the choice on what we take to be good reasons, constituting evidence of trustworthiness’. The construct proposes that the trustor integrates the diverse information from all the other constructs (trust beliefs, disposition to trust and institutional trust) where it is processed to facilitate the trustee making a decision as to whether they intend to trust someone or something. McKnight and Chervany (2001a) identify this as incorporating a *process of categorisation* and an *illusion of control*.

The categorisation process is influenced by perceptions of others as belonging to particular categories, what they identify as *Unit groupings*, where it is possible to identify others with the same beliefs, goals and values as themselves. Those whom are perceived to belong to the same unit grouping as themselves are perceived as being more trustworthy than those outside this group. The process of categorisation also includes perceptions about the *reputation* of another which can include competence and benevolence (McKnight *et al* 1998) and it is also influenced by *stereotyping* those who belong to other groups based for example on gender which facilitates the trustee to make inferences about the other.

The *illusion of control* process refers to the extent to which the trustee feels that they have control or influence over the situation, based on an analysis that they have

processed all the variables and that one can make a leap into the unknown assured that one has established some control over the outcomes. McKnight *et al* (1998: 481) citing Langer (1975) and Mayerson *et al* (1996) point to the fact that 'the individual may form unjustifiably strong confidence' in the trustworthiness of the other as a result of this process resulting in unjustified trusting decisions. This cognitive process is relevant to an understanding of the decision making method of participating in HE and how trust impacts on that decision.

Nooteboom (2006) takes the view that much of the mental activity involved in these decision making processes is 'subconscious or only partly or occasionally conscious' (p.173) while Rousseau *et al* (1998) suggest that we rely on 'Clues' which according to both Lewicki *et al* (2006) and Hansen *et al* (2002) have both cognitive and affective elements in decisions about 'making bet of trust' (Sztompka 2006, p.33). Despite the uncertainty of this process (Sztompka 2006, p.33) argues that, 'individuals can be viewed as vigilant social perceivers who are attentive to a variety of ambient cues within an environment' a view supported by Kramer (2006) who proposes that people operate as 'Intuitive social auditor[s]' in making their trust decisions.

This approach acknowledges the agency of these individuals who are perceived to be well equipped to interpret the explicit and the implicit cues which are presented to them and that the aim of the researcher should be to gain an understanding of how this sense making occurs. It proposes that understanding of the trust dynamic for mature students in Higher Education requires that the researcher explores the interpretative and meaning making activities with which the students engage in deciding to enter and participate in HE.

Trusting intention

Research on the relationship between trust decisions and trust behaviours is a matter for debate. There is agreement that the presence of trust is beneficial for organisations but the study of trust is bedevilled by the problem of cause and effects, in earlier research Mayer *et al* (1995, p.711) and Rousseau, (1998, p.396) debated whether trust was a 'cause, effect or interaction', and Dirks and Ferrin (2001) suggested that trust sometimes operates as a *Main Effect* i.e. that it results in particular outcomes and trust and in other situations it operates as a *Moderating effect* i.e. it mediates the effects of a particular situation. In empirical models trusting intention is defined as an intention to trust but is conceptualised as being distinct from trusting behaviour.

For McKnight and Chervany (2006) the concept of intention to trust is understood to be robust when there are many antecedents to support the intention and it is described as fragile when the antecedents are limited or in cases of high risk. My research examined the relationship between trusting intention and the behaviour of the mature students in making decisions to enter HE and how trust influenced this process.

2.3.3. *Distrust*

Though the concept of distrust/mistrust did not emerge as a major construct in my research, within the trust research literature interest has begun to focus on issues of distrust and trust violations. (Kramer and Lewicki 2010). The inclusion of this discussion in my Literature review serves, (following Charmaz 2006) to acknowledge the role of the researcher in mapping out the extant literature on the research topic.

Lewicki et al (1998:439) have defined distrust as ‘confident negative expectations regarding another’s conduct, this was developed by McKnight and Chervany (2001b:43) to suggest that distrust results in behaviour where ‘a person, does not voluntarily depend on another person, with a feeling of relative certainty or confidence when negative consequences are possible’. Lewicki et al. (2006) suggest that high distrust is characterised by ‘..fear, scepticism, cynicism, wariness..’ and distrust tends to provoke feelings of anxiety and insecurity..’ (Tschannen-Moran et al 2000:550). The concept is considered to be significant in the context of organizational effectiveness where Sztompka (2006) suggests that a breach of trust results in people adopting ‘adaptive reactions’ such as ‘..the overgrowth of vigilance..’, excessive litigiousness, ghettoisation paternalisation, externalization of trust (Sztompka 2006:116-117) and

The construct was initially conceived as existing along a continuum between trust at one end and distrust at the other, implying that one either trusted or distrusted others. Subsequent research (Lewicki et al: 1998) now suggests that it is a construct which has its own antecedents and consequences (McKnight and Chervany 2001b:43) which can be studied as a separate construct. In McKnight and Chervany (2001b) the authors adopted their earlier Trust Model above (2.3.2) and developed a similar typology for Distrust:

Dispositional Trust	Institutional Trust	Interpersonal Trust		
<i>(Distrust in General Others)</i>	<i>Distrust in the Situation or Structures</i>	<i>Distrust in Specific Others</i>		
Disposition to distrust: displaying a consistent		Distrusting Beliefs: beliefs	Distrusting Intentions: No	Distrust Related Behaviour: Lack

tendency not to be willing to depend on general others across a range of situations and people.	Institution Based Distrust: No structural assurance, no situational normality.	that the other person does not have characteristics beneficial to one.	willingness to depend on others	of co-operation, information distortion, increasing controls, etc.
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Figure 2.5: Adapted from McKnight and Chervany (2001b: 43-46)

This model suggests that in addition to having separate antecedents, that distrust and trust can co-exist together, and that they are empirically separate constructs, this alternative approach mirrors Hardin’s (2002) conceptualisation of distrust and trust as asymmetrical concepts, and is confirmed in recent neuro-imaging research (Dimoka 2010) which demonstrates that distrust and trust are activated in separate locations in the brain. Distrust is associated with the amygdala and is an indicator of very strong emotions associated with the experience of distrust which explains why individuals are unwilling to participate in environments of distrust.

The inclination to distrust can emerge from; one’s personal propensity to distrust (emerging from ones early socialisation experiences), from environmental factors, from previous experiences, or from a categorisation of the other as outside ones trust sphere. Hardin (2002: 93-94), suggests that these decisions to trust or distrust are made complex by the climate of uncertainty in which we all reside and Kramer and Lewicki 2010: 251-252, suggest that trust is broken down through disrespectful behaviour, communication issues, unmet expectations, ineffective leadership, unwillingness to acknowledge, performance issues, incongruence, and structural issues. The complexity of the concept also relates to the fact that it is also possible to trust another within a specific range of activities, but not in a different context.

The concern for issues of distrust and trust relate to the fact that the presence of trust creates the possibility of building co-operative relationships which are beneficial to both parties, while distrust completely blocks these opportunities. The challenge for higher education therefore, is to maintain trust in the system and limiting the distrust elements within its control. The maintenance of trust is complex; research shows that while building trust is a process that emerges through a number of positive trusting interactions it takes only one incidence of distrust to create a climate of distrust. For people and institutions the rebuilding of trust is problematic, Kramer and Lewicki (2010:252-255) suggest that the tools for repairing trust include explanations, accounts and apologies, reparations, penance reinstatement, forgiveness, but Celani (2008) notes that people who had previous positive expectations from the organization respond 'especially negatively' where they feel that the organization lets them down. The construct did not emerge as significant in the outcome of the data collection in this research, this may be related to issues of power and powerlessness with which individuals engage with large institutions such as HE and their representatives (see 6.5.1), it may also be that by conducting longitudinal research with students over the lifetime of their experience in HE which would encompass successful and unsuccessful engagements with HE could provide purposeful data in relation to the distrust construct in HE.

2.4. Applying McKnight's Model to my Research

Acknowledging the complex nature of the trust construct indicated that the adoption of an integrated approach provides a comprehensive framework within which the research participants' interpretations and meanings might be situated recommended

itself to my research. This approach addressed my concern that in embarking on a Constructivist grounded theory research project employing a concept such as trust that the emerging data from the participants would suffer Lewicki's (2006) fate, or alternatively that the step in raising the data into grounded theory would be missed. The framework would both assist in guiding the data collection process, (see **Figure 2.5**, below) and would facilitate making connections between the emerging meaning generated by the participants and the original trust literature, a position supported by Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) who suggest that examining atomistic elements of the trust construct have proven limited in determining how exactly trust operates in organisational contexts.

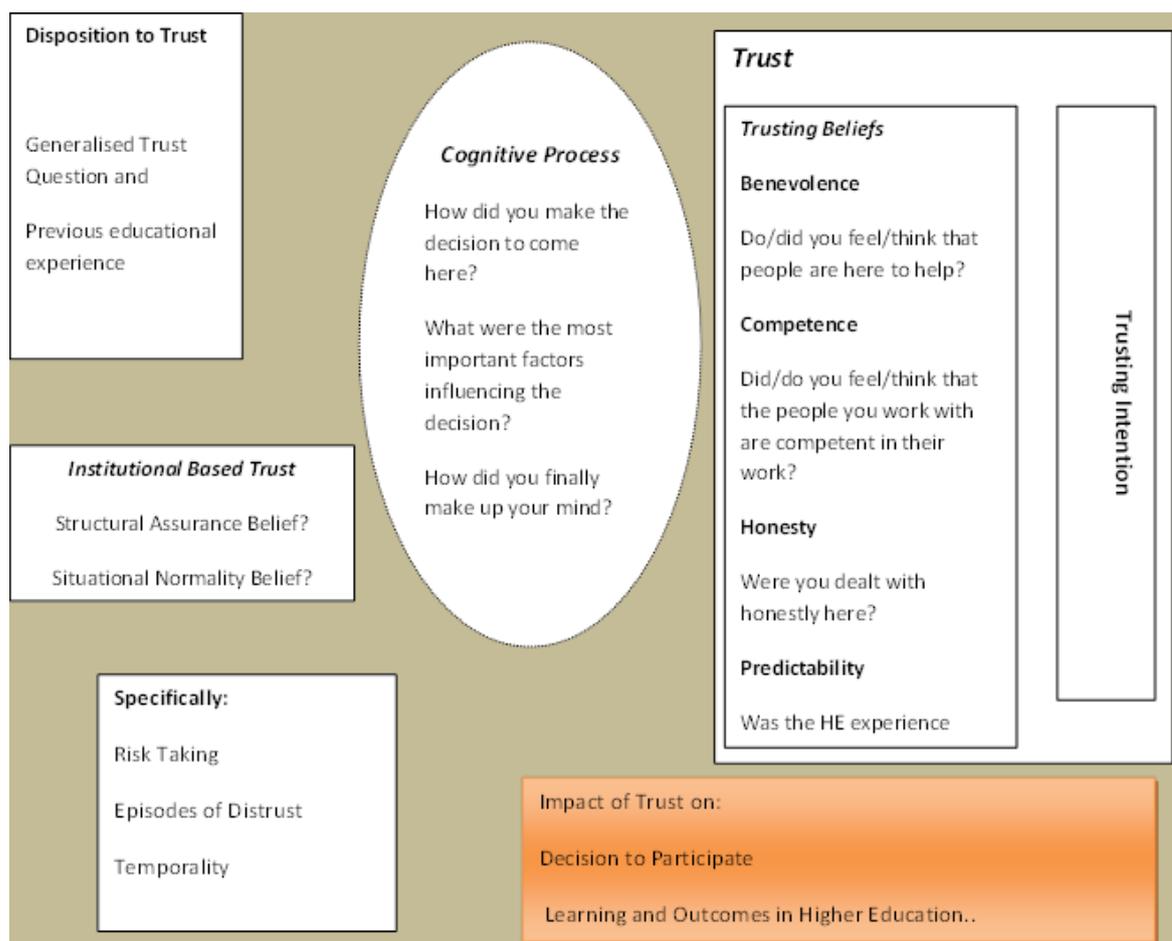


Figure 2.6: McKnight's Model (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) Guiding the Research Questions

Figure 2.5 takes McKnight's Model (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) and tentatively identifies areas for exploration in my research which were developed further in the Research design phase in **Chapter 4**

The potential limitations of the model identified by McKnight and Chervany (2001a, p.53), relate to the fact that by integrating concepts taken from various disciplines one can lose the fine grained nuances of their original definitions and this is recognised as a potential limitation. In earlier research the authors also identified one of the potential limitations of the model being the potential for the constructs not to be discriminant of one another, though in later research (McKnight *et al* 2002b) provided empirical support for this discrimination.

As a result of the fact that the model measures both 'cognitive processes and factors which makes it hard to test in one study' (McKnight & Chervany 2006) they suggest that it may require the use of different tests but in my research I adopted the view that recognises the ability of the students to act as affective interpreters of the trust clues in the environment and that they would provide a rich source of research data. Finally, although the model was designed to be used in beginning relationships and has been taken from within a specifically ecommerce context, nonetheless this was not perceived to be a significant limitation of its application in this research.

2.5. Trust in Higher Educational Research

Initially, research on trust in an educational context was concentrated in the US in the primary school sector where research by Imber (1973), followed by further empirical research by Bryk and Schneider (2003), Goddard (2003), Hoy and Gaskill (2003), Hoy *et*

al (2006a), established the significance of the role in enhancing student performance, ensuring the effectiveness of schools and school leadership. In HE, trust research by contrast has focused primarily on the relationship between trust and issues of governance, with limited application to student experience (discussed later in **Chapter 3**). The interest in trust is stimulated by the massification and marketisation agendas pre-dominating HE (see **Section 1.4**) and corresponding demands for increasing accountability. Stensaker and Görnitzka, (2009), conclude that these trends have led to the adoption of rational/instrumentalist approaches rather than normative/cognitive approaches to building trust in the HE system. Meanwhile, extensive research literature from across the world, (Hoecht (2006) in the UK, Leveille (2006) in the US, Samier and Schmidt (2010) in Europe, and Vidovich and Currie (2011) in an Australian context), indicates that these instrumentalist accountability systems are anathema to the creation of and building of trust in education. Indeed Klein (2010) argues that the proliferation of instrumental accountability instead leads to a diminution of trust, while Carless (2009) demonstrates the negative effect of accountability and the emergence of distrust in implementation of change in assessment practices in HE. Tierney (1995; 1997; 2006) and Klein (2010) have proposed that in response to demands for accountability in HE, that the focus should instead be on the creation of a culture of trust where values such as respect and fairness flourish. This approach is supported by Allen (2003) and Daly (2009), who provide evidence that the presence of trust and effective leadership facilitates the creation of a culture of empowerment and involvement and a more positive response to change, while Le Grange (2003) and Shore and Groen (2009) also show the important role that trust relationships play in building transnational research.

In developing our understanding of trust Tierney (1995; 1997; 2006) advocates the adoption of a sociological approach to research into the role of trust in HE, arguing that an understanding of an organisation can only be established by an examination of the multifarious interactions between the people who populate the organisation because this is how individuals create and construct their own realities. The adoption of this cultural approach suggests that participants' conceptualisation of, or *meaning of trust* can only be understood through the lens of their lived experiences. This position is supported by Sztompka (2006) who opposes purely quantitative approaches to measuring trust, suggesting instead that consideration of the context in which the question is situated, could facilitate the identification of 'a true Durkheimian "societal fact sui generis" often recognised by the imprecise common sense as the "climate of trust," the "atmosphere of trust," or in a more academic language the "culture of trust" could exist' (Sztompka, 2006: 907). Since Tierney (2006) views the individual as 'agentified', and inherently motivated to co-operate with others, he proposes that to understand the trust process 'of necessity one investigate the *socialising mechanisms and processes* that induct the individual into the culture' (Tierney 2006, p.184). This approach resonates with Seligman (1997) who suggests that 'trust enters into the social interaction in the interstices of system, or at system limit, when for one reason or another systemically defined role expectations are no longer viable' (Seligman 1997, p.25), this cultural approach becomes visible (Sztompka 2006, p.94) in tacit factors such as 'keeping the door of professors office open'.

My research focuses on contributing to the understanding of the mature students' experience through exploring the socialising mechanisms and processes that the mature students experience entering into HE, and the trust meanings which the

participants create through the lens of their lived experiences. It recognises that trust exists in the 'spaces' between structures challenging the researcher to access the 'implicit' elements, the tacit knowledge which influences trust decisions. A further discussion specifically focusing on the trust experience of students in the context of the Mature student experience in HE in **Chapter 3**, and specifically in **Section 3.5** below.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter the review of the trust literature has identified two main traditions or approaches to trust research, which favour either a psychological/normative or behavioural/rational perspectives. Each approach has contributed to the development of our understanding of the concept of trust and its constructs, and there is common agreement that the concept is multidimensional and multifaceted. The concept has been shown to contribute to organisational effectiveness but its application in HE has been limited. The complexity of the concept has led to the development of integrationist approaches to conceptualising trust, Mayer (1995), Fukuyama (1995), Rousseau (1998), which have been identified as providing a framework within which my research endeavour is situated focusing particularly on the framework provided by McKnight, *et al* (1998; 2001; 2002).

My study takes the view that humans appear to have the capacity to take in and interpret the various 'cues' (Sztompka 1995) with which they make 'bets of trust' about others at a personal, interpersonal, institutional and societal level. Adopting this approach my study is also informed by the cultural approaches to the study of trust provided by Tierney (2006) which is perceived to be an appropriate framework for a

constructivist grounded theory study to facilitate the researcher's attention to focus on the 'emergent' nature of the research data.

In the next chapter the literature on the mature student experience in education is discussed and focuses specifically on the research which explores the role of trust in that experience.

CHAPTER 3: MATURE STUDENTS AND HE EXPERIENCE IN IRELAND

3.1. Introduction

The mature student cohort is of increasing research interest to educators and policy makers because of Irish Government strategies' focused on the creation of the 'knowledge society' (see earlier discussion **Section 1.4.1**). These strategies have a particular focus on mature students who, in Ireland, have been identified as having particularly low levels of education (HEA 2012). This literature review draws on research focusing on; the experience of mature students in HE (Davies & Williams 2001, Haggis 2002, Brooks 2007, Crozier *et al* 2008, Christie 2009, Reay *et al* 2010); issues of teaching and learning for mature students (Mezirow 1991, Brookfield 2007, Barnett 2007); and research on the experience of mature students specifically in an Irish context (Lynch & Moran 2006, Keane 2009, Kenny *et al* 2010, Smyth & Cohen 2012). The review also includes research identifying the implications of the impact of habitus (Bourdieu 1988) and social capital (Fukuyama 1995, Tierney 2003, 2006, Kilpatrick *et al* 2003 and Goddard 2003) on the mature student experience, and finally focuses on the limited existing research concentrating on trust and mature students in HE.

3.2. The Mature Student Category in Higher Education

The literature on students engaging in HE identifies two student cohorts, the traditional cohort which consists of students who enter HE directly from secondary education and who have traditionally come from particular socio-economic

backgrounds (Gilardi 2011). The non-traditional students are regarded as those who engage with HE from outside the traditional progress routes (Schuetze & Slowey 2002) - this group includes mature students, but also those from groups traditionally underrepresented in HE, and those perceived as being of particular risk of dropping out (Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011).

Early research interest in this second student cohort concentrated on identifying the demographics of the group. In more recent years, research has focused on the impact of social class (Reay 2001; 2002; 2003), race, ethnicity and gender (Tett 2000) on the 'experience' of the student in HE, and its impact on their participation and success rates. What emerges is that, for these non-traditional students, their relationship with HE is characterised by a complex process of meaning-making intertwined in issues of self and social class (Reay 2002; 2003 and Reay *et al* 2002). Making sense of their HE experience is depicted by Warmington (2003) as a process fraught with tension, emanating from a dissonance with their own values and biographies, and the values and culture of the HEI, which Read *et al* (2003) identifies as related to issues of marginalisation and exclusion emanating from the transition from a culture in which they are 'embedded' into the HE culture which is alien to them.

3.3. The Embedded Nature of the Mature Student experience in Higher Education

To comprehend the mature student experience in HE, is to understand the 'embedded' nature of that experience. The concept of 'embeddedness', taken from Granovetter (1985) and employed in adult learning research, is widely accepted in the literature on mature student participation (James 1995, Ball *et al* 2002; Buskens *et al* 2010; Molm *et al* 2012). Pink and Leder Mackley (2012) use the term 'entangled' lives to describe the

concept which echoes Bourdieu's (1988) concept of 'habitus', or what Crozier *et al* (2008) describe as the students' own socio-cultural locations, namely class, gender, age and ethnicity, or what Jarvis (2004) refers to as their own unique 'socio-cultural' (Jarvis 2004) context.

For Mezirow (1999, p.1) this being 'caught in our own histories', is the source of some of the barriers to mature student participation in HE which Jarvis (2004, p.75) has identified as; situational, dispositional and institutional barriers, where the role of money, time, confidence and family commitments are serious elements influencing mature student participation, engagement and success in HE. The idea establishes that mature students participation in HE cannot be considered in isolation from their whole life experiences because their engagement in HE becomes part of an already well-established web of relationships, understandings, responsibilities and pressures which continue while they are in education. Decisions to participate in HE are, therefore, complex processes in which many others are implicated. As a result of 'this very pluralism of affiliations and involvements' (Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011, p.36), mature students are engaged in a 'balancing act' (Darmody & Fleming 2009) to manage the diverse demands upon which their existence is predicated. The challenge of managing these multiple roles has been described as a 'struggle' by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) while Darmody & Fleming (2009), albeit in research on part-time mature students in Irish HE, have termed this experience as 'role overload'.

Due to these diverse demands and expectations, the decision of mature students to participate in HE is a complex process, research by Davies and Williams (2001), Mathers and Parry (2010), and Osborne *et al* (2004), challenges the assumption that these students are the presupposed highly individualised, instrumental, and economic

actors, that rational economic policy and Government policy suggests. On the contrary their research suggests that the 'lifeload' of the mature students, and the role of emotions and social capital, are important influencers in the decision of mature students entering HE. My research is intended to contribute to understanding the contribution of trust to this decision making process.

3.4. The Mature Student Experience in Higher Education

This transition from mature students' existing life experiences to HE, has also been conceptualised as a change in 'field' (Cooper 2011), which James (1995) identifies to mean that the mature students change from a familiar to a new habitus (Bourdieu 1988), requiring them to learn the skills of operating in two different 'fields'. Bernstein (1999) conceptualises this as a process of acquiring the capacity to develop the recognition and realisation rules necessary to make sense of the university experience, and the knowledge of how to navigate through this system and make it work for them. For mature students, this requires (Hinsliff-Smith *et al* 2012) that they develop coping strategies to help them manage in HE through a socialisation process which 'involves a give-and-take, where new individuals make sense of an organisation through their own unique backgrounds and the current contexts in which the organisation resides' (Tierney 1997, p.6). The success of this process is understood to be an important consideration influencing the level of engagement of students and their likelihood to succeed in HE (Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011).

This socialisation process is a matter of debate in the literature, in the context of the widening participation (WP) agenda, Hunt (2007, p.766) advises that 'successful diversity depends, not on "normalising" students to fit into existing practices, but

rather on building on different backgrounds, experiences and interests to develop HE within this dynamic context'. Tierney (1992) conceptualises the socialisation process as a co-created process in which the members, both existing and new co-create their meaning, but the problem according to Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) is that the institution is in fact inflexible and that all the pressure is on the student rather than the institution to adapt to the fixed habitus of HE. For Haggis (2003) these are some of the assumptions that need to be challenged in the mass higher education system where the system assumes that the students come with the capacity (and inclination) to engage with the system and its educational processes. It is also viewed as problematic because of the requirement for mature students to separate from their previous lives and values (Reay 2002, James 1995) which, they argue, is impossible for mature students because of their (embedded) commitments and connections. Further to this, Haggis (2003) (following Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011) challenges the prevailing assumptions within HE of a model of the 'traditional student' entering the 'traditional university' where the students hold or will develop the dispositions and qualities required by the system removing them from the 'richness and complexity of his/her multiple contexts.' (Haggis 2003, p.98). The socialisation process has been problematised in Ireland by Keane (2009) who discovers that, for students underrepresented in HE experience, the socialisation process sometimes results in 'frictional relationships' with the 'traditional student' cohort.

Entering and participating in HE is therefore a risk situation for the mature student as a result of the various barriers which they must negotiate and which requires that they leave an established habitus to engage with another one designed for a different type of student, making that transition problematic. By introducing the concept of trust my

research contributes to an understanding of how mature students experience this process.

3.4.1. Challenges to Self-Concept

The problems of socialisation are compounded by the challenges which this process represents to the students' own self-concept, resulting in what Johnson and Robson (1999) describe as 'threatened identities', and creating self-doubt in the mature students (O'Shea & Stone 2010). Although this challenge has been described by Wenger (1998) as being an integral part of the education process and the developing trajectory of the self, this relationship between a pre-existing self and the 'new' self to be *developed* by the experience of HE has been problematised by Reay (2002) and Clegg (2011). In a HE context it suggests that the participants should experience their education as transformative and there should be a leaving of the old flawed self behind, which for working-class students requires that they change their 'inappropriate habitus' to succeed in HE (Clegg 2011). The challenge is not confined to working-class students and Reay's (2002) argument is that the societal narrative which suggests that individuals should seek for self-actualisation and to develop their full potential, implying a need for transformation in order to be happy and complete, is suspect. The consequence of this prevailing narrative results in participants in HE taking personal responsibility for their own success and were more likely to blame themselves rather than the system or the institution when they did not succeed (Reay 2003) thereby compounding the prevailing situation.

Transitioning to HE requires that students adjust to HE at both sociological and psychological levels; to do this they engage in a process of interpretation of the explicit and implicit messages of this new habitus, and Torche and Valenzuela (2011) propose

that at the heart of this interpretive process is trust. This trust is conceived to be 'embedded' in the social capital available to the students, and has been identified by Keane (2009) as a key element in influencing how the students negotiate the socialisation process connected to participating in HE; her research supports Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) suggesting that it is key to the retention of students in Higher Education.

The interplay between education and social capital is of interest, it has been shown to enhance relationships between individuals, in society (Putnam 2000), and in primary school settings. Leana and Pil (2006, p.362) have identified social capital as playing 'an important role in predicting organizational performance'. It has been shown to contribute to enhancing teacher trust in schools (van Maele and van Houtte 2011), which contributes to student achievement (Goddard *et al* 2001, Goddard 2003, Bryk and Schneider 2003 and Tschannen-Moran 2004); it becomes visible in teacher-student interactions where it is conceived as an iterative process. Van Maele *et al* (2009) and Kilpatrick *et al.* (2003, p.429) have identified formal education as a key contributor to increases in social capital because they suggest it 'influences the breadth, depth and richness of networks and produces skills in relating to others'.

The concept as defined by Nieminen *et al* (2010, p.531), following Bourdieu (1988) and Putnam (2000), is that 'social capital can be broadly defined as resources emerging from networks of trust'. Kaasa and Parts (2008, p.147) propose it consists of- *Structural Elements*, consisting of formal networks and informal networks, and *Cognitive Elements*, which are built on general trust, institutional trust and norms (trustworthiness). It is an inherently trust-based concept which for students is a double-edged sword; the social capital available to them as they enter HE influences

how they manage the transition process (Tierney, 2006) but successfully negotiating the HE process enables them to increase their store of social capital for future use.

3.5. Trust and Mature Students

While social capital and the trust embedded in the concept plays an important role in the transition to HE, and McElhinney (2007, p.53) proposes that ‘there should be a relationship between the university and the student, based on trust, on excellence and on mutual benefit’ research which explicitly sets out to examine the role of trust in the experience of students in HE is very limited (Ghosh *et al* 2001, Clouder 2009). However if one takes the view, following Barnett (2007), that teaching and learning which is core to the HE project is an inherently relational process, then trust plays an important role in that process in addition, research which views the affective (Beard 2007) as playing an important role in how students engage with each other and with their HE experience also identifies trust as playing a key role in such processes, and that literature is explored further below.

Qualitative research explicitly focusing on trust and student experience in HE is confined to Clouder (2009), whose research demonstrates the enabling effect of trust on student learning where the experience of being trusted by their workplace mentors, facilitated learners to reach their potential. Her research identified that the students had a clear understanding about which of their own behaviours contributed to the decision by the mentor to trust them, these included ‘demonstrating capability’, ‘being honest about knowledge’, ‘keeping [mentors] informed about what you are doing’ (Clouder 2009, p.297), and being proactive at work. These factors also fit with McKnight’s Model (1998, 2001, 2002), and its trust dimensions, but also established

the role of trust as an element of an iterative trust building relationship which facilitates learning.

Quantitative research which explicitly explores trust and HE is confined to Ghosh *et al* (2001) who helpfully defined student trust in college as ‘the degree to which a student is willing to rely on or have faith and confidence in the college to take appropriate steps that benefit him and help him achieve his learning and career objectives’(Ghosh *et al* 2001, p.325). Their research, conducted from a marketing perspective, adopted a statistical approach to identifying antecedents of student trust in HE, and hypothesised that students trust in college was determined by their perception of a number of factors including co-operation, timeliness, tactfulness, congeniality, openness, sincerity, expertise and integrity antecedents (ibid, p.332). Their statistical analysis revealed evidence to support only the final five, of which sincerity was the most significant. These antecedents of trust resonate with McKnight *et al* (1998; 2001; 2002) (McKnight in ordinary text and Ghosh in *italics*) Integrity =*integrity*; benevolence =*congeniality, openness*; competence = *expertise*; honesty= *sincerity, and predictability*. Although the sample size was small (one college) the theme was taken up in two subsequent research papers. Sung and Yang (2008) examined the relationship between the image of the university and its impact on student perception and found that the presence of trust both played a role in influencing students decisions to enrol in the university, and was likely to lead to positive evaluations, and perhaps more cynically, helped ‘increase quality perceptions, generate positive word-of-mouth effects, and reduce sensitivity to cost and tuition changes’ (Sung and Yang 2008, p.364) suggesting that trust is an important metric for HEI’s to aspire to. Fairchild (2005) also identifies the important role of Ghosh’s antecedents in building trust

between lecturers and students, which he identifies as an outcome of the perceived responsiveness of the lecturer to the needs of his students, which is conceived by students as being a part of the 'service' responsibility of lecturers.

3.5.1. *Affective approaches.*

This theme of relationships in HE is taken up in *acknowledging the affective in Higher Education*, where Beard *et al* (2007) propose that because students bring their entire selves to education, that education is an inherently emotional journey, and that trust plays an important role in this journey. This approach to understanding the student experience in HE is taken up by Brooks (2007) in research exploring friendship relations between students in HE, she distinguished between what she identified as competitive friendships, and trust based friendships, where trust based friendships were perceived to play an important role in social learning in HE. Similarly, in research into young working class students transitioning to HE, Christie (2009) identified the role that trust plays in their transition to university, where its presence enabled the students to manage the emotional challenges faced in this transitional process. Her research also speaks of the trust placed by the students in HE, related to a belief that the HE system would contribute to facilitating their attainment of better quality employment and would contribute to facilitating their attainment of better quality employment and would provide support for what Christie (*ibid*) describes as an inherently emotional journey through the system. The nature of this trust placed by the students in the system is explored further in my research and contributes to the understanding of this process.

3.5.2. Teaching and Learning

Focusing specifically on mature students from a teaching and learning perspective, Merrill (2001) proposes that the learning experience of adult learners in the university system is a relatively un-researched area. From a pedagogical perspective, current research views mature students (and other non-traditional students) as a group indistinguishable from all other students in HE (Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011). This is despite the fact that a long tradition of research and development in the area of adult learning outside the formal education system has clearly identified the mature students as a distinct group of learners. Knowles' (1990) concept of 'andragogy' identified the specific needs of adult learners and promoted the adoption of alternative teaching and learning techniques in recognition of this difference. Within higher education there has been a relative lack of questioning about the current teaching and learning practices which Haggis (2003, p.96) attributes to 'the novelty of pedagogical research in higher education as a field of research'.

In the context of teaching and learning, Barnett (2007) posits that since all learning and teaching presents as a source of 'risk' to students trust therefore plays an important role in the teaching and learning dynamic. Risk in this sense is identified as emerging from the ontological, epistemological, discursive, practical and self-induced challenges presented to the student in HE (reference **Table 3.1** below).

Table 3-1: Risk Inherent in Higher Education

	Space	Risk
Curricula	Intellectual Space	Epistemological Risk
	Practical Space	Practical Risk
Pedagogy	Space-for-being	Ontological risk

Source: Barnett (2007, p.144)

The nature of the risk according to Barnett (2007) above, relates to its impact on the students' 'pedagogical being' because it challenges the student related to matters of 'what exists' and what 'constitutes' knowledge', along with the practical risk of engaging with the unfamiliar system which is reflective of the earlier discussion on 'field' and 'habitus'. It also presents a practical and ontological risk which together pose a significant challenge to the equilibrium of the student at a personal level and create the risk that they will be unable to successfully negotiate this journey which is an important consideration to all HEI's struggling with issues of student retention.

The model of teaching and learning presented by Barnett (2007) is informed by a humanist philosophy which views education as the 'development of the individual and for the betterment of society'. Mezirow (1991) conceptualises this approach to teaching and learning as a relational construct, which draws 'on a vocabulary barely seen in debate on higher education these days of being, becoming, authenticity, commitment, passion, care' etc. (Barnett 2007, p.168). This vision of education challenges the teacher to cede space and authority to the student in the teaching and learning process, and envisages a type of teaching relationship in which learning and indeed knowledge is co-created. It demands relationships between lecturer and student which follows less the model of teacher as master and instead adopts a constructionist framework moving from 'teacher focused teaching' to 'student focused' or 'learning focused teaching' (Roxå and Mårtensson 2009, p.547). This type of teaching it is argued, contributes to a 'new type of knowledge creation' – that related to 'not-yet-embodied-knowledge' (Scharmer 2001), and also implies the development of new 'third type learning infrastructures' (Scharmer 2001), such as 'co-operative inquiry' (Reason 1999), engagement in 'generative dialogue' (Isaccs 2008),

on-line learning (Smith 2008) and participation in placement and learning (Hodge *et al* 2011) among other initiatives.

This model of teaching and learning, Fransen *et al* (2011) and Barnett (2007) challenges students to participate in learning in a different way - as active participants in this creative project, bringing the need for interpersonal trust to the surface by suggesting that trusting relations may contribute to ensuring the effectiveness of the learning. It also challenges students to come to education with the following dispositions: a will to learn, a will to engage, a preparedness to listen, a preparedness to explore, a willingness to hold yourself open to new experiences, a determination to keep going forward, and with the qualities of: integrity, carefulness, courage, resilience, self-discipline, restraint, respect for others, and openness (Barnett 2007). Real life teaching experiences suggest however that neither all teachers nor all students come as well-equipped as this model might suggest. My research contributes to an understanding of how this complex relationship is managed by mature students, and builds on interesting recent research by McCune *et al* (2010) which identifies a difference in the motivation and engagement levels of mature and younger students with the task of learning in HE. This humanist view of education fits uneasily in the accountable environment characteristic of the field of HE in Ireland where uniformity and systematisation limit the flexibility available to lecturers to respond at a human level with students (Fitzmaurice 2010).

The prevailing perspective in Irish HE, that education should be based on economic realities, 'education as provider of appropriately qualified graduates necessary for the economic development of society' (HEA 2011), creates a tension illustrated in EU and Irish policy documents - which suggest on the one hand that 'reforms should aim to

ensure the acquisition of the key competencies that every individual needs for success in a knowledge-based economy, notably in terms of employability, further learning, or ICT skills' (EU(2) 2010, p.25) i.e. the *student as human capital*, and simultaneously that 'there is deep concern to ensure [higher education] can continue to deliver the personal, social and economic capital that has enriched this country' (HEA 2011, p.3) i.e. *the student as human being or human becoming*. The current climate in Irish HE, characterised by massification and reduction in resources, challenges the viability of the broadly humanist approach to HE and consigns teaching and learning to a rationalist/instrumentalist approach focused on the concept of people as 'Human Capital' and the role of education as the honing of that capital to increase its worth in an economic context.

3.5.3. Assessment processes

The role of trust is also visible in another key process in the teaching and learning contract, Young (2000) and James (1995) have pointed to the role it plays in relation to the assessment process. This is particularly significant because James (1995, p.462) suggests that 'assignment grades had become a ruling definition' of the progress of students in HE. The premise of this assessment relationship therefore is based on the understanding that 'one trusts others, not to simply be consistent in action, but also to act in one's best interest' (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 1997, p.342); this assumes therefore that the staff, both academic and administrative, the institution and indeed the policies and agents with which one interacts in ones higher education experience will behave consistently and act in the best interest of the student.

3.5.4. Critical Approaches

The development of critical theory within adult education associated with Habermas (1986), Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (2007), challenges the very basis of the existing systems of education viewing them as 'an ideological state apparatus work[ing] to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology, not so much by teaching values that support that ideology but more by immersing learners in ideologically determined practices' (Brookfield 2007, p.15). Hunt (2007) suggests therefore that some adult education principles could make a significant contribution to the teaching and learning agenda in HE a view supported by Haggis (2003) who also argues, that in the context of mass higher education, the assumptions which were relevant for higher education in a previous period no longer hold relevance. She criticises HE for being behind in its thinking on teaching and learning, while the field of adult education research is, in her opinion, ahead of the research thinking in its incorporation of concepts taken from other disciplines.

Haggis' (ibid) argument resonates with Barnett (2007), that other viewpoints such as the humanist perspective, and critical reflexivity, have much to contribute to the understanding of teaching and learning in HE through its focus on *how* learning and teaching might be conducted in the future. This approach, according to Haggis (2002), recognises that the process of learning is complex and is, in fact one in which emotions, intuition, relations and political dimensions are significant contributors. It envisages a teacher/student relationship where the teacher must

*'not know him as **them** [my bold], as the sum of qualities, strivings and inhibitions, he must be aware of him as a whole being and affirm him in his wholeness. But he can only do this if he meets him again and again as his partner in a bi-polar situation' (Buber 1959, pp.131-132 cited in Jarvis (2004, p.164),*

a relationship which is built on trust.

Critical perspectives in teaching and learning have problematised this student/teacher relationship, Molesworth *et al* (2011) point to the role of the dynamic between power, agency and resources, factors which permeate all trust relationships, as also impacting on this relationship. In the context of HE, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) and Tierney (2006) identify similar dynamics in other significant relationships in HE such as that between teacher and administrator, administrator and financier, public and private providers which impact on the environment of HE institutions. These power relationships influence debates as to the how HE is conceptualised; as a public good or a private provision which in turn influence the conceptualisation of the relationship of the student to the institution (Molesworth *et al* 2011).

Although it is beyond the capacity of this literature review to adequately discuss the teaching and learning research literature, the output data from my research will contribute to an understanding of the mature students conceptualisation of such relationships and as such can build on Zachariah (2007) who points to the key role of the lecturer in motivation and facilitating and stimulating the students engagement in the learning process. My research focuses on examining the nature of these trust relationships and identifying the participants' understanding of the meaning of these trust relationships, and the impact that they have on the student experience in HE.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter of the literature review has identified the embedded nature of the life experiences of mature students from which their HE journey begins. They are challenged to participate because HE is conceptualised as a distinct 'field' with a

'habitus' unfamiliar to the mature student, and the transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar is demanding because of the practical and the emotional challenges that it presents. In addition, participating in teaching and learning is conceptualised by Barnett (2007) as a risk environment into which the mature student enters. Within this risk environment, despite limited research which explicitly employs it as a research framework, trust has been identified as playing a key role in facilitating the transition to HE and in managing the experience of HE.

Conducting research into the role of trust in the mature student experience in HE is challenging because of the complexity of the concept, but Smith (2008, p.338) proposes that research which focuses on identifying 'trust issues at an individual level ... would help understand how trust influences students overall experiences' and Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) argues for research to develop awareness of the needs of the mature students in the HE sector.

My research takes the view that the student's own interpretation and understanding of their experience of engaging with higher education is valid and that this research extends the existing understandings of what it means to be a mature student in HE in Ireland exploring the relevance of the trust concept to understanding that experience. It aims towards an inclusion of the voice of the mature student in an understanding of the higher education experience and, therefore, adopts a participant-centred approach to the research.

Adopting this research approach is supported by McKnight and Chervany (2001a, p.38) who proposed that 'common-sense terms like "trust" should be accessed from the "real world"'. The research approach leads to a challenge to the teacher/academy, and to my research to understand the socialising and interpretive 'meaning making' 'sense

making' processes of mature students and so to contribute to better provide for their requirements into the future. In the next chapter, the detail of the research design which adopts a constructivist grounded theory approach is set out and the application of the trust framework as a tool to inform the exploration of the trust concept is outlined in further detail.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

The mature students returning to HE offer a unique perspective to researchers of the student experience in HE because of their previous life and work experiences outside of HE. The challenge to the researcher is to identify an appropriate research strategy to explore the student understanding of the role of trust in their HE experience, and an approach that would fit with what Creswell (2007, p.15) describes as the inquirers philosophical assumptions and 'world views, paradigms, or sets of beliefs'.

