Navigating personal change: Transforming perceptions of self as learner

by

Julie Anna Willans

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Faculty of Arts, Business, Informatics and Education

CQUniversity

Australia

April 2010
Abstract

The thesis is based on the findings of a qualitative case study that examined perceptions of self as learner for a small group of mature age participants who engaged in a thirteen week Enabling program in a regional Australian university. Transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003) is drawn upon to frame the phases of personal transformation the participants experienced when they came into contact with various Discourses of a formal learning context. The emergence of particular borderland Discourses (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 2005) highlights some of the tensions associated with the personal transformations each participant experienced as their perceptions of self as learner were challenged, critiqued and transformed. Findings in this thesis reveal that although personal transformation can be empowering, it can be an erratic, emotion-laden process, fraught with contradiction and tension. Furthermore, contextual influences and the passage of time in which meaning making can occur have been found to be significant in the transformative learning process. These findings have implications for pedagogical practices of Enabling programs in Australia, especially in light of imminent Higher Education reforms (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) aimed at sizeable increases in participation rates and more equitable representation in university contexts. Amongst the citizenry projected to participate in such contexts will be mature age learners, some for whom inclusion in higher education may be problematised by past formal learning environments that have cemented negative perceptions of self as learner. Implications of this thesis suggest that future Enabling programs take into account the unique characteristics of the mature age learner in order to optimise their meaningful and successful higher education experiences. Ideally such programs would be theoretically and philosophically based on a comprehensive understanding of both the institutional and personal challenges faced by contemporary mature age learners who engage in Enabling programs. Theoretical findings in this thesis have the following implications for practice in Enabling programs: (a) the provision of supportive learning contexts that respect and build on the mature age learner’s prior skills and knowledge; (b) acknowledgement that emotion plays a vital role in the meaning-making process; and (c) the consideration of the sometimes contradictory patterns and different periods of time over which mature age learners come to examine and reconstruct long held perceptions of themselves as learners.
Publications related to this study


Papers Presented at Conferences

Refereed conference papers


1 This paper presentation was revised and accepted for publication in the Australian Journal of Adult Learning.

2 This paper presentation was also revised and accepted for publication in the Australian Journal of Adult Learning.


**Conference presentations**


**Other presentations**

# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii

Publications related to this study.................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ ix

Declaration ....................................................................................................................... x

Glossary of terms ............................................................................................................. xi

Chapter 1  Justification for this study ............................................................................ 1
  1.1 Background to the study ......................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Aim of the study ...................................................................................................... 3
  1.3 Rationale for the study ............................................................................................ 4
  1.4 Setting and Participants .......................................................................................... 5
  1.5 The research design ................................................................................................. 6
  1.6 The significance of the study ................................................................................... 6
  1.7 The limitations and delimitations of the study ......................................................... 8
  1.8 The organisation of the thesis ................................................................................. 9

Chapter 2  Contextualising the study .............................................................................. 11
  2.1 Overview .................................................................................................................. 11
  2.2 Contextualising Enabling Education ....................................................................... 11
  2.3 Examining the relevant literature .......................................................................... 24
  2.4 An intersection of the literature ............................................................................. 34
  2.5 Summary ................................................................................................................ 38

Chapter 3  The theoretical framework ......................................................................... 40
  3.1 Overview ................................................................................................................ 40
  3.2 Transformative learning theory ............................................................................. 41
  3.3 Emotion .................................................................................................................... 57
  3.4 Discourses ............................................................................................................... 60
  3.5 Summary ................................................................................................................ 64

Chapter 4  The research design .................................................................................... 65
  4.1 Overview ................................................................................................................ 65
## Table of Contents

4.2 Research methodology – Case study ........................................... 68
4.3 Data collection tools ..................................................................... 71
4.4 Organisation and analysis of the data ............................................ 80
4.5 Trustworthiness, research ethics and the researcher’s roles ...... 84
4.6 Summary...................................................................................... 91

Chapter 5 Analysis and discussion...................................................... 92
5.1 Overview .................................................................................. 92
5.2 Barb’s borderland Discourses....................................................... 93
5.3 Borderland Discourses of Barb’s transformation ..................... 114
5.4 Bert’s borderland Discourses........................................................ 116
5.5 Borderland Discourses of Bert’s transformation ....................... 136
5.6 Ella’s borderland Discourses......................................................... 137
5.7 Borderland Discourses of Ella’s transformation ......................... 151
5.8 Discussion................................................................................. 152
5.9 Summary..................................................................................... 155

Chapter 6 Conclusions..................................................................... 157
6.1 Overview..................................................................................... 157
6.2 Theoretical significance .............................................................. 157
6.3 Implications for policy in Enabling education ......................... 159
6.4 Implications for practice in Enabling programs...................... 161
6.5 Summary..................................................................................... 167

Chapter 7 Reflections on the journey ................................................. 168

References...................................................................................... 172
Appendices....................................................................................... 194
Appendix A: Enabling/Preparatory/Bridging programs in Australian universities .. 195
Appendix B: Ethical Certification Statement ..................................... 198
Appendix C: Information sheet......................................................... 200
Appendix D: Consent form.............................................................. 204
Table of tables & List of figures

Table 2.1: Overview of relevant research.................................................................25
Table 4.1: Schedule and foci of the data collection tools........................................73
Table 4.2: The semi-structured group interview questions and schedule ............74
Table 4.3: The semi-structured individual interview questions and schedule........77
Table 4.4: Overview of the data sorting process and procedures.........................82
Table 5.1: Barb’s borderland Discourses .................................................................94
Table 5.2: Bert’s borderland Discourses .................................................................116
Table 5.3: Ella’s Borderland Discourses .................................................................138
Table 5.4: The participants’ borderland Discourses .............................................153
Table 6.1: Emotions, borderland Discourses and implications .............................161

Figure 4.1: The research design.................................................................................66
Figure 4.2: The data collection tools.......................................................................71
Acknowledgements

Compiling this thesis has been akin to making preparations for a protracted journey. The journey began with a suitcase brimming with enthusiasm and naivety, and maintained a steady momentum until life events slowed the journey. The pace continued at a less frantic rate, allowing for maturity and clarity of thought to come to the fore. Many people have walked this journey beside me ... some for a short while, others for the long haul. Thank-you to Patrick Danaher and Jenny McDougall for walking beside me and providing guidance for part of the journey; to the late Jenny Simpson who walked beside me in the early days of this thesis, and who is never far