This chapter sets out the researchers' worldview, followed by a discussion of the ontological and epistemological perspectives informing the research approach and the ethical and verification issues impacting on the research. The chapter then explores why Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was chosen as an appropriate research approach and concludes with a discussion of how it has been applied in my research study.

4.2. Research Paradigm

The philosophical perspectives of the researcher are key to an understanding of the research paradigm (Creswell 2007), it informs the ontological and epistemological perspective of the research (Guba & Lincoln 1994a, p.108), which in turn informs the approach adopted in the research. The significance of the researcher's personal paradigm challenges the qualitative researcher to make their personal values explicit

and in the discussion below I set out the axiological perspective which has informed my research journey.

4.2.1. Axiological Perspective

My own worldview is influenced by a number of perspectives; the theme of trust has been of personal interest (see **Section 1.2**) since, as the literature suggests (see **Chapter 2**), it is a key component in facilitating effective relationships between individuals, organisations and society, and in the context of my role in HE has stimulated my interest in whether the concept of trust plays any role in the experience of the mature student cohort in HE.

My worldview is 'pragmatic' to the extent that 'Pragmatist researchers look at the 'what' and 'how' to research based on its intended consequences –where they want to go with it' (Creswell 2007, p.23) but it is also an ethical or moral pragmatism influenced by Dewey (1934) such that decisions made about what works are also influenced by what is right and not simply what works. The pragmatic perspective offers freedom to the researcher to choose the range of research methods either quantitative or qualitative which will contribute to the intended outcome. It also recognises that all research is influenced by the context; social, historical, political and economic within which the research is situated and it acknowledges both the existence of an external world 'independent of the mind' and also one that is 'lodged in the mind' (Creswell 2007). In the context of my research this approach has facilitated an engagement with the literature on trust from across disciplines and perspectives in the pursuit of an approach which fits with the purpose of my research.

My teaching and learning philosophy is informed by a humanist perspective which views the engagement as a relational process (Merriam *et al* 2003) underpinned by

respect for the students as participants in a co-created teaching and learning experience (Buber 2000) where the knowledge and experiences of both together can create a positive developmental outcome for the learner, and for the teacher. My position as a researcher has also been influenced by teaching from within the self-directed team in the Centre for Education and Developing Human Potential (CEDHP), who model a co-created respectful way of engaging which has been creative and productive for the team members and the students with whom they have engaged, both within and outside the HEI.. It has informed the approach taken in my research, which endeavours to respect the voice of the students (Seale 2010) and ensure that their views are included in my research.

My research perspective aimed towards understanding the *meaning of the world that is created by those who live in it*, in this case the meaning that the mature students give to trust in their HE experience which supported the adoption of a 'social constructivist' perspective. This approach assumes that the process by which *individuals make sense of the world* comes from within a psychological and sociological framework (Mason 2007), recognises that the 'sense making' processes are both conscious and unconscious challenging the researcher to bring to consciousness that which previously was unconscious.

The concept of the conscious and the unconscious traces its roots back to Sigmund Freud, (1933) Alfred Adler (1998) and Carl Jung (1978). My research does not attempt to provide a complete analysis of the debate about the role and function of the unconscious but a brief outline of their contribution as it relates to this research is considered important and is taken from Edwards and Jacob (2003). It resonates with Sztompka's (1999) assertion in the previous chapter that the tacit and unstated plays a

significant role in building trust. Freud adopted a biological approach to understanding the role of the unconscious, he introduced the idea of layering which, for the purpose of this research suggests that there is information that is readily available stored in conscious memory and other information not as accessible stored in the unconscious and made available through verbal communication. Freud (1933) viewed the unconscious as the store of unwanted memories, and also acknowledged that the unconscious works to assist in processing the large quantity of information being directed towards individuals at any one time.

Adler (1998) alternatively, adopted a constructivist approach to conceptualising the unconscious, suggesting that the information stored in the unconscious is information which is 'not yet understood' because it has not yet been explored for meaning. While Jung's (1978) perspective of the role of the unconscious, views it as the store of the emotions and feelings of the person. Jung's and Adler's theories of the unconscious suggest that for the purpose of my research that engaging with the research participants in a participative manner and employing photographs as stimuli will facilitate the creation of an understanding of the significance of trust for the mature student engagement in HE. It facilitates an engagement which is not only at the level of the conscious but also at the level on the unconscious through bringing to consciousness that which was previously unconscious enabling them to explore its meaning and relevance in a safe environment.

My research is interested in developing an understanding of the 'sense' that the mature students make of the process and understanding the role of the conscious and unconscious processes will facilitate access to the explicit meaning that trust holds for the participants but also the implicit or as Adler says the *not yet understood* meaning.

This approach is supported by Smith (2008) on research into trust in online learning groups in a higher education context where, she suggests that the use of a technical-rational approach to understanding the trust experience of students provides limited clues to the problem. She argues that 'a psychodynamic constructivist theoretical framework can help illuminate the problem' (ibid, p.326). The contribution of this approach is that it 'allows an examination of both the conscious and unconscious meaning-making' Smith (ibid, p.327) and its use enables access to the unconscious meaning of the participants.

4.2.2. *Ontology and Epistemology*

The ontological (Denzin and Lincoln 2008a, p.245) stance of this research is informed by a constructivist perspective because it is interested in how the students construct and make sense of the 'trust' concept in their higher educational experience. The view of the constructivist is that the 'actor' is engaged in a 'process' of creating meaning (Mezirow 1991) as they work to make sense of the lived experience in their 'lifeworld' (Angen 2000), the objectivist perspective takes the view that the social world exists 'external' to the social actor (Bryman 2004). Because my research aims to understand the mature students experience from within their own sense making a constructivist ontology resonates with that objective and has been adopted for that reason.

The epistemological alternatives (Carter and Little 2007) suggest a choice between a traditional positivist approach and the alternative 'interpretivist' (Schwandt 1994) perspective. The positivist perspective has traditionally focused on knowledge which can be accessed through the 'senses', and with Theory Testing the aim of which is to identify the existence of an objective reality and to prove or disprove a hypothesis identified at the outset. This results in a preference for quantitative methods of data

collection and analysis adopted from the natural sciences. The limitations of this approach in the context of my research relate to its limited explanatory capacity.

The interpretivist perspective alternatively conceptualises knowledge as embracing that which is observable, but significantly also recognises the 'subjective' meaning which the actor ascribes to the situation. The interpretive perspective facilitates the process of understanding through engagement with the subjective meaning which the participants ascribe to the concept. Its contribution is primarily to Theory Building rather than Theory Testing and allows for a more flexible approach to choosing methodologies and a design which will fulfil the challenge of making a contribution to the body of research knowledge. Research methods appropriate for an interpretivist research study are generally rooted in qualitative approaches.

The interpretivist approach is not without its limitations; its inherent flexibility has also been the source of much criticism since it can take the process of interpretation to extremes. Critics of this approach (Sandelowski 1986; 1995) have balked against its potential for a completely relativistic analysis, which has resulted in a call for the adoption of a 'moderatum' attitude while researchers from the positivist tradition question its 'reliability' and 'validity'.

Because the focus of my research is on understanding the role of trust and the meaning ascribed to it by the mature students in HE the interpretivist epistemology was considered to be most appropriate approach to adopt. This view is supported by Lewicki *et al* (2006, p.1015) who have identified the influence of qualitative approaches to trust 'since they 'allow insight into the way that trust is socially and subjectively constructed' and have high external validity. This approach also resonates

with Tierney's (2006) research which adopted a constructivist approach which he regards as appropriate to explore trust in a cultural context.

4.2.3. Research Questions

The focus of this research is to create an understanding of the role that trust plays in the HE experience of mature students, framed around the Integrated trust model of McKnight *et al* (reference **Figure 2.3**) and informed by Tierney's (2006, p.181) cultural approach which suggests that 'from this perspective, one seeks to understand the social bonds and shared identities that enable trust to occur'. The key research question informing my research is:

What is the role of trust in the experience of mature students participating in learning in higher education in Ireland?

My research (as outlined in **Section 1.1.1**) aims to identify how trust can facilitate an understanding of the mature student experience in HE. By adopting a constructivist perspective and giving voice to the implicit/tacit processes through which they 'make sense of' or 'interpret' their experiences, it aims to add the mature student's voice (Fielding 2004, Seale 2010) to discussions on the future of higher education. Student voice work has been developed in second-level schools (Rudduck & Fielding 2006) where Busher (2009) has done some interesting research using photo-elicitation to facilitate the inclusion of the students' voice on social interaction. To-date its application is less developed in HE (Seale 2010), where there is a relative absence of the student perspective, and Fielding (2004) has pointed to a range of challenges related to student voice including issues of power and positioning which incorporate challenges of speaking for, versus speaking with, students. My research will work with

mature students and will include their voice in the discussion into the challenges faced by HE and fits with my view of education as a democratic enterprise.

It also aims to explore the role of relationships in facilitating the educational experience of the mature student and to examine the qualitative issues which impact on the students HE experience. In accessing what Newton (2002) has described as the tapping into the 'inner life' and 'inner workings' of being a mature student my research moves 'beyond what adult students experience to an understanding of why and how they experience this'. To facilitate the achievement of these aims Wilson (1997) who earlier had pointed to the dearth of research on the subjective experience of mature students advocated for a social constructivist approach to research in this area, while in an Irish context, Keane (2011) also advocate the same approach in order to better understand the complexities of the student relationships. The research questions guiding the process are as follows

- How is trust manifested for mature students in higher education?
- What is the role and function of trust, and how does it impact on the experience of the mature student?
- What is the role and understanding of 'risk' in their HE experience?
- What is the role of socialisation and relationship building on the mature student experience? What are the factors which contribute to the enhancement or dissipation of these relationships?
- What theory of trust building (if any) explains how mature students experience trust in their higher education experience? In this regard does Tierney's (2006) or Sztompka's (1999) cultural approaches have resonance for the mature student and

does McKnight *et al*'s (1998; 2001; 2002) framework provide a useful tool for use in capturing an elusive concept?

From a methodological perspective, the research aimed to identify if the photo-method adopted has a role to play in research focused on accessing the 'implicit' or 'tacit' processes which give meaning to an experience such as this?

4.3. Choosing a Research Approach

Guidance for the most appropriate research strategy was taken from; existing approaches to trust research guided by McKnight's Model (reference **Figure 2.6**) and by research into the mature student experience. A review of existing approaches to trust research in HE (**Chapter 2**), has centred around two alternative perspectives, one which adopts a largely quantitative, 'atomistic' approach (Ghosh *et al* 2001), the limits of which are addressed by Sztompka (2006, p.907) who argues that these quantitative approaches cannot access trust as seen in imprecise common sense language such as the "climate of trust", the "atmosphere of trust" or, in a more academic language, the "culture of trust". Möllering (2001, p.417) instead proposes that 'trust research should aim to study instances of trust assuming idiosyncratic praxis and paying attention to the fine details of interpretation'. Guidance was also taken from Tierney (2006, p.184) who advocated the necessity of investigating the *socialising mechanisms and processes* that induct the student into the culture of HE.

Research into the mature student experience also provides evidence of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Phillips (1986) adopted a quantitative approach, exploring mature students and their characteristics,

experiences and expectations but Wilson (1997) suggests that such quantitative approaches are limited in exploring the 'lived experience' of the mature students in HE and that the dearth of such research means that it is also difficult to know how to produce policy or teaching practice for this cohort of students.

Research adopting the alternative qualitative research approach evidences use of a variety of research methodologies: using *ethnographic research* (Warmington 2003); *Phenomenological approach* (Johnson and Hirt 1999); *in-depth interviews* (Mathers and Parry 2010); in-depth interviewing examining trust and friendships in a competitive academic context (Brooks 2007), *student narrative* focusing on understanding the sociological and psychological elements of the mature student experience (Britton and Baxter 1999 and Reay 2002; 2003); *Narrative Inquiry* exploring trust in the area of Transnational Project work in HE (Shore and Groen 2009); *case study* in their research on decision making (Davies and Williams 2001); case studies to access the culture of trust in HE Tierney (2006); while Hoecht (2006) employed *semi-structured interviews* exploring issues of quality control in HE. The breadth of these alternative approaches affirm the relevance of a qualitative approach for my research.

In a further review of the various qualitative approaches available consideration was given to each as a potentially appropriate choice of research methodology. Each research approach offers its own guidance as to: the literature search and its role and position in the research process, data collection and interpretation including how best to represent the data and it guides the position of the researcher as interpreter of the data and considers issues such as the ownership of the data collected. These factors along with the considerations of my axiological, ontological and epistemological stance guided the decision making process and consideration was given to the potential

adoption of; case studies, ethnomethodology, narrative inquiry and phenomenology before finally determining that a Grounded Theory study and specifically a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) would be most appropriate for the purpose of my research. (Details of this exploration are included in **Appendix 2.**)

4.3.1. Grounded Theory

The Grounded theory approach is focused on developing a 'theory grounded in the data from the field' Creswell (2007, p.79) and it is considered appropriate for exploring the process of action or interaction between individuals. The Grounded Theory approach rooted within Symbolic Interactionism (Mead 1863-1931, and Charles Cooley 1864-1929) and associated with the work of Erving Goffman (1990) and Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), its current existence can be traced to the seminal *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded Theory offers both a perspective and a methodology to researchers, it provides clear guidance on how data is to be analysed to ensure the trustworthiness of the 'emergent' theory building. Following from Glaser and Strauss (1969) a number of alternative approaches to grounded theory have been developed the earliest of which reflects the dispute between the original authors over issues of 'groundedness' and 'emergence', where Glaser (1992) argued that the Strauss application of the analytical methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1990) resulted in a 'forcing' of the data and therefore it betrayed the foundation on which CGT was based.

4.4. Adopting a Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

The criticisms levelled at its positivist leanings led to the development of a constructivist perspective to grounded theory (Clarke 2001, Charmaz 2006), which Charmaz (2008, p.132-133) describes as a theory which 'loosens the method from its positivist roots, moves it into interpretive inquiry, and preserves and enhances its pragmatist heritage'. While her framework remains rooted in traditional Grounded Theory, and there is the familiar test 'to understand what living in this world means, we need to learn from the inside' (Charmaz 2004, p.980) but it emphasises a more relativist epistemology suggesting that significant meanings are often tacit and implicit and unstated and that actions are representative of the meaning which participants ascribe to the invisible which has resonates with the purpose of my research.

CGT regards choice about research design as an 'emergent method' (Charmaz 2008), and views the design of the project as an 'iterative' (Charmaz 2006) process such that new information gathered during the research process may require a re-visitation of elements of the planned research design in order to achieve the objectives of the research. This perspective suggests that 'methodological strategies consist of heuristic devices, not rigid rules' (Charmaz 2008, p.133), and Mason (2007) therefore rejects the possibility of setting out a complete *a priori* blueprint for the research project. The complex challenges which these principles present to a researcher are explored in further detail below in the discussion on the challenge of interviewing.

The constructivist version also restates the concern for the creation of a 'contextual understanding' (Charmaz 2004, p.987) which includes but is not confined to the theoretical framework within which the research is situated.

4.5. Why Constructivist Grounded Theory?

From the alternative research approaches available to the researcher, the choice of Constructivist Grounded Theory recommended itself to my research at a number of levels; because of its contribution both as an *approach* to conducting research and as a *method* of conducting research, and because it resonates with the objectives of my research under the following headings.

4.5.1. In the context of HE research and honouring student voice

- Grounded Theory and specifically constructivist grounded theory has been employed by Keane (2011) in her research on the experience of students accessing HE through a non-traditional route i.e. after completing an access programme.
- The method 'has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the 'under-theorised' (Thomas & Quinn 2007, p.15) field of WP' (Keane 2011, p.710).
- Its potential to contribute to the 'substantive' theory in relation to trust literature in Higher Education.
- Its 'groundedness' which focuses on building theory from the ground up ensuring that the voices and views of the participants are the primary source of data for any concepts created.

4.5.2. As an Approach to Data Collection

- Its acceptance of the contribution of alternative methods of data gathering which are judged on their ability to access the information considered necessary to achieve the research objective.

- The Symbolic Interactionist roots of Grounded Theory have provided the method with a framework which focuses on the process by which people interpret and make sense of the world which they experience. It is interested in the micro-sociological world and its' focus is on how the individual perceives the world, and its relationship to the actions which result (Glaser & Strauss 1967).
- It also focuses on how these interpretations influence the action taken by the participants which in turn, will become the prior conditions for actions yet to come (Baszanger 1998, Goulding 2002, p.41).
- In my research, it facilitates the inclusion of the previous personal and social experiences of participants into the current research frame and includes the impact of previous life, educational and learning experiences on the 'meaning' that participants make of their current higher education experience.

4.5.3. *As a Guide to Interpretation and Analysis*

- The approach, following Glaser and Strauss (1967), is committed to the view that the purpose of research is to create 'theory' which goes beyond the concept of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). This was one of the reasons why this method recommended itself over a purely phenomenological approach to my research.
- To achieve this objective it sets out a 'more defined and systematic procedure for collecting and analysing qualitative data' (Goulding 2002, p.40) according to the prescribed 'coding' (open, axial and selective) methods, ensuring that the outcomes of the research are not purely relativistic. For this reason it is particularly useful in contexts where there is 'little already known or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge' (Goulding 2002, p.42).

- It is appropriate for researching the concept of 'trust' which is a complex concept with which to work, as the method provides both flexibility and a framework for conducting the research which guards against becoming 'hogtied' (Lewicki *et al* 2006) in debates between and within different approaches to the concept.
- Grounded theory emphasises the change and complexity of life and suggest that all meaning is culturally created and 'all interpretations take root in social worlds or communities' (Goulding 2002, p.40).
- The positioning of the researcher in the interpretive process in Grounded theory has been the subject of dispute, where the idea that the researcher can or should interpret the tacit meaning of the participants is a topic of theoretical debate. Glaser (1992) disputes the right of the researcher to create a meaning which is not evidenced by the explicit data at hand. This approach suggests that the role of the researcher is as a distant analyser of the data, rather than someone whose own knowledge and experience can be brought to bear in the analytical process. In CGT Charmaz (2006), following Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1994; 1997), acknowledge the contribution which the researcher's own (etic) knowledge can bring to the analytical process both in analysing the data and contributing knowledge based on their interpretation of the data. CGT therefore acknowledges the validity of the interpretive role of researcher who comes from their own constructed world, but with the provision that the rigorous process of analysis is also adhered to.
- Finally, the approach recommends itself because it is also encouraging of a shared process of information creation which is helpful in understanding how the concept of trust is experienced by the students.

- With these objectives in mind the Grounded Theory approach and more specifically a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach offered the most appropriate research approach to achieving this outcome.

4.6. CGT Challenges and Criticisms

The challenge of using a CGT approach includes the ability of the researcher to live with the 'uncertainty, the ambiguities and the bewilderment' (Charmaz 2004, p.981) associated with the approach and which is a considerable challenge. The approach also challenges the researcher to achieve 'Intimate familiarity' with the research, which suggests that, to do research one needs to be able to expose your whole being to 'the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals' (Goffman 1989, p.985 cited in Charmaz 2004, p.984), while this is probably an impossible task the intention is clear. According to Charmaz (ibid.) 'We try to learn what occurs in the research setting we join and what our research participants' lives are like. We study how they explain their statements and actions and what analytic sense we can make of them (ibid, p.2). Such approaches require having cognisance of the content and relationship dimensions of the research transaction, and require empathy on behalf of the researcher to get behind the reasons to a comprehension of the meaning of trust experienced by the participants. This intimate familiarity needs to be handled carefully since it asks that the participants trust the researcher to allow them to connect closely with them, and yet the researcher is not in an 'intimate' and needs to be aware of the privilege with which they have been endowed (see further in **Section 4.7.3**).

Critics of Grounded Theory (Haig 1995, Robrecht 1995) suggest that the method gives too much credence to the positivist view of research, and alternatively that the method is not sufficiently respectful of the interpretivist paradigm. Critics are to be found in the positivist schools who do not accept the premise on which qualitative research itself is based, and argue that the 'iterative' nature of the research method, and the flexible nature of the research process, leads to completely relativist outcomes from the research endeavour.

There are also critics of the method from within those who accept the validity of the qualitative approach, Thomas and James (2006) have presented vigorous arguments about the fundamental premise of Grounded Theory, and argue that the roots of the method from within a positivist paradigm are inappropriate for qualitative research. They further argue that the use of mechanistic tools and methods 'forces' data into categories therefore not adequately respecting the voice of the participants, and that its claims towards theory building demonstrate its leanings towards its positivist roots and demonstrate its lack of commitment to the qualitative/interpretive research paradigm. Though Thomas and James (2006) note the shift in Grounded Theory visible in the development of a Constructivist Grounded Theory by Charmaz (1990; 1999; 2006) they are unconvinced that it addresses their concerns.

These criticisms are countered by proponents of the approach who argue that the research in staying close to the data that 'emerges' from the research is in fact being truer to the participants story than alternative methods.

4.7. Research Process

At the outset of the research process the choice of data gathering method was informed by the research question, *What is the role of trust in the experience of mature students participating in learning in HE in Ireland?*, by the ethos of a CGT research approach and by concerns to build theory from the emergent insights and understanding of the participants. In this section, the discussion begins by exploring the sampling strategy adopted, introducing the participants in the process and the pilot study which was conducted at the outset of the research. This is followed by a discussion of the data gathering methods adopted and the experience of gathering the data using these methods.

4.7.1. Sampling Strategy

The steps in data gathering in a CGT study, begins with locating the site/individual, (Creswell 2007) where the key focus is on identifying individuals who have each participated/experienced the same phenomenon (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.28). For my research this meant identifying mature students participating in full-time higher education programmes of study at either level 7 or level 8 in Ireland. The key factor influencing the choice of individual according to Creswell (2007) depends of the nature of the story that they have to tell and in constructivist grounded theory the objective is to gather data until 'theoretical saturation' (Guest et al 2006) has been achieved. Identifying the sample size in Grounded Theory, as in other qualitative research approaches such as Ethnography is controversial, the small sample size leads to questions of representativeness Charmaz (2004) proposed an ideal sample size of 20-30 people.

In my research the final number of participants was 12 students, from within 4 different HEI sites, one of which was subsequently not used in the analysis because the participant was in full-time employment, and his participation in HE was fully funded by his employer, and was atypical in his engagement in HE. Although a formal stratification process was not conducted consideration was given to issues of representativeness to ensure participation from across the HE journey and also to ensuring gender representation. For each of the participants, this was their first experience of higher education.

4.7.2. The Participants

The following are brief vignettes (**Table 4-1**) which provide an introduction to the participants and their stories:

Table 4-1: Research Participants' Profile

Research Participants (Code, Year of study, brief introduction to them)	
Eda-Yr 2: A mature student in her 40's from Nigeria resident in Ireland a single parent of two primary school children	College 3
Edm-Yr 2: A is a mature student married with two small children. Previously worked in the construction industry and had to stop due to physical injury.	College 4
Gim-Yr 1: A mature student in his fifties who has returned to education after a period of self-employment. He has a young family and continues to run his business on a part-time basis while studying.	College 1
Jac-Yr 3: A mature student in his fifties who as returned to education after a period of self-employment, he has a teenage family and continues to maintain his business while participating in higher education.	College 2
Kim-Yr 1: A young mature student in her mid- twenties who has returned to education after a period of unemployment. She has moved away from home to pursue the course of her choice. She is single.	College 1
Lim-Yr 2: A single mature student in his 30's, not previously employed.	College 3
Mar-Yr 2: A mature student married with two small children. Had become employed and previously worked in retail management.	College 1
Owl-Yr 4: A mature student in her 50's with a partner and a grown up family, who was made redundant from a caring position	College 3
Pam-Yr 2: A mature student, with a child also studying at third- level in a different college. Recently made redundant from secretarial position.	College 3
Pog-Yr 1: A mature student in his forties who has returned to education after	College 1

becoming unemployed, he has a young family.	
Sal -Yr 4: A is a mature student from Eastern Europe a single parent of three almost adult children. Gave up a full-time job to come to HE	College 1
Erm-Yr3: Not subsequently analysed as he was participating in HE as a fully funded employee of an organisation and was returning to employment on course completion.	College 4

4.7.3. Methods of data collection

In a CGT study, Charmaz (2004) exhorts the researcher to make the research their own, and recognises the potential offered by employing mixed qualitative methods to gathering the research data. In the context of my research topic where the trust concept is understood to be complex and multidimensional identifying the appropriate data gathering tools was complex. The data gathering tools finally used in my research were; the **semi-structured interview**, supported by **photographs** which were used to stimulate the discussion. This data gathering process was also supported by the use of a single quantitative question, the **standard generalised trust question** devised by Noelle Newman in 1948 (Couch & Jones 1997, Uslaner 2007, Delhey *et al* 2011) and (in the pilot studies only) a **relationship map** which were included as supports for the data gathering process.

Semi-Structured Interview

In accordance with general Grounded Theory approaches the ‘face to face unstructured in-depth conversational interview in the ethnographic tradition is favoured (Goulding 2002, Charmaz 2006), where the aim is to ‘break the studied phenomena open’ (Charmaz 2004, p.980). In employing an interview strategy the aim is to access the ‘insider’ view of the experience, which as Charmaz (2004:980) suggests is ‘far more problematic and arduous than researchers acknowledge’. This focus on the

'liminal, unstated and unacknowledged' challenges the researcher to hear 'between the lines' of the interview. This concern with the 'tacit' is one of the distinguishing elements of the social constructionist approach to Grounded Theory, it challenges the researcher to 'come to sense, feel and fathom what having this experience is like' (Charmaz 2004, p.981).

In the context of the complexity of the interpersonal communication process Charmaz (2006, p.3) proposes that the interviewer should 'attend to what we hear, see, and sense during the interview'. It presents a difficult challenge to the researcher and raises issues about the researchers' ability and their capacity to be fully 'present' during the research process. Concern for attending to the 'sense' making process is a priority and the ability to hear and 'attend to' what is being said is critical, in ensuring that the researcher can get 'deep inside' (Charmaz 2004) the data gathered at the subsequent analytical stage.

In determining the questioning strategy for the interview process in CGT there is the choice as to whether the interviewer adopts a more constructivist than objectivist focus to the process (Mischler 1991, Thuesen 2011). My research takes a constructivist focus in addressing the challenge of identifying the questioning strategy. The importance of the questioning strategy in research is restated by Charmaz (2004, p.983) who notes that 'Our questions and our way of asking them affect what our participants choose to tell us' and Goffman (1990) affirms this position stating that the questions that one asks shape the answers that are obtained. In traditional grounded theory the focus was on the 'why' question as a method of connecting the mental process to the action of the participants, and within CGT the interest is in the 'what' and the 'how' followed by the emergent 'why' questions. Creswell (2007) suggests that

having five key questions gives 'space' to the participant to respond while Charmaz (2006) suggests that one question may be enough to elicit the 'rich' data required.

Guided by this discussion and to ensure that the interview stayed in focus a series of questions were prepared to guide the interview process (see **Appendix 3**). It is important to note though, that while these questions were prepared they were only employed as a guide rather than as the source of direction for the interview. The role of the questions as an aide memoire was felt to be important because of the potential for the concept under exploration to remain ephemeral. During the conversation and the engagement with the participants, their thoughts and views on these issues 'emerged' from the conversation rather than being 'forced' to emerge through mechanically employing the questions to drive the process.

The approach could be challenged for adopting an over structured approach which brings too many of the preconceived attitudes/theories of the researcher to the process, but this criticism is countered by the need to provide guidance to ensure that the research process stays in focus, and is balanced by the adoption of a reflexive approach to the process to facilitate staying close to the meaning created by the participants in the research.

Photographs

The decision to employ these methods was informed by a view of the students as participants sharing in the research process (Pink 2007) rather than as the object of the research. The aim was to find a mechanism which positioned the researcher 'to the side' of the sense making process of the participant and to create a 'space' for the meaning making process.

- I was persuaded by Literat's (2011) argument that perhaps the primary benefit of using visual participatory methods in research is 'its co-constructed design, which enables the participants to take charge of framing their own realities in an expressive and personally relevant manner', and their potential contribution when attempting to 'facilitate ways of being close to the non-verbal, tacit, emplaced knowledge that a sensory analysis seeks to identify' (Pink 2009, pp.130-131).
- The method is appropriate in a constructivist grounded theory project which aims to comprehend the meaning of the trust concept from the participants' perspective. The emerging meaning attributed by the individual to the photograph is taken to be contingent, tentative and situated (Crossan et al 2003) and not deterministic or objective.
- The approach also recommended itself because it offered the opportunity for 'respectful' engagement with the participants which is affirmed in López *et al* (2005) cancer research study where they found that the participants 'felt they were partners in our study because they had decision making power over which topics and photographs we would discuss during our photo discussion sessions' the photographs facilitated their ability to discuss important topics that they would not have normally thought appropriate to bring up with others. (ibid, p.113).
- The use of photographs as a research method provides an alternative to 'textocentrism' (ibid) as a mode of comprehension and expression (Prosser 1998). Their use in research has taken many forms, and dates back to use in population research as a tool for recording data by the researcher it is used in ethnographic research especially in health (Wang *et al* 1998; Wang & Pies 2004, Oliffe & Bottorff 2007), to record the data, (Gotschi *et al* 2009), as photo elicitation (Campbell

2011), and as participatory mapping (Dennis Jnr *et al* 2009). It has also been used as a participatory research method based on work by Robert Chambers (Photovoice UK) and Paulo Friere (López 2005) where the principal objective of such methods is to facilitate the voicing of 'narratives that were previously marginalized, silenced, overlooked or rejected' (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty 2006). Indeed Wang *et al* (1998), Wang and Pies (2004) and Singhal *et al* (2007) employ the method as an explicit tool in participatory educational research programmes. The participatory aspect of their use particularly recommended itself to my research.

- Using photographs contributes by introducing a third dimension to what can otherwise be a two-dimensional conversation; the visual stimulus can introduce a different dynamic to the research and can bring an interview to a geographically different space. Pink (2009) and Warren (2008, pp.570-571) describe their impact as creating a 'window' to the aesthetic world of the participants, facilitating a 're-creating' of the participants experiences, and creating a 'site' in which to explore the participants socially constructed experiences. In recreating the situation or the geography of the experience it also facilitates the recollection of the emotions, feelings and tensions associated with the data gathering, what Pink (2001) describes as the distinction between the 'visual' and the 'visualised'.
- It draws on conscious and apparently unconscious meanings because the significance of the photograph is in the eye of the beholder (Clark-Ibanez 2004). The meaning created is unique to the individual and not the photograph itself, as Pink (2007, p.67) stated 'the meaning of photographs are arbitrary and subjective; they depend on who is looking' a factor which for Pink (*ibid*) and for Busher (2009)

is a strength of this approach as it facilitates the emergence of the voice and meaning of the participants.

- The application of visual methods has developed into what Pink (2010) now terms Sensory Ethnography, an ethnography based on all five senses, see, hear, touch, taste and smell. This approach recommends itself for my research because the senses connect with an embodied way of knowing (Pink 2010; Sodhi and Cohen 2012; Jordi 2012) and creating meaning past what words alone can provide. Since my research is focused on accessing the meaning both conscious and unconscious the tacit and the implicit elements of the participants understanding of the concept the photographs recommend themselves as a useful tool. The key to the use of photographs is to ensure that it is voluntary, (participation and engagement depends on trust) and that the participants can choose the photograph which hold significance for them. The process of interviewing with photographs is recognised as 'a social act' (Warren 2008, p.573) in which the discussion is at two levels, relating first to the content of the photograph itself, but subsequently in facilitating the creation of new understandings from 'reflecting' (Schön 1983) on them.

The criticisms of the method of is that it could lead to a completely 'relativist' analysis of the meaning emerging from the research process which is avoided I suggest through the application of the analytical methods at the heart of CGT. Indeed Sarah Pink (2010) argues for the use of grounded theory or emergent research approaches when using photographs in research.

The generalised trust question and relationship map

The **Generalised Trust Question** (Figure 4.1, below) was included with the intention that it would provide a method of verification that the participants' general trusting attitude was within the normal accepted range. The limitations of the question are discussed earlier (Beugelsdijk 2008) but its use in this research was to ensure that there was some method of ascertaining whether the participants, who were unknown to the researcher held a generalised view of trust which was not at the extremes of the range. This might have indicated that their opinions were at least unusual and would therefore not be reflective of the general population.

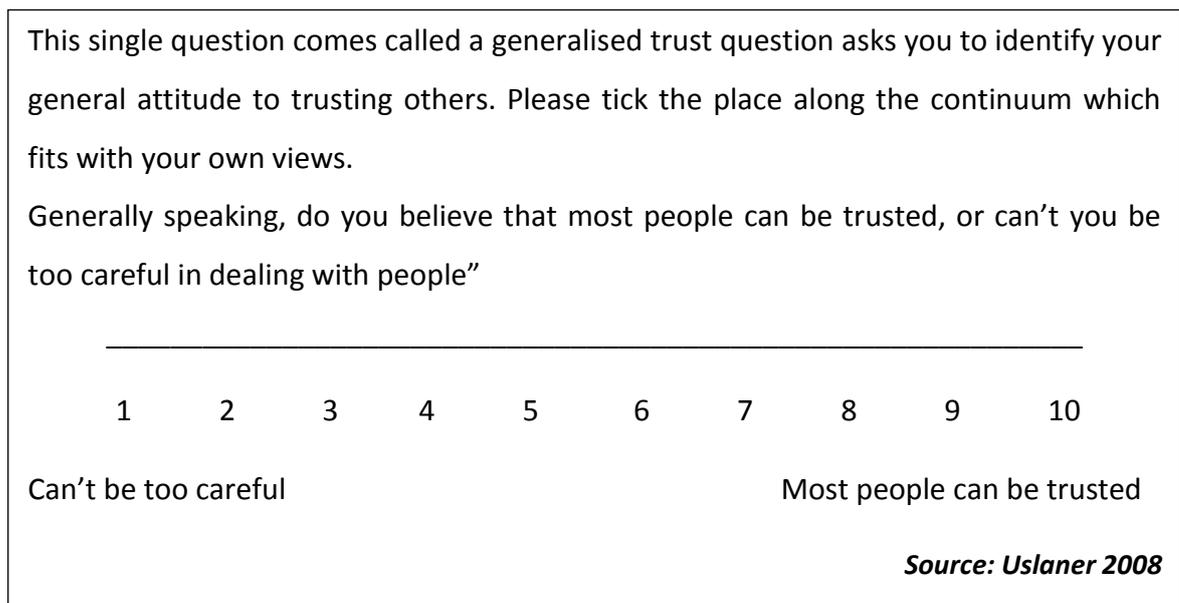


Figure 4.1: The Generalised Trust Question

The **relationship map** (reference **Figure 4.2**) was included in recognition of the potential for participants to adopt alternative 'sense making' processes and to offer the possibility of accessing data in alternative forms. It was designed as a visual method of verification of the relative importance of the various trust relationships in a HE context. The method was used for the Pilot study and for the first two student

interviews and was then discontinued when it did not produce any additional information and only served to confuse both the participants and the researcher.

Relationship Map: To identify what relationships are significant for you in your Higher Education experience?

There are generally a number of relationships/interactions in your Higher Education experience which are felt to be significant in ensuring that the experience is a success for you. This sheet sets out some suggestions for relationships which may be significant for you personally.

- a) Please tick which ones you **personally** experience as important for you.
- b) For each of those that you have ticked, rate on a scale of 1-10 the relative significance of each (where 1 = very insignificant, 5 = moderately significant and 10= very significant.).

Note: The **Other category** at the end of the list can be used to add in other relationships/interactions which you personally identify as important to you which are not already on the list.

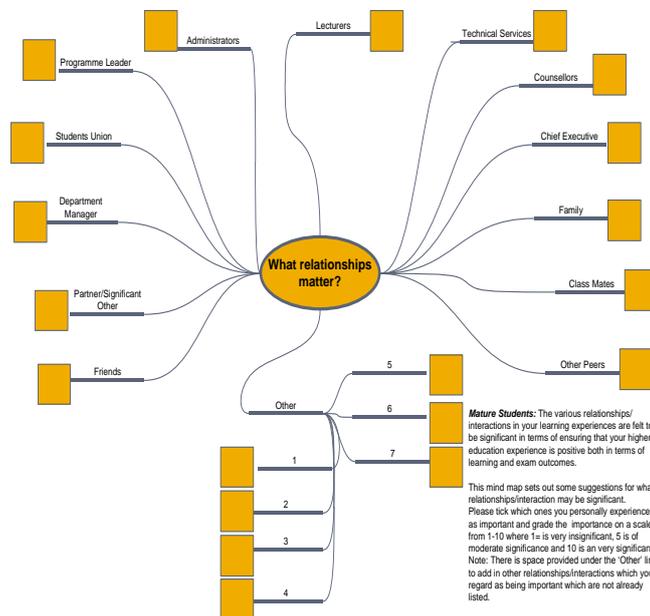


Figure 4.2: Relationship Map

4.7.4. Pilot Study

In the process of finalising the research methodology a pilot study (see **Appendix 4**) was conducted with a colleague in the first instance who had experience in research at Doctoral level but who participated as a student in the pilot study. This was especially useful in that he was able to give feedback on the experience from a participant and a researcher perspective which was valuable. The outcome of this pilot confirmed the potential usefulness of the chosen research method.

The learning from this pilot study was:

To restrict the number of photographs being used because the full set of 75 photographs took too long to peruse, created the impression of a very significant task for the participant and became too intense, as a result of the learning from that experience a sample of 25 were chosen (every third photo) from the full set and were employed in all of the interviews. By choosing the photograph sample in this manner it was felt it would not distort the integrity of the set.

The other significant learning was not to be afraid to use the word 'trust' early in the interview, I had been concerned that the question would result in a restricted interview based on my apprehension that responses to questions about trust in HE would result in a positive/negative single word answer, or that the question might be perceived as too personal, or that the participants might feel challenged by the question and therefore the pilot interview focused on the dimensions of trust rather than directly mentioning trust itself which was limiting.

As part of the preparation for the interview I had prepared a sheet which had the 'generalised trust' question, the relationship map and other questions on it (see **Appendix 5** below) which was completed at the end of the pilot interview as an

exercise in validating the data. For the following pilot studies with students (see below) I changed the sequence to send this information to the participants in advance of the research so that the sheets were used as preparation for the interview instead.

Following this first pilot, I conducted two more pilot interviews with 'real' students who had self-selected from a group of first years based on an invite to participate in the process and whose interviews are included in the research data. The two students were in first year in HE and of different gender and different age groups. In these cases based on the learning from the first pilot I met with the students briefly (10 minutes) to explain the nature of the research and gave them the information letter and the relationship map and the generalised trust question to be completed before coming to the interview, and we arranged the date and time of the interview.

These two pilot interviews (1 hour) confirmed the usefulness of the data collection method, the comfortableness for the participants in engaging with the photographs as research tools and the participants' willingness to engage with the interview conversation and the photographs. This piloting experience confirmed

- the need to respect the participant's view of what was emerging for them as significant and
- for the researcher the challenge was to 'follow' their exploration while simultaneously being conscious of the tension in maintaining focus on the research agenda and the requirements of a doctoral thesis.
- This is indeed a challenge, and created a 'tension' in the researchers mind reflective of Charmaz (2006) who identified the challenge of staying close to the emergent meanings during the research process.

The 'generalised trust' question proved to be challenging for one of the participants because of the perceived 'personal' nature of the question, and they did not complete this element before the interview but did so with some reassurance on the nature of the question at the end of the interview process. For the next series of interviews consideration was given to the provision of more explanations in the hand out but I decided instead to offer the participants an option of completing before-hand or at the interview so that any apprehensions could be raised as necessary. In the case of the second pilot the questions raised no issues of concern.

The relationship mapping idea proved unfruitful when working with the students. It did not elicit additional information and instead required the duplication of information on behalf of the participants. As a result of these pilot studies I decided not to include the relationship maps as part of the data gathering process for each of the other interviews.

4.7.5. *Data Gathering Process*

The interviews were conducted between December 2011 and February 2012 and in the HEI where the participants were studying, I personally contacted each individual through email and telephone to send them the formal letter requesting participation and contacted them by telephone to make the practical arrangements in relation to time and date, while the venue was arranged in conjunction with the gatekeeper in the HEI who facilitated access to the participants. Each interview took between 55 minutes and 65 minutes and was recorded using a video camera and a sound recording device. The data was subsequently transcribed verbatim and the video and audio tapes were listened to and watched in the process of data analysis (see **Section 4.9.1** below).

In the context of the research and the challenge to access the 'liminal, unstated and unacknowledged (Charmaz 2004, p.980) I felt that the semi-structured interview on its own was insufficient to achieve this outcome. The complexity of the trust concept and the challenge of understanding the mature student's perspectives on the concept would have required a type of questioning and probing which I felt would become invasive and confrontational and potentially frustrating for the participants. Out of respect for the participants and to follow through with my personal goal of creating an I-Thou (Buber 2000) relationship with the participants and to facilitate my understanding of their meaning and sense making process I chose to use photographs to enhance the interview process.

Photograph use in practice

The photographs employed in my research were taken from a set of photographs called Photospeak (Partners in Faith 2010) which were produced and are available from Partners in Faith (details in **Appendix 6**). They were designed by the organisation originally as a tool for facilitating conversations between people, generally in a developmental context. The visual stimulus transcends any capacity to read or write and therefore is a useful tool in community work contexts. They are designed to facilitate interpretation and to enable participants to articulate their unique perspective on the topic being discussed. The photographs are random constructions some which depict landscapes, others have random people of different ages at work or involved in various activities and still others are of inanimate objects. They are usually employed in group settings where the full set of 75 photographs (measuring 10" by 8") are set out on the floor to facilitate access by all members of the group who move around in search of a photograph which represents their interpretation of the topic

under discussion. I had personally had experience of using an older set of these particular photographs in the context of personal development training and had found them to be effective as tools which facilitated participation and engagement by the participants in the discussion process.

During the initial pilot interview the full 75 photographs were used, but as a result of the learning from that experience (see **Section 4.7.3** below) a sample of 25 were chosen (every third photo) from the full set and were employed in all of the interviews. By choosing the photograph sample in this manner it was felt it would not distort the integrity of the set.

Before the interviews began the photographs were laid out on a table adjacent to the chairs in which the participant sat. The participant was advised, both in the written information given to them in the week before the interview, and before the formal start of the interview that the photographs were being used to assist with the 'conversation'. The photographs were introduced in as relaxed a manner as possible, with the reassurance that there were no right or wrong choices, that the choice of photograph was entirely at the discretion of the participant and was based on their own interpretation of what was regarded as 'significant' for them.

In my research I used the following questions when requesting the participants choose a photograph, the selection of photographs took place at three different stages during the interview process.

- *Choose a photograph which represents how you have experienced HE to date.*
- *Choose a photograph that represents the risks that they had taken to participate in higher education*
- *Choose a photograph that represents what you are trusting that HE will do for you?*

The participants got up from their seats and walked around the table on which the photographs were placed to select the photograph. After choosing the photograph the participant returned to their seat, they placed the photograph in front *of them* on the table and the photograph acted as a focus for the conversation for a period of time. In some cases the participants held onto the photographs and in others the participants placed the photograph on the table and then at a later stage picked it up to discuss some element of the meaning of the photograph. The discussion on the photograph was informed by, but did not mechanically follow Wang's (2004, p.98) SHOWeD framework which consists of a sequence of questions designed to probe for depth of meaning. (Bold and italics mine) '(a) What do you **See** in this photograph? (b) What is **Happening** in the photograph? (c) How does this relate to **Our** lives? (d) **Why** do these issues exist? (e) How can we become **Empowered** by our new social understanding? and (f) What can we **Do** to address these issues? This line of questioning helped us to move the discussion about each photograph from concrete and personal levels to social analysis.' For my research the concentration was on questions a) to d) while e) and f) may prove useful in facilitating mature students to become empowered in bringing about change in their situation, which was not the primary purpose of this research project but could be a fruitful follow on project.

Three interesting processes emerged from the exercise:

- Participants were offered the opportunity of not choosing a photograph where they were unable to identify a photograph which resonated for them. This option only occurred once in the process.
- During two of the interviews the participant choose the same photograph to represent two different interpretations which was interesting.

- Some of the participants choose two photographs to represent their response to one question.

4.7.6. Validity and Reliability in Constructivist Grounded Theory Research

Within the qualitative research tradition, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.300) suggest that the aim is to establish the '*trustworthiness*' of the research which is established by the following criterion 'credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, [and] confirmability' of the research. For Creswell (2007, p206-207) the most important criterion is to ensure the '*accuracy*' of the findings which is established by remaining close to the participants and their meanings and employing 'thick description' to add to the value of the study. Creswell (ibid, p.217) suggests the following criteria for measuring the worth of a Grounded Theory study:

- *That it studies a process, action, or interaction as the key element in the theory.* In my research the study of the role of trust in mature students experience of Higher Education in Ireland.
- *A coding process that works from the data to a larger theoretical model.* In my research I have aimed at ensuring that the research is trustworthy through rigorous data gathering and the adoption of the systematic approach to data analysis which is offered through CGT. I have made extensive use of the participant data to establish the credibility and the authenticity of the research and to ensure that it accurately presents the participants meaning and I have employed the McKnight Model as a framework through which the data can be reconnected to the existing literature.

- *The presentation of the theoretical model in a figure or diagram.* I have used Visio as a tool to facilitate the creation of a visual representation of my theoretical model as it applies to the outcomes of my research and have offered a theoretical diagram of my research findings in the concluding chapter (**Chapter 8**).
- *A story line or proposition that connects categories in the theoretical model and that presents further questions to be answered.* I have worked to achieve this outcome by systematically working from the data through the coding process, and representing the findings using the data grounded in the participants interviews (**Chapters 5-7**) and finally identifying the areas for further research (**Chapter 8**).
- *A reflexivity or self-disclosure by the researcher about his or her stance in the study.* This has been achieved through the use of Memos in the context of the study but also through the process of reading, writing and revising the data throughout this entire research process.

The adoption of the CGT approach whose validity is based on the thoroughness of the research process, and ensuring that the findings are empirically founded has facilitated the creation of a research outcome which is trustworthy.

4.8. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues may arise at all stages of the research process (Bryman 2004), the ethical principles which informed my research took guidance from the British and Irish Sociological Associations Statements of Ethical Practice (2012) the aim of which is to ensure no harm to the participants, and that participation is achieved with informed consent (Christians 2008). For Charmaz (2004) these criteria are supported by ensuring

that the research is without deception, that it ensures privacy and confidentiality, and that it will be accurate. The ethical concerns in my research also gave rise to considerations related to the use of video to record the interviews and the use of photographs as tools in the research process. Approval of the research process was sought and granted from the ethics committee within my own HE institution along with that of the University of Leicester (see **Appendix 7**).

Consent and Confidentiality

The participants in my research were invited to participate in the research through two processes, in the first instance the invite was issued by me to a gathering of class groups where the nature of the research was explained briefly at that stage and the extent of the participant commitment required was indicated and interested individuals were invited to write down their contact details if they were interested in participating, no inducements were offered. Participants in the other institutions were invited in a similar manner by the 'gatekeepers' in the HEI to whom I had previously sent the details of the interview process and the consent forms.

From the list of volunteers within my own institution participants whom I was teaching or whom I could reasonably anticipate would be teaching in the future were not considered because of the potential conflict of interest and each was contacted to indicate this and to thank them for volunteering.

In accordance with BSA statement on best practice the information provided to potential participants provided details of the purpose of the research, the method by which the research was to be conducted, the storage and management of the data, and what the participants could expect in terms of feedback from the results

generated (see **Appendix 5**). The participants signed the document indicating that they had read and understood the research process.

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants the data from each participant was allocated a code (pseudonyms seemed appropriate e.g. Kim-Yr1) which ensured the anonymity of the participants. In addition references in the data to details which could be employed in identifying the participants (e.g. geographic, personal details, HEI) were reviewed to ensure that they remained anonymous. The raw data (the visual and auditory recordings) were stored on my personal laptop and subsequently stored on a separate device inaccessible to others. Great care was taken to ensure the safe storage of both to ensure the confidentiality of the information. On completion of my Doctoral process the video data will be deleted so no record which can identify the participants remains.

Interview

In the context of the semi-structured interview Creswell (2007) suggests that the challenge of the researcher is to create an environment in which the participant is comfortable to share information. Incorporated in this challenge are other ethical concerns which Fontana and Frey (2008) identified as issues of the relative power positions of the researcher and also maintaining a balance between being objective and the concern for the human being with whom we are researching. In Constructivist Grounded Theory Charmaz (2004) takes the view, which I support, that the needs of the individual are more important than the needs of the research and ensuring their wellbeing and safety during the research process is paramount.

In consideration of the nature of my research it was anticipated that one of the outcomes of the 'reflexive' approach to this research might be a change in the

participant's views in relation to the topic, and the possibility (however unlikely) of unanticipated outcomes in relation to connections with unconscious processes which could trigger unanticipated responses. In consideration of such outcomes the contact details of the researcher were made available and participants were encouraged to contact me afterwards if any issues arose, in the event I was not contacted by any of the participants.

Visual Methods

The use of video recordings and the photographs in my research process gave rise to special consideration in relation to the ethics of their use. Gonzales (2002) identifies the main issues as relating to a heightened responsibility to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the tapes. The video recording of the participants was conducted for the purpose of data analysis, and the participants consent to such recordings was re-checked at the commencement of the interview process. The video data was not, nor was it intended to be used in the reporting of my research and there is no video data available which could identify the participants. In my research the recordings were placed on my laptop and were immediately deleted from the camera. Storage of my laptop has been a priority over this research and all video data will be removed on completion of my Doctoral process.

The specific ethical issues which arise in the use of visual methods of research was identified by Themessl-Huber *et al* (2008), Prosser *et al* (2008), Boxall and Ralph (2009), Wiles *et al* (2012), and Allen (2012). The concerns relate to the nature of the visual material used, how it is created, what is represented, who should have access to the information afterwards and where non-participants have been represented what the various ethical and moral responsibilities one has in all these areas. Many of the

ethical concerns relate to issues of confidentiality, where the participants can be identified in the research, issues of representativeness where the participants are not represented in a manner which does them justice and because the photographs are in reality only fully comprehended within the context in which they were created. Although I have used photographs in my research, the photographs which are from a publicly available set (Partners in Faith 2010) and are employed to facilitate the research process. They are not unique representations which could be attached to any of the participants, nor could my research participants be identified from the photographs. (reference **Appendix 8**)

The decision to use the photographs did give rise to an awareness of ensuring that the participants were aware that the research process would include the use of the photographs, referring to them specifically in the consent form. At the interview stage the photographs were laid out on a table and were visible to the participants before the interview began which allowed space for the participants to raise any concerns ahead of the interview. At that point I also demonstrated how they were being employed in the research to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the process and understood what they were consenting to. The method of using photographs which facilitate access to the conscious and the unconscious gives rise to ethical concerns as to the extent to which participants can give their full consent to such processes before the research begins. Conscious of this, I advised participants in the letter of consent that they could withdraw from the process at any stage if they felt the need to do so and I also offered all the participants a full copy of the transcribed interview.

The ethical issues of data representation (Wang & Redwood-Jones 2001) relate to ensuring that one is accurately portraying the views and meanings of the participants, including (Fontana & Frey 2008) representing them as they envision themselves. In my research I aimed to honour the priorities of the participants through adopting the CGT approach of 'staying close to the data' and in using their voice and the photographs which they chose in telling the story of their experience. This commitment was I believe facilitated through the discipline of the CGT approach including the Memos which imposed a reflexive discipline on the process.

4.9. Data Analysis in Grounded Theory

Grounded theory offers a methodology for data analysis which provides the researcher with tools which are equipped to ensure that the analysis and the resulting 'theory' remains 'grounded' in the data gathered. The methodology requires a method of analysis based on a number of stages designed to protect against imposing pre-existing categories and concepts, either from the extant theory or from the authors own understanding.

In Traditional Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990; 1994) the analysis follows three phases of coding; open, axial and selective, which is designed to build a story and to ensure an ending in a 'set of theoretical propositions' (Creswell 2007, p.160). In a CGT study the analytical process is regarded as an iterative process, which is described by Hoare *et al* (2012) as Dancing with Data and which continues throughout the research process. Charmaz (2006) proposes that a CGT analysis requires the use of at least two types of coding, though in practice she uses three which are: Initial, Focused

and Theoretical, an approach which I adopted for the purpose of this research. The analytical process for my research consisted of the following stages;

Stage 1: Initial Coding and the *creation of Themes*

Stage 2: Focused/Axial Coding and the *creation of Concepts and Categories*

Stage 3: Analysis of the Categories and the *creation of a Theoretical Framework*

Stage 4: The emerging construct and meaning framework

4.9.1. Stage 1: Initial (Open) Coding

Initial coding is a process of engaging with the text of the interviews and working systematically through the data to identify the messages being transmitted. In this phase Charmaz (2006), following Corbin and Strauss, exhort the researcher to stay close to the data, to use words and phrases directly from the text to ensure that you work with the participants meanings and to 'remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities we can discern in the data' Charmaz (2006: 47).

The unit of analysis in grounded theory is debated, Charmaz suggests that conducting line-by-line coding ensures that each line is considered and forces the researcher to give attention to all the data. It also assists in resisting the temptation to rush to data which fits with one's own constructs or prior experiences. Glaser (1992, p.47) argues that this 'fractures' the data thus dismantling the real story being presented and results in the analysis being framed according to the meanings constructed by the interviewer rather than the interviewee.

In choosing between word by word, incident by incident or line by line approaches, I began the process with a line-by-line analysis of the data, because of my concern to stay close to the participants meanings and to resist my own natural temptation to read my meaning into their story. The line by line analysis resulted in attention being

paid to the complete interview, it required a disciplined mental process to engage with the language and emotions of the participant rather than one's own, to remain with the data and to avoid rushing to 'sense-making' based on one's own frameworks. This was a particular challenge for this research when dealing with a concept such as trust which has common currency but is not uniform in terms of each individual's understanding of the elements of the concept.

In this phase of the analysis Glaser (1978) also notes the importance of capturing the *action* as a core element in a Grounded theory study and he proposed the use of gerunds, such as 'deciding' or 'decision making' rather than *decision* as a method to capture the dynamic nature of the process. This is an important element in raising the data from a personally understood concept to enable the data explain the dynamics of the participants' HE trust experience. During this phase of the analysis note was taken of any words or incidents which had particular significance for the participants, words such as 'baggage' or 'embarrassing' (known as *in vivo* codes) or incidents such as the examinations process which were processes which held particular significance for the participants.

In relation to the interpretation process one of the important challenges experienced during the coding process was recognising the limits of the written word in generating meaning. The transcribed tapes, even when transcribed exactly (including pauses and exclamations) provide a limited percentage of the meaning which is generated by the communication created by the participants. In an effort to understand the meaning intended by the participant and ensuring that the analysis would capture the complete 'package of signals' generated in the interview process, attention was given to the tone of voice, the body language and physical messages given by the participants. To

assist in this process, the analytical process adopted has been to listen and watch the recordings while simultaneously working with the written transcripts to conduct the open coding phase which enabled the researcher to become ‘present’ with the participant again in a way that the written word alone does not. Perhaps this is related to the researchers own biases but has been a significant learning for me, and fits with the goal of CGT to build the story from the ground up. Being fully present with the interviewee during the interview process is part of the tools of effective interviewing but when analysing the data it is easy to become distant from the meaning created by the participant too quickly and while there is a need to avoid going ‘native’ as required by good research practice it is important in grounded theory to remain close to the data during this analysis stage. During this phase the transcripts were each inserted into a table and duplicate columns were created (see extract in **Table 4.2**, below) to facilitate the coding process.

Table 4-2: Interview Data Analysis Initial Open Coding Phase

Interview 1 - Gim-Yr1	Initial Open Coding (Stage 1)	Emerging Themes (From Stage 2)
You know, which is probably a good thing you know, positive enough you know but a kind of a painful process within yourself.	You know, which is <u>probably a good thing you know,</u> <u>positive enough</u> you know but a <u>kind of a painful process</u> within yourself.	Experiencing a painful process within Questioning a sense of self Feeling tentative

The first column preserved the data in its original form, the second used a process of line by line highlighting of distinct points made by the participants and underlining those accorded additional meaning (either through tone, pace, pitch of voice, body language or the presence of silence or hesitancy). The process challenges the

interviewer to postpone any rush to judgement and ensures that the interviewer 'mines the data' working carefully with the data to identify the emerging meaning which the interviewee attributes to the experience. The process of highlighting the data meant that the language of the participant was maintained and the relationship between the emerging themes remained connected to the language and words of the participants.

4.9.2. Memos in CGT

In Grounded Theory research the researcher and their thoughts, reactions and observations are a key element in the process, the framework proposes the use of Memos (reference **Figure 4.3**) to 'help map out the emerging theory' and in line with the 'emergent' nature of the research these memos are recorded at all stages in the data gathering stage.

Example Memo (Feb 2012)

Based on the analysis of the codes at the open coding phase of the process these are the themes that are emerging. The themes are based on the data analysed and use a mixture of 'in vivo' codes (The Baggage, Niggy Naggy Things and Us and Them) along with themes such as The Promise of HE and Trust Metrics to encapsulate the information provided by the participants.

There are emerging issues about burdens and responsibilities which are felt by the mature students and perceived by them not to be the same as for the younger students. This leads to a conceptualisation of themselves as different and more burdened.

Figure 4.3: Example Memo (extract)

The use of Memos at each stage of the research process was important in capturing my thoughts, reactions and responses along with identifying new areas for exploration

and areas for further development in the research. The memo is an unstructured recording of thoughts, ideas, emotions which can later be revisited in the process of data analysis and is viewed by Charmaz (2006) as a key element in the constructivist grounded theory approach to research. It plays an important role in the process of working the 'data' into categories, and moving upwards from data collection to analytical level and on to writing drafts of papers. In my research it provided an opportunity to stand back from the data and it also offered an opportunity to explore my etic perspective on the emerging data as well as a place to explore my axiological perspective.

Consideration had been given to the use of InVivo as a method in assisting with this analysis phase. Creswell (2007) has identified some advantages and disadvantages of employing computer analysis to the data, in the context of my research and concerns for the potential distance that might develop between the researcher and the data, and the potential loss of 'clues' what Tierney (2006) describes as the epiphenomenal interpretations of the interview process I decided not to use a computerised system.

4.9.3. *Photograph Analysis*

Within this research project the use of photographs provided an additional analytical challenge, determining an appropriate method of analysis is complex because 'Processes or methods for analysing sensory ethnographic materials are as yet underrepresented in existing literature' Pink (2009 p.130), she suggests therefore that analysis 'should be a continuous and incremental process rather than simply a stage in the research process' (ibid p.128) and 'A potential way forward would be an engagement with existing methods of analysis, involving ethnographers rethinking these methods in ways that are attentive to the senses' (ibid p.130). Taking guidance

from Pink (2007; 2010) I applied the principles of a CGT analysis to the process of coding the photograph materials. I created a table in which the photographs were positioned initially in the sequence in which the participants engaged with them along with the narrative used by the participants in responding to the photographic stimulus. These were then coded in a similar manner to the textual data above.

In the table (**Table 4-3**) below the Participant is identified in column 1, the question that was asked is in column 2, the photograph chosen in column 3, an extract from the participants' description of the meaning of the photograph is in column 4 and the emerging theme in column 5.

Table 4-3: Initial Open Coding of Photograph Sample

(Ref: Appendix 9 for complete set)

(1) Code	(2) Area 1	(3) Photograph	(4) Narrative	(5) Theme (From Stage 2)
Gim- Yr1	choose one that kind of represents the role that trust plays in higher education for you right now.	The swans (No 9) 	Well ah...I suppose, I'm the child...I'm taking a chance, it might bite.	Risking, being vulnerable

Following the open coding phase and the emerging themes from the analysis I then tentatively progressed to **Stage 2 analysis** using focused/axial coding.

4.9.4. Stage 2: Focused/Axial coding; moving to the Emerging Categories

The issue of moving from codes to categories is approached differently by Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), in both approaches the outcome is the creation of categories which incorporate the *codes and the themes* which have emerged through the earlier coding systems. The categories created should have the capacity to 'raise' the data to concept level and simultaneously stay close to the meaning created by the participant.

This stage involves the use of the 'constant comparative approach' (Creswell 2007, p.160) which requires the comparison of information between data sources which creates new codes which are more directed, selective and conceptual' than line by line coding. It requires the identification of which ones of the earlier codes 'make most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely' (Charmaz 2006, p.57) The data is analysed to ensure that there is 'saturation' of the categories and the possibility exists of further analyses of these 'categories' to identify the 'properties' (sub-categories) so that the emerging categories fit what Glaser (1992) suggests should be the 'central criteria' for a good Grounded Theory: 'fit, work, relevance and modifiability' (Glaser 1992, p.15) and also to stay close to the participants meaning.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to this stage as 'axial coding' where the 'categories' are further analysed to identify the core or central phenomenon of interest, this central phenomenon is used to interrogate the database to identify the 'causal conditions' which influence the context, conditions and consequences of this strategy. In a CGT study Charmaz (2006) also follows a process of code analysis and category population which she calls focused coding. The difference in approach relates to the tension that exists between; imposing a framework on the data which may be inappropriate, and,

working from the data to ensure that the framework *emerges* from the data. Adele Clarke (2003) approaches this stage through a process of elaborating and developing the category and diagramming the relationships between the elements which adds a visual element to the process.

In my research this Stage consisted of reorganising the data using Microsoft Visio to incorporate (see example **Appendix 10**) and compare the data from the interview process. Visio is a Microsoft tool for mapping relationships between data, and representing the relationships visually. It has application across the fields of, business, engineering and ICT and it can be used as a brainstorming tool, as an organisational chart, or flowchart among its many capabilities. It recommended itself in the context of CGT because of its flexibility in re-arranging the data to create themes and categories during the research process and facilitated amendments as new data emerged and clarification was received. It also facilitated the visual representation of large quantities of data in one place which I found particularly effective.

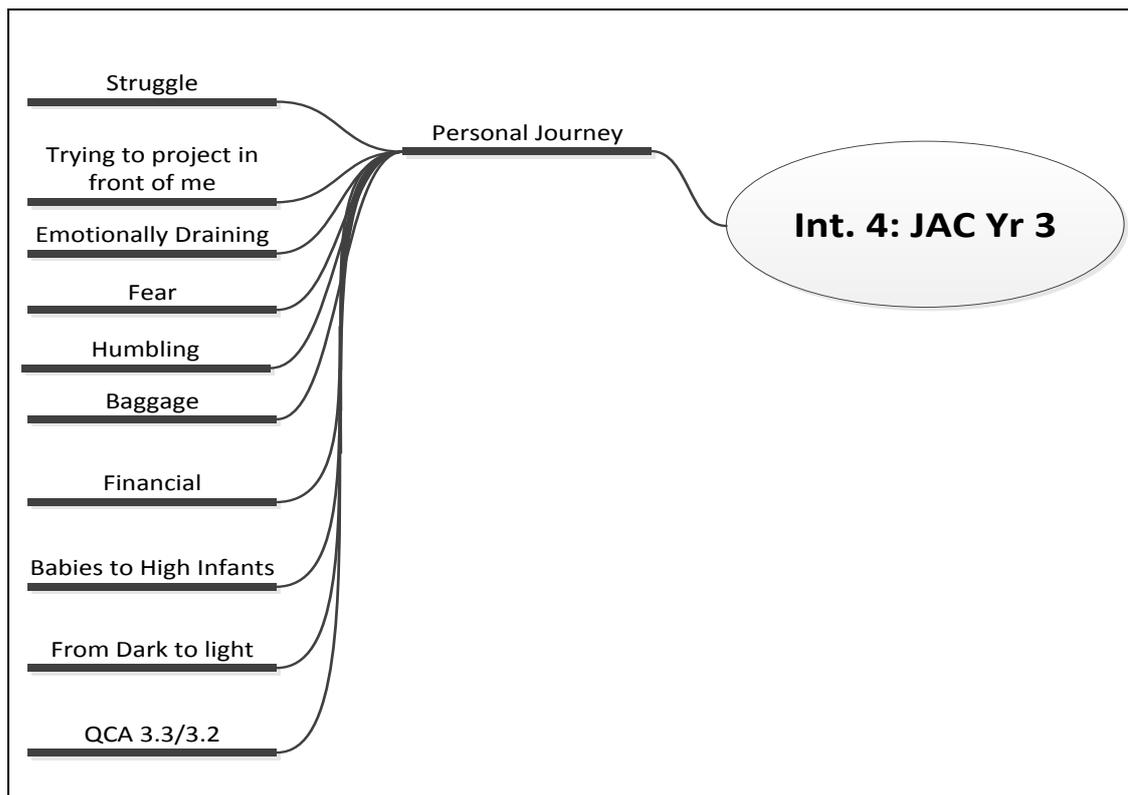


Figure 4.5: Moving from initial codes to identification of 'emerging themes'- Extract (example)

Using Visio as a tool to hold the codes, it offered a visual representation of the data and the possibility of seeing the 'emerging themes' and potential categories (**Figure 4.4** and **Figure 4.5**). I began by experimenting with codes such as this one which I titled **Personal Journey** to describe the experience of the Mature Student entering Higher education. This code suggested that the Personal Journey might become a theme populated by the codes identified in the Initial coding phase such as *moving from dark to light, trying to project in front of me* etc. as demonstrated in **Figure 4.5** above.

Table 4-4: Example: Comparing data with data to populate the emerging Themes

The Baggage	
<i>the work was beginning to dry up, well it didn't dry up totally but it had dwindled away quite a bit.</i>	Gim-Yr1

<i>No. What else would I be doing, like, I wouldn't have anything else to do. I wouldn't have a job to go to, I'd be basically just going back, I'd be going backwards and I kind of knew myself in my heart that it wouldn't continue that way. It would take some sort of sequence of events for that to change, or maybe I should start going out and it was like, I think I went out once in the very beginning and I didn't really go out again and I said, ah no, I'm going to start going out and then that kind of changed...</i>	Kim-Yr1
<i>I felt I was kind of, I was very low for the last few years, not being working and I felt really the two previous years have been worth it so to speak. I've enjoyed getting exam results actually...</i>	Pog-Yr1
<i>When you bring your family to destitution and all that type of thing ... and your business gone down the f...ing tubes and everything you worked, you know, hard for. I mean I worked for 30 years and never asked for anything from anybody so you have all of that on your back like.</i>	Jac-Yr3

This emerging theme was compared following the constant comparative method with the themes that emerged from the other interviews to determine if the data supported the creation of a category. The decision to create a category was postponed until further conversations took place exploring this theme in more depth and then after subsequently comparing the codes to see if indeed this was a common theme for the participants. **Table 4.4** (above) and **Table 4.6** (overleaf) are illustrative of the process of moving from codes, through themes to identify the emerging categories and identifying the appropriateness of the content of the categories (comparing category with category).

Table 4-5: Example of working from Themes to emerging category comparing data with data

Participants					Emerging Categories ↓
Ena-Yr2	Owl-Yr4	Pam-Yr2	Pog-Yr1	Sal-Yr4	
Personal sacrifice. tighten my	Commuting	Solo Journey	Personal commitment	Language and learning	Commitment

belt					
Single parent...	I am making progress but husband is burdened	Partner	Disruption to family and others	Responsibility for family... single parent	Connections ... embeddedness ... habitus
Family... children... time	Technology	Being found out	Risk	Would I be able	Vulnerable

In this stage the photo analysis consisted of creating a table of all the photographs chosen by the participants which related to one particular question which facilitated the comparison of the responses to each of the questions. This process both provided evidence to support categories identified in the data analysis above and contributed by adding other categories which had not been identified earlier. This process facilitated an integration of the data gathered with the photo stimulus and the text from the interviews into one place.

Table 4-6: Constant Comparative Method applied to Photo Analysis (example)

Area being explored: Participants sense of the Risk that they have taken to participate in Higher Education	Themes	Concepts
	<p>The washing line (No 14). Exposing my weakness, risk of being 'found out'.</p>	<p>Risk- personal exposure</p>
	<p>The person typing at the desk (No 45). The promise of HE. A new vision.</p>	<p>Risk rewards- The promise of HE</p>

In the figure below (which stretches across nine pages in reality) the breadth and complexity of the codes and themes is visible). The decision on the final categories was made having due regard to the number of times the codes were represented, (comparing data with data), analysing the fit of the data with the emerging category and comparing data with categories.

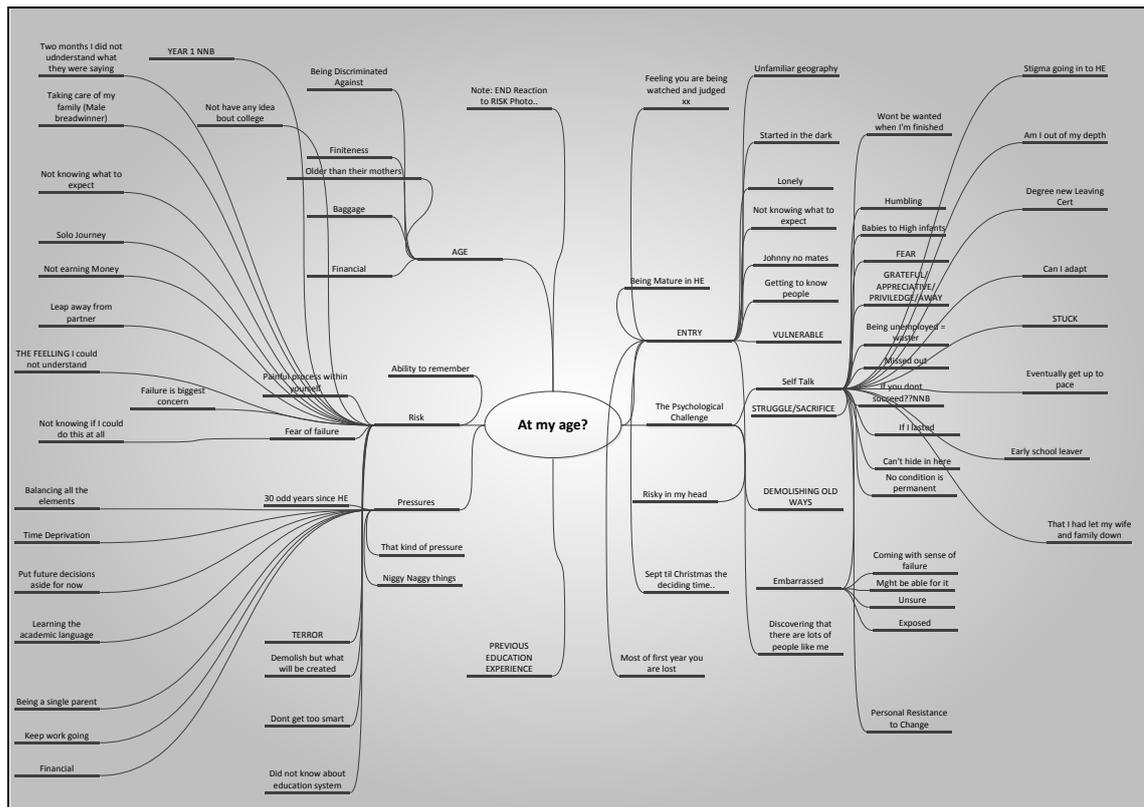


Figure 4.6: Moving from Codes to Themes (example)

In all these steps the significance that the participants attached to the experience, the depth of emotion connected to the theme by the participants became the background guide as to the appropriateness of the fit between the data and the category. This process of analysis (using both the Visio and the tables) enabled the connection to be maintained between the data generated by the participant and the final category.

4.9.5. Stage 3: Theoretical Coding

This is the stage where the 'categories' are further 'raised' to enable the development of theory. This theory development should be: applicable in practice, be useful in theoretical advances, provide a perspective on behaviour, enable prediction and explanation of behaviour and provide clear categories and hypothesis so that they can be verified in further research. Charmaz (2006, p.63) states 'In short, theoretical codes

specify possible, relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding'. Glaser's (1978) initial approach to this stage suggests that there are six key coding families: causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions; however Charmaz (2006) identified that there are others such as Conflict which are missing from the list and so advocates the identification of codes which ensure that the theoretical codes are supported by the data.

Working from the categories identified at the 'focused coding' stage above the aim of this stage was to explore these to identify a theoretical concept which would serve to connect these categories together. Charmaz (2006, p.68) suggests that a 'fine line exists between interpreting data and imposing a pre-existing frame on it'. It was at this point in the process that the Grounded Theory 'bracketing' out of the researchers own emotions, thoughts and prior experience proved most difficult. CGT's stance of recognising the emic and etic elements of the interpretative process of moving from concepts to theoretical coding offered a more malleable process such that the researcher's own experience of working in HE also contributed to guiding the interpretive process.

In **Figure 4.7** (also in **Appendix 11**) the relationship between the themes and categories and how these have been connected to Theoretical Codes is illustrated.

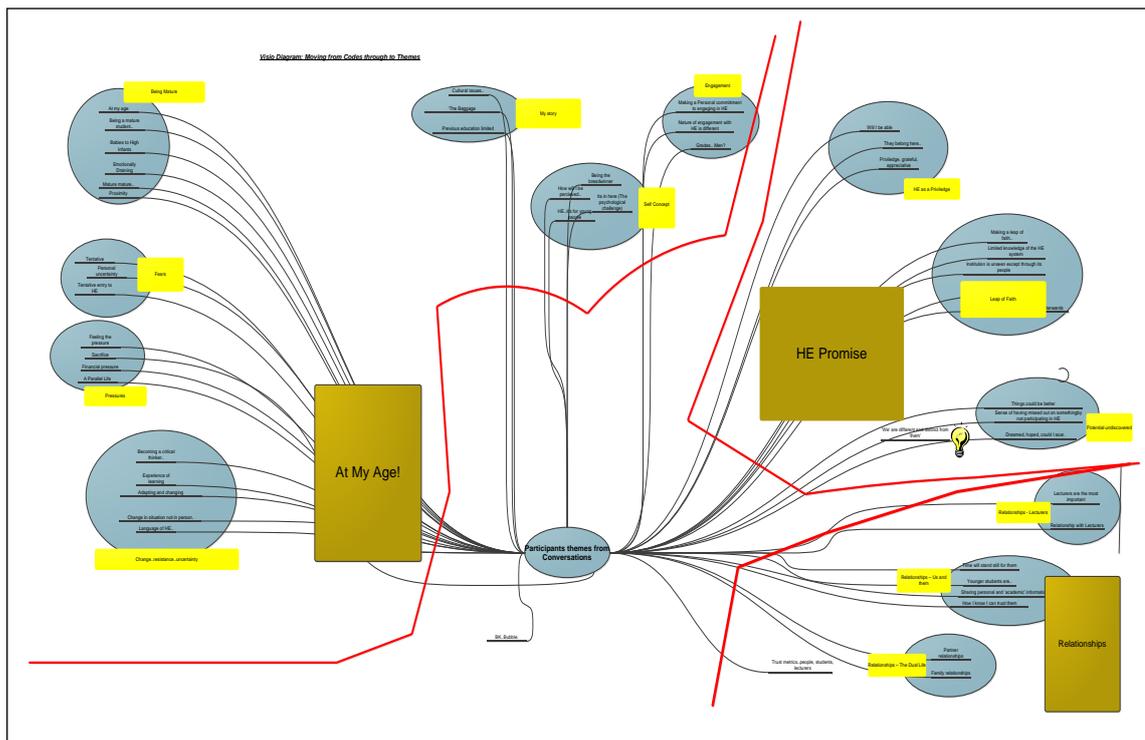


Figure 4.7: Moving from Themes and Codes to Categories into Emerging Theoretical Codes

4.9.6. Stage 4: Finally: The emerging construct and meaning Framework

The result of the interpretation created the following Theoretical codes which each incorporated a number of the themes and categories above.

At my age (incorporating the following categories: Self-concept, being mature, my story, engagement, fears and pressures)

Trusting Relationships (incorporating the following categories: Us and Them, The dual life, The lecturers)

The promise of HE (incorporating the following categories: HE as a privilege, Leap of Faith, Undiscovered potential).

Each of these Theoretical codes will be explored and examined in the following chapters where the data provided by the participants will be juxtaposed with existing trust literature to facilitate the development of a theory explaining the Trust

experience of mature students in Higher Education. The emerging construct and meaning framework is created in bringing the trust models together with the emerging concepts from the research to identify the contribution of this research to the understanding of the role of Trust in mature students in HE.

4.9.7. Conclusion

My research employed a constructivist grounded theory framework to achieve its objective to make a contribution to the substantive theory of how trust is experienced and understood in the mature student experience in higher education. In so doing it engaged in a respectful relationship, endeavouring to be fully 'present' with the participant during the research to facilitate an exploration of both the explicit and tacit understanding of the topic. At all stages of the research consideration was given to the ethical engagement with the participant and with the material. The constructivist grounded theory model offered a disciplined approach to data gathering but particularly to data analysis which made it particularly appropriate for this research project.

In the next Chapter the emerging concepts and codes are discussed with a view to further exploring the emerging framework from this research. It sets out to discuss the findings from this analysis and to revisit the Trust model in the context of the research findings.

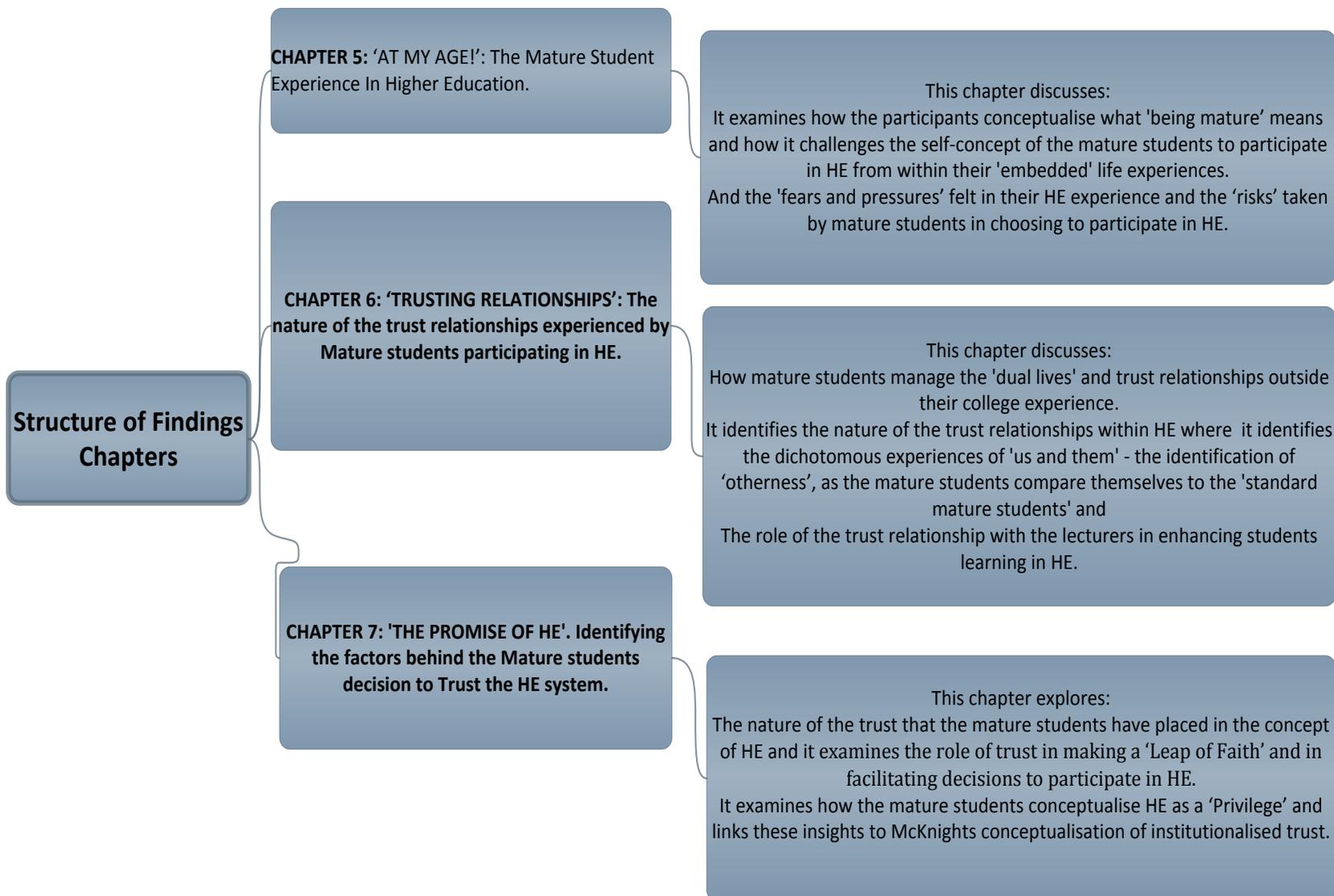
PREAMBLE TO FINDINGS CHAPTERS

The researcher acknowledges the tension between honouring the 'constructivist grounded theory' nature and the academic requirements of this research which led to some challenges as to how to represent and sequence the content of each chapter. In determining the sequencing and representation of the research one was conscious of the challenges of:

- Honouring the objective of remaining close to the data and the meaning attributed to it by the participants as it has emerged from the analysis process.
- How best to incorporate the 'visual' element into the presentation of the research findings. The visual element was a significant contributor to the meaning making process of the participants where they stimulated their emerging meanings and responses, in some cases the photograph triggered a comprehensive dialogue covering a breadth of issues and areas of concern, in others the photograph was selected and stimulated a discussion on a relatively narrow topic area. This decision raised the issue of the relative positioning of the text/verbal and the visual (Luttrell and Chalfen 2010) elements of this research. In positioning the photographs guidance was taken from the data analysis process which guided the emergence of the key themes and concepts and the photographs are positioned where they 'emerged' from the data analysis. I have presented the photographs with the literal participant meaning to present the information as near to the context from which the meaning emerged. This results in a dispersal of the visual in different quantities throughout the chapters but in the positions where they emerged from the data analysis process.

- Finally a decision needed to be made around the sequencing of the findings chapters, whether to begin the analysis with an examination of the institutionalised/structural elements emerging from the research or to reflect the meaning and significance emerging from the data, which identified critical meaning making as located within the individuals themselves. It was eventually determined to begin this series of chapters with the participants conceptualisation of what it means to be in HE '*at my age*', (**Chapter 5**) and issues of self-trust, then moving to the *trusting relationships* (**Chapter 6**) and finally to the *trust within the institutional context*. (**Chapter 7**).

The overall structure and the emerging concepts are set out visually on the following page.



CHAPTER 5: 'AT MY AGE!', THE MATURE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

5.1. Introduction

In my research HE emerges as a place of risk for the mature students, challenging them at a very personal level and creating a sense of vulnerability. This outcome resonates with research previously conducted by Davies and Williams (2001), and in an Irish context by Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), Kenny *et al* (2010), and Keane (2011). My research extends the existing understandings of what it means to be a mature student in Irish HE, and identifies trust as a relevant concept through which to examine that experience.

This first findings chapter explores how the participants in the research construct their understanding of what it means to be a student in HE 'at my age'. The story of this Chapter focuses on the themes, categories and sub-themes emerging from the *intra* personal conversations with which the mature students are engaged as they set out on their HE path, and as they progress on that journey.

1) It begins with **My story** which incorporates themes of;

- a) the *Baggage*, the lived experience of the participants,
- b) their *limited experience of HE*, and its impact on how they made sense of
- c) their *decision to participate* in and their journey through HE.

2) It then examines the mature students' **Self-Concept**, which explores the themes of;

- a) *'being the breadwinner'*, mature students concept of their role and responsibilities,
- b) how *HE is understood as a place for 'young people'* a place *'not-for me'*, and the mature student's sense that *'they are all looking at you'* and how they conceptualise themselves as being an outsider in HE.
- c) it explores the internal dialogues of the mature students, *'it's in here'* [*referring to his head*], the internal process of making sense of the risks attached to participating in HE.

3) And finally it explores the concepts of ***Fears and Pressures*** identifying; the *fears and tentative steps* with which the students begin their engagement in HE and the risks that they have taken to participate in HE.

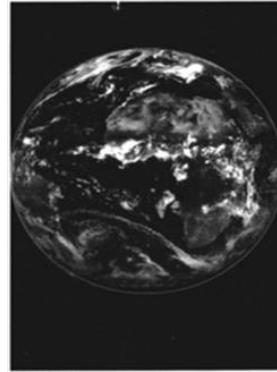
5.2. The Visual element of the Chapter

The photographs were chosen by the participants to represent their 'story', the meaning of the photographs emerges from the participants own 'sense-making' processes. The photographs (shown here) and their significance are presented later in the chapter connected to the meanings attributed to them by the participants.

Some observations about the collection of photographs:

From the range of photographs here and throughout these chapters, the same photographs were chosen to represent different meanings for the participants at different intervals in the research process. See: Table 5-8:Photo: Fears 1: The Building Site.

The photographs acted as 'triggers' for the participants thoughts, the representation depicted in the photograph e.g. Swans and child in many cases emerges as a 'holder' for the meaning that they represent for the participants.



- The photographs chosen by the participants are apparently random; there are people and inanimate object and nature represented in the selected photographs.
- They are used to anchor the participants' stories and they illustrate the power of the visual to access the tacit/unconscious meanings that the participants ascribe to their experience
- The photographs are suggestive of a slice of a larger photograph, with the potential for different contextual settings which are created in the minds of the participants.
- It may have been interesting to examine why they chose their particular photograph but I felt that this would have interfered with the interpretive process and could be an approach adopted in a different research context.



These conversations emerging from the research reveal stories of challenges to their own sense of self, and interpretations of their own self-worth much of which is self-deprecating. Their conversation is interlaced with questions about their own sense of agency, which fluctuates between a view which suggests that they trust their own capacity (self-trust) to be able for this HE journey, and other times where they doubt their own self-efficacy. Their stories are interwoven with the knowledge from the relevant extant literature, and compared to the trust models which were the frame of reference for this research.

5.3. My Story (The embedded lives of the mature student)

This section introduces the mature students who are the participants in this research. It builds on the brief introduction that took place in **Table 4-1**, and explores their journey to Higher Education. Their mini-biographies have been set out here to honour their presence in the creation of this research, in willingly participating in the research the participants shared their lived experiences and I felt obliged to represent them and their views appropriately in this research.

The conversation which generated this information was stimulated by inviting participants *to choose a photograph which represents how you have experienced HE to date*. The photographs 'opened a window' for the participants in which they chose to share their life story, which, in turn set a context for their decision to participate in HE and a framework for how they have experienced the journey to date. These short introductory conversations act as a signpost to concepts which

are raised here and which are explored further in this and the following two chapters.

All of the participants in this research were mature students with no previous experience of being in HE, all but one had previously left secondary school and gone straight into work. The one who had attended college previously (Mar-Yr3) dropped out after only a few weeks after realising that it was the wrong course for him. Some of the participants had left school before completing the Leaving Certificate and all had been employed or self-employed until either shortly before or, in the case of Gim-Yr1 and Jac-Yr3; continue to have business commitments while attending college. The participants were at different stages of their HE journey, some were just beginning and were in first year and others were in their final year. Gim-Yr1 (married with children and returning to education after being self-employed) explains that he came to HE through his recent business experience.

This is my first year; yeah the work was beginning to dry up, well it didn't dry up totally but it had dwindled away quite a bit...go on the dole, so to speak ah, I said I'd have a go, sure what's there to lose... ahm ... it's an extra drain I suppose because you're that much older... when I was 18 coming in because I wouldn't have all this whole - thirty years of baggage coming in with you.. It's not that at all, it's just your own attitude. You know, whatever's in yourself. ... You'd be coming in maybe even with a sense of failure within yourself ... You have to ride with that and it's not just yourself is depending on it. (Gim-Yr.1)

He explains that as a mature student he is entering HE with the 'baggage' of thirty years of work experience since leaving school, and he introduces the idea that at that age it is a challenge to begin again and especially so when you might be coming in with 'a sense of failure' which is a theme which is expanded on later. The reference to 'it's not just yourself' depending on the experience, introduces the nature of the network of relationships within which the HE experience is nested.

For Kim-Yr1 (single no children) her entry to HE came after becoming unemployed.

She also had a sense that this was an opportunity which she might have taken straight after school and instead had

when I left school I had been working and travelling and I had kinda gotten myself into that work cycle but I, you know, I was sick of it. And then I lost my job and said right, so this is like, so this would be the opportunity to go back to school. (Kim-Yr1)

The experience of heading straight into work from school was also Pog-Yr1's (married with small children) experience.

Ahm, well, like, I left school I suppose at 17 and I was working straight away, you know. I had moved away and I was working in [the city] and I worked straight through for the next 20, 21, 23 years and I changed jobs and lost that job then and then I was thinking ... I suppose I was in my late thirties, but only still giving me maybe 25, 30 years if I wanted to retire at 65 so I wanted to be sure that what I did next, you know, I didn't want to make a mistake. I said that if I went back to education I'd give myself the chance of a good, a better job maybe. You know, because it was, for me it was my last chance because say I had just went and got any kind of a job, ahm, would I have been sorry, you know. (Pog-Yr1)

He introduces the concept of the time limitations faced by the mature students and an awareness of their mortality. This story also demonstrates the experience of some of the mature student cohort coming into HE where they have relevant practical experience but none of the formal qualifications, this theme of creeping professionalisation and the need to have a formal qualification is supported in Tomlinson (2008) and Warmington (2003) who provide evidence for, but also challenge the prevailing credentialist paradigm.

The extent of experience which the mature students bring with them is illustrated in Jac-Yr3's (married with teenage children) story.

In two thousand and ah, well I suppose if you go back a fair bit, I worked in [communications company] and finished up there at a managerial level. Came back to [this town] for family reasons. ... And then I started by own business. Went out to do a bit of property development, ahm. Got caught at the last, to make a long story short, got caught in 2008 like three-quarters of the country

... [and now has considerable debts] When you bring your family to destitution and all that type of thing ... and your business gone down the f...ing tubes and everything you worked, you know, hard for. I mean I worked for 30 years and never asked for anything from anybody so you have all of that on your back like. (Jac-Yr3)

His story also introduces the impact of the life experience on their sense of their own self-worth and the impact of this 'fragility' and the vulnerability on their self-concept and self-identity (Britton & Baxter 1999, Clegg & Bufton 2008, Haines 2011).

Within the group of participants in this project there were two black participants, one Irish and one of African origin. Owl-Yr4 (married with grown-up children) is Irish and her story also includes substantial work experience, but her experience also includes a personal story which encompasses experience of discrimination.

I was discriminated against first of all in Irish society because of the colour of my skin. So that was a huge thing to have to go through as a child on top of being a child. Ahm, so that was a huge, they were huge barriers, being discriminated against. (Owl-Yr4)

And Eda-Yr3 (a single mum of two young children) describes the challenge of coping as a lone parent.

My name is Eda and I am from [Africa], I thought of what I want to do, why I want to do it. I know the challenges that are going to be involved as a lone parent with two very young children. It's not going to be easy but I chose to do it because I know it will be a success, it will be fruitful in the future. (Eda-Yr3)

In her story Eda-Yr3 has introduced one of the key issues for mature students, which is that the trust that she places in the HE education experience will be fruitful in the future. She expects that the experience will be costly in terms of her own personal life but that there will be rewards at the end. This trust in the institution is the subject of further discussion in **Chapter 7**.

The immigrant experience of returning to HE also contributes to our understanding of the mature student experience. Eda-Yr3, above, has come to Ireland from Africa.

Lea-Yr3, who is from Eastern Europe and is a single mum of teenagers, describes the impact of her immigrant experience on her motivation for coming to HE.

Because I was you know I was working from 2009 I started so four years I was working and building up my life again in Ireland so when I came back to education probably I needed that knowledge and that experience from you know from the people who are professionals ... Not from the media or from the newspapers I needed that knowledge that was just scientific which is important and you know when people like Lecturers who are talking about you know what we should know, what we should learn, how we are supposed to understand some things was very good for me. I was like all the time excited like. (Lea-Yr3)

She points out her expectation that in some way those who teach and what is taught in HE is providing an education, based on the 'right' kind of information and the correct way of understanding the world. It positions the lecturers and the institution in a place of power relative to the participants, which in turn impacts on how they experience HE. The impact of this positioning is discussed further in

Chapter 6.

For Edm-Yr3 (married with small children) the journey to HE began when he was forced to give up work on building sites due to developing a physical disability.

I have never been one to give up. I sort of, you see people you know, they take on so many things and it's just sort of boredom they decide I'll do this and then after a week they think "ah, I can't be bothered". You know I can't understand that. I get very frustrated with that like you know. I took, like, we have a lot of bills at the moment, myself and my wife, and I knew there was no chance of me going back into my job. I can't, you know, because of my back. I've been told I'll be in a wheelchair. So I knew I had to find something ... I had no intentions of ever coming back into College at my age. Ahm, how it turned out was I was in FÁS, while there a lady from the College came down and said how they had this Access Course, like Foundation Course, for mature students to come back into College. Something just clicked in my head and I thought "yes, that's it". Because all my life I was in trenches and stuff. I was a pipe layer. And all of my life I've been in dirty trenches, it's raining and snowing down on top of you. There has to be something better than this. (Edm-Yr3)

In his story the challenge of coping with unemployment, the development of his disability and the story of indebtedness, demonstrates the complexity of the

pressures on the mature students, all of which impacts on their engagement and experience in HE. His story introduces the theme of relationships and expectation of *'there has to be something better than this'*

Some mature students were coming from a background of limited employment which is Lim-Yr2's story where he had previously

worked in the community, volunteering and on the Board of Management as well in a Community Development setting. So I always knew that at some stage I would go back to College to try and get my degree to get back into that profession plus ahm ... So I knew to get the qualification to be a Therapist I needed to get a degree in Social Care or some social related field. So [this course] was most applicable to what I had experience in so that's how. I came back here because with the economic down turn there are the moment it's too hard to get good jobs... So I get my degree, have it. I think ... That there might be something out there for me. (Lim-Yr3)

For Lim-Yr3 the promise of HE includes the expectation of employment or purposeful engagement on completion of the course. The extent of the financial commitment which the mature students have made to come to HE is articulated by Mar-Yr3 (recently unemployed married with small children) when he speaks of the commitment required to come to HE

we have made a large financial commitment for me to come back, and my wife has put a lot of, as you say trust in me that I was making the right decision for all of us, not just for me. So, that kind, that would be my biggest goal in College, it's not just qualifying for me but also my family. (Mar-Yr3)

His story also illustrates the network of relationships within which the mature students decision to participate and their engagement in HE is situated. (explored further below and in **Chapter 6**).

For Pam-Yr2 (partner and college aged child) her story introduces another theme which is the one of the missed opportunities of not having participated earlier in HE.

I suppose not educating myself, you know. You know, that I'd arsed around 6th year. The Leaving Cert was brutal. I had an awful lot of troubles. A cousin of mine and very good friend was killed ten days before the start of the Leaving Cert so you know I wasn't even expected to pass at all. Ahm, I went off to

England, arsed around there for many, many years, got married, had a child, got divorced, came back and she is in College.[elsewhere]. (Pam-Yr3)

These stories are typical of the life stories with which mature students enter HE, the issues identified by these participants include financial, relationship, self-esteem, discrimination and parenting issues and are typical of the range of experiences which most mature students will bring with them into their HE experience. They are, what has been described by Darmody and Fleming (2009, p.69) as the 'life-load' of the mature student, or what Ball *et al* (2002), Buskens *et al* (2010), James and Curtis (2011), and Molm *et al* (2012) referred to as to their 'embedded' selves, or their 'entangled' lives as per Pink and Leder Mackley (2012).

5.3.1. Deciding to come to Higher Education

The process of deciding to come to HE had been a difficult one for the participants. The motivation to participate was precipitated by a variety of reasons, the participant's spoke of the shift in the structure of employment where the nature of the work has become professionalised and now requires a third-level qualification (Owl-Yr4, Lim-Yr2). Because of structural unemployment (Pam-Yr3), in construction (Edm-Yr3) and the retail sector (Mar-Yr3, Pog-Yr2), and because of the requirement to reinvent a career (Kim-Yr1, Gim-Yr1, Lea-Yr3, Eda-Yr2, Jac-Yr3) after the loss of a business, through immigration or because of a second chance opportunity.

The motivation to attend college to enhance their employment prospects was one of the motivating factors, but to ascribe their choice to participate to a purely rational decision making process would be to underestimate the complexity of the decision.

For Pog-Yr1 the decision to come to college related to the prospects of becoming employed, but was more than that.

Because working is so important to me. I want to be working again. I feel, I do feel less at the moment confidence wise in myself because I'm not working and ...I find it for me to be working is very important. (Pog-Yr1)

For him, being unemployed correlates with feeling less, not having confidence, and a sense of limited worth because one is 'supposed to be a provider', tied into issues of one's sense of self-esteem and trust in oneself. Coming to HE holds the promise of facilitating a change not only in his employment status but more particularly in his sense of self-worth.

The fragility of the participants' decision making process was also evident in Gim-Yr1's description.

and I thought if I got in on the bottom and learned a bit about it I might be able to make a logical decision in two years' time, if I get that far ... Am, so that's the decision I made, yeah. I said I'd come in for the two years, have a go, see if I lasted. ...I picked up, maybe, from the prospectus that there'd be extra help for people like who were under pressure, especially the mature student, excuse me, am, that's a kind of a factor that I'd hone in on as well. (Gim-Yr1)

The decision to participate for the mature students was also conceptualised within the temporal limitation of being 'my age', this incorporates an understanding of the limited time ahead of them in life. It was theorised by the participants as significant in terms of their decision to participate, and the impact of the investment that they are willing to make to engage in HE.

when you make a decision you have to sort of go with it. I don't have time either to think in a years' time "oh I can't be bothered with that, I'll do something else" either. I have sort of 20 years of work left in me before I get to 65, I'll probably be 70 I suppose by the time I get there, you know. (Edm-Yr2)

Their investment in HE needs to provide a return to the participants, because they perceive that there will not be a further opportunity in their lives to start over again. The key themes permeating their decision making process were; a life-time of

being productive and being in the work force, the consciousness of limited time represented by a calculation of the time to retirement and the pressure to 'not make a mistake' in this decision. For some of the participants (Pog-Yr1, Pam-Yr3, Owl-Yr4, Edm-Yr3) the decision to come to HE was preceded by participation in a FETAC course during which the decision to come to HE solidified, Pam-Yr3 describes the process.

Yep. Am, I was made redundant in 2009, January 2009, and I'm from [that town], about 20 miles that way and there is a further education centre there, a very good one and I did a course there years ago, a secretarial course. Kind of got my job out of it. I was working ... in conveyancing, bottom fell out of the market,.. and I kind of took a little bit of time out and decided to go back to the Further Education Centre. I Realised Business was not for me but I wanted to carry on studying so I looked around, in particular [this college] because it's close. What kind of courses were on offer. Saw [this] course. I thought the content was very interesting. Ahm, sent in my CAO application. In the meantime I arranged to meet the Lecturer, ... She further convinced me that it would be something that I would like so I started. So when I got a place then I was delighted and very scared and but it's going really well, ya, I'm really enjoying it. (Pam-Yr3)

The role of the tutors and lecturers in facilitating her decision making acted as an affirmation for her pre-existing interest to 'carry on studying' and the journey through her earlier programmes has enabled her to be ready to take the next steps. The important role of college preparation courses in facilitating this journey has been identified earlier by Tierney (2004b) for young students but it is equally important for older students as also evidenced in Kevern and Webb (2004) in research into mature nursing students' experiences.

The participants in this research affirm Davies and Williams (2001) findings, that the decision to re-enter education is complex and "fragile" (ibid 2001, p.198), it is a decision which embraces both 'rational/instrumental and emotional elements' (McCune *et al* 2010, Clegg 2011, McCoy & Byrne 2011) but, they argue, and this

research supports the fact, that the decision is based, less on a rational choice (Abell 1991, cited in Tomlinson 2008), than on the emotions or feelings attached to the decision.

The decision to participate cannot be rational because there is no access to complete information. The decision instead needs to be viewed through the sense making process the 'classifiable practices and classificatory judgements' (Ball *et al* 2002, p.53) informed by their 'habitus', and their limited understanding of the 'field of higher education. The decision to participate is made (Ball *et al* 2002 p.52) suggest within 'two registers of meaning and action' (ibid, p.52) one is cognitive/performative and the other is social/cultural.

The decision making process of the participants in my research is reflective of a process which is a function of their accumulated experiences both educational and societal. The story created is one of layers of complexity, personal factors, some limited options, and in the early stages a tentative step, and then a final decision to make a full-time commitment, it opens a window into the factors which influence mature students decision to make the 'leap of faith' into HE explored further in **Chapter 7.**

5.4. Self-Concept

The experience of participating in HE as a mature student was conveyed as having been a particular challenge to the '**self-concept**' of the participants. As a mature person all of the participants entered HE with substantial life experiences and in many cases significant career experiences, but despite this capacity Kim-Yr1 says

Cos, I don't know how, I mean a mature student couldn't come into college with high confidence. They might have their own personal high confidence but in that environment ... I don't see how you could.

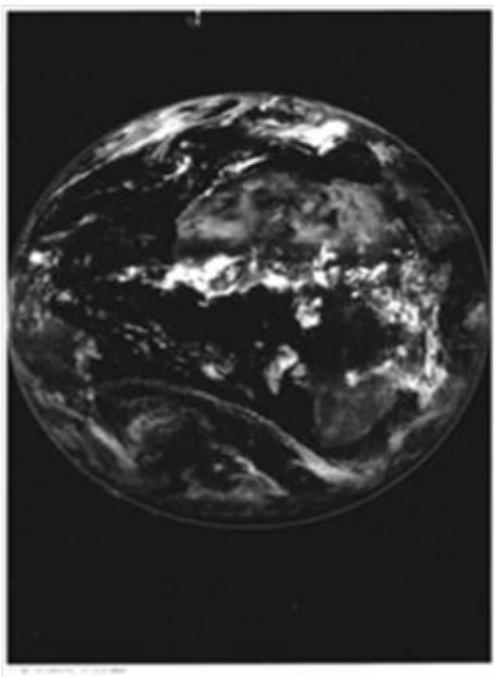
The idea is that although they might be fully functioning adults in the environment outside of college crossing the threshold of the HE institution causes them to doubt their own capacity.

The content of this section of the Chapter was developed from the invitation presented to the participants to *choose a photograph which represents how you have experienced HE to date?* which prompted the participant's to choose a photograph, but also to narrate the meaning which they attached to the photograph.

Edm-Yr3 chose the photograph (

Table 5-1 **below**) of the world was representative the enormity of the step inside the door of his HE institution and his personal sense of feeling overwhelmed. The narrative represents his interpretation of the meaning which he personally ascribes to the photograph itself; it is not what is actually represented in the photograph.

Table 5-1: Photo HE is a Big World



Ya, there is. I mean there is a stigma going in as well like you know when you are going into a classroom with 18 and 19 year old kids and you are sort of sitting there. I'll be 45 next month and you are thinking am I out of my depth here. Yes. And there's a lot of pressure as well... There's timetables and all set, but when you have kids coming in from the Leaving Cert and it's just a progression for them. They are learning the stuff.

I never done a Leaving Cert like you know. I got an Inter Cert it was back in 1985 and that was me out of school. But like ahm to go back in and a lot of the Lecturers expect that you know this. You done it last year because you were doing a Leaving Cert or whatever and you know most of the time in First Year you are playing "catch up" and it's really hard, it's really frustrating when you are sitting in a classroom, especially Maths, and they are doing integration and stuff like that and you are sitting there and you have no idea.

Absolutely nothing. (Edm-Yr3)

The narrative is one of 'being out of my depth', that there is a 'stigma' attached to being in HE as a mature student, the comparison with the young students who are perceived to be on top of the situation and minimising his own capacity 'I never

done a *Leaving Cert*' you know. This self-doubt is clearly visible in Owl-Yr4's description (in **Table 5.2**, below) of her experience of participating in HE.

Table 5-2: Photo: Reaching out!

I see a journey. I see some grey clouds in that journey. A lot of ... sometimes doubt, self-doubt, ahm, I see the sun, I'm looking for the sun. I have been doing that, it feels like all my life. Ahm, because I started out in very humble circumstances so I have been reaching out forever it seems and I'm finally reaching that shoreline, I feel. I still have more to go but I feel that sun shining on my face and calling me, beckoning me forward and all this good grass, these tree things here, are just would look like they were, I say the word "were" ... obstacles that were always in my way. (Owl-Yr4)



The journey that she speaks of is in her life and she speaks of 'reaching the shoreline' as a result of being in college but it is a journey with 'doubt, a lot of self-doubt'.

The big risk of self-belief, believing in yourself and keep going, keep going, keep going, and achieving it ... The obstacle of my age, ya, that used to be, used to be. That, you know, self-doubt. ... when I really go out there in the hard world looking for work I won't be really wanted because I am ... they will see me as over the hill type thing. You know all this negative stuff would come and go. (Owl-Yr4)

This 'glimpse' of the internal dialogue which the participants engaged in relation to their own self-concept is suggestive of the presence of the risk and vulnerability of the mature student, hers has been an obstacle-filled journey and she has been reaching out to something which has been beckoning her forward.

The theme of self-doubt, an absence of trust in their own capacity and capabilities characterises their internal dialogue, which was conceptualised by the participants as being core to their participation in HE. They were engaged in a number of internal dialogues; ones which minimised their previous experience, ones which minimised their own capacity and ones where the accreditation provided by HE is extolled. The reverence shown to the accreditation process is articulated by Pog-Yr1, who asserts its significance.

because I didn't complete a Leaving Cert and I was working in Retail which was a grand job and you know it was fine but you never achieved anything for yourself. Whereas I feel the satisfaction of completing say the three years here will for myself emotionally would be very high. (Pog-Yr1)

This minimisation of their own experience and knowledge tied with the buy-in to the accreditation dialogue (Tomlinson 2008, Warmington 2003) is problematic for mature students who perceive themselves as relatively powerless in their engagement in HE, a theme explored further in **Section 6.5** below. For Jac-Yr3 the experience of being mature, calculations of his mortality and his prior experiences resulted in his return to HE being conceptualised as akin to being back in 'babies' (i.e.: Junior Infants) in Primary school.

I mean your mortality is kind of (around the corner, I know). Like you know, no matter how young at heart I may feel,.. You know there are 10, 15 good years in me I would think, you know. My energy levels are actually stronger or better now than they were a couple of years ago because I had to turn around that whole soakage, that whole draining thing that happened and all that so, ya, that's, so I came in humbled, had to find your way around everything, look for

help. So, ya, it's been a humbling kind of a thing in that way. You are brought back to earth.

It's you only, you know, I keep saying to people, you know they say "how are you getting on". Let's say now at this stage I am in High Infants, that's the way I would kind of describe it, you know. And you start off in Babies, you know, and you work your way up to High Infants and then you know, so that's, I've approached it that way and right or wrong. (Jac-Yr4)

The conceptualisation of HE as a 'humbling experience' where you 'start off in babies' and after three years you get to 'high infants' is interesting. As a mature student in HE the theme of vulnerability, of beginning again as if their whole life learning counts for nothing is challenging. HE is perceived as being in some way separate from the outside 'real' world of work, as Jac-Yr3 conceptualises it is also a place of refuge after a turbulent period but one which is time bounded and exit is imminent.

The psychological strain of engaging with HE as a mature student was a theme also raised by Gim-Yr1

It's not ah, well I like coming in ... am, ... it's a drain, you know it's a kind of a ... it's that extra little psychological drain on you. The pull, it takes that extra little bit of energy to come in [to college].

The internal dialogue of pressure and being 'overwhelmed' is visible in the meaning created by Lim-Yr2 from his choice of photograph (**Table 5-3**). For him the photograph represented 'stuckness' the challenge 'how the hell am I going to get out of here'.

Table 5-3: Photo: Surrounded!



Lim-Yr2: It's like ahm for me it's that when you come into an environment and you are overwhelmed or surrounded by so much. And you are stuck and you don't know where to go, what to do, how the hell am I going to get out of here. I'd say how do I get out, I mean that it's a new environment and as a person I'm not a fan of change. I like the idea that I would be liberal minded. I like change over time. And but when it comes to change within my own personal life I am kind of resistant. I like to be consistent. But, ahm, the fact that this young girl is that she is surrounded by tyres and is very confined. Plus as well I suppose when I first came to [this college] I noticed that there were people going the whole time. All floods of people moving around the College. It was like a mixture between a shopping centre and an airport. It was all people.

The conversation discloses issues of personal propensity for change and the challenges represented by the change he experienced by coming to college. He uses an interesting description of the *'floods of people'* which he experienced in coming into college even though this was a small institution, it was perceived to be *'all people'* which of course HE institutions usually are, and this can be particularly challenging for shy or more introverted students whether mature or not.

Table 5-4: Photo: Exposed!



I ah [long pause choosing photo, nervous laughter] it's out there for everyone to see now ... now, win or lose. Hang your dirty washing out, basically that's what came into my head when I saw it. (Gim-Yr1)

The 'risk of exposure' was the motivation for the photograph (Table 5-4:Photo: Exposed!) of the washing line chosen by Gim-Yr1. The photograph represents for him the risk of being exposed, which related to issues of the challenge of being a student at this stage of his life which was common to all of the participants and was a significant motivator for the relationships which they built in college. The exposure theme also related to the risk of being exposed academically, that they would not be able for college that they might not be able to pass exams or cope with assignments. The photograph represents the vulnerability of the mature student and the challenges faced by them in engaging with an education experience in which their limitations and capacities are being questioned, where their self-concept is under threat. It raises for me the issue of their own sense of self, of self-trust can they trust themselves to manage this challenge?

The internal dialogue of self-doubt and the reference to 'in this environment' above, also represents for the mature students a recognition of the disconnect between the students previous experience and their move to HE. The 'outsider' perspective of HE was articulated by Lim-Yr2, here he describes his perception of HE before he

came into college which was based on the advertisements and media associated with HE. He notices in these media representations, that there are no mature students represented.

Nothing, not a mature student in sight. So it's all obviously targeted at younger people and also the risk was that I wouldn't be able for a degree. That was a huge risk for me. (Lim-Yr2)

This perception of a place 'not for me' resulted in a sense of aloneness and increased the trepidation with which they entered HE. This theme was apparent in the photograph chosen by Pog-Yr1 and the narrative accompanying the photograph (Table 5-5).

Table 5-5: Photo Transition to HE: Alone!

	<p><i>Because ... sorry. Ahm, it's just, I suppose it reminds me, you know, because that's a person on their own, they, I suppose they are in thought, lost in their own thoughts, and I think I had a lot of that ahm, in do you know, in the initial stages, so that's, you know.. Ahm, lonely, ahm ya, because I hadn't prepared myself for that. (Pog-Yr1)</i></p>
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The difficulty of the transition from a place of comfort to a place of isolation was also identified by Kim-Yr1 in the narrative and photograph (Table 5-6) below.

Table 5-6: Photo: The Transition into Higher Education

<p><i>Ya, I think 'cos it kind of reminds me of being at home so probably more of a comfort thing that I kind of missed that, that I kind of didn't have any comforts here because it was all new, so without that I felt quite isolated. (Kim-Yr1)</i></p>	
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My findings confirm Haggis (2002, p.217) conceptualisation of an equilibrium phase, which describes the students' lives before coming to HE, and the subsequent development of dis-equilibrium from the experience of the new environment and its resulting uncertainty. It also resonated with O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) understanding of separating from a place of belonging and entering into a situation which challenges their sense of belongingness and creating the potential for isolation.

This isolation and the identification of a place in which you do not belong has been conceptualised in previous educational research as a challenge to the 'habitus' of HE (Bourdieu and Passeron, cited in Grenfell 2008), which is understood as being a place 'not-for me' (Archer 2007, Davies & Williams 2001) and my likes, because of issues of race or social class (Hatcher 1998). The field of HE is also understood initially as a place where mature students are not located and therefore it creates a sense of exclusion for mature students in advance of entering into HE, which further feeds their self-doubt. The participants were also acutely aware of the challenge presented by this different institutional habitus. Their choice of college reflected

their awareness both of the challenge of making the transition to the new HE habitus, and of the subtleties between the habitus of the different HE institutions. In the following narrative the difference in the status of each institution was articulated by Owl-Yr4, she speaks of her sense of belonging in coming to her current college, which is relatively small both in geographical and in student numbers terms, she says that

you feel you are part of the place when you walk in. You feel homely. It is, it's lovely here, actually, it is quite homely. There is not this air and grace, you know, that I believe, I don't believe but I'm not sure what you would have up in [specific university] you know, the aloofness. But this down here, ya. Mind you saying that I wouldn't mind if I had had the opportunity to go to [specific Universities]. (Owl-Yr4)

The sense of not being 'aloof' was important in helping people to settle into the college experience. The recognition of the layering of HE institutions and the difference in college reputation and the concept of the 'elite' HE institutions was clear to the participants as evidenced in this comment from Mar-Yr2

Oh, jeez, I'd love to go to [specific University] but just it's not possible here with a mortgage, like we wouldn't have been able to sell our house, I wouldn't have been able to move up to [the city]. (Mar-Yr2)

The discourse from these participating students indicated that the challenges of managing the complexities of family life and their own self-concept resulted in an identification with their proximal institution, which in most situations was an IOT rather than the perceived more inaccessible 'elite' institution.

The concept of entering into a different institutional habitus has been identified as problematic for participants from working class backgrounds making the transition to HE (Reay 2004, Reay *et al* 2010) and although the application of the concept of 'Habitus' is questioned by (Atkinson 2011, Reay 2004) it does provide a useful framework for understanding the relationships embedded in the different

biographies of the participants and the opportunities which are perceived to be available to them and will be explored further in **Chapter 7**.

5.5. Fears and Pressures

In the research process the participants were also asked to choose a photograph *that represents the risks that they had taken to participate in higher education*. The emerging concepts were of the risks that they were taking to come into HE and were conceptualised as being primarily emotional in nature.

Table 5-7: Photo: The risk...it might bite!

	<p><i>Well ah...I suppose, I'm the child ...I'm taking a chance, it might bite. (Gim-Yr1)</i></p>
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In the exploration of this theme the photographs chosen by the participants provide very powerful visual anchors for the meaning that they attribute to the issue. (The full choice of photographs and the responses from each individual are included in **Appendix 6**)

In choosing the photograph some participants used it as a starting point from which their story emerges, for others it is a launch into their own sense-making process. These alternative approaches are evident in how the participants speak of the photograph, in some cases they refer to the photograph and the significance of its symbolism for them and in others the conversation appears to bear no immediate

connection to the photograph. This was a challenge resolved by a decision to work with the meanings that were created by the participants which is appropriate for a CGT research. What also became apparent was the ability of a single photograph to have multiple interpretations attributed to it, for example two photographs included in the discussion here were chosen by a number of the participants, the building site (3 people) (**Table 5-8**) and the dark alley (4 people) (**Table 5-9**) and both appeared to have a unique resonance for each of the participants.

Table 5-8: Photo: Fears 1: The Building Site

	<p><i>I suppose it's a single journey even though you might have support, and anything else it's still a solo journey that you are on. Risks, I suppose, not being out working, not earning money, ahm, financially its tough, especially with [my daughter] as well in College. No, it's been very tough. Just one more year anyway so. (Pam-Yr3)</i></p>
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<p><i>It is because it affects our, because you know we have a mortgage and we have you know. Ok, our youngest fella he won't be, he is 2 so he is not really in school yet but the eldest girl will be going to school in September so the financial side of it I suppose is the risk of being in College. Although her wages are decent enough and her wages are the reason I can go to College so to speak so that photo basically says that if [my wife] lost her job my whole college thing would collapse because then you know we have, it's going to create a different problem. I couldn't see any way where I could continue College and my plans would be rubble. (Pog-Yr1)</i></p>	<p><i>It resonated with me number 1. Number 2 it kind of reminds me of how, just how badly the whole thing fell into disrepair if you like, you know, the whole system fell down around its ears so, you know, its destroying a building like but often you know as developers we go in and destroy something to build something else ... So I would see that as your ... ya, I'd see that analogy as you have to get rid of whatever bad is there, you know, again the darkness whatever that kind of thing. And changes and you want to transform it so, you want to transform something you often have to you know even though there is a perfectly nice house there for example, people say "Jesus you can't knock that" you know. But I say I am but I'm going to build six more you know. ... Because I want to do something better, you know, that's the same (laugh). (Jac-Yr3)</i></p>
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5.5.1. Building Site

Pam-Yr3 chose two photographs one of which was the building site above which conceptualised risk for her; it firstly relates to the pressure of the course and the financial challenges and secondly she raises an issue of the risks created to her relationship.

Ya, ya, that's as you say when you reconstruct something, you know, it's not going to be the same, it's going to be, it has to be different, you know. [And later] Ya, ya. Something new is going to rise out like the Phoenix, but something new is going to come out of it. I just feel like I have changed an awful lot anyway, just from being here like, just. (Pam-Yr3)

This raises the mature students concerns about the potential consequences of the changes which participation in HE brings about. For the participants and especially Jac-Yr3 the photograph chosen represents an analogy for the change experience, the demolition of something in order to be able to create something better. The risk is in the demolition the leaving behind, the knocking down, the end of a previous existence; it represents a discontinuity, a disruption a departure from a place of

familiarity for the promise of something better. In the telling of this story and of the meaning that it created for him was a clear emotional sense of vulnerability but also a determination, a resilience, a commitment to change and trust that it would all be worthwhile.

What emerges from the discussion emanating from the choice of photograph is that each participant had taken a 'risk' to come into HE, this risk is financial certainly but also to their relationships (Pam-Yr3) and status within the groups that they originally belonged (Pog-Yr1) but especially a risk to their own ontological security about themselves and their place in society (Barnett 2007). In their decision to participate in HE, there is evidence of a complex decision making process which shows less concern about the rational elements of the decision and more evidence of the affective concerns in relation to decisions to participate in HE and concerns as to how they continue to negotiate these risks over the lifetime of their HE experience.

5.5.2. Dark Alley

The second photograph chosen by three of the participants is the 'Dark Alley', which was evocative of a feeling, an atmosphere, and a sense of foreboding.

Table 5-9: Photo: Fears 2: The Dark Alley

	<p>Owl-Yr4: <i>'This one. The risk, ya. Its dark, its cold, its trepidation, you don't know what to expect. And there is some light coming in. That's telling you that you want to do this, you want to achieve this but there's risk with it. So that, that conjures up the risk for me. I'm surrounded by this sort of blanket of darkness and I am trying to escape and I want to be in so I walk the pathway down and I have to walk down the rest to reach that. (Pointing to the light at the end.)</i></p>
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	<p>Edm-Yr3: <i>That sort of looks like someone that's lonely in a dark place like you know. And I don't want to sort of be back there so I mean failure. That looks, that probably doesn't mean failure but like the darkness and sort of the person on their own and stuff like that. To me you would be.. sort of everything is wrong. So probably that is the picture that stands out... But for this picture like to tell you it's dark, it's a person on their own, they are going up a hill like you know what I mean. Like everything about it is a strain to sort of go through the darkness, on your own, uphill. That looks like I said, it's a failure so that picture would sort of mean to me that I had let my kids down and at the moment that's not an option... That's probably why I picked that photo.</i></p>
	<p>Lea-Yr3: <i>This one. But it's supposed to be upside down. Supposed to be ... [and she turns the photograph upside down]</i> <i>That path probably is significant for me because it shows you know it's getting wider so that's you know, I started in very you know narrow road and its getting wider because I'm getting knowledge, I'm getting to know understanding, I'm getting learning, I'm getting you know more aware about myself, more aware about others. I am getting to know many skills and tools to you know, understand what I want.</i></p>

Owl-Yr4 choose the Dark Alley photograph which she felt represents her sense of being *'surrounded by this sort of blanket of darkness and I am trying to escape'*. HE is conceptualised as a means of escape from this darkness. The photograph elicits sensations of *coldness* and a *sense of trepidation* which symbolises the risk that she is taking, she does not know what to expect, but there is light at the end of the journey and she *'has to walk along that path'* and can visualise the outcome which is now very clear to her.

The same photograph represents for Edm-Yr3 the burden of the family responsibilities that he holds. He questions himself and his own sense of self-worth suggesting that he has let his family down and the photograph represents that meaning. He speaks of the *'lonely dark place'* and the sense of failure. It also provides a glimpse of the internal dialogue that he is engaged with in relation to the future trajectory of his life. He is hoping that the family and he will get back to where they *'used to be'* which is represented by being able to go on holidays and for himself to *'get back a bit of pride'*.

There is also the 'glimpse' of the need for ontological security in needing to *'find my boundaries'* and his sense from the photograph of the effort *'it is a strain to go through the darkness'* up the hill in this HE journey. The photograph clearly demonstrates the impossibility of understanding the mature students' experiences of HE without fully appreciating the complexities of the lives from which they engage with the process and the extent to which the journey is an emotional one fraught with risks.

For Gim-Yr1 who chose the photograph (**Table 5-7** above) the conceptualisation of the risk associated with participation in HE is also clearly perceived as being an internal process, according to Gim-Yr1 it's

'Not out there if you know what I mean. Not in financial terms, not in ... a waste of time or anything like that. It's just the risk that you're taking in here. [Pointing to his head] You know? If you don't succeed ... how will you take that mentally, you know, will that apply to your next project so to speak? (Gim-Yr1)

For Lea-Yr3 the photograph (for which she took ownership) represents her learning journey from a *narrow road and its getting wider because I'm getting knowledge, I'm getting to know understanding, I'm getting learning, I'm getting you know more aware about myself, more aware about others.* The path of learning for Lea-Yr3

represents a conceptualisation of learning as theory but also as change which impacts on the level of knowledge and also at the level of the person. The journey is conceptualised as opening up and is visualised as a broadening of understanding and possibilities a view of education which is inherently humanistic.

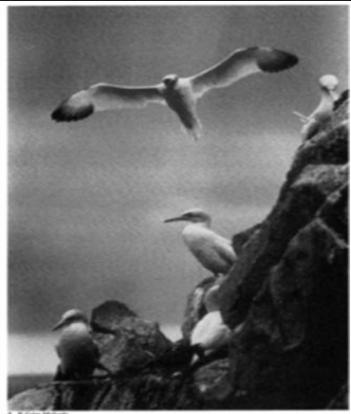
5.5.3. *Managing Multiple Roles*

Being ‘my age’ for these mature students is also characterised as being a time when as a student you have accumulated ‘multiple roles of responsibility, which carry considerable emotional and financial burdens’ (Osborne *et al* 2004, p.312) which is characterised by Owl-Yr4’s experience

and you see there’s another thing about coming back to College as a mature student, you are married, you have a husband, you have a mortgage, finance. That’s a huge thing as a mature student. (Owl-Yr4)

For the married male students in the group such as Edm-Yr3 who had become unemployed or were struggling in business, the role of the breadwinner was presented as a particular source of stress and pressure, which was apparent in his choice of photograph (above **Table 5-9**) while for Mar-Yr2 it is

Table 5-10: Photo: Watching over.

	<p><i>...the old the breadwinner of the household. The man of the household and he should be earning money, paying the bills and paying the mortgage and I kind of see this as the family and that’s me kind of over them and protecting them and minding them and maybe scavenging for food. Mar Yr2.</i></p>
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The internal dialogue is one in which traditional ‘breadwinner’ and gendered roles are apparent, the role of the man is to provide for his family and his sense of pride is tied up in being able to provide for them. The breadwinner role has been identified as a challenge for mature student participation in HE in previous research by Osborne *et al* (2004, p.310), and Marks (1999) where it was identified as a factor which impacts on the decision to participate in HE. The trend in Ireland is for an increase in unemployment to be particularly borne by the male population which is likely to make this issue and concern more problematic for the mature male students in particular.

The managing of multiple responsibilities or ‘role overload’ resonates with Darmody *et al* (2009) findings in research into part-time undergraduates in Ireland. Gibson and Waters (2001) have associated this concept largely with female students although, in my research, it was apparent that role overload impacted on all of the participants except Kim-Yr1, who was single with no specific caring responsibilities. Kim-Yr1 provided an interesting alternative perspective on the risk relating to participating in HE where she perceived the risk to be less in terms of being in college but more that she might end up in a mundane repetitive job.

Table 5-11: Photo: Fears and Pressures

	<p><i>As soon as I saw it! Ahm, it may is not a direct risk ... but that would be, like, my worst nightmare as a job and as the thought of wanting to become stable later on in life, sitting in an office, just being, ugh. (Kim-Yr1)</i></p>
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The child rearing role (**Table 5-12**) was identified as a particular challenge, there was a significant role of childcare for two of the male students (Pog-Yr1 and Mar-Yr2) whose children are young and whose partners are working. They have taken on extra parental duties which complicate their student lives through scheduling and study pressures. The impact of caring for dependent children was identified in previous research by Marandet and Wainwright (2009) which also recognised the complexity of the decisions to enter into Higher Education faced by students with dependent children.

Being a single parent adds to these child care responsibilities, and the practical pressures of juggling the life roles discussed earlier is visible in the photograph chosen by Eda-Yr2.

Table 5-12: Photo: Childcare and being a Single Parent

	<p>Eda-Yr2: <i>Okay, but what I see is a parent playing with the child. I am a parent now. Like now I am in school. I am supposed to drop my children in the morning and come here. Because of parking. I have to come out here at 8.25. So I have to come early to get good parking because I don't want that frustration of going about looking for parking. So I have to drop my children off at the Homework Club. Then they will drop them in school and pick them back up. So, time, you know. Time to play with them more. To spend more with them. That is limited. Monday to Friday ...</i></p> <p><i>But there are other, so many risks involved coming to College for me. The financial challenge is unbelievable with the recession now making it, because I don't get any support except the students' fund for my children so I have to pay everything myself. Thank God I am able to ... It could be worse.</i></p>
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In the 'juggling' of her various roles she is balancing the college experience with the challenges of being a mother to her children and there is always a sense of anxiety about being able to fulfil all these roles at once along with the financial challenges.

But there is a glimpse of her resilience and determination in the following excerpt

*So these risks I am suffering is just for three years. It's not for the rest of my life.
So I tighten my belt strong, and go for it for that three years. By the grace of
God after the three years I will be there for them. They will have me more.
(Eda-Yr2)*

The complexities of this care agenda for students participating in HE has been problematised in research by Alsop *et al* (2008), who argue that there is insufficient recognition of the complexities of interweaving care and education responsibilities in consideration of mature students participation in HE. For Eda-Yr2, her childcare responsibilities reflect the alternative pressures and pulls on her at a personal level, which is seen later to impact on her engagement patterns in HE. This 'struggle' mirrors the findings and arguments presented by Reay *et al* (2002) and subsequently by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) in research into the challenges of mature students moving into HE.

These two themes of the responsibilities and the roles are related to what it means to be a mature student; it entails roles of responsibility within a network of relationships and duties of care to others and financial responsibilities. These pressures influenced the decision to participate in HE, because issues of proximity to college, which facilitates the juggling of the multiple roles of the students was an important consideration. Pam-Yr3 noted that she '*wanted to carry on studying so I looked around, in particular [at this college] because it's close*'. This limited the courses available to the participants but it confirms that the decision making process is influenced by the embedded lives of the participants and is not just a

rational education focused decision to engage in HE. Although the accessibility of the college is an important consideration it is important to point out that all the mature students were still commuting to college from their home bases which in the case of Owl-Yr4 meant that she had *to get up every morning at 6.15am and out the door and I'm coming in and seeing the girls all sauntering in at 9 o'clock*. While Jac-Yr3 undertakes a journey of 1.5 hrs. each way every day.

In the context of the HEA (2011) and the current strategy towards rationalisation of colleges and programmes, this strategy could represent a particular challenge for college access for mature students in Ireland. For these mature students, there is a perceived limit to the geographic distance that they are willing/able to travel in order to maintain and manage the 'lifeload' and the multiple roles which they must manage. The 'anchoring' of the students to place has previously been identified by Mathers and Parry (2010) identifying that students were unable to attend colleges a distance from their place of residence because of the multiple roles that are intertwined with their self-identity.

5.5.4. Regret

The concept of regret is very clear from the excerpt above, although it is balanced by a pragmatism recognising the dilemma of the impossibility of putting 'old heads on young shoulders'.

Of course I regret that I didn't come in here at 19, you know what I mean, and have the brain that I have now, but you couldn't have it then, you know so, it could all have gone pear shaped for all I know back then. So it was a tinge of regret all the time that if I could have only benefited from all of this in my early 20's where could I have, what could that have led me to, you know. (Jac Yr3)

The regret was also in evidence from Pam-Yr3, Edm-Yr3, Owl-Yr4, Mar-Yr3 and Kim-Yr1 in particular where in Edm-Yr3's case the opportunity for a totally different

career path presented to him at 18 was scorned in favour of work on building sites, and in Mar-Yr3's case the opportunity of completing a college course was spurned and he dropped out of college. The existence of an awareness of 'lost opportunities' has influenced these mature participants attitudes to engaging with HE.

I still feel that I'm making better use of my time, even if I wouldn't be looking to climb the career ladder or anything else even at my age, like, probably ridiculous but just using my talents better. (Pam-Yr3)

The emerging story is of a lifetime of baggage, the minimisation of capacity and the real risks and fears with which the participants engage in their intra-personal dialogues. It is also accompanied by a commitment to their HE experience and an engagement with their educational process to ensure that the investment pays off. From a trust perspective what arises from the conversations is a complex dialogue related to sense of self, self-confidence and self-efficacy. The participants at one level were vulnerable and were taking a risk at many levels to engage in HE, which fulfils the basic principles of a situation requiring trust. The presence of vulnerability and the risk associated with mature students in HE has previously been identified by Davies and Williams (2001); for students participating on an 'access' programme; Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey (2009), looking at the challenge of being a carer and a mature student while other research into the mature student experience focused on issues of social class, race, ethnicity and gender (Archer & Hutchings 2000, Reay, 2002a; 2002b, Ball *et al* 2002, Brooks 2003, Crozier *et al* 2008, Noble and Davies 2009) and, in an Irish context (Lynch & O'Riordan 1998, Kenny *et al* 2010, Keane 2011). My research extends the understanding of the mature students lived experiences of these risks and assists in understanding what it means to be a mature student in HE in Ireland.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter deals with the emerging glimpses of the *intra personal* conversations and dialogues with which the participants were engaged in their decision to begin their HE journey. The research confirms Warmington's (2003, p.96) analysis of mature students in part time HE that 'revealed the world of mature students as self-evidently pitted with financial insecurities, family responsibilities, potentially fraught educational relationships'. The nature of the risk experienced by the participants was complex and varied from financial risks to more complex issues. What emerges from this chapter is a picture of vulnerability which the students struggle with through their HE experience, and also resilience on their behalf to manage this 'struggle'.

The trust model (McKnight *et al* 1998; 2001; 2002) that is being employed as a framework for this research speaks of trust in the institution, relationship trust and personal propensity to trust. My research by identifying and understanding the dialogue happening *within* the mature students, which is related to their felt sense of vulnerability and fear, and to their sense of uncertainty or ontological insecurity (Giddens 1991), represents a process best described as a challenge to the idea of *trust in oneself*. It suggests that although the literature on trust does not speak about self-trust, it speaks of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-belief, the role of self-trust is an important influence on the mature student's personal propensity to trust, and their ability to engage in and succeed in HE.

In the next section there will be an exploration of how this self-trust is influenced by the network of relationships that the students are entering HE from and the influence of the significant relationships that they build in college.

CHAPTER 6: THE TRUST RELATIONSHIPS

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the 'intra personal' process of sense making and the role of self-trust was explored, this chapter explores the significance to the participants of the *network of relationships* within which they are embedded and from which they embarked onto their HE journey. It begins with an investigation of the role of the *significant others* (partners/family) in the decision to come to HE and in continuing to participate, building on previous research (James 1995, Young 2000, Davies & Williams 2001, Reay 2002, Warmington 2003, Hunt 2007, Kenny *et al* 2010 and McCune *et al* 2010). This is followed by the exploration of the process of creating the new '*Us and them*' relationships built when they enter HEI and how they conceptualised these. It concludes with the identification of the significance of the inherently relational nature of the *academic relationship* with the lecturers with whom they have engaged. In the exploration of the range of relationships which are significant for the mature students they have identified the factors which enable them to distinguish between 'thick' and 'thin' trust relationships.

The chapter begins by exploring

1. The trust relationships from within which the mature students embark into Higher education, it looks at how they manage ***The dual life*** and the tensions created by the challenge of managing relationships with *Herself*.(the significant others in their lives)

2. It identifies the network of relationships created by the mature students within HE, and the identification of 'thick' trust relationships with other mature students identified as 'us', and 'thin' trust relationships with the younger students 'them'.
3. And finally the findings identified the trust *relationships with the lecturers* and the significance of these relationships in facilitating effective learning for mature students and identifies the factors which create these trust relationships.

6.2. The Visual element of the Chapter.

The visual content of this chapter includes only two additional photographs chosen by the participants to explicitly explore relationship issues. In this chapter there are less photographs represented, this has occurred as a result of the analysis process, where the content of this chapter emerged from the dialogue which was initially stimulated by the photographs included elsewhere. The original photographs stimulated a dialogue which continued past its original purpose to develop to explore other issues including issues of relationships and the role that they played in HE.

The conversation was allowed to develop by the researcher guided by the CGT approach to follow the meaning created by the participants but this creates an unevenness in the visual representation. In further research, (having identified the trust parameters in this current research) it could be purposeful to structure photograph choice around these emerging themes.



What emerges is a story of trust and trust building and a research outcome which develops the understanding of the interpersonal trust relationships, and their impact on how the participants adapt to the challenges of the HE environment. It identifies the criterion on which the trust relationships are built and the layers of relationships within which the participants experienced HE. This chapter confines itself to the examination of the interpersonal trust relationships while an exploration of institutional trust will be addressed in **Chapter 7**.

6.3. The Dual Lives: Significant Others

Though the learning experiences of students is conceptualised as an individual relationship with the HEI, the conversation of my research participants identifies an experience which is deeply woven into the web of their prior and existing life experiences. Within the group of participants some were in long-term relationships with partners and children and others (all female) were single parents while two people had no children. The narrative was about children, partners (Gim-Yr1, Jac-Yr3, Owl-Yr4, Pam-Yr3, Pog-Yr1, Mar-Yr2, Edm-Yr3) and family, and describes the significance of the network of relationships which the participants bring with them to the HE experience. It confirms previous research by Granovetter (1985), Pink and Leder Mackley (2012), Crozier *et al* (2008), and Jarvis (2004), which has identified these networks as elements of the social capital which operates both in providing support, and paradoxically in adding to the stress of participating in HE. My research adds the participants experiential and tacit understanding of this 'embeddedness', how it is conceptualised and its impact on their HE experience to the existing research literature.

6.3.1. 'Herself': The Partners

For the group with partners, the most significant relationships in terms of sustaining the participants in HE were their personal relationships with their 'significant others'. It was evident from their conversations that their partners had placed a great deal of trust in the participants and shared the commitment and responsibilities of their HE journey. The support that they gave is illustrated by Owl-Yr4: *'and it's all here, I know that, but God bless my husband. Oh God, only for him I don't think I would have continued'*. Two of the male participants referred to their partner as 'herself', which was interesting; the significance of the support of 'herself' was evident for Edm-Yr3.

Herself backed me to the hilt so I wanted to sort of pay her back for her trust in me as well and everything, as well so you know I mean, when you make a decision you have to sort of go with it. (Edm-Yr2)

The trust that she has placed in him and her decision to back him *'to the hilt'*, is an act done without expectation of repayment, it is not a rationally based trust but one associated with specific relationships (Couch & Jones 1997), the nature of such trust was of a type which resonates more with the concept of trust of Simmel and Frisby (1990) or Sztompka (1999) which is a 'sense of faith' placed by the other in you. But it has also been identified by the participants as a double edged sword creating a burden related to trust which is given unconditionally, discussed further below.

The importance of these supportive relationships is identified by Edm-Yr3 where he contrasts his own experience with the impact of an unsupportive relationship on the ability of a student to continue in HE.

So I took my claim and I talked to herself, she's really great. She said, whatever you want to do, which today is a big bonus, it really is you know. A friend of mine now he done the foundation course and his wife was at him constantly to give it up because she had two jobs to try and keep the house going and all and

he was coming into college and sort of he eventually had to give it up. Because you know he didn't have any sort of backing at home and he was constantly getting phone calls and pressure and all you know. But I am lucky enough, you know. (Edm-Yr3)

The extent of the trust can be understood in the context of the impact that their participation has on their family and relationships illustrated by Edm-Yr3.

When I was on the building sites I'd come home in the evening and I'd be tired, physically tired. But I would be able to maintain a conversation with herself like you know if I just flopped into the armchair or something. I could talk away to her for the whole night but now she even sees herself, I am mentally drained when I come home out of college and physically I am fine but I just go in and my brain just needs peace and quiet and when you are going into a house with a wife who has three young kids talking to her all day she wants adult conversation and the kids want to talk to you as well, so do you know what I mean. (Edm-Yr3)

The challenge of participating in college was conceived not as a physical challenge but a mental one for Edm-Yr3, his story illustrates the shift in his communication patterns and engagement with 'herself', and for mature students with children their HE participation means that their partner is obliged to take on a more significant role in parenting which, according to Gim-Yr1,

means then every Sunday Herself has to go and take them all. So it's an awful lot of pressure on her, she never gets a break. (Gim-Yr1)

The nature of the relationship is further complicated by the effect on their sense of self-worth brought about by their employment status and articulated by Pog-Yr1 as

I feel lesser as a person by not ... I think she does kind of mention the fact that she is the bread winner as such. We don't fight over it, things like that, because that's one thing, we are good, we are a very good team ... It's not good not to be working unless there is a good reason for it. It makes me feel, as I said already, I'm embarrassed to meet people. (Pog-Yr1)

Here there is the 'glimpse' of the tension created by not being the breadwinner in the family, and the impact of that change in status on his relationship with his wife.

In this extract from Jac-Yr3, he identifies the struggle of the other person in coping with his participation and acknowledges the 'pretty big statement' which making that sacrifice makes.

My wife works as well now ... She did her Masters here you know on [that topic] that type of thing. So the idea was that she was going to go on and do her PhD, so I was going out to start a business and do all that so the plan was that ... She did her Masters which was fine like and then, Bang, the whole thing came crashing down around her ears ... She is now working two or three part-time jobs, this kind of thing to keep you know. So am, you know, without that kind of support from somebody, you know, I wouldn't be sitting here doing this either, you know. So, you don't come here you know on your own...I am aware of the sacrifices she makes as well, you know, and but we have also done it because she knew that I needed to turn my life around, you know. She knew that this was going to be a very good thing for me to do that, you know. Is she peed off with me, does she F..k. me from a height, ya, absolutely. And does she still do it? Of course she does, you know. She gets fed up like and here's me swanning back after my day and you know in [this college] like ... So, you know, life ain't perfect, you know, that's for sure. (Jac-Yr3)

He reiterates the concept that 'you don't come here on your own you know' that the journey is one 'embedded' in their families and the sacrifices that they make to facilitate their participation in HE. The burden and the pressure brought about by these trust relationships is also evidenced in the subsequent comment.

But you know I have to be aware that if somebody does that for you, you know, that's a pretty big statement ... Somehow it puts a big responsibility on yourself and you actually think Jesus I don't want to blow this, I want to make this successful, you know ... Ahm, and then for my kids I know I have been absent quite a bit like.. (Jac-Yr3)

In addition to the impact on work, communication and role patterns that their HE experience has had on their relationships, Pam-Yr3 speaks of her concern that she might be

taking a leap in brains from away from my partner. And I thought he might, I don't know, feel a bit threatened maybe, or something by it ... when I was on placement I was meeting a lot of girls who were doing courses who wouldn't have come from you know they would be very much from disadvantaged areas and that and one girl said one day something about learning, loved learning she said ... and one of the other girls said "but your husband is supportive at least. Sure my fella said, you know [he said] it's great that you are getting smart, just don't get too smart". You know that type of thing, you know. And I

was thinking about that and thinking, ya, you know, I would hate that to become an issue that in some way that I feel superior or intelligent or something. You know what I mean? That type of thing. I was a little bit nervous that I was, because you know a lot of the reason I am doing the course is for myself, it's not just for a job down the road as well, you know. (Pam-Yr3)

The narrative raises issues of the consequence that education has in bringing about change and the consequences of that change on their lives and relationships and affirms the tension between the role of being a mature student and the previous roles played by the participants previously identified by Reay (2002) as a tension between maintaining the status quo within their existing comfort zone and a process of 'disaffiliation' (Reay 2002, p.410) from existing networks.

The participants felt the pressures which their engagement in HE has brought about and their challenge of renegotiating the trust relationships with their partners, the impact of participating in the experience of HE was identified by Owl-Yr4 as one of the areas that she was going to need to address when finished college

But realistically I know myself and my husband will have to try and work on getting our close relationship on sync, now I'm going to have to concentrate on that in the immediate future when I am finished because there is a lot that was being sacrificed for me coming here. (Owl-Yr4)

What emerged from my research was that for the mature students with partners, their participation in HE was facilitated by the existence of trusting relationships between themselves and their partners, but that this trust relationship created a sense of obligation and responsibility which in turn added to the pressures to complete the journey. The research supports the idea that the trust relationship with their partners and families creates a well of social capital from which they can draw in their experience of HE. In our understanding of the mature student participating in HE the 'embedded' Granovetter (1985) relationships confirm this as an important element, in our understanding of how mature students negotiate their

journey in Higher Education supporting Keane (2009) and previous research by Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011).

For the participants that were not in relationships, two were single parents where the negotiation of space related to their family responsibilities and is discussed in **Section 6.4.3** below, the participants without family responsibilities were able to participate in a different manner to all other participants for example both moved accommodation to be near college thus reducing some of the pressures of participation. The outcome recognises that the mature student cohort confirming Hunt (2007), is not uniform and suggests that further research comparing the trust experience between sections of the cohort could also contribute to our understanding of the mature student experience.

6.4. Us and Them

As a result of their vulnerability and the dislocation felt by the participants it was important to them to build relationships and create new social capital to help with their HE journey. Moving into HE introduced the participants to a whole new set of relationships, the most significant of which were with their peers, and with their lecturers. In this section the relationship with peers is addressed and the relationship with lecturers is explored further in **Section 6.5** below.

The importance of building relationships with their peers, identified in previous research (Keane 2009 and Gilardi & Guglielmetti 2011) was seen to have a number of dimensions, beginning at the most basic level, e.g. for the participants meeting others whom you can chat to and whom are identified as 'nice' (illustrated in **Table 6-1** below).

Table 6-1: Photo: Chatting with my classmates



The role of these new relationships and the importance of having someone to 'bounce off of' was articulated by Edm-Yr3

You really do. You need people to have something in common with, you know. I've seen over the last two years, not necessarily mature people but even kids coming in, and there was one girl, she was a Romanian girl, she came in and she never really made friends. A lovely girl you know, sitting in the front of the class, and you could chat to her during the class but when it came to breaks and all she would just go away. She never really sat with anyone and she got to just before last Christmas and she had to pull out. Just too much pressure, you know. No-one to compare things with, no-one to sort of bounce off of, you know, when you are having problems or something. (Edm-Yr3)

For the mature students in my research building relationships was important to their sense of commitment to their education, a factor which also applies to non-traditional students. The important role of the HEI in facilitating such socialisation has been identified previously (Thomas 2002) but for the mature students the standard socialisation systems are inappropriate because their pattern of engagement in HE is different than for the traditional student cohort. Aware of this challenge, some HE institutions have specific induction days for mature students which facilitates the identification of those who are *like me* and in making

connections very early on, although for my participants it was only when they identified those in the same class group that progress was made.

In the following discussion my research contributes to an understanding of the relationship building experiences of mature students, it identifies an interesting process of trust building related to the method of identifying who can be categorised as peers, and also explores the process of stratification of these trust relationships. From the outset, the participants conversations around the nature of their peer relationship was characterised through the use of the terminology of 'us' and 'them'. The 'us' being conceptualised as being the students 'the same as me' and the 'them' being the younger students.

6.4.1. *Us: The same as me: On Being a Mature Student*

In this section the process by which the participants identified those the same as me and its impact is explored, the process began in the very first days of entering the HEI, where the importance of building relationships and creating a network was particularly noticeable for the mature students. Pog-Yr1, who had completed a FETAC programme in preparation for coming to HE, had anticipated all the challenges in relation to coming to college except for the pain of the isolation that he felt at the beginning.

So what I wasn't prepared for, what I was surprised with, the fact that I was "Johnny No Mates" for a couple of ... for the first month, until I got to know my own classmates. (Pog-Yr1)

The narrative of the isolation and vulnerability of the first few hours and days was very clear among the entrants to HE but was reinforced by the clarity with which the third and fourth year students could all recall their own first day experiences. At the early stages the process of distinguishing or defining the members of the 'us'

category was initially based on age as the key 'signifier' and Lim-Yr1 describes this experience of coming to college for the first day.

Oh my heart was pounding, absolutely pounding and the first person, the first mature person, I saw I grabbed on to them for dear life (laughter) ... at the beginning. (Lim-Yr1)

This sense of desperation and relief resonated with Mar-Yr2 who still remembers his first day.

Well, the same thing, when I came back into college ... waiting for the day to start, looking around and I couldn't see anyone kind of my age group and I was standing in the corner going "what the hell am I doing here?" (Mar-Yr2)

This trepidation was also very clear for Gim-Yr1, who was just starting out the process of connecting to and attempting to fit into college, and he affirms the importance of building connections and creating a supportive network.

Well I suppose there are another two people in the class that are much the same age as myself ... and kind of buddied up if you know what I mean, and that makes it an awful lot easier ... the older guys that I'm with, are more or less of the same educational background as myself and they're finding it more or less the same degree of difficulty in certain subjects that we would find difficult, you know. (Gim-Yr1)

For him being with those who are identified as 'us' is a source of comfort and support in the early stages of the HE journey.

The early 'signifier' of age created a clear distinction between the mature student and the younger students, creating the 'us' and 'them' category, but this was later developed into an awareness of the distinctions that exist within the category of 'mature', for example, Owl-Yr4 says 'I call myself "mature mature" because of my age' while Pam-Yr3 states 'there are a few of them that are 23 but we don't really consider them mature students'. Pam-Yr3's view is reflected by Edm-Yr3 who says

The "mature, mature ones" I'd say there would be, I suppose, over 40 there might only be three of us or four of us, and then you'd have a good group between 30 and 40, and that's maybe the ones close to 30 as well you know that hang around with us you know, sort of. There is a nice spread. (Edm-Yr3)

For Kim-Yr1 (who is in her twenties)

But I think, because you're kinda late 20s, you are not a mature student, probably what they are thinking in their head, a mature student is probably somebody that's 40-up or 30-up or "oh my God, you are old". (Kim-Yr1)

McCune *et al* (2010) had earlier suggested that the mature students could be divided between two groups: those up-to, and those over, 31 years of age; my research reveals a further variance within the category of mature student over-30 which appears to relate to expectations of life experiences.

The concept of similarity related to age, and how it impacts on building trusting relationships was narrated by Jac-Yr3

It's not the same as when I worked with a team of guys, you had trust in the fact that the experience was a common one, that fellas were all around the same age, ... you know you are in the same reality. We have had a few kids so the trust is ... a much deeper one and you are much freer in yourself, you know. I mean there's no point in me talking to them about mortgages and kids and debts and the whole lot like. ... at type of this like but you know 20 years' time they will have a different view. So in that way the trust is different you know. (Jac-Yr3)

In this extract, the concept of 'the same reality' is one of the factors which facilitates an establishment of a common understanding related to having undergone the same life experiences.

In the early stages of relationship building in HE, Gim-Yr1 acknowledges the impact of the presence of role models (i.e. mature students who are in 2nd. 3rd or 4th. Year) in being able to 'identify' with others who are the same as me who have succeeded in the HE journey. For him the journey was described as

I suppose [it's] a bit embarrassing, you know, going back to school again, but am, they had to do it and they're going good so far they are nearly finished or, I think they're finished this year.... that's the impression I got you know. Don't throw in the towel just yet. (Gim-Yr1)

The narrative here is of uncertainty and then the reassurance provided by the presence of someone *like me* in providing a role model to emulate and to assist with persisting in college.

In the conversations with the participants it became apparent that as the year progressed a more discerning process of determining who is the 'same as me' emerged. The trust in 'us' then became based on factors described by Lim-Yr2.

I trust them because they pay attention. I trust them because when a Lecturer asks a question in the class you see how they listen and you see how they participate. Their participation shows you that yes, they are listening. They remember what they are taught. They know why they are here and even their own questions, the questions you ask Lecturers during a class shows how analytic or critical you are, you are thinking ahead so. But some will not ask questions the whole time. (Eda-Yr2)

and for Gim-Yr1 the trust is based on his experience with one of his peers whom he describes as

a very nice lady very willing to share everything she's, she'd learn or knows you know, she's not one of these keep it to myself, taking it to the grave type of thing. So am, and we get on great. (Gim-Yr1)

This is similar to Pam-Yr2's experience of sharing the work in assignments.

Ah, and we do that and that works and any double assessments we can do, we'll do them together. Am, he's pretty strong in some subjects ... he'd give me the benefit of his advice maybe. (Pam-Yr2)

But the connection with the others the same as me is not without its problems. In some courses where there was not a critical mass of mature students there were challenges to the search for someone to identify with

you know, because a certain amount of the old ... mature students, if you want to call it that way, are kind of battered you know and beaten by life and they are not, you know, a lot of them are not in a great space you know and whereas I am ... I can see myself as a 21 year old here nearly, you know that kind of way, and enjoying it and getting the best out of it. (Jac-Yr3)

Apart from this comment, the participants overwhelmingly identifying with the 'us' supports the idea that trust in those who are perceived as being the same as me is

easier to build. For the participants in my research the relationship with the other mature students was a key element in the quality of their learning experience in HE, and was important for the students.

My research confirms the role of 'Homophily' (McPherson *et al* 2001, p.416) and identification based trust (Nooteboom 2011, p.178) related to the sharing of a common cognitive frame, in building trust relationships between mature students. In other research, Mouw (2006), and Kenny *et al* (2010) also identified a tendency among social-classes to connect together which was not apparent in my research, though this may have been as a result of the relatively small numbers of mature students and the fact that the group tended not to further fragment into smaller groups, the lens of 'mature' for these participants appeared to outweigh any other conceptualisation of class or gender. The process of trust development resonates with McKnight's Model demonstrating that the nature of the trust relationship was initially based on similarity, depending on categorizing others who fitted into the same *Unit groupings* (McKnight *et al* 1998) based on age but later developing into a categorisation process based on the *reputation* that the student developed of sharing work and information. The trust developed initially because of the cognitive categorisation identifying with those the same as me based on age as a signifier, while subsequently the trust was based on clues about what one believes about the predictability, benevolence, integrity and competency of their peers. In the next section the role of *stereotyping* became apparent in the identification of the others, those not the same as me.

6.4.2. *Them*

The identification of what it means to be 'us' is also conceptualised as different to 'them' or others, the term 'them' in general began to be used as the language of other the 'not me' and in my research was generally employed to refer to the younger students.

The younger ones who we will greet when we come "Hi, Hi" but my closer relationships are with the mature. Like, do you know the younger ones will see old, you know, the age the experience, so. (Eda-Yr2)

Eda-Yr2 conceptualises the relationships as belonging in two different spheres (Freitag 2009) or layers of trust (Fukuyama 1995), the distance is represented by the polite way that the younger students are greeted and her perception is that they also identify this difference they

will see old, the age, the experience'. The presence of the young students is challenging; 'a load of young faces all around you, and it's nice to see them all that but you'd find, I'd find that a little bit intimidating maybe, you know (Gim-Yr1)

and for Lim-Yr2 the apprehension and the challenge of negotiation the relationship with the younger students was more pronounced

No, I actually expected rejection, really expected rejection. Because I'm a mature student they might be labelled as boring, reserved, and the fact that I don't smoke doesn't help me either ... (laughter). (Lim-Yr2)

The mature students position themselves as at a disadvantage compared to the younger students

they are in the system a long time so they are used to the structure of school like whereas I suppose as a mature student it's hard and with the family side of things ahm because, you know, trying to organise ... I envy their free time because their time, and not always, but their time is more or less their own. Ahm, whereas if I have an hour like yesterday if I had an hour I have to come home and start a dinner for the evening or I have to collect, say, [my child] from playschool and bring her to the child minder. (Pog-Yr1)

They are perceived to be much more familiar with the expectations of the system, and generally living a freer life with less responsibilities and more time to themselves. The freedom that the young students have is represented in the priority that they give to their social life and engaging with what is termed as the 'student experience'.

There are only about twelve in our group and like two matures we'll say and then the others are kids, you know ... They are very nice, they are, you know, there is nothing untoward in the class, there is no "them and us" kind of thing. Even though they tend to stick together because they are talking about the [local hotel] or whatever the night before ... you know I went on Facebook, ...I can go into a class with them and we say "well, how are you?", chat, and you know that kind of thing, so it's friendliness there. (Jac-Yr3)

The relationship with the 'kids' was not understood as being 'frictional' in the manner envisaged by Keane (2009) but the younger students were positioned at a distance from the mature students.

they have a different world. I mean, the world of babies and children and you know family life and going home cooking dinners means nothing to them so they wouldn't necessarily have the same connection. (Pog-Yr1)

Kim-Yr1, who is in her early twenties, sits at the intersection of this divide

It was probably a stigma I put on myself, this kind of everyone, you know not everybody, sorry, but a lot of the students are 18 or 19 and we wouldn't necessarily have that much in common perhaps, and they've got all this stuff they still need to get out of their system. Stuff that I've gotten out of my system years ago, so I felt that maybe we wouldn't be on the same level. [She goes on to say] But I have to give them some credit, like (laugh). I've been spending a lot of time, like, and there would be a few in my class in particular and they are actually, I should give them, they deserve the credit that I should have given them in the first place because they are lovely and they are not at all how I pictured.. But I think, because your kinda late 20s you are not a mature student, probably what they are thinking in their head a mature student is probably somebody that's 40 up or 30 up or "oh my god you are old". It's like, but you are not there. (Kim-Yr1)

She describes being at the intersection between the 'us' and 'them', and identifies her own stigmatising of herself as not being very useful at the outset.

The young students are 'stereotyped' as having an understanding of what HE entails having moved directly from secondary school, as being better equipped to manage the process, and being young that their primary motivation is to enjoy the experience. They are conceptualised as different ('them' the 'others' and the 'not me') which has moved 'them' into a different category or into a different layer of trust. The difference between 'us' and 'them' becomes clearly visible for the participants through the identification of their patterns of engagement in HE explored in the next section.

6.4.3. Engagement in Higher Education

The mature students' engagement in HE is characterised as one which, despite the juggling of their various responsibilities, and the weight of the baggage which they bring to this experience, their determination and commitment to ensuring a successful outcome becomes apparent. Their initial tentative engagement and participation pattern is evident in Kim-Yr1's observation about the mature students (she sees herself as being one of 'us' and an outsider at the same time).

Ya, cos, literally because you have been out of education for so long, you're, you're not familiar anymore with that environment ... you can see a difference in them between now and back, let's say, maybe two, three weeks after we started. That they would have been a lot quieter, they wouldn't have really participated in class, they would have kind of sat back and just gotten used to everything and how things are done, but now they are not. (Kim-Yr1)

For the mature participants, their engagement in HE is constrained by other pressures in their lives and they have been obliged to adopt pragmatic strategies to manage their educational experiences such as: engaging with HE as if it was a job.

I turn up at nine o'clock and I stay until five or six ... it's very difficult to find time to study ... Well, it's, it's difficult that way. As a mature student, am, I think with a family and a young family, ah it's harder to find the time to give to it. You know, so that's why what I can do within a 9 to 5 or a 9 to 6, I'll try to

cram it there, cause when you leave here the chances of you doing it or getting enough time on your own to do it is limited anyway. (Gim-Yr1)

The engagement outside these hours is compromised by their other responsibilities so they aim to have a perfect attendance pattern ensuring that no learning opportunities are missed and the library and learning resources are used during 'work' hours.

Outside of college attendance the participants demonstrated a disciplined pattern of study which began when their role responsibilities were completed.

when I go home it's kind of (another job) ya. Like, I know my wife is after being there all day and she has the kids all day. When I go home I have them then all evening, and it's 10 o'clock at night when they are in bed and you sit down and you actually have to get a cup of tea and relax and then you know you have to start into 5 hours of study. (Mar-Yr2)

So, and I think I probably would say that mature students definitely, well I would say the majority of us would put in a lot more work in on a whole, because we have had that time to kind of over-think, more than likely of everything, so it's like you put in the extra work and you don't feel like you have to deal with things like peer pressure and stuff like that. "Oh, come on out for a pint". "No I can't, I'm working". But if you are younger you are more inclined to go "Ah ya, OK, course I will". You know that kind of way? You are more easily swayed. So, I think that's a big advantage being a mature student, definitely, hands down. (Kim-Yr1)

This commitment and the challenges of managing the scheduling pressures of attending college are also accompanied by a requirement to schedule assignments to fit with their family schedule

that day they give an assignment, I start it that day. Every one of my assignments I start it that day ... and no matter how little but I start it that day. I would be ready a week before, that is if I am late because I don't like pressure. So everything that will give me pressure, I like, my children knows, I like to start it early to eliminate that pressure because I have to. (Eda-Yr2)

Apart from the scheduling of assignments, the role that the assignments, along with the marking and feedback they received was an important feature of the learning and engagement process for the mature students.

All that time that you spend there like you know trying to learn and trying to catch up, trying to figure out what's going on, when you go into your exam, you do your exam and get back maybe 80% or something, you think "yes, it's worth it"... it carries you on to the next time you are doubting yourself or the next time you are sitting at the end of the table on your own sort of you know on a Winter's night and the rain beating again the window behind you and herself in the sitting room (laughter) with the fire. You are sort of thinking "no, it's worth it, I need to keep going". So I suppose in that way the grades do keep you tipping along. (Edm-Yr3)

The grades acted as affirmation for the students and the dynamic of grading and the relationship between grades and effort was particularly significant for students beginning the journey.

and then I think as well when we start getting marks back ... you're like, there would be one or two people where they are like "Oh, I can't do this and I can't do that" and in-class work as well. I was like "no, you'll be fine, like, don't worry about it" and then when they get the results back, like, oh, and you can kind of see actually I can do it. That kind of reward system always works and I think helps build up that confidence. (Kim-Yr1)

The story illustrates the emotional nature of the mature student experience and the significance that they attach to the marks that they receive. In the following comments the different grade expectations of the mature students is visible.

70% of mature students I know are completely committed, and 65s in an exam isn't good enough; they worked hard, kind of, over 70, 75. If they get below that it's a big disappointment. Whereas the younger students they are just happy to get their 40 and pass. Scrape through. (Mar-Yr2)

The reason for this view is that according to Jac-Yr3

my college experience is actually coming here for me, to get the best I can out of it, you know, and to get the best for my family out of it afterwards. [I] got As and Bs, which I was delighted with, so it gave me great confidence ... so I knew I could do the course because the Maths now, and the Chemistry, were to be quite honest we were challenged and all of us mature guys were, and there is no two ways about it, we fecking swotted our asses off you know and attended everything, and every fecking tutorial and everything, you know, trying to soak it in. (Jac-Yr3)

The role of grades and feedback in contributing to the educational experience of students had previously been identified by Young (2000) while the participants comments are reflective of James (1995, p.462) assertion that 'assignment grades

had become a ruling definition' they act as affirmation, as confirmation of worth and as measure of progress for the students. In this way, they help the students to build their trust in their own capacity to succeed, but James (ibid.) also identifies the potential of grades as demotivators where the ruling college approach relating marks to the quality of your degree can act as a source of frustration when students cannot attain the higher marks.

The impact of a positive HE experience on the wellbeing of the participants, while not the specific focus of this research, was an unexpected outcome, and was evidenced in comments such as this one by Pog-Yr1, which would be a purposeful area for further research.

I felt really good about being in college. I felt I was kind of, I was very low for the last few years, not being working and I felt really the two previous years have been worth it so to speak. I've enjoyed getting exam results actually. That's all nice. (Pog-Yr1)

The vulnerability demonstrated by the mature students in the earlier sections is accompanied here by a strong work ethic and a commitment to achieving high standards. Over the period of their HE journey, early vulnerability and self-doubt was replaced by an emerging self-trust such that the students began to visualise themselves as successful students engaging with commitment in HE, their conversations, resonating with McCune *et al* (2010, p.701) offered 'richer and more sophisticated accounts of the significance of their studies for their careers and wider lives', a factor which, he argues, explains why mature students engage so actively in their studies. My research outcomes run counter to a narrative that suggests that widening participation in HE will cause a dumbing down of the standards in HE, also challenged by Haggis (2006). The mature students in my research, while challenged by the complexities of participating in HE were

committed to ensuring that they would get the maximum benefit from their experience and need not be viewed through the lens of the deficit approach to the WP agenda. Instead they affirm Keane's (2009, p.93) research recognising that the nature of the mature student engagement is qualitatively different than that of their younger counterparts and that they are 'less likely to adopt a surface or superficial approach to their learning'. The meanings generated by the research participants provide a glimpse to a different type of learner in HE very different to many of the 'traditional students' coming straight out of school, and the theme of 'successful completion' and the commitment of students to being successful was very strong in the interviews with all the participants. The discussion also identifies that the nature of the engagement and the risks that the participants have taken to engage with HE encapsulate their entire being and not just elements of their sense of self.

6.4.4. *Frictional Relationships*

One of the outcomes of the different engagement patterns discussed above was the creation of an element of what Keane (ibid.) describes as 'frictional' relationships between the mature students and the younger students. In the earlier discussion the mature students were clear that they were different from the younger students, but they generally adopted a benign attitude towards them, however in the context of participating with them in a learning environment, such as the lecture or in tutorials some 'frictional relationships' (ibid. p.93) developed. These tensions arose because of the different patterns of engagement and resulted in a perception of the young peoples' behaviour as.

Annoying. Ahm, it's aggravating coming in late and, ahm, talking and chatting and chattering away in the class. It's very aggravating, ya. Because what I would love to say to them is you would really you know you don't want to be in my position. (Pog-Yr1)

The mature students are sometimes frustrated by the non-participation of the younger students - 'The younger ones -they won't ask questions' (Lim-Yr2), and for Eda-Yr2 it is simply that

you know what you want, so you are different from the younger ones because you can see them most of the time the assignments, the younger ones there are always late in submitting their assignments. You see them on that day, the due date, huddling in the library, running up and down.

Keane (2009, p.89) also identified the frustration which the mature students experienced with the younger students 'apparent lack of willingness to actively participate'. These different patterns of engagement and the potentially frictional relationships are very apparent in the context of working in groups. The response to participating in group work with younger students resulted either in avoidance, or alternatively taking responsibility for the group and their learning. The issue of self-responsibility appeared to be at the core of the difficulties relating to group work.

Say if you have a project to do, a very simple thing, and you have two or three people doing a project like, and I'm saying "right, let's meet today, let's have a you know blah blah blah". And that's how we do it and we get it done and there's this guy you know saying "ah no I can't do this" and I just say "f.k off - go". ...they are not that straightforward with each other, whereas I am kind of, like well, "ah no, if you think I'm going to be sitting here doing your work for you, you know, forget it mate", you know. This is if we have to do this we can all do a bit of it, share the load, you know, the usual. It's a mature attitude to the thing whereas the boys are well, you know, trying to get them to meet. They don't turn up, you know this kind of thing. (Jac-Yr3)

The outcome of these behaviours was a breakdown in trust

So, ya, you couldn't trust them in that way, you know, some of them you couldn't, but others you could trust that the minute somebody says OK we get together with [X and Y] and someone else and you say "great" 'cos you know [X] will do it and you know [Y] will do it and you know, you know and again like that would, I would say there is a 60:40 split in our group you know. 60% of them I would trust that they would do the right thing, you know, just to get it done and I don't mean that you know just in terms of task stuff ... I see things

obviously quite differently so trust, trust is different in that way then. The younger students look up to more mature students for guidance and for support. (Jac-Yr3)

The trust between the mature and younger students correlates with their commitment to deliver to the highest standards, the students that can be trusted are those that are willing to take responsibility for their own learning and demonstrate the same level of engagement and honesty and integrity as the mature students. While Jac-Yr3 adopts a distancing response to the younger students engagement patterns, some of the mature students adopted a parenting pattern and the adoption of a strategy of almost double-doing the work to ensure that they achieved their marks. This pattern was employed by some of the respondents as a tool to ensure that the group work fitted in with their own agendas.

The younger ones who don't have family, like children, responsibilities: "I have children, so I want to start early so [I talk to the young students] when will it be okay for us to meet again and decide on what topic so that everybody can start their research". It could be two days or three days, it depends on their decision. (Eda-Yr2)

Here she organised and scheduled the meeting times to ensure that the work would get done. She adopts a pragmatic approach to engaging with them and in the end she finally worked with one other student from the group to get the work completed.

Most of the work was done between me and him. Then the other two girls ... if we had waited for them we wouldn't have completed the assignment on the right time. So I considered but (pause) ... he needs only a little support, little push. The others need more help, or to strangle them, for them to really do something. Because they want to do it and the last minute "I don't want to do" at the last minute. (Eda-Yr2)

Her frustration was visible in her interpretation that she might need 'to strangle them' to get them to do the work. It appears that in addition to all the other

pressures that they are experiencing in HE the mature students are also potentially burdened by the responsibility for the learning of the younger students as well.

The contrasting sense of responsibility between the 'us' and 'them' is clear in the understanding of being a young student where 'the only real thing that they really have to get used to is the fact that all the responsibility is on them. Where we have, I would say mature students have that in the bag' (Pog-Yr1), this is very interesting since so much of teaching and learning theory in the context of HE refers to and advocates the use of group working and the importance of self-directed learning, though Lizzio and Wilson (2006), has suggested that if self-managed groups are to be key in academic learning there needs to be a better understanding by teachers of the social nature of these group processes. What my research identifies is that mature students are happy to participate in groups where they feel that they can trust the other members of the group, the decision to trust is based on the commitment that the other members are willing to make to get the work done, there was no suggestion that the capacity of the other members was a factor in the development of trust, just the commitment. This commitment connects to two of McKnight's (1998) trust beliefs of *Predictability* and *Integrity* which is understood to encompass issues of honesty, reliability, dependability and credibility which were not visible in the behaviour of the younger students from a mature student perspective and my research has contributed by 'actively, seeking to uncover and understand the reasons behind the tension that mature students experienced with younger students'. Keane (ibid, p.93) related this to their different engagement patterns in the classroom and in especially in group work, in my research there emerges a narrative of a clear distinction being made in terms of self-identification,

as being 'different' than the younger students, but there was also evidence of a respect for the concept of being 'young' and an emerging pattern of 'parenting' the younger students and not just among the female parents in the group. The emerging story was one of a layering of trust levels from the *Us* and *within the Us* and also *Them* and *within the category of them*. The distinguishing factors related to issues of commitment, similarity and shared experiences which distinguished those that experience different levels of trust. In the next section the relationship between the participants and their lecturing staff was explored. These layers are represented in Figure 6.1 below.

6.5. Relationship with Lecturers

In the context of their HE experience the relationship identified by the participants as holding most significance for them along with the peer relationships in college was the relationship with the lecturers. Earlier research by Kenny *et al* (2010) had identified the significance of the encouragement and support provided by staff to mature students, my research extends those findings by developing the understanding of the mature students' interpretation of these relationships using the concept of trust as an anchor. Lim-Yr2 proposes that

trust is important in Lecturers. It is important. Because I think if you trust someone at least you have some kind of idea that if something goes wrong or if you do come across some kind of challenge that when you build a relationship with them a professional student/lecturer relationship that if something goes wrong they can keep it confidential. It's very, very important. Even like ahm, how to say this, but it's a different kind of trust though because you might get on, say, you might get on well sure but you wouldn't, but it's more important to get on than it is not, if that make sense? And if you don't keep the trust then we are in trouble.

The significance and the nature of the relationship with the lecturers was articulated by Kim-Yr1 as

right now we have a brilliant dynamic, we get on well with our lecturers, we can have a laugh, we can kind of, you know, because it's a college environment, it's not as structured as it would have been in school, so rather, like as lecturers kind of point out before we start, "I'm not here to tell you this, that and the other, I'm here to help you to figure it out on your own". And you can kind of do that when, in that environment a lot easier when people get on and we have a laugh together. We have debates and there's no aggression or anything, everyone is just kind of bouncing ideas off each other.

The participants were very clear about the positioning of the relationship which they identified as a *professional student/lecturer* one where you *get on* with each other. The understanding of the boundaries that exist in the relationship was articulated by Owl-Yr4 in

Oh ya, the Lecturers are very important. But then, you know, they are coming in, they are doing their job, and that's it. You don't go out and have coffee and tea [with them], that's their job!

and by Lim-Yr2 *'if a Lecturer is there and they are helping you and they are chatting away, you know, at the end of the day they are not your friend, they are your Lecturer'*. The bounded nature of this 'academic relationship' was articulated clearly by Jac-Yr3 when he stated

but I'm sitting there like listening to this guy pontificating, that's all he was doing like and I'm going well I didn't come in here to listen to this. Now if I wanted to go to the pub with you and have a pint, he is a very nice guy and I get on very well with him, but I'm sitting there going I'm not learning anything from you.

Lea-Yr3 conceptualises the relationship as that of adult teaching a child, (**Table 6.2** below) she positions herself as the child and the adult showing and teaching her.

Table 6-2: Photo: The Teaching/Learning Relationship

For me it's a picture what explains kind of for me being a child and for somebody else like, you can see from the picture a parent or older brother or a friend, like you know. An adult, so that's where I started probably and that's what you know process of the ... you finding something important in the picture because adult showing something for the child. So for me it's very good. It's probably still, I'm not in the final year or I think I didn't finish my education yet so that picture is very good at explaining that I am in the middle of finding something for me. (Lea-Yr3)



By positioning herself as the child she views the relationship as unequal, the adult is the expert and the child is being taught.

6.5.1. Issues of Power

Her positioning also resonated with Edm-Yr3 who provides a glimpse of how the power relations between lecturer and participant is conceptualised '*like I said, they probably come back down a little bit towards our level as well*' (Edm-Yr3). The observation is indicative of how the power relationship is understood, the lecturers being up there and the participants are 'down at our level'.

For the participants the power of the lecturers was particularly visible in the context of marking assessments, while earlier (in **Section 6.4.3**) the role of feedback in building the self-confidence (James 1995) of students was identified; its impact and the role of the lecturer in marking assignments was well understood by the students.

At the end of the day like the Lecturer is kind of making a mould of your shape and your career in College and if you don't trust the Lecturer to mark it appropriately, if you haven't gotten a good mark and if you don't trust them to mark it fairly ..it could blow out of all proportion.... (Lim-Yr2)

[and later he observes that] Kind of like the Lecturer needs to basically deliver the class and which is more important they actually can be the ultimate decider, whether you pass or fail a subject, because like you might ahm, for example, between your first class honour second class 2.1, 2.2 if a Lecturer is having had a run in with you. Or you have had a run in with a Lecturer for whatever reason say something happened and then when you get back the 2.2 and you feel you should get a 2.1 because they are the ones with control. (Lim-Yr2)

But for Lea-Yr3, her trust in the lecturers to mark independently was without doubt.

The results in my, you know, the results from the, from assignments probably I, you know, I just think Lecturer is giving me the marks that I earn. That's it. It's not influencing. (Lea-Yr3)

The issue of power in trust relationships dates back to Luhmann (1979) and has been of particular relevance in the context of Higher education where the insecurities of the current change environment impact on the positioning of academics (Clegg 2008a, and Giroux 2010) on the role of power in accountability systems (Allen 2003) and in implementing change, (Klein, 2010, Hoecht 2006 Stensaker and Harvey 2011). The power of the lecturer is also visible in the conceptualisation of the lecturer as a 'gatekeeper' in allowing the participants access to the required information.

Because of what I have risked to come back and if they are not willing to give me the information I need then they, they are like they are ruining my chance of actually doing something and getting somewhere. (Mar-Yr2)

This view was affirmed by Pog-Yr1 where the nature of the reasons for this trust is clear.

It matters because I want to come out of here say at the end of my three years with the best possible result that I can get because it's going to be a very competitive market when, you know, over the next few years ... so ultimately for me to achieve that I need to be able to trust my Lecturers. You know, their knowledge, their own experience that they can help me as well. (Pog-Yr1)

They are perceived as the holders of the knowledge and information which the mature students need to access in order to get their qualifications. This resonated also with Gim-Yr1, who wants the lecturer to

no, literally that, to give me the opportunity to get an education. Ahm, but as a mature student so I trust that they know what extra baggage can come with that, and that they can [pause] not accommodate but, ahm, be aware of it, I guess.

The participants' conceptualise a clear relationship boundary between themselves and the lecturers which is reinforced by their understanding of the assessment and gatekeeper roles in their learning experience. These power relationships in HE and their impact on the learning experience of the students identified in my research has been presented as exclusion by Lynch (1997) who argues that 'the superordinate-subordinate relations are built into the structures of institutions and systems'. While Haggis (2002, p.11) had also previously pointed to the difficulties created by these 'implicit power relations' and the 'different 'stance' that teachers and learners take up in the teaching-learning situation' as being part of the difficulty in addressing the barriers faced by disadvantaged (including female) mature students'. In my research there was recognition of the boundaries and the potential for power plays, however in terms of a trust relationship they also identified factors which contributed to their trust in the lecturers which are discussed in the next section.

6.5.2. The elements of this Trust Relationships

The factors which contributed to trusting the lecturers related to both explicit elements related to the role of the lecturers as teacher and then some more implicit elements related to what Tierney (2006) speaks of as a culture of trust.

The explicit elements related to the lecturers capacity to teach which Jac-Yr3 identifies as the *professionalism* of the lecturer. This professionalism is constituted by the existence of the following elements

I expect them to be there, I expect them to have their notes, I expect them to have you know notes that have been thought through, that they make sense to us, that they are down to a level, you know, I mean, they are down to a level that we understand you know and the course content and all that kind of thing. And yes, so you expect them to have put the work into that. They deliver it reasonably properly, you know ... you are not going to like all of them but you know you do trust that when that they do deliver, that they do the right thing. And once they do that then whether I like them or not it doesn't bother me they have done the right thing. It's now up to me to go away and try and learn, you know learn from what they have given us. So ya, I would have huge trust in them. (Jac-Yr3)

This theme resonated with the other participants who spoke of the trustworthiness of the Lecturers being determined by whether they

are confident in how they are delivering their lectures. Their lectures and also you know the material they give you for tutorials... I trust them, you know, in that sense. (Pog-Yr1)

The importance of the *skill of teaching* in facilitating the trust in the lecturers was articulated by the participants, and illustrated by Pam-Yr3, who distinguished between the competence related to knowledge, and the competence of teaching; the lecturer with knowledge competence was recognised as such, but the teaching competence was perceived to be more significant in facilitating the learning of the student.

I suppose I would have to specify particular Lecturers, really ya. You know that ahm, like our Psychology Lecturer is, there is no doubt everybody who has any lectures with her, she is top dog, she is brilliant, she's really good. She is a great teacher and everything else, really helpful. You could certainly trust her. So one or two others, well, one this year and one last year, who were not very good teachers. They are very knowledgeable. Really know their stuff but can't put it across to a student. So from that point of view I wouldn't trust that they are giving me all the information I am going to need, do you know what I mean? (Pam-Yr3)

The relationship between the knowledge and delivery skills of the lecturers was explained by Edm-Yr3.

Some of them are people that's over educated, really, really brainy people but don't know how to convey it to people, you know. They really don't. They just sort of, they can't be bothered But I have, basically I expect the college to sort of ya, come good with the lecturers. (Edm-Yr3)

For Eda-Yr3, one of her learning challenges was the different teaching styles of the lecturers

Yes, they have different ways of approach. Yes, very different way of approach which doesn't bother me as I told you I am here to learn and that is what I am here for.

For Lea-Yr3, the competence factor also related to her perception of the *previous experience* which speaks to the *credibility* of the lecturers

that all staff is very, you know, they have very huge experience from practical point because all Lecturers were you know were working before somewhere connected with like you know real place, real world so that practical experience very important.

Pog-Yr1's judgement on the quality of the knowledge of the lecturer is that '*I feel there's 100% trust that I could talk to them and that you know that they would solve my problem*'. In addition to the explicit beliefs about the competence of the lecturers in the context of the teaching/learner relationship, my research identified that decisions about the trustworthiness of the lecturer was built on tacit elements or 'clues' about the lecturer (Sztompka 1999). In the following discussion the factors which the participants identified in making these decisions are identified.

The participants' decision to trust was built through their student experience of their *interactions* with their lecturers.

I know what this trust is for me, that I can come and ask and won't be judged on my question or I have, well definitely I have less knowledge than the Lecturers have.. You are not judged on your knowledge, on your background, on your, you know, on any. You are not judged in the college from the lecturer's

point of view. ... I didn't experience exclusion or you know I didn't experience not understanding. (Lea-Yr3)

The *absence of judgement* by lecturers was an important element in Lea-Yr3's experience, her confidence that the lecturer was able to meet her in an accepting respectful relationship was significant. The participants interpreted this absence of judgement through the demeanour with which the lecturer engages with this process.

I feel from the interaction in lectures and tutorials that you know if you ask a question there is no impatience, there is a kind of a right well, we will stop now and then we will continue it on. If they are not in a position to continue it on they tell you they will talk to you at the end of the class, they will talk to you before another class, they will talk to you in tutorial and they do. (Pog-Yr1)

The importance of the *accessibility to lecturers* as evidenced through their communication systems was a key element in the trust decision and was valued by the participants. The trust is made visible in

how they make themselves available to you in Tutorials particularly, ahm, the information they give you, their own contact information ... you can arrange a meeting with any of your Lecturers if you want to. Ahm, but it does come across very strong. (Pog-Yr1)

This is reaffirmed by Jac-Yr3, who identified one problem lecturer but

other than that everybody else has lived up to the trust I would have given in them in that they know what they are talking about, they will help you if you come up you know

and Eda-Yr3 supports the significance of the accessibility

The lecturers are supportive because ... after the in-class lectures you can talk to them, email them. You can communicate with them through emails ... about any particular problem.

The process of sense-making is subtle; Lea-Yr3 observes that even when the question is not immediately relevant/appropriate, *the tolerance* shown by the lecturer impacted not only by the student asking the question, but on the entire class group.

Ahm, it was you know friendly and it was nothing taken, you know negative if you didn't know something. It was always explaining, always encouraging you. Not you only ... you would see that, you know. If somebody misunderstood something they were asking questions. Maybe sometimes questions not related to the topic at all. You know, but I remember that. I, you know, I remember that and the Lecturer never showed that the person who asked it, was you know out of context. It was kind of way of putting that person and all group in the right way. (Lea-Yr3)

This is instructive, for her, trust was built through her observation of how others are dealt with, this approach to understanding trust building resonates with Sztompka's (1999) analysis that trust exists in the interface of the system structures, when it operates as 'a lubricant for social systems' (Evans *et al* 2011, p.171).

Similarly the impact of *care shown by the lecturer* was also recognised by the participants.

Ya, when you get a Lecturer who will come up to you and say "I haven't seen" (you or) or "I haven't seen such and such, do you know if they are okay at home" or stuff like that and then kind of seeing if you can find out from their friends that they are okay.. It's nice to see Lecturers come up and saying that to you. (Mar-Yr3)

For Gim-Yr1 the *vocational commitment* of the Lecturer evidenced in her going 'out of her way' to help was appreciated by him.

Well the lecturers are great, lovely to talk to, am, even the maths lady goes out of her way and gives us an extra class to try and bring us up to speed you know? ... well it's the ... the encouragement I suppose, (Gim-Yr1)

For Kim-Yr1 there was a need for the lecturer to be *aware of the baggage* with which mature students come to HE

It is just an awareness more than anything. It's not, I don't, I'd say the majority of mature students don't want to be treated any differently than a younger student or don't want any, you know, you are just at the end of the day a student like everybody else. But the, I suppose, the awareness probably would play a very big part. (Kim-Yr1)

The significant processes challenge the current instrumentalist accountability systems which do not do justice to these professional behaviours and which are not amenable to inclusion in spread sheets. According to Hoecht (2006, p.543) this is

the current crossroads of higher education, the intersection where the 'Tension between accountability, professional autonomy and trust' is visible. At this crossroads the traditional view of the role of academic staff and academic freedom which has been central to academic life (Tierney 2004) comes under pressure. The traditional view of what it means to be a 'professional' is defined by Barber (1963, p.672) as having four essential attributes

a high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge; primary orientation to the community interest rather than to individual self-interest; a high degree of self-control of behaviour through codes of ethics internalized in the process of work socialisation, and a system of rewards (monetary and honorary) that is primarily a set of symbols of work achievement and thus ends in themselves.

This view of being an academic is an approach built on a system of trust in which, in a school context, Brien (1998) and Bryk (2003) argue that through the creation of trust, and through the professional behaviour of participants, ensures that the required educational outcomes will be achieved. Their research identifies that institutions that foster a culture of trust which includes a respect for individuals, sincerity, honesty, community service and a commitment to the professions clients and includes more formalised systems 'including codes of ethics, education programs, disciplinary bodies, adjudication and interpretation bodies will all work together to engender and articulate a professional ethic' (Brien 1998, p.404-5). Through the creation of an environment of trust, Bryk (2003) evidences that teachers went the extra mile for the students and engaged in reform because it was the 'right thing to do' which is very relevant in the context of the changes being implemented in HE in Ireland which creates a culture of uncertainty and conflict in HE organisations which I argue, is not conducive to creating a trust environment. In this new environment the traditional values of being a professional academic will

come under pressure and will impact on the provision of the trust factors identified above.

6.5.3. Fragile Trust

The fragility of this trust relationship was also identified by the participants, for Lim-Yr2 it disappeared in one single incident, as described

We had had a debating class which got a little bit heated. It got a bit hot headed at times so the trust was gone. That's what happens. The trust crumbled and that was that.

Distrust emerges from the experiences of the students

The difference is, I come out of the lectures and I don't feel I have learned an awful lot. I feel that the Lecturer...I wonder myself, if the Lecturer is confident in themselves. I think they know the material inside-out, but I feel that if you challenge them, and none of us know enough to challenge, but I feel if they were challenged I think you could knock them off their game. I don't know it's, I don't feel, I don't look forward to the lecture as such. There is a tendency to race on, and not cover points or come back to a student on a point, say, 20 minutes later. (Pog-Yr1)

The participants were also very clear about the lecturers who were not to be trusted (academic trust)

They plug in their memory stick, they set up, up it comes on the big screen in front of you and they say "right, we were talking the last day about this, now we are moving on to this. This is what this" and it's just a progression straight through the class. The memory stick is taken out and they are gone, you know. (Edm-Yr3)

The absence of care is frustrating, and for Mar-Yr2 feeling the message of "go on, off you go, read it if you want, if you don't want I don't care. I'm getting paid tomorrow anyway", results in a breakdown in trust.

The participants were cognisant of the complexities of the lecturer relationship but some interestingly theorised that lecturers adopted a caring stance towards the students because the students' results were somehow used as a measure of the effectiveness of the lecturers!

They are not just there to do their job and throw the information at you. They actually seem to care if you pass or not. Maybe because they think it could be a reflection on them if you don't ...The fact the college then is so small, and everybody knows each other, and that the culture is there from when it first started that you must look after your students and kind of mind them. (Mar-Yr2)

The academic trust relationship with the lecturers is clearly different than that which one might have with friends, nor is there any expectation that they should be. The lecturer is viewed as someone who is employed to do a job and in doing the job there is an expectation that they have the *ability* to carry out their duties and that they will behave with *benevolence, honesty, integrity and predictability*. This mirrors the expectations that relate to professionalism in the trust literature but what was striking was the clarity with which the participants expressed the certainty of their trust in the lecturers.

6.5.4. Learning and Teaching: A reciprocal trust relationship

The importance of preserving these trust factors and their contribution to creating a positive trust environment impacts on the core work of the HEI, i.e. the teaching and learning experiences of the mature students. The relationship between the lecturer and the teacher is conceptualised as iterative in nature, it is impacted by the student's belief in the lecturer which in turn impacts on their learning potential.

like if I got the feeling that a Lecturer wasn't there and believed in their ability and that they didn't believe in me, I don't think I would believe in them or the course either. If I didn't get the feeling that they are actually there to help me and wanted to help me I would find it very hard to actually listen to what they had to tell me. (Mar-Yr2)

The role of the affective belief about the motivation of the lecturer represents the

'invisible' aspects of the formal learning process include the unconscious holding and modelling of particular values, the feelings of learners and teachers. (Haggis 2002, p.211)

and its impact in creating a reciprocal learning response is articulated by Pog-Yr1

I do think that any of my lecturers want me to do the very best that I can do and they are going to do their level best but ... they expect effort from me as well and if I don't put in the effort they are going to concentrate on the people that are putting in the effort and I accept that.

The impact of this trust relationship was significant throughout the participants' experience, but especially at the beginning of the journey when they were feeling most vulnerable. For Mar-Yr2 the commitment shown by the lecturers reinforces his obligation to fully engage with the learning process. The lecturer who commits to

the hour tutorial, they will also be in the canteen for an hour after if you go in to talk to them. Like you know they are committed and you know they are giving you the best that they can give you, they are giving you their heart and soul. And you in return will give back as much as you can. (Mar-Yr2)

The reciprocal nature of the contract was reiterated by other participants such as

Owl-Yr4's statement

It's a two-way system. It's not just that they are excellent. It's me as well. What I give to them and what they give back to me. You know, I'm not here wasting anyone's time and I'm serious about what I am doing and I get good enough results and they are doing a good job.

and also Jac-Yr3 stated that

The competence and the fact that they are there doing the right thing. They are here to lecture, they are here to give you the information, to facilitate your learning is the way I see it, you know. I don't see them as lecturing to us like. They are giving us the information and the trust is between us insofar as if you give me the information in a reasonably right way I will take it up, I'll do the best I can with it and I'll regurgitate it again then into a reasonable form, you know that kind of way, from my understanding of it, not your understanding of it, you know, but from my understanding of it and I think that's you know, they are not trying to make little clones of themselves you know which is an important thing.

My research has identified, following Kenny *et al* (2010), the importance of the lecturers' belief in the students, and the impact of that trust on the participants' experience of HE. This reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner is, I would argue, characteristic of a vocational commitment to the students, and a teaching model which fits with Barnett (2007) and Buber's (2000) concept of respect and service. It is also a process which facilitates student retention and their

successful journey through HE. My research supports Adcroft's (2010, p.480) suggestion, that the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning can act as a counterweight to the movement towards commodification and de-professionalisation identified previously by Adcroft and Wills (2002). The argument is that a focus on teaching facilitates the creation of 'competence based' trust which is in turn a key element in the decision to trust an organisation.

My research provides an insight into how this 'competence' or professionalism is understood and interpreted by the mature students in HE and the importance that they allocate to this work. However, since work by Hunt (2007) and Robertson and Bond (2005) identifies that for career academics teaching is not regarded as the key to progress within the system and the role of the academic as professional is highly skewed in favour of research while lecturing and tutoring is regarded as a 'must do'. There is a real challenge in maintaining a focus on the teaching and learning element in HE (Clegg 2009, Adcroft 2010), but my research confirms its significance in creating trust relationships which create a reciprocal teaching/learning dynamic which benefits both lecturer and mature student. Tierney (2003b) identifies this dissonance between the declared mission statements of university systems, who explicitly commit to excellence in teaching while simultaneously affirming the priority of the research agenda. My research points to the very significant role which the academic plays in the mature student experience and yet this element of the role of the academic remains under recognised. The significance of the teaching agenda will be further pressurised in the context of the limited Government funding for HE, the demand for increasing numbers, which requires the HE institutions to pursue research funding as a matter of priority.

6.6. Conclusion

The focus of this section has been on the relationships which the participants have identified as significant in their HE journey. The research provided evidence of a layering approach to trust reflective of Fukuyama (1995) and Sztompka's (1999) approach and suggestions of a particularised trust relating to Freitag and Tranmüller (2009) model such that the students identified different trust relationships related to different trust referents. The research has been able to identify characteristics which enable the participants to distinguish between the layers of these trust relationships (**Figure 6.1**, below). In their HE journey as the students move to participate in HE, new trust relationships, evidence of an expanding social capital, are created.

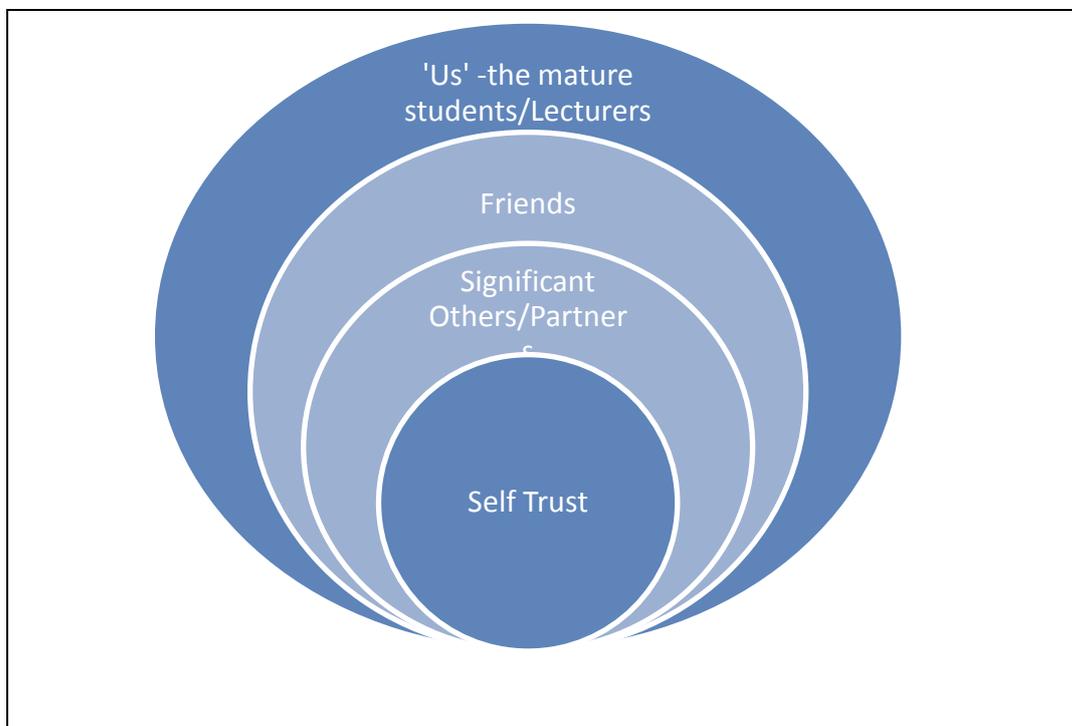


Figure 6.1: The Layered Trust Relationships for Mature Students in HE

The model which is an adaptation of Fukuyama's (1995) Layers of Trust Model (**Figure 2.4**). At the centre of the model I have placed the Trust in self which has been important element emerging from this research. There is a connection between this and the social capital emerging from the trust relationships built with, the significant others and friends. From these first layers the students move out to participate in HE, new trust relationships, evidence of an expanding social capital, are made in the transition to HE. Of these new relationships the most significant for the students were with peers identified as being 'the same as me' based on an identification based trust and beliefs about the competency, integrity, benevolence and predictability of the group. The trust relationship with the lecturer is also positioned at this level (the research is not able to further distinguish between these two elements of this layer and perhaps could be explored in follow up research). In the context of the trust relationships developing in HE the final element of the layers relates to the 'others' who are conceptualised as not 'us' and are positioned at a distance from the students.

Darmody and Fleming (2009, p.80), citing MacDonald and Stratta (2001), and Merrill (2001) suggest that lecturers are inclined to take the view that non-traditional students should be assimilated into the culture of the traditional student experience in HE and that a culture change is not required. For the purpose of this research it appears that the students are not asking for or expecting that there will be an accommodation of their 'difference'. Ger-Yr1 expresses the tentative view that there may be some tolerance for the mature students but nothing is demanded. Alongside this approach however is a picture of students who are committed to holding up their side of the learning contract despite the challenges experienced by

them (Richardson and King 1998). From a teaching perspective the evidence supports a qualitatively different engagement experience which appears to warrant consideration in the context of the teaching practices in HEI'S. The problem of accommodating the different learning patterns between the mature and the younger students is difficult.

Earlier in the literature review, **Chapter 3**, Haggis (2006) had problematised the assumptions about the correct approach to teaching and learning strategies in HE, and Hunt (2007) proposed that the adoption of an androgic approach to learning in HE suggests that adult education (AE) which embraces the concepts of 'critical practitioner' and as 'psycho-diagnostician and facilitator of learning' (Hunt 2007, p.767) requiring appropriate role of the lecturer move from one of imparter of knowledge to one which acknowledges the students as 'fully participating adult presences'. This argument is relevant because in the view of the participants in my research there is a clear acknowledgement of the boundaries that exist between lecturer and student but that a trusting relationship embodied in a more equal interaction between the learners and the students facilitates learning. In the context of the accountable culture of HE perhaps trust presents itself as a concept worth considering as a mechanism of measurement of the effectiveness of the HE process for the students. It provides a tangible measure for intangible concepts and encompasses the complexity of the experience of the students while also remaining a commonly understood concept.

CHAPTER 7: THE PROMISE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

7.1. Introduction

The previous findings chapters identified the participants understanding of self-trust (**Chapter 5**) and trust in others (**Chapter 6**), this final findings chapter discovers how trust in Higher Education is conceptualised by the participants based on their experience of their engagement with their chosen institution. The interpretations contained in this chapter emerged in response to the request to the participants to: *Choose a photograph that represents what you are trusting that HE will do for you?* The question was stimulated through Giddens's (1991) conceptualisation of systems trust and McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001; 2002) conceptualisation of Institutional trust which encapsulates the concepts of *situational normality* and *structural assurance*. Emerging from the coding process is an understanding of the mature students' relationship with the Higher Education system, which is conceptualised in '*The Promise of HE*'.

This Chapter explores why Mature students:

- 1) Make a *Leap of Faith* into an institution and process about which they have very little prior experience or knowledge.
- 2) How they conceptualise the benefits for them of taking the risk to participate, and the role of HE in developing their *undiscovered potential*, which will benefit not only themselves but their families and significant others as well.
- 3) Finally the findings identify the nature of the *relationship with the Institution* which is HE, it identifies that the students perceive their participation in HE to

be a privilege and have placed their complete trust in an institution to deliver on its

7.2. The Visual element of the Chapter.

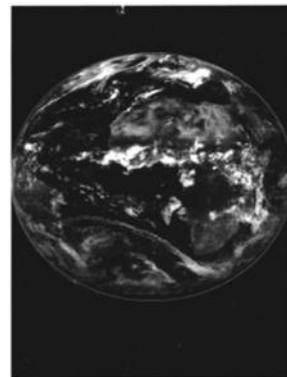
Researcher observations about these photographs:

- Some of these photographs have appeared in earlier chapters where they were chosen by other participants as representations for different meanings.
- This suggests the flexibility offered by the pre-existing photo set to represent completely different realities and meanings for people. For example the building site photograph here is representative of the potential that HE presents, a reconstruction of the lives of the participants and earlier it was chosen to represent the fears and pressures felt by participants.
- Similarly the swans here represent an outcome from HE, opportunity to be with family, while elsewhere it represented the risk taken.
- These potential for multiple interpretations and meanings suggest that the interpretive power of photographs exists independently of who created the photographs. The most significant aspect is, I suggest,



the element of choice offered to the participants such that they are facilitated to make their own choices which will enable them to identify those which best match their own intended meaning.

- The role of this research approach using an existing set of photographs is examined further in *8.4 Contribution of this model of photo-methodology for research (below)*.



As in the previous findings chapters, the participants' views and analysis is set out first, which ensures that the analysis remains grounded in the meanings constructed by the participants and is then further connected to existing research. Through the following discussion the photographs are employed to both anchor and encapsulate the participant responses and to enable the reader visualise the meaning which the participants attach to their experience.

7.3. 'Leap of Faith'

Earlier (**Section 5.3.1**) the factors surrounding the participants' decision to enter HE were identified, this section takes up the story examining the rationale which the participants present for how they made that decision. What emerges is that the participants ventured into HE with relatively little understanding of what to expect of their HE experience. *'I had not been here before I started study. I don't know what to expect'* (Eda-Yr2). The participants had never previously participated in HE, nor did they have a peer group outside HE to learn from, and were journeying into an unknown experience.

and I didn't have any idea about college, you know. I read it but I read it you know just what was on some brochure. I didn't have all the handbooks. I came to [this college] it was in the springtime and it was the first introduction day so, but anyway, I didn't learn a lot about college you know straight away or about education. So I started in, I didn't know about many things or about [how it worked] even though I read the programme. (Lea-Yr3)

And despite the information provided in written form in terms of the standard HE handbooks, prospectus and course guides there was a significant lack of knowledge as to what to expect when you come to college.

Lea-Yr3's story (above) identifies the insider/outsider perspective, where the system of HE is well understood from inside but for students coming from outside preparation for entry is problematic. To bridge this gap presents a challenge to the HE to communicate the meaning of the experience to the student in ways in which they can understand both what is expected of them, and what they can expect from the HEI. This is also a trust juncture, the mature students coming to HE can probably never be completely prepared for this journey, and this presents a challenge to the *trustworthiness* of the institution to act with integrity towards the participants.

The response of the participants to the uncertainty of their engagement with the HE institution, was the internalisation of responsibility for their HE experience through the use of the language of 'I', which began at an early stage.

I didn't really know what to expect. I suppose when you hear going back then, I suppose when you hear Degrees, Degrees, Degrees, you say "oh God, I'd never be able to do that". So I really didn't have any image in my mind or know what to expect. (Owl-Yr4)

This was mirrored by Pam-Yr3

Because I just had no idea what to expect. I'd never gone to college, I'd never guess how I got through the Leaving Cert and had a brain in the 80s you know. Ahm, so there was that aspect of it, can I do it, have I got the smarts, have I got the staying power, three years it's a huge thing and all of that. (Pam-Yr3)

The participants ventured into HE with little knowledge of what to expect and with a prevailing sense of trepidation about their own capacity to cope. Pam-Yr3, who is at the end of her second year in college, and has successfully negotiated the two years, still speaks in vivid terms ('it's a huge thing') of the significance which she attaches to coming 'into' HE. The challenge for the students in becoming 'insiders' was difficult and fraught with doubt but was made possible by the 'promise' of HE.

7.4. Undiscovered Potential

To understand the nature of the trust that they placed in HE, the conversations with the participants explored their expectations as they set out in the HE journey. What emerges are a range of expectations of what the experience of participating will bring to them, a key element of which is based on their analysis that it offered the potential for better things for themselves and their families. These emerging themes resonate with the expectations identified in earlier research by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003 p612) who characterise the experience of HE as a 'pleasurable

and fulfilling experience' in spite of the struggles experienced by the students in participating, while research by Wainright and Marandet (2010), and O'Shea and Stone (2011) notes the impact on their families from female participation in HE.

7.4.1. Dreams and Hopes

The nature and meaning of these expectations becomes clearly visible in the photographs that the participant chose, in the photograph and the narrative below (**Table 7-1**) Edm-Yr3 demonstrates the presence of the explicit and tacit meanings which he ascribes to his participation in HE.

Table 7-1: Photo: Undiscovered Potential

<p><i>Basically my whole thing was to come in to College to more or less get a job. It wasn't to sort of prove anything to myself. Well, maybe a little bit to prove to myself that I could sort of maintain a good job. But basically it was just to get work ... Ya, well hopefully. There was a little bit of proving to myself that I could do this, that or the other. Does, all my life, like I said all my life I just wanted to have a job that I would get up in the morning, look forward to going to that job because I spent 25 years in construction, 15 of it in England, 10 back here, where I got up every morning hating the thoughts of going out the front door ... And I always envied one of my friends; he used to go in of a Saturday to work, he didn't have to, he wasn't getting paid for it, but he used go in of a Saturday because he felt, he loved his job, I always envied him. I always wanted to be the person that went out the door whistling in the morning like, you know. (Edm-Yr3)</i></p>	
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For Edm-Yr3, his first response to what he expected from HE was employment, which is what the instrumentalists would have you believe is the purpose of HE, subsequently, his emotional response, a sense of undeclared meaning was disclosed through his narrative of *never having been able to look forward to going to work*, his

own personal understanding of the impact of that type of work experience and his envy of his friend. There is a sense of regret about previous missed opportunities and for him HE becomes the mechanism for him to fulfil his potential for a different life. The photograph provides a glimpse of the emotional and affective impact of work which is unsatisfying and its influence on the lived experience of the individual, it is a representation for Edm-Yr3 of a life that he wants to move away from and which he hopes will be made possible by his engagement in HE.

The presence of both explicit and tacit meanings in Edm-Yr3's story resonated with all of the participants. In the conversations with the participants the explicit elements quickly gave way to expose the more implicit expectations of HE identified by the participants. These explicit and implicit meanings are briefly set out in the following discussion.

Expectations of employment (but not just work)

The expectation of employment was particularly significant for the male participants in the research and relates to their conceptualisation of their 'breadwinner' role explored earlier in 5.5.3.

Because working is so important to me. I want to be working again. I feel, I do feel less at the moment confidence wise in myself because I'm not working and, am, to me to be working is important and particularly as a Dad and you know you are supposed to be a provider and you are not. I find it for me to be working is very important. (Pog-Yr1)

Table 7-2: Photo: The Promise of Employment

	<p><i>Ahm, ultimately it's the Education system is going to put me in this position. That I will be gainfully employed again. (Pog-Yr1)</i></p>
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Pog-Yr1, conceptualises working not simply in terms of the income that work will bring but **(Table 7-2)** its impact on how he defines himself in his role as 'Dad' and the duties and expectations of 'being a provider', this understanding becomes clear through discussing how important this education opportunity is for him and its impact on his whole life experience.

Expectations of Learning

For the participants there was evidence of what might be perceived as the standard expectation of what HE brings for the participants,

A lot will be different because new knowledge, updating my knowledge. I came to learn and I know that after spending the two or three years surely I am going to have learned from them. If not, the three years won't be worth it. (Eda-Yr2)

The expectation is that the learning will in turn impact on her financial and family in a positive manner as indicated in her choice of two photographs in

Table 7-3 below.

Table 7-3: Photo: The Financial and Time Benefits

	<p><i>This is, I see sunshine. I don't know what it ... and green [in black and white photo]. I like natural because I grew up in a countryside as is here and so after this experience I hope to get employment and then my financial situation will improve and I will be able to save money and send my children on holidays</i></p>
	<p><i>No. 2: It's going back to parent; I would have more time with the children. More time, time, time. We have more time to play with them. ... Just have more time to be together as a family. (Eda-Yr3)</i></p>

Eda-Yr2 expects that there will be financial gains and that there will be more time to be with family after the pressures of managing HE and being a single parent, the benefit of this change accrues both to her family and herself. The expectation of the positive impact of education for their families was also evident for Eda-Yr3 and Gim-Yr1, who both have young children.

Benefits to family and community

The benefits of HE also accrue to society, for Eda-Yr3 the value of education for her community was also an important consideration in her participation in HE.

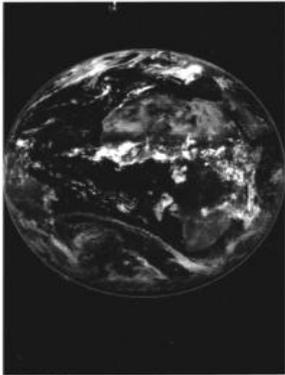
So, I'm going to learn to improve me as a person to help improve my children, that growing up to help them in their academic activities, help my community. To be able to give something back to my community by helping, getting involved in any way I can. Then getting employed. (Eda-Yr2)

Eda-Yr2 conceptualised the experience as an improvement at the level of the personal, the family, and the community, such that her investment, and indeed the investment by the state in her education, has an impact at the personal, but also at societal level. This provides evidence that education is not simply a private good for which there is only private benefit and supports research by Osborne *et al* (2004, p.307) and Wainright and Merendet (2010) who identify the benefit which also accrues to the children of parental participation in HE.

The opportunity to travel

For Lim-Yr2, education will enable him to travel **Table 7-4** and his choice of programme was based on its ability to facilitate his employment in any country.

Table 7-4: Photo: Opening to the World!

	<p><i>Ahm, also when I seen that it's kind of like community. The whole world is one big community. Whether on line or shared interests or geographical but the fact that the degree that I am doing can leave you open to most, loads of opportunities. I can go off anywhere I want in the world. Lim-Yr2</i></p>
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For these participants the potential of HE to bring about growth at a personal level was a common theme apparent in the narrative and the photographs chosen by the participants. In this photograph chosen by Gim-Yr1 the focus was on the sunflower as a representation of growth.

The promise of personal growth

In viewing this photo, the sunflower is a representation for Ger-Yr1 of his expectation that HE will facilitate his growth which he conceptualises as a development personality wise or mentally and that he will grow in some positive way.

Table 7-5: Photo: The Promise of Personal Growth

	<p><i>Growth of myself, within myself, be that personality wise or ... mentally. I suppose I'm trusting myself and my time here that I grow in some positive way. (Ger-Yr1)</i></p>
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This potential for growth was also reflected in Eda-Yr2Yr2's reflection.

That this also refers to my growth. My growth because I'm in second year now, I know that where I was two years ago, mentally, in everything, academically and even in my private life is not where I am today. I have moved, I have grown...so it's growth, progress.

It demonstrates the impact that education has in the whole sphere of peoples' lives and is also visible in Lea-Yr3's story as someone who has immigrated to Ireland and strives for a better life and better understanding which she expects Higher Education will deliver for her.

I started back to education because I wanted higher education ... So I didn't have the chance in my own country and when I work hard and I saw that there is chance for me to try get education I wanted so to improve myself, to grow up as a person, ahm, to understand people better, understand the world better, to get a job. (Lea-Yr3)

The concept of the promise of HE was evident here, the extent to which they were willing to embrace the risks for a promise of something better is significant. It is important to note that even these visual representations are limited by their ability to adequately demonstrate the strength of the emotions which resonated across the conversations with the participants. The pitch, tone and pace of the conversations were indicative of the significance of the meanings which they attached to their present situations. The vulnerability and their positioning in a system which they trust will deliver on its potential to fulfil what it promises is profound for them. From the researcher's perspective, being close to the rawness of these expectations and the expectations of delivery on the trust that the participants placed in HE was significant and a privilege.

The strength of the emotional journey and the tacit expectations of the contribution of HE was very clear in the narrative surrounding the Seagull Photograph below which was chosen by four of the participants to represent what they trusted that their HE experience would do for them.

Table 7-6: Photo: The Promise of HE

	<p><i>I see layers, ya, you know and I see the ability to soar, the ability to get going you know that kind of way. Here [pointing to the bottom seagull] you could say beginning, middle [pointing to the middle seagull] and end [pointing to the topmost seagull in flight] you know.. and I see you know coming from the dark you have really dark here down this end of it you know to getting lighter and getting brighter as well so I see that as a reasonable analogy you know to my progress here in [This Institution] you know. And I'd love to be able to fly. (Jac-Yr3)</i></p>
<p><i>Freedom, I feel like I can soar, I can stand up for myself. I can talk to anybody, even if it is Kofi Annan, even if it is Barak Obama. I can stand. I can sit in front of them like I am sitting in front of you [the researcher] and talk to them confidently. (Owl-Yr4)</i></p>	<p><i>I immediately thought wonderment and soaring. Just taking off on an upwards trajectory and, ya, and wonderment. (Pam-Yr3)</i></p>
<p><i>This one! It's definitely a journey. ... you know, for me its kind of, I don't know, its just beginning. Its again, its again beginning because ahm I have optimistic view, probably too optimistic, I have the optimistic view that I will go and I will find job I want and it will be significant for me but significant for other people too. (Lea-Yr3)</i></p>	

The participants' conceptualisation is of movement, 'it's a journey' in which they are on an 'upward trajectory' offering the possibility of 'soaring' above all their existing challenges and 'dark places' to be able to see themselves as able to sit 'in front of [Barak Obama] and talk to them confidently'. The story that emerges is one of trust that the HE experience will bring about change in the extrinsic elements [learning, employment, money and time] but will also bring about intrinsic change to the person. This is well illustrated in Pog-Yr1's story below:

yes it does because even if I go back say 10, 15 years I was technically uneducated to a certain extent because I didn't complete a Leaving Cert and I was working in retail which was a grand job and you know it was fine but you never achieved anything for yourself. Whereas I feel the satisfaction of

completing say the three years here will for myself emotionally would be very high. (Pog-Yr1)

Here he defines himself as '*technically uneducated*' despite having a previous career in retail management, and he frames that experience as; '*never [having] achieved anything for yourself*', which shows that he expects that all this will change as a result of participating in HE.

The participants' coping strategy resonates with Giddens' (1991) concept of 'bracketing' where the extent of uncertainty being embraced in the transition to HE is so great that the risk to the self- created by the ontological insecurity results in the adoption of a strategy which ignores large elements of the HE landscape in order to cope with the experience. Möllering (2001), who bases his analysis on Simmel's (1990) conception of trust, identifies a similar concept called 'suspension' which he regards as essential to enable people to make this 'leap of trust'.

The individual capacity of individuals to make this leap of faith (Giddens 1991) is related to the early life experiences of individuals. For the participants in this research what has emerged in terms of this 'leap of faith' is that the students' perceptual analysis of the trustworthiness of the experience and the institution is based on a relatively limited comprehension of the institution or the system. The students entering HE made their decision to trust based on reputation and relatively little factual information, the image of HE which is available to the students before coming to college is based on a concept, an idea, a promise, and confirms McKnight's (2001) idea that decisions to engage with such institutions are akin to a 'leap of faith' a decision to trust the institution to deliver something which at the 'initial trust stage' is based on very limited information., which is akin to structural

assurance and situational normality constructs in McKnight's model. The decision to come to HE (discussed in **Section 7.1** earlier) is a very personal story situated within a limited knowledge of, but with an implicit trust in the system.

The discussion shows that the students are engaging with the education experience itself while the mechanics of the provision through the systems and structures of HE is invisible to them. The emerging picture of their trust therefore is in the concept of 'the education process' of HE rather than in the institution that provides the education. For the participants the experience of the education process, classes, lectures, lecturers, assignments, exams etc. is real and tangible but the 'institution' i.e. the management, policies etc. are not in the range of awareness of the student, their conceptualisation of HE relates to their experiencing of HE. This point will be discussed further below in the context of the emerging implications of this frame of understanding of the sense-making processes of the participants.

7.5. Trust in the HE Institution: Higher Education as a Privilege

The extent to which the participants have positive expectations about their HE experience is reflected in their decision to take this leap of faith into HE, which they trust will deliver on their expectations. Related to this risk is the tacit understanding of where the participants position themselves relative to the HEI, in the conversation with the participants this relationship with HE was characterised through a narrative of 'gratefulness'.

*It's something as well that I feel that I have over a lot of mature students and a lot of students that are in this College, that I am grateful to be here. I don't know if this opportunity would have been around 15 or 20 years ago. The way that the structures that are in place to put me here, do you know what I mean.
(Pog-Yr1)*

This sense of gratefulness resonates with Jac-Yr3 who describes it as ‘a great privilege for anybody to go through a third-level institution’.

When a trust relationship is characterised by one party being ‘grateful’ and having a sense of ‘privilege’ in relation to the other, then it appears that the other is in a position of power or authority in that relationship. The consequences for trust of unequal power relations suggest that the person in the position of power has no need to engage in a process of building reciprocal trust, because they have the power to impose their wishes on the other. The powerless person is in a position of vulnerability where they feel that they have little resources to draw on and which means that they must rely on the ‘benevolence’ of the other to deliver on their promise (Cook *et al* 2004, Cohen and Avrahami 2006, Hoecht 2006, Klein 2010). Haggis (2003, p.96) had earlier characterised this relationship between the student and the Institution as part of the ‘unexamined power relations of adult educational contexts’.

The conversation with the participants’ exploring their expectations of what the HE *institution* would provide for them elicited a very limited response which was unexpected. ‘I know there will be Lecturers to teach me and that’s all I expected. Any other thing that comes is a plus’ (Eda-Yr2), and later this student spoke of their surprise when they accessed some financial supports for their childcare.

Lots I didn’t expect that happened. Like they have helped me know the second time in funding my children’s crèche for after school ... I did not expect it so I was so delighted. So, so, happy because it is a great, great relief! (Eda-Yr2)

For the participants, the Institution is ‘made visible’ or ‘embodied’ in the person of the lecturer and their peers rather than the Institution, and their judgement around the professionalism of the institution is based on these interactions. The

management of the colleges were invisible to the students, and were not conceptualised as having a visible role to play in their HE experience. Support staff, Access and finance were only identified as significant where the participants had particular problems or issues.

It is interesting that the growing managerialist agenda does not present in the student awareness, the turmoil behind the scenes and the tension between academic and managerialist agendas did not emerge as an issue for the participants in this research. In the conversations there was evidence of limited expectations of the Institution itself and a limited awareness of the responsibilities of the Institution. This pattern has previously been reflected in research by Reay (2000; 2007) as being the result of the participants limited access to 'reserves of economic, social, emotional and cultural capital (Reay 2000, cited in Reay 2007, p.314). Their approach suggests that this subsequently limits their potential to challenge the Institution to accept a shared responsibility for facilitating the students' success in HE. In the earlier sections the participants in my research have evidenced a level of resilience and durability in their engagement with HE and are not without a level of social capital, however their limited understanding of the institutional systems of HE provides evidence of limited bridging social capital which is perceived as problematic in bringing about change in their HE experience.

In previous research in the UK which compared the engagement of students in 'elite' universities versus a 'post-1992' institution (Read *et al* 2003) suggests that the 'challenging' and individually oriented environment of the 'elite' university is important in developing the social capital required by students to be effective in the employment market. This is achieved through the development of an alternative

'habitus', and the alternative 'post-1992' university is perceived to provide a less challenging environment, and therefore does not equip its students as well. The challenge is for the student to embrace the networks available to them in HE and to adopt an alternative, more successful habitus to achieve these goals. In an Irish context therefore the participation of the mature students in the more accessible, but less 'elite', IOT institutions may result in limiting their development of this alternative 'habitus', which will equip them to become successfully employed which is the reason for them coming to HE. This 'habitus' proposition has been challenged by Clegg (2011) who disputes the requirement that working class students, to be successful need to change their 'inappropriate habitus'. Her analysis is critical of the proposition that the life experiences and social capital of working class students is in contrast to the type of social capital required to be successful in employment and is therefore in need of change. The increasing numbers of applicants to the 'elite' universities in Ireland would suggest however that the 'education market' does believe the proposition and suggests that the concept of trust in the HE institutions could usefully be examined to identify if there is indeed grounds for stratifying HE institutions according to the level of trust that can be placed in them. The emergence of league tables for HE has been a response to this need to measure whether we can trust the institutions and are gaining currency despite being criticised for their level of unsophistication.

7.5.1. Complexity of Institutional Trust

The initial focus of this exploration had been on the identification of the participants understanding of institutional trust as conceptualised in the Trust Literature i.e.

trust that the judgement one makes about the institution (in this case the HE institution) is based on a perception that the institution will operate in ones best interests. In the context of McKnight's (1998; 2001; 2002) concept of *situational normality*, it could be argued that the trust in HE as a provider of learning and employment opportunities, which is based on past experience of participating in HE is now under question in the context of the massification of HE. The participants in my research have clearly trusted the experience to provide these outcomes yet research by Reay (2000; 2003) has noted that 'a large percentage of female graduates risk making a loss from their financial investments in higher education, especially those from working class backgrounds' (Edgerton & Parry 2001, cited in Reay 2003, p.314). A recent study by Tomlinson (2008, p.54) notes that

higher education students view their credentials as positional goods that provide advantages in the labour market; however, there was also widespread concern about their limitations. A dominant concern amongst these students was that the supply of graduates leaving mass higher education is exceeding the actual demand for graduate talent.

This is supported by an analysis conducted by the OECD data on graduate employment rates demonstrating that the wage differentials change in the context of 'massification of HE' (OECD 2011a, pp.179-183) and raises issues as to whether the students trust in the employment promise of HE is justified.

One of the clear motivations for the students participation in HE was to become credentialised (Collins 1979), where the process of acquiring credentials is perceived as essential in the path towards employment and as representative of their growth through the HE process. The narrative is based on a belief evidenced in previous research by Riseborough (1993, p.38) who describes students' belief that qualifications generate 'their own employment opportunities' as an alignment with

the 'dominant ideological fantasy' of contemporary education and training. This issue has been identified in Kenny *et al* (2010, pp.31-32) suggesting that the role of the Mature student in HE must be understood 'in the context of a set of powerful, if somewhat vague, discourses about the benefits of credentials (NQAI), formal learning and upskilling in an era of lifelong learning.'

The employment trends in Ireland among undergraduates suggest that the undergraduate degree is now becoming essential for what in the past might have been perceived as 'ordinary' jobs, and Level-9 degrees are now being used as the mechanism for distinguishing between the quality of the students. Drawing on research in the United Kingdom, Brennan observes that a degree is 'no longer enough to obtain a high economic and social position' and that it must now be of the 'right kind', from the 'right kind of institution', and 'preferably accompanied by the right kinds of social and cultural capital' (Brennan 2002, p.77, cited in Keane 2011a, p.460).

The trust which the students place in the HE experience is significant and it is argued here requires that HE itself then has a 'moral duty to care' for the students which is not part of what is measured and counted in HE systems in Ireland. The challenge is to find mechanisms which give attention to these implicit elements of the experience and which can be recognised as legitimate measures of the effectiveness of HE.

7.6. Conclusion

This thesis identifies the affective challenge that participating in HE presents to students, their emotional and physical response to being academically lost and the

significance of the peer support in sustaining them through the HE experience. The mature students who have participated in this research have taken a 'leap of faith' to participate in Higher Education; in so doing the institution itself, which provides the education, remains relatively invisible to them and the relationship between the students and the Institution is primarily embodied in the role of the academic staff. The distance between the students and the management of the institutions is problematic in terms of the understanding of the types of needs that the students require and is not helped by accountability systems which focus on explicit/rationalistic rather than tacit/normative measures (Gleeson & Ó Donnabháin 2009, Stensaker & Görnitzka 2009, Stensaker & Harvey 2011), which takes little account of the students as people and regards them as numbers measured through CAO (Central Application Office) numbers, retention rates and graduate numbers.

What my research shows is that the participants, the mature students, make sense of and understand the institution and HE through what Giddens (1991) and Sztompka (1999) speak of as the 'points of access' to the institution. For the mature students this is the lecturer, who provide the face-to-face contact and who, along with the other mature students, represent the most significant trust relationship in the HE. This research has demonstrated that mature students are motivated and interested but are personally facing many complexities in successfully negotiating their HE journey. The perception of their own vulnerability in the face of the large institution and system of HE, and the act of faith and trust with which they engage with HE, suggests a moral and ethical obligation on behalf of the Institution to 'reciprocate' this trust through behaving benevolently, honestly, etc. in its

engagement with the student. The concept of HE having a moral/ethical responsibility for the learning of the students is a framework which runs contrary to the mechanistic and instrumentalist processes currently visible in HE. The views of the mature students in this research demonstrate clearly the presence of an emotional discourse and engagement which supports Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin's (2009) argument that a balanced approach to accountability which would recognise the impact that access and participation in HE makes for the students might be appropriate.

'In spite of the flowering of trust research in the social sciences, trust remains a puzzle. Conceptually it is clear that trust is the key ingredient of social capital, but its origins remain uncertain and its consequences are yet to be clearly established.'

(Delhey *et al* 2011, p.800)

CHAPTER 8: EMERGENT CONCLUSIONS - THE ROLE OF TRUST IN THE MATURE STUDENT EXPERIENCE TOWARDS AN OUTCOME!

8.1. Introduction

Over the preceding chapters of this constructivist grounded theory study, the *role of trust in the experience of mature students participating in learning in higher education organisations* was discussed. This final chapter draws together the learning from this research:

- It identifies the role of trust in the mature student experience through the creation of the Mature Student Trust Model. (Figure 8.1: The Role of Trust in the Mature Student Experience in Higher Education)
- It discusses the contribution of McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) Trust Framework and the cultural approach to trust (Sztompka 1999, Tierney 2006) and their relevance to HE trust researchers.
- It examines the contribution of the particular approach to photo-methodology adopted in this research and its potential relevance to researchers focused on accessing the 'implicit' or 'tacit' processes which give meaning to a concept such as trust.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for mature students, policy makers, educators in HE and researchers interested in the relevance of the trust concept in understanding the mature student experience in HE.

8.2. The Research Contribution: To understanding the role of trust in the mature student experience in HE

In the absence of an expansive tradition of trust research into the experience of the mature student in HE (Ghosh *et al* 2001) my research began with the intention of identifying *if* the concept of trust resonated with the mature students.

The thesis confirms the relevance of the concept in comprehending the mature student experience where it;

- *underpins the mature student decision to participate in HE,*
- *facilitates their on-going participation,*
- *and contributes to the effectiveness of their learning processes in HE.*

The requirement for trust is related to the fact that, for the mature students, engagement in HE is conceived as a risk situation which, requires that they willingly accept their own vulnerability in the face of that risk, and which is compounded by the fact that they have no control in this new situation. The participants identified this situation as requiring an element of trust and in this thesis the manifestation of that trust is identified.

The outcome of this research is presented visually in the diagram below, **(Figure 8.1: The Role of Trust in the Mature Student Experience in Higher Education** presents the holistic picture of HE experience for these Mature Students. The framework draws together the learning from the thesis and integrates the complex

understanding of the mature students into a model which can be developed and expanded in further research. It draws together the participants perspective on the role of trust in their HE experience, together with McKnights Model and finally, situates it within the Trust and Mature student literature.

The model illustrates both the complexity of the trust experience and also the pervasiveness of the concept in the mature student experience of HE. By presenting the conclusions in this manner I attempt to remain true to the participants lived experience of participating in HE rather than separating the experience from the contexts from which their HE journey develops. My research has identified the important role of trust relationships and the contribution they make in enabling the mature students to make a 'Leap of Faith' into HE.

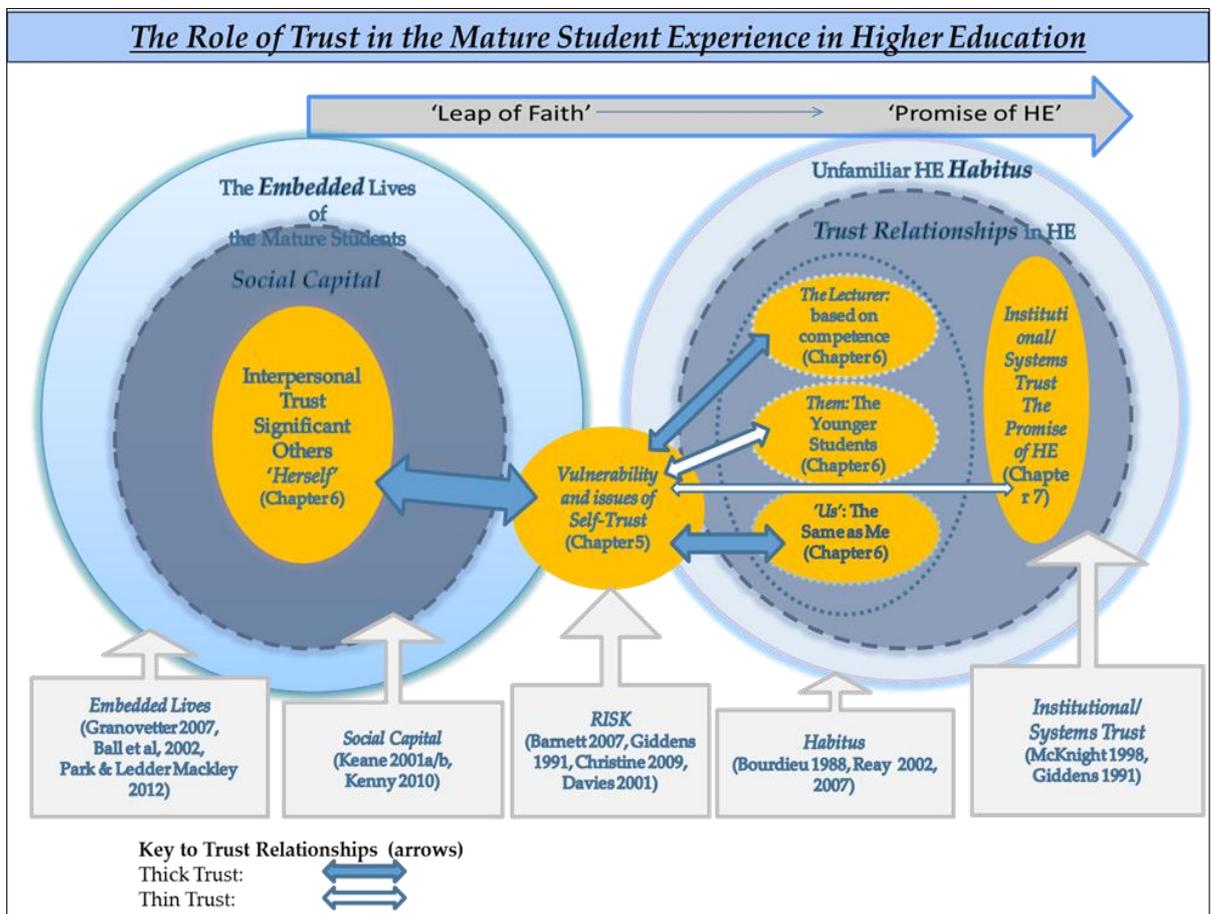


Figure 8.1: The Role of Trust in the Mature Student Experience in Higher Education

8.2.1. *The trust relationships which are significant for Mature Students.*

The stages of the mature student journey in HE are illustrated by reading the framework from left to right. For the Mature students their journey into HE is made from within Trust Relationships (left hand side) with significant others, (Chapter 6), these relationships are situated within their available social capital (Keane 2001 and Kenny 2010) and their embedded life experiences. (Granovetter 2007, Ball et al, 2002, Park & Ledder Mackley 2012). After their decision to enter into HE, the mature students are presented with the challenge to their Self-Trust (Chapter 5) which also presents as a risk (Barnett 2007, Davies 2001). Subsequently, (right hand-side) they are faced with the challenge of building trust relationships within HE (Chapter 6), which is made difficult through the new 'habitus' which it presents (Bourdieu 1988, Reay 2002,2007) and finally they negotiate trust decision in relation to the institution of HE (Chapter 7) which is presented as systems trust (Giddens 1991).

Significant others.

In negotiating their participation in HE, the trust of their 'significant others' (Chapter 6) was identified as crucial to the process for the students with partners. These relationships are identified by the participants as based on a particular type of trust, a 'faith' placed in them by these partners. It is conceptualised by them as a

reciprocal responsibility created by the faith placed in them by others, which both supports and creates an additional burden which must be borne in their HE journey. The thesis identified the complexity of the negotiations undertaken by the mature students in maintaining these relationships while sustaining their HE journey and while also re-affirming the 'embedded' (Ball *et al* 2002, Tierney 2004b, Warmington 2003) nature of their HE journey.

Self-Trust: Being and becoming (Barnett 2009, Christie 2009)

At an intra-personal level, my research confirmed previous research by Ball *et al* (2002), Crossan *et al* (2003) and Christie (2009), acknowledging that decisions to participate in HE are in fact infused with emotions and it challenges research which positions the students as assertive purchasers of a HE product (Molesworth *et al* 2011).

My thesis develops the understanding of the *felt sense of vulnerability* (Crossan *et al* 2003) experienced by the mature students entering into HE, by connecting this to issues of *self-trust* (**Chapter 5**) which are particularly acutely felt at the beginning of the HE journey, evidenced in the language of feeling 'exposed'. The thesis contributes to the understanding of the early days of HE and identifies the tentativeness of their first year experience, their journey is one which challenges the participants at the level of their self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-concept, created by a sense of not belonging, of being different and being surrounded by uncertainty.

The risk is entwined in the concept of education as a developmental process, such that the adoption to the new 'correct' HE 'habitus', is conceptualised as a dislocation, challenging the students at an intra-personal level to straddle the new

and old habitus (Bourdieu 1988, Reay 2002, 2007) resulting in anxiety about maintaining existing relationships, responding to shifting communication patterns, and renegotiating their old and new roles in a complex balancing act.

The decision to participate in HE, presents as a situation of risk at many levels; (Barnett 2007, Giddens 1991, Davies 2001)

- *ontological* - challenges to the students foundational knowledge;
- *epistemological* - becoming uncertain about that which actually exists;
- *discursive* – a challenge to their communication capacity;
- *practical* – related to time available, balancing the various roles to be played and funding available; and
- *self-induced risk* - related to their self-confidence, self-efficacy and the engagement with a habitus which is entirely unfamiliar to them.

The thesis confirms the presence of these risk factors and affirms that for mature students the entry to HE presents as a classical situation which requires ‘the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party’ (Mayer *et al* 1995, p.712) a situation requiring trust. To manage this risk the thesis confirms that the mature students have bought into the neo-liberal agenda (Darmody and Fleming 2009) of taking personal responsibility for their own educational experience. They have constructed a reality where the burden of managing is internalised, and where the risk requires that the students draw on their personal store of social capital, their own self-trust, and the support of ‘herself’ and the ‘academic’ relationships built within HE to sustain their HE experience.

These constructs coupled with a conceptualisation of HE as an entirely different 'habitus' has resulted in the participants 'discounting' (Clegg 2006) their own self-value and minimising their own capacity, through conceptualising themselves as 'babies', thus placing themselves in a powerless position within HE. It is a clear demonstration of the vulnerability of their engagement in HE, they are self-deprecating and self-analysing and this vulnerability also diminishes their felt capacity to challenge the system to specifically respond to their needs, be it in timetabling, in the classroom or in providing services which are essential to their learning.

Us and Them

While the decision to enter HE is facilitated through the existence of the trust relationships and the broader level of social capital that the mature students can access outside of HE, their journey within HE has been sustained through an engagement in HE which is understood as inherently relational. The journey is made possible through their own personal developing confidence but also through the development of new trust relations which they build in participating in college. The early process of relationship building was identified as particularly traumatic for some of the students.

Initial decisions to trust their peers, were based on a process of 'categorisation' (McKnight and Chervany (2001a) based on age as the 'signifier' to determine those that are perceived as being the same as me, (McKnight *et al* 1998) and are therefore trustworthy. Past this initial 'homophile' (McPherson *et al* 2001, p.416) process, a more nuanced trust process based on an interpretation of more diverse 'clues' (Rousseau *et al* 1998; Lewicki *et al* 2006; Sztompka 2006) developed. These

clues were identified as attendance patterns, the nature and quality of participation and the level of engagement of others. These clues facilitated the development of what the participants have identified as 'academic trust' relationships with their peers.

In my research, those identified as being the '*same as me*' based on age, remained the single most significant element in distinguishing those with whom there was 'thick' trust and others where there was 'thin' trust (Putnam 2000, Li 2008). It confirms the relevance of Fukuyama's (1995) and Sztopka's (1999) layered trust models in conceptualising trust relationships for Mature students in HE. The layering is conceptualised in the Model above (Figure 8.1) through the use of thick and thin arrows illustrating the participants' conceptualisation of the depth of the various trust relationships which have relevance for them in participating in HE. The thick trust relationships within HE are with the other mature students ('us') and the thin trust relationships are understood as being with the younger students ('them'). By employing a layering concept one begins to understand how the mature students identify and position others within their trust radius and the factors/clues on which these layering decisions are based. The trust relationships built by the mature students were important in sustaining mature students participation in HE, but the polarisation of trust based on age presents itself as a challenge to the classroom dynamic and impacts on their engagement particularly in group work situations and is discussed further below. (8.5.2)

Lecturers

My research identifies the significance of the trust relationship with the teaching staff as an important linchpin in the mature student experience in HE. It identifies

the complexity and the nuanced nature of the lecturer\student trust relationship and contributes by explicitly identifying the factors which mature students employ in establishing their '*belief*' (McKnight's 1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) that the lecturer is indeed trustworthy. Their trust decision was based on their assessment of both explicit and implicit 'clues'; For the mature students in my research their belief around the *competency* related to the *professionalism* of the lecturer was identified as based on two equally important constructs, credibility related to their *knowledge* of the subject but also credibility related to their *skill of teaching*.

This is hardly surprising, but what was interesting was their interpretation of their belief as to the *Honesty/Integrity*, of the lecturer. This belief was determined by a sense that the lecturer is fair towards the students, it incorporate issues of honesty, reliability, dependability and credibility. For the mature students this assessment was based on a nuanced interpretation related to the participants' experiences of their *interactions* with their lecturers and importance of *the non-judgemental* nature of these interactions in facilitating the development of a trust relationship. The construction of a relationship based on a connection built around the *accessibility to lecturers* and the *tolerance* and *care* shown by the lecturer and their *vocational commitment* was identified as a significant factor for the students.

But perhaps most significant was the importance attributed to both *Benevolence*, (which incorporates the concepts of good will, morality, caring and responsiveness, which includes a capacity to acknowledge the *baggage* of the mature students), and *predictability*, conceived as behaving consistently.

The research identifies the significance of the tacit and implicit in determining the trustworthiness of the lecturers, and identifies that the trust relationship between

the mature student and the lecturer was understood by them as a *reciprocal* relationship, which contributed to the effective negotiation of their HE journey and more importantly to the sense of responsibility which the students felt about engaging in learning in HE. This is an important consideration in defending a humanist teaching philosophy in HE in the light of increasingly mechanistic responses to the challenge of managing HE institutions. The ability of HE to embrace its obligations in a move away from the 'bare pedagogy focused on the marketized imperative' (Giroux 2010, p.185) to a conception of HE which could include issues of authenticity, commitment, passion, care' etc. a concept focused on human becomings (Barnett 2007) would have resonance with the participants in my research.

Institutional or system trust

Through their decision to return to HE, the students have taken a significant risk to participate in HE, this risk has been made because of the trust they place in the 'promise of HE'. The promise for the participants in this research related to employment certainly (especially for the male participants) but also particularly as a tool through which their sense of themselves and their self-worth can be re-established. In McKnight's Model this trust in the Institution is based on perceptions of *Situational Normality* and *Structural Assurance*. My research suggests that the mature students have bought into the narrative of the importance of qualifications and the contribution of HE to facilitate access to a better life. There was little evidence of a critical examination or a rational analysis of the *structural assurance construct*: the protective structures – guarantees, contracts, regulations, promises, legal recourse, processes, or procedures (McKnight *et al* 1998, p.478) before or

during their participation in HE. Nor was there an explicit awareness of issues related to the *situational normality construct* because the participants showed little awareness of the flux within which HE is situated. The participants were also unquestioning of some of the hegemonic assumptions about the role of HE in facilitating access to the labour market built on a 'fantasy of classlessness,' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003, p.599) which ignores the contribution of the available social capital in sustaining their HE journey, and which is also considered influential in accessing employment on graduation (Tomlinson 2008).

The complete 'leap of faith' undertaken by the participants in this research challenges policy makers, educators and the HEIs to embrace their moral and ethical responsibilities to the students, what Leveille (2006) identifies as being of the nature of a covenant or 'social contract' and reciprocate the trust placed in them through fostering a culture of trust throughout the system. This approach is especially important in the context of Christie's (2009) analysis that the prevailing narrative conflating HE qualification with access to 'good jobs' could prove to be a costly assumption for the mature students as a result of the dangers inherent in an overcrowded graduate market.

This reality challenges policy makers and those of us employed within the system to develop more research and adopt a critical analysis on some of the assumptions on which the 'promise of HE' is predicated to ensure the maintenance of the 'faith' which the students and particularly mature student place in it.

8.3. The potential contribution of McKnight's Model in HE.

In the context of my research McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) framework, which was designed in response to the need to create an integrated model to conduct research to investigate the building of new relationships in e-commerce contexts was employed to good effect. Although the model was designed as an empirical tool to measure each distinct trust construct, it was employed in this research as a framework against which the emerging trust data could be compared. The model recommended itself since it integrated the trust constructs from a variety of trust traditions and approaches, its constructs were drawn from reputable research and the empirical testing conducted by the authors has proven the robustness of each of the constructs. It also follows a tradition of developing integrated models in an attempt to incorporate the lived experience of trust decisions into a single explicative model.

The limits of the model from an empirical perspective relates to the difficulty of conducting multiple measurement exercises to create data to confirm the efficacy of the model. This requires multiple research exercises to be conducted simultaneously to capture the real lived experience of trust making decisions which is very difficult. Employing the model in my research I adopted the perspective, reflective of Sztompka's (1999) view that the mature students were vigilant social perceivers, who are adept in interpreting explicit and implicit 'clues' based on a complex but accessible process of synthesising information (Rousseau *et al* 1998) in determining the trustworthiness of others. This perspective facilitated the use of the Model outside of its original application which one could be challenged since it

was designed as an empirical model and has been used in what is a normative approach to this research.

Through my research each of the individual constructs from the model proved relevant, *Interpersonal Trust* emerges as the most significant construct for the mature students, through the relationships that exist outside of HE with significant others and through the trust relationships established within HE this construct has particular resonance for the participants in my research and my research was able to identify the factors which contribute to the creation of trust between the mature students and their peers and the students and their lecturers.

The research also confirms the presence of the mature student trust in the *Institution* of HE, however this trust is complex because for the participants in this research their decision to trust was based on a complete 'faith' in the system to deliver the promise of a better life for them. There was very little evidence of a rational/calculative assessment of the risks and benefits attached to their decision to commit to participating in HE. This 'faith' which is given so willingly and at a considerable cost to the participants, does I suggest create a moral obligation on HE institutions to deliver on this promise. This presents a considerable challenge to HE institutions in the context of the marketised agenda within which it is currently operating. It also presents I suggest an important risk for HE, if the trust that is placed in the institution breaks down and distrust develops then the consequences for HE could be very significant as the costs of repairing broken trust is very significant.

McKnight's model is designed for application in new trust situations and speaks of Trusting intention rather than trust behaviour, the students in my research have

engaged in trusting behaviour through making their decision to participate in HE which makes that element of the model less relevant in this research. It would be useful to conduct research with potential entrants to HE using the same framework to determine their trusting intention and perhaps later their ultimate decision to enter into HE.

The Disposition to trust construct did not emerge as a key element in this research, it can be argued that for these participants they had demonstrated a strong disposition to trust having made the decision to enter HE, it would also be interesting to further examine the cohort who potentially consider entering HE but then do not commit, to explore if their personal propensity to trust is a factor in that decision.

The cognitive elements especially the 'categorisation' process emerged very clearly as important elements in the participants decision to trust. Students identified others the same as themselves as being trustworthy, and institutions that were perceived to be accessible were categorised as more likely to be a place for them. However in relation to the '*illusion of control*' this was absent in relation to HE where the participants positioned themselves as vulnerable and powerless. In relation to the interpersonal trust relationships this illusion of control was made visible in the process of identifying those who were committed to learning as worthy of being trusted.

For researchers interested in exploring trust in HE the McKnight *et al's* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) Model has provided an effective framework to anchor my research and contributed to maintaining a focus throughout the research process. It also contributed through facilitating connecting the participants emerging story

through the analysis process, and connected it back to the extant research literature on trust. As an integrated model it recommends itself and could be used to explore trust decisions for other categories of student and for academic and other staff within HE and indeed for other stakeholders which would give a broader perspective on trust in HE.

8.4. Contribution of this model of photo-methodology for research

The research methodology of this thesis employed a pre-existing random set of photographs as an aid to facilitating the participants in their exploration of their tacit understanding of the trust concept and its relevance in HE. The use of pre-existing photographs I suggest contributes to the range of alternatives available to researchers interested in incorporating the visual into research and is I feel, particularly appropriate in a CGT study whose primary aim is to prioritise the interpretations of the participants.

- The photographs used in this research were produced by Partners in Faith and are used primarily in the context of participatory community development and in the context of Frierian emancipatory development projects. Although the name of the publishers suggests religious connections they are intended for use in all environments and are independent of any considerations of faith. The public and accessible nature of these photograph sets gets over the sometimes thorny question of ownership of and ethical rights in relation to participant generated photographs and self-representation (Luttrell and Chalfen 2010).

- The set of photographs are in black and white, the question arises as to the relative advantages/disadvantages of monochromatic images versus coloured images. From my perspective the monochrome was less suggestive of real life, it provides less detail, and fewer distractions and as a result allowed more space for participant interpretation than if the photographs had been in full colour.
- This methodology attached to the use of the photographs (see 4.7.5 above) is significant along with the continuing availability of the alternative photographs throughout the research interview which positions the participant in a place of control in relation to the choice of photograph and also allows them to change their mind during the process.
- The availability of an adequate range of photographs to choose from is an essential element in the process, in my research there were 25 photographs to choose from but this could be broadened to include the full set of photographs (75) though as suggested earlier this requires more time. The method also facilitates the participants' kinaesthetic engagement in the research which is important in creating a more participatory relationship between the researcher and the research participant allowing them to take ownership of the photograph and to a limited extent of the research process. This was evidenced in the participants holding of the photographs and, pointing to various elements in the photographs.
- The method has a contribution to make where researchers wish to incorporate the use of visual methodologies in situations where time/access to participants is necessarily limited. For researchers interested in the

potential contribution of the visual to their research the availability of the photographs as a pre-existing set of photographs offers an immediately available and accessible set of tools which can be employed in their research process.

- The use of pre-existing photographs suggests that the ownership of the images does not belong to the participants or the researcher (Packard 2008). This also excludes any difficulties with the technical competence of the participants which has been identified as a problem in other research (Allen 2012). Because neither the researcher or the participant created the photographs there can be no preconceived 'correct' interpretation of the meaning of the photographs and no conflict between the position of 'creator' and 'interpreter' of the photograph. In this way it allows the observer to engage on a completely interpretive exercise with the photographs. The use of an existing set of photographs avoids the tension created between the aesthetic and the documentary elements of the photographs, where there is less sense of ownership over the photographs it may shift the emphasis away from any pressure to defend the aesthetic quality of the photographs and concentration on the emerging meaning. (Luttrell and Chalfen 2010)
- It recommends itself as an approach through its potential to contribute a third dimension (Pink 2009, Short & Warren 2012) to the research conversation and particularly in facilitating the participants 're-creation' and exploration of their socially created experiences (Warren 2008). In my research it facilitated the re-positioning of the participant allowing them to

connect with the emotions associated with the meaning emerging from their engagement with the photograph, but to do so at a safe distance from the emotions triggered by the photographs which was important in ensuring the well-being of the participants. It suggests that the photographs acted as independent holders of the emotions of the participants allowing them to 'bracket' their feelings into the photograph and to then look at 'them' and speak about the feelings from outside the emotions.

- The use of photographs as tools to facilitate access to the tacit understandings of the participants was very effective in this research. Their use does challenge the researcher to create a secure safe environment in which to conduct this type of research. It also presents a challenge to the researcher to be especially cognisant of ethical and power (Busher 2009, p.3) issues in engaging participants in this type of research, as a tool one is conscious of the need not to use such methods as 'extractive' methods on unsuspecting participants.
- If balancing power relationships is important the researcher is challenged therefore to negotiate the boundary between any interpretation of the data past that created by the participants through their own interpretive processes. The role of the academic as 'expert' and having the authority therefore to interpret past the presenting information, is challenged Through engaging with the participants in a participatory and flexible manner with the pre-existing photographs one can maintain 'The emancipatory power of participatory visual methods..' (Packard 2008: 75)

- The use of the pre-existing photographs also avoids the problem of researcher exclusion from the research (Allan 2012) where the participant has a greater understanding of the context in which the photograph is set and effectively excludes the researcher from the interpretive process.
- An alternate perspective suggests that the use of pre-existing photographs excluded the participants from the creation or from being engaged in the construction of their representation of their lives, (Radley 2010) they exclude the participants from creation their own illustration and evidence (Packard 2008), and is therefore exclusionary. In visual methods which rely on participant generated photographs the assumption is that this approach gives power to the participants and increases their level of participation in the research, but this concern is balanced through the provision of a sufficient choice and by the flexibility offered through the availability of a pre-existing set. This idea has been expressed by (Radley 2008: 277) that 'photographs are not just representations but are also traces of the world that remain within it.' That what pictures portray and what stories narrate are versions of our experience of the world, not constructions of the world that we experience. This suggests that it is the interpretation that is most significant rather than being engaged in the construction.

'Writing about the field of visual sociology in 1979, Howard Becker remarked that it was 'a field for people who could tolerate disorder' (Becker 1979, 7), this was especially true in my research and resonates well with the expectation of

uncertainty which is also part of the challenge of engaging with CGT research the outcome of which is significant and worthwhile.

In my research the tentativeness of relying completely on photographs as tools with which to investigate a multidimensional concept such as trust resulted (I feel) in some unevenness in the representation of findings and resulted in an imbalance in parts between the verbal and visual content. In further research I would recommend a sustained focus on employing the photographs to facilitate the research dialogue on the topic. If visual researchers are to bridge the power gap in creating participatory research approaches it must also be accompanied with a clear commitment and intent on behalf of the researcher to honour the voice of the participants and to represent these as near to the source as possible and for this reason the principles of Grounded theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory sits well with this intent and approach because at all stages the researcher is entreated to stay close to the meaning created by the participants.

8.5. Implications of this research

In addition to the potential for researchers created through the use of McKnight *et al* (1998; 2001a/b; 2002a/b) model and the photo methodology, the outcome of my research has implications for three areas of HE, for the mature student cohort in HE, for the HE system and policy and for the teaching and learning practices in HE.

8.5.1. For mature students

The research highlights the complexity of the HE journey experienced by Mature students who demonstrate extraordinary resourcefulness in negotiating their HE

journey. Mature students should take courage and recognise the strengths they bring to HE, to develop their self-trust and to recognise that they are resilient and persistent, that the social capital available to them is significant and to embrace the power that they have to challenge the 'culture' of the HE system to continue to adapt to the needs of this changing student cohort, despite the resistance (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003) they may experience from the HEI.

From a teaching and learning perspective the research provides clear evidence that mature students are a different type of learner from the traditional student cohort. They demonstrate a much greater degree of responsibility for their own learning and have a great wealth of experience upon which they draw in managing the travails of HE. This store of expertise should be harnessed in the teaching/learning relationship and students should challenge the hegemony of the 'academic' within HE.

This engagement does present a challenge to teachers in HE where this differential engagement challenges lecturers to be responsive to the disparate needs of these distinct cohorts.

8.5.2. *Implications for teaching and learning*

As an educator in a HEI, this research has offered some significant insights into how Lecturers are conceptualised by the mature students:

- Being a Lecturer in HE is perceived by the students as being a significantly powerful role, it is possible for lecturers to exercise this power either in an authoritative manner and to create a dynamic of fear or to meet the student as 'thou' (Buber 2000) and create climate of trust in the teaching

relationship. The creation of such a climate of trust is perceived as playing an important role in the level of the mature student engagement, in their learning experiences and in their involvement with HE.

- The experience of being trusted is also perceived by the participants in my research as being significant in their developing self-trust, a belief in their own capacity as learners and in their engagement with and retention in HE which are significant concerns for the HE sector and are considerations worthy of further exploration.
- Academics interested in developing a trust relationship do this through establishing their *competency* both in the knowledge that they hold but also in the manner that they deliver it i.e. their teaching practices. It is also important that they behave with *integrity and honesty* in the interactions with the students through their engagement in teaching and assessments. The trust is also built through the adoption of a *benevolent* attitude towards the students not offering special treatment but through engaging with the students in a respectful, more equal manner acknowledging the value of their prior experiences, demonstrating a duty of care and helpfulness towards the students, and being interested in them as people.
- The importance of the teaching as a relationship reflective of the humanist tradition is evident in my research where teaching and learning is identified as an inherently emotional process in which the mature students trust in the lecturer is an essential enabler in their learning process.

The challenge to educators therefore is how to create this climate of trust when there is little evidence within HE, that teaching is perceived as being an important factor in career advancement (Clegg 2009, Adcroft 2010). There may be a shift in focus to ensure that this becomes an important element through the developing teaching and learning initiatives in HE but this is balanced by a prevailing promotional paradigm which values the research or management status of the applicant above that of their teaching credentials.

My research does present a challenge to academics to give consideration to exploring teaching and learning systems which facilitate the retention of the relational elements of the experience while teaching to an increasing and diverse student cohort.

8.5.3. Implications for policy makers

The challenge is accentuated in the current climate of cutbacks and mechanistic pressures in the system, which defies educators to sustain a professionalism to enable them to facilitate trust and growth in their own students.

The climate of change and uncertainty currently being experienced in Irish Higher education sets a particularly important context for the outcomes for this research. In the context of the demands for increasing efficiencies and increased research resources it appears that there is a dissonance between a vision of teaching which is affective and flexible and an accountability system which is linear and mechanistic. Policy and parsimony is turning teaching in HE into an exercise which precludes the possibility of building any relationships with the student or the possibility of giving recognition to the affective or embedded nature of their lived experiences which

has emerged from this thesis as a significant element in the mature student experience.

The development of the flexible delivery agenda in HE would be of potential benefit to mature students juggling the various pressures in their lives but would need to be reflected in funding strategies for HE to recognise participants on such programmes as full time equivalents for funding purposes.

The authentic inclusion of the voice of the student (Fielding 2004; Seale 2010) would reflect a genuine effort to honour the stated policy aim of facilitating a quality teaching and learning experience in HE in Ireland. In this way recognition could be given to the needs of mature students in scheduling and consideration could be afforded to the potential contribution of flexible learning to facilitating their needs and from a funding perspective, students on flexible learning programmes could be included in measurements of funding allocations to HEI's.

The trust constructs identified in my research could be adapted as tools in evaluation, e.g.: *to be accountable to building relationship, to use the constructs of belief, predictably etc.* as tools for evaluation. This would need to be accompanied by appropriate research tools in the identification of such outcomes but would shift the focus of teaching to attend to issues of the emotional journey which is HE.

In an Irish context, where HE is operating in an uncertain political and legislative environment, the call for a reassertion of the academic in education (Garvin 2012) would seem to be a timely argument which has resonance with Gibbs (2004), Tierney (2006) and Stensaker and Harvey (2011), suggesting that there is a need to re-focus HE as a provider of a public good related to the needs of society at large and not just the economy.

8.6. Recommendations for Further Research

The thesis contributes to the understanding of the role of trust in the Higher Education experience of mature students which could be enhanced by further research in the following areas:

Broadening the research base

The research sample for this thesis was drawn primarily from within the IOT sector which has a disproportionate number of mature students in its cohort, further research which specifically concentrates on the Mature students in the University sector to determine if the outcomes from this thesis have the same resonance in that sector would be purposeful. A more comprehensive study of students drawn from within the University sector where mature students are underrepresented might have a different outcome. It would be an interesting source for further study and comparisons between the experiences of the two cohorts could be illuminating.

The participants in my research were chosen from all four years (the common duration of an undergraduate degree) programme, through this sampling strategy it was possible to see the developing confidence and self-trust over the lifetime of the programme but a further research opportunity to conduct longitudinal research focused on the same participants over the lifetime of their HE journey and their experience after completing their studies would be revealing.

There was glimpse of an emerging difference between the expectations of the male and female participants which could also be the subject of further research, similarly the emerging difference between the 'mature, mature' students and the

younger mature students deserves consideration in further research. The focus of my research was on the mature students within the non-traditional cohort in HE, for that reason it did not focus on differentiating the sample based on cultural, economic, ethnic or social differences which might be a useful construct to bring to the sampling procedure in further research.

The participants in my research adopted a positive trusting stance towards HE, it would be interesting to explore how others e.g. students who potentially could engage in HE trust or do not trust the 'promise of HE' and if it is a factor in their non-participation.

Developing the Trust Framework

The Mature Student Trust Framework which has been created in response to incorporating McKnight's Model with the outcomes emerging from my thesis could usefully be explored in further research.

Developing the photo-methodology

The photo methodology as employed in this research has proven very useful, it would be interesting to develop its application further and to assess its relevance outside of this context.

8.7. Potential Limitations of this Research

The potential limitations of this research which merit some consideration;

The category of mature students employed in this research incorporated class, gender and age differences which were impossible to develop adequately in this research project but which might be a useful construct to bring to the sampling procedure in further research.

McKnight's model is designed for commencing relationships, it has been applied in this research retrospectively in some ways and this may well be a valid criticism of its use in this context, however it has also proven to be useful and relevant as an anchor for this research which is significant.

8.8. Conclusions

The promise of HE, to not only deliver employment to graduates but to offer a genuine educational experience for the students which is built neither on knowledge or skills but in focusing on the 'being' of the students 'is fundamentally challenged in and by a world of super complexity (Barnett 2009, p.439). Meanwhile the mature students are heavily invested at a personal, family and financial level in this neo-liberal construct. There is a sense that in the economic climate that exists at present, that the tensions within the system preclude it from making adjustments to accommodate the specific needs of the non-traditional student cohort and specifically the mature students. Indeed it is argued that the growing 'audit' culture is bringing an increased rigidity to the system which is not conducive for either the mature students or the 'traditional' students in HE. In this climate the HE project is challenged to offer a genuine educational experience for the students which my research demonstrates is underpinned by the presence of trust.

Through the creation of *The Emerging Trust Framework* I have shown the journey of the mature student into HE which is fortified by the presence of trust relationships outside of and within their journey. The research points to a type of trust which exists in and between the layers of the system. It is clearly understood by the mature students who are identified as 'vigilant social perceivers' (Sztompka's (1999) well equipped to make interpretations and decisions to trust. The trust relationship with significant others and the trust relationships established in HE are critical to their HE experience. Particularly significant in issues of learning and retention is the role of the 'lecturer' and the nature of their engagement with the student. The participants also demonstrated a depth of trust in the '*Promise of HE*' which has been identified as being precarious in the context of the increased number of graduates exiting HE, this fact along with the dichotomous managerial/academic platform on which Irish HE is being structured challenges the institution/system that is HE to behave ethically in maintaining its trustworthiness in the face of such challenge.

Finally

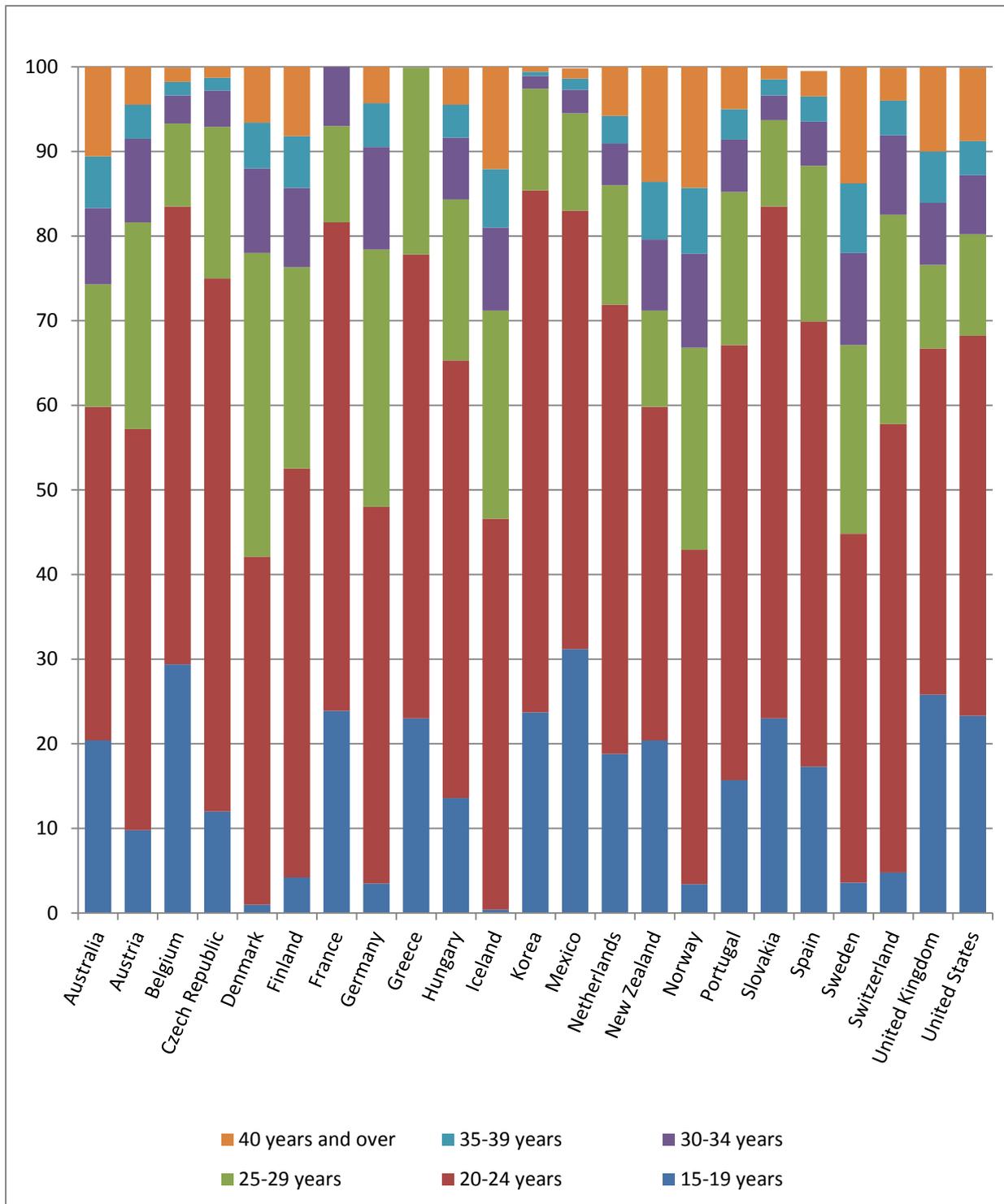
This research journey has been challenging, over the period I have been privileged to have been able to share in the participants' story and the trust that they have placed in me to share their story and their challenges. In reporting their story I have attempted to remain true to their meaning making. I have found the CGT methodology to be an effective guide throughout this process and have been

particularly impressed by the power of the photograph to engage the participants (and myself) in the research process.

These are challenging times for HE and all those both inside and entering into the process, there is of course a need to ensure the financial sustainability of the institution but if the trust that the mature students in my research have placed in the institution is to mean anything then there is a need to revisit some of the underlying concepts on which HE is built, one of which is trust evidenced in "*the degree to which a student is willing to rely on or have faith and confidence in the college to take appropriate steps that benefit him and help him achieve his learning and career objectives.*" (Ghosh and Whipple 2001:325).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: OECD Table on Student Participation in HE OECD Mature student



Participation in Higher Education (Reference source)

Appendix 2: Exploration of Alternative Qualitative Approaches

Case Study

The Case study approach which has been employed widely in educational research Merriam (2001) recommends itself as an approach in describing the operations of a particular 'case' or site its objective is to provide an insight into how a particular practice operates in that case or site. It draws on multiple (quantitative and qualitative) sources of data in building up the description. The method has been employed by Beard et al.(2007), arguing for consideration of the affective in HE in exploring student relationships in the first year in college. Clegg and Bradley (2006) exploring the introduction of Personal development planning in HE, and earlier Clegg et al.(2000) used a case study exploring issues of gender in HE and Davies (2001) used case study in institutions in exploring issues of decision making in choosing to participate in HE. As a method it is challenged to develop boundaries to the research and the challenge of balancing depth and breadth in its descriptions of the site or case. It was considered inappropriate for this research because the unit of analysis that is the purpose of this research is the individual rather than the site, though future developments of this research project could include other perspectives and be developed into a case study or case studies.

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology offers the opportunity to engage with the entire cultural system of the group and the opportunity of including the emic and etic perspectives of the participants and the researcher, its roots in anthropology lead to the creation a 'cultural portrait' (Creswell 2007 :70) of the group. It has been influenced by the development of realist and critical approaches to ethnographic study and has been employed as a method by Clegg (2010) researching the relationship between strategy development and teacher

improvement, Trowler (2001) exploring the academic discourse on the 'New Higher Education Project' in the UK and New York, and by Wong and Tierney (2001) on organisational change in HE. As an approach it recommended itself potentially for my research because of its ability to access the emic and etic perspectives and facilitating an in-depth understanding of the mature student experience, it was finally considered unsuitable because of its requirements to engage over an extended period with the students, its focus on description rather than theory building and was considered beyond the capacity of this project.

Narrative Inquiry

The Narrative inquiry (Clandadin and Connolly 2004), approach recommended itself to my research since it is interested in developing a description of the lived experience of individual lives, its use of the interview as the core method of data gathering was interesting and this engagement with the participants was considered appropriate for this research problem. Within HE it has been employed by Britton and Baxter (1999) in understanding students own understanding of the HE experience, who argues that it is a more effective research method to access narratives of the self than traditional ethnographic approaches. This approach is challenged in how to manage the 'emic' and the 'etic' perspectives and issues of who 'owns' the story and how the researcher should interpret the story presented by the individual in 'restorying' (Creswell 2007: 54-56) the data.

Phenomenology

Is an approach which facilitates the examination of the lived experience of a phenomenon such as 'trust' of a group of individuals who have each had experience of the concept. Its objective is to distill the 'essence' Creswell (2007:58) of the experience. It is an approach grounded in the philosophical assumptions in which the research is situated. It has been

employed in educational research by Van Manen (2000) focusing on the nature of care and worry in a pedagogical context, an example is found in Friend and Costley (2010) looking at distrust in the shopping experience of individuals, though Pink (2011) draws on the concepts of phenomenology in her research on method on the application and use of the 'visual' in the research process.

While different approaches to phenomenology, (Hermeneutic and Transcendental) offer the opportunity of a nuanced approach which suggested itself as appropriate for this research project, it was considered limited by its objective of describing the experience of the phenomenon and not developing this further into the implications of such experience for policy or practice. For this research project at the outset I was hesitant to assume that 'trust' as a phenomenon existed for mature students in HE and it seemed inappropriate to begin to research a phenomenon without first beginning with an investigation of whether it actually resonated with the lived experience of the participants.

Appendix 3: Research questions

Key area of interest for the research	Associated Question (s)
<p>To identify a framework for the exploration of trust for mature students in higher education (Literature Review and Interview process)</p>	<p>How is the concept of trust perceived in all the diverse literature?</p> <p>How has the impact of trust been explored in the context of learning organisations?</p> <p>Which of the frameworks for researching trust is most appropriate to the study of trust in higher education?</p>
<p>To identify the key trust relationships for mature students in higher education.</p>	<p>What relationships are most significant for you in your higher education experience?</p> <p>What relationships contributed to your decision around trust? What actions contributed to this decision?</p> <p>What is your general trusting stance? (Use the generalized trust question?)</p>
<p>To identify the role of trust in the learning experience of mature students</p>	<p>What role does trust play in your higher education from a mature student perspective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How is the concept of <i>'trust'</i> understood and experienced by mature student learners as individuals? •How does the level of individual trust impact on the <i>choice to participate</i> in higher education as a mature student? •What is the impact of <i>previous learning experiences</i> on trust of the higher education system?
<p>To identify the factors which impact on</p>	<p>Willingness to be vulnerable – What risks have you</p>

trust

taken in deciding to participate in higher education?

Have you taken any risks in choosing to participate in higher education? What is the nature of these risks?

What are/were you most fearful of as you embarked on higher education?

What was familiar and what was unfamiliar?
(Relationship to the past?)

Describe the level of trust which you have experienced participating in education in this Institution? What does it say? What did you base your decision on?

Explain how your trust level impacts on your experience in college?

Has there been any occasion when you have lost trust in the education experience?

•Factors which influence the trust levels of students.

○Quantitative/Qualitative information/ source of information?

•

○What are the factors which enhance the level of trust that the participants have in the higher education system?

○What is the impact of the role of actor and environmental factors on the trust levels?

○What are the factors which inhibit the level of trust that they have in the higher education organisation?

○What is the impact of trust in the horizontal (other learners) or vertical (tutor) networks on the learning experience?

•To understand the relationship between trust and the educational outcomes of the students. •What are the implications of the trust experience for *the outcomes* for the students?

Appendix 4: Learning from Pilot Interviews

Pilot Interview 1 (Dec 18th 2011)

These were the photographs which were chosen.

First: the experience of Higher Education No. 57 and for institution No. 3

Learning:

1. Use less photographs but overall they worked well
2. Placing on table works, takes time to make the decision to choose a photograph because there are too many.
3. Ask trust question earlier.. did you trust them.. who do you trust.. what does trust mean to you.
4. Ask the meaning of trust earlier perhaps as an opener
5. Use video recorder but use the tripod? Or position this accurately..
6. Framework works well.. some resistance to institutional trust
7. Think about the analytical framework..

Appendix 5: Consent Letter to Participants

Date

Dear xx,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process. I appreciate the time that you have given to this and I hope that you will find the process interesting and not too difficult.

The information that is gathered will be used as part of my Doctoral Thesis with the University of Leicester. . I am interested in hearing what you have to say and what your views are on the topic of ***Trust and the experience of Mature Students in Higher Education.***

In accordance with their Ethical guidelines and those of LIT Tipperary our concern is that the research is conducted to the highest standards ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The interview will be taped and recorded and all of the information that you give will be dealt with in a confidential manner and will not be shared in its interview format with others. After this interview your name and details will not be attached to any of the information used.

If at any stage in this process you would like to stop or indeed withdraw from the interview and the research process this is understood and accepted.

When the conversation is complete you are welcome to give me feedback on any aspect of the experience.

I have attached a form which it would be helpful to have completed before we meet, it will provide some helpful background information for the research. The interview/conversation process is informal and I expect that it will last between 1 hour and no more than 90 minutes. During the process we will be working together using some prompting questions

and photographs to help us along. If you have any questions please let me know and I will gladly answer these.

Bridget Kirwan

086-1601284

This single question comes called a generalized trust question asks you to identify your general attitude to trusting others. Please tick the place along the continuum which fits with your own views.

Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can't you be too careful in dealing with people"

12345678910

Can't be too carefulMost people can be trusted

Consent Form:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process. I appreciate the time that you have given to this and I hope that you will find the process interesting and not too difficult.

The information that is gathered will be used as part of my Doctoral Thesis (Social Science) with the University of Leicester. In accordance with their Ethical guidelines and those of LIT Tipperary our concern is that the research is conducted to the highest standards ensuring confidentiality and anonymity

The information that you give will be dealt with in a confidential manner and will not be shared in its interview format with others. After this interview your name and details will not be attached to any of the information used.

If at any stage in this process you would like to stop or indeed withdraw from the interview and the research process this is understood and accepted.

When the conversation is complete you are welcome to give me feedback on any aspect of the experience. If you would like to have access to your own interview data at the end of the process please let me know.

I am happy to participate in this research:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 6: Partners in Faith

Partners in Faith

c/o Sophia Housing Association

25 Cork Street

Dublin 8

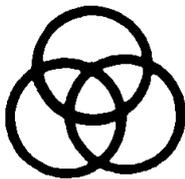
Ireland

Phone: +353 (1) 453 5348

Mobile: 086 398 9309

Email: info@partnersinfaith.ie

Website: www.partnersinfaith.ie



Who we are

We are an agency for the personal and social development of adults from a faith perspective.

Structures

We have a four member team, four trustees and a small circle of advisors and contract facilitators.

What we do

We provide opportunities and resources for people in areas where economic resources are low, to deepen and develop their understanding of God, God's dream for people and

articulate the values they live out in the cultural, economic and spiritual climate of their milieu. We work organically, with people where they live and continually adapt sessions to what ever is emerging in conversation with the participants.

How we Do This

The working team uses the Partners in Faith methodology and content evolved over 25 years of experience with people in parishes. Some surveys were done in the inner-city and outlying parishes of Dublin. The original team piloted sessions from '86-87 and finally put together 25 sessions in book form in 1990. The sessions interweave strands of the core Biblical message, experience of Christian community, critical analysis of society and action for transformation. By the end of the PIF experience participants form teams to engage in designing and running sessions themselves. This brings about a huge increase in confidence and leadership.

Roots:

Socio-cultural of local communities:

Unemployment, poverty

Neglect by state and business

Early school leaving

Atmosphere of oppression (apathy or aggression)

Losing faith in oneself, in God in the ability to influence situations individually or collectively

Signs of resilience, solidarity and struggle against all the odds

Appendix 7: Ethics Letter

To: **BRIDGET KIRWAN**

Labour Market Studies

Project Title: **Trust and the Mature Student Experience in Higher Education**

Thank you for submitting your application which has been considered.

This study has been given ethical approval, subject to any conditions quoted in the attached notes.

Any significant departure from the programme of research as outlined in the application for research ethics approval (such as changes in methodological approach, large delays in commencement of research, additional forms of data collection or major expansions in sample size) must be reported to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer.

Approval is given on the understanding that the University Research Ethics Code of Practice and other research ethics guidelines and protocols will be compiled with

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice>

<http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/>

The following is a record of correspondence notes from your application **bak6-b2c1**.

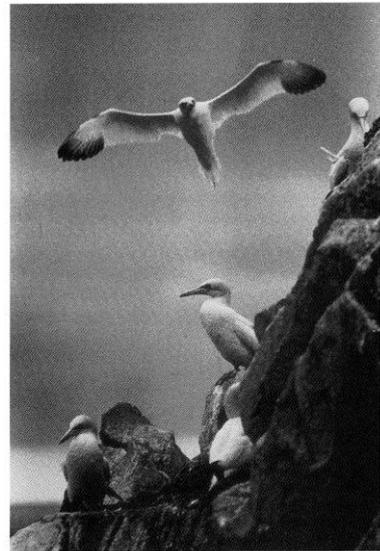
Please ensure that any proviso notes have been adhered to:-

--- END OF NOTES ---

Appendix 8: Photographs



1. 14. © Colin Mearns



2. 9. © Colin Mahady



3.



4. 52. © Chris Maguire



5.

© © Getty Images



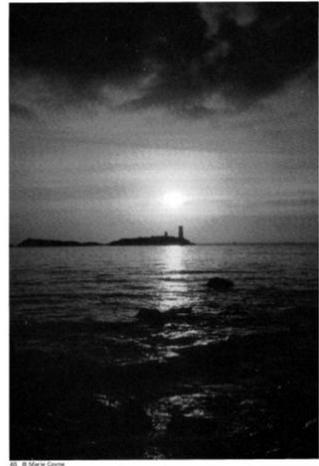
6.

© © Colin Mather



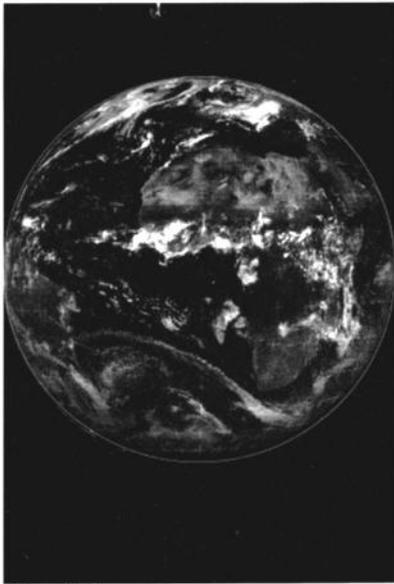
7.

© © Getty Images



8.

© © Mike Gagne

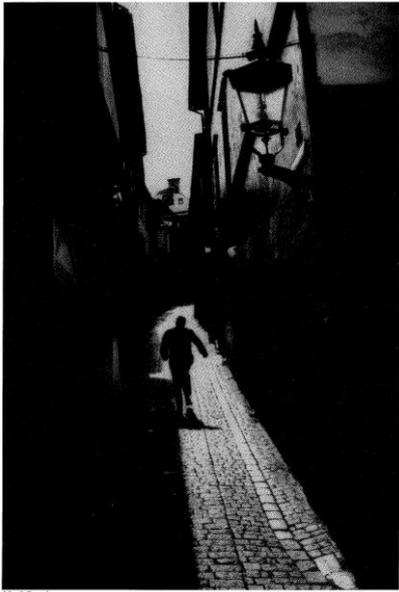


9.

© © University of Toronto



10.



11.

36. © Trocère



12.

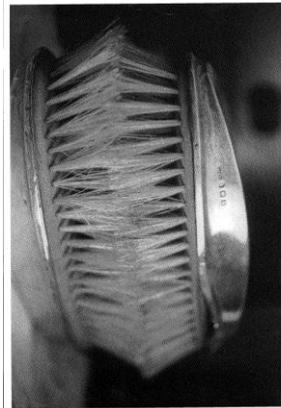
13.



14.

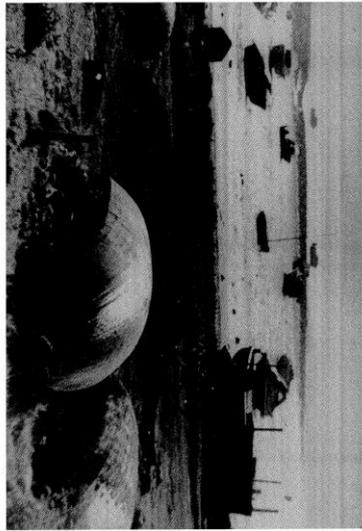


15.



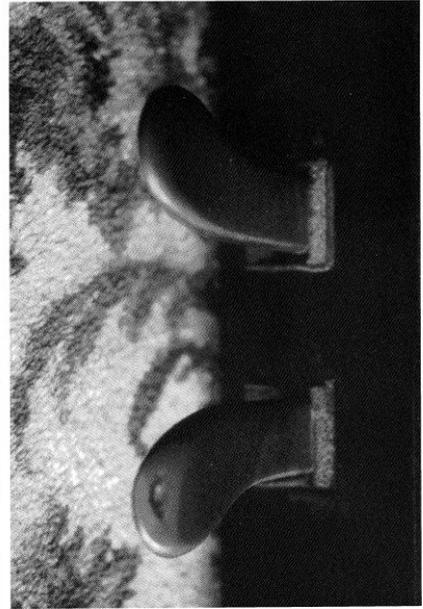
11. © Amy Coombs 1999

16.



28. © Tony Medson

17.



44. © Ann Cravin 1999

18.

19.

20.



21.



22.

23.



24.

Appendix 9: Open Coding Photographs Example

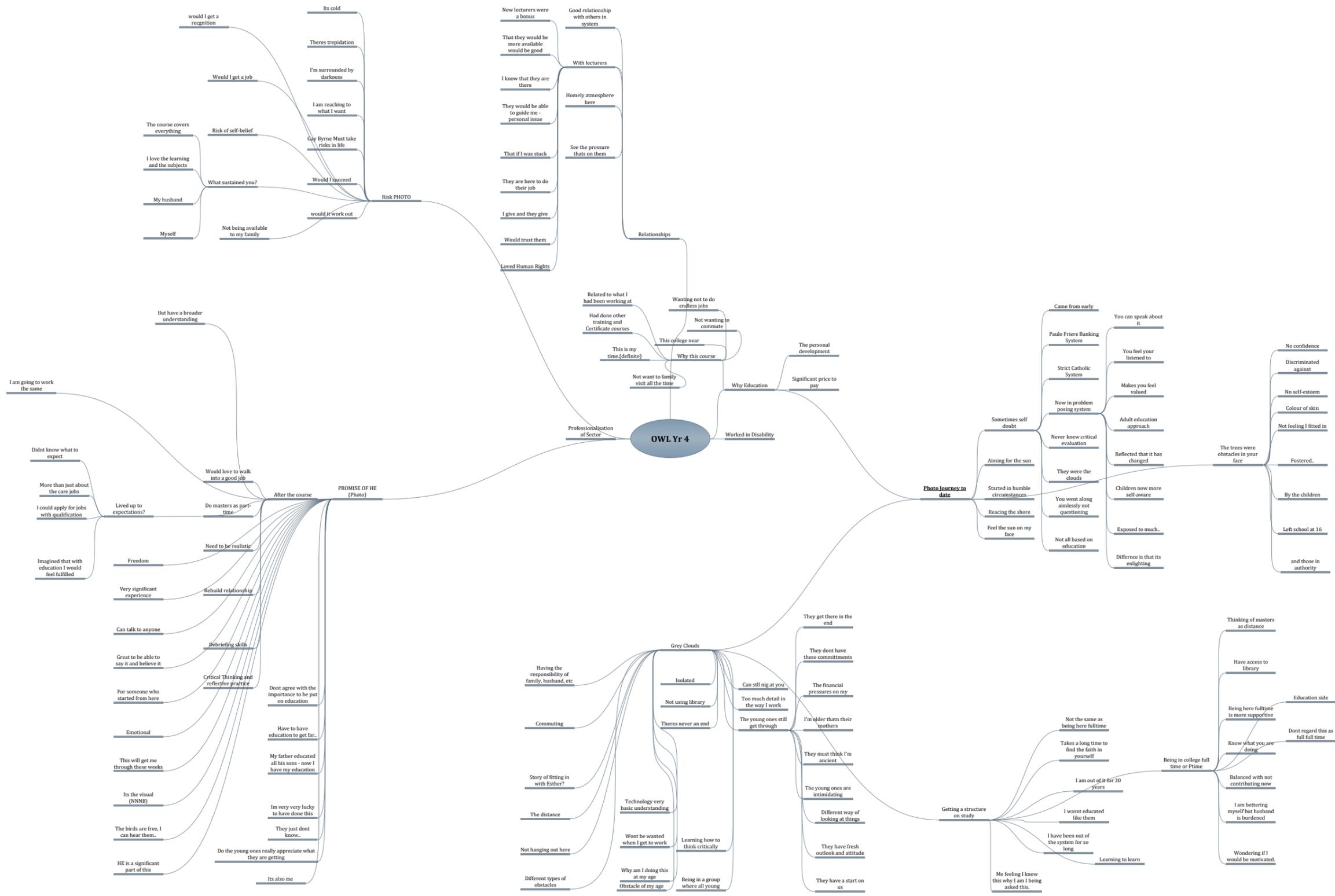
(1) Code	(2) Area 1	(3) Photograph	(4) Narrative	(5) Theme
GIM Yr. 1	choose one that kind of represents the role that trust plays in higher education for you right now.	<p>The swans (No 9)</p> 	Well ah. . .I suppose, I'm the child . . .I'm taking a chance, it might bite.	Risking, being vulnerable
GIM Yr. 1	Area 2			
	if you were to choose a photograph there that represents the risk that you have taken here am, to come in here, what photograph would you choose?	<p>The washing line (No 14)</p> 	I ah(long pause choosing photo)(laughter) . it's out there for everyone to see now. . . now, win or loose. Hang your dirty washing out, basically that's what came into my head when I saw it.	Exposing my weakness, risk of being 'found out'
GIM	Area 3			

Yr. 1				
	<p>of those photographs on a final choice represent what HE has to offer and what you are trusting it to do for you..?</p>	<p>The sunflower(No 7)</p> 	<p>Growth. Of myself, within myself Be that personality wise or am . . . mentally . . am . . I suppose I'm trusting myself and my time here as I grow in some positive way, ha ha</p>	<p>Promise of HE growing myself</p>

Appendix 10: Visio Example (A3)

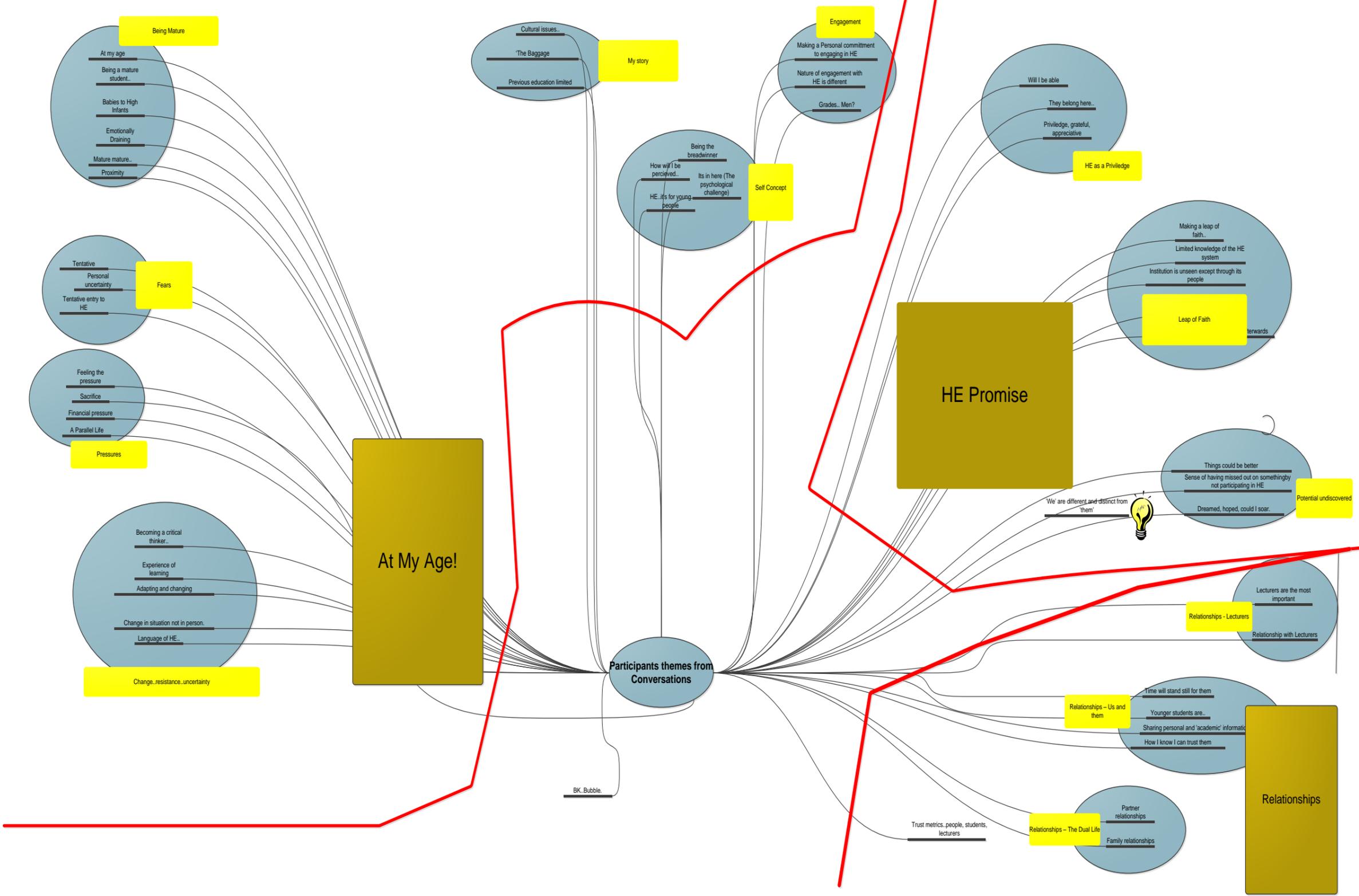
Visio file prepared with 'codes' emerging from the conversation with each participant.

(example)



Appendix 11: Codes to Emerging Themes (A3)

Visio Diagram: Moving from Codes through to Themes



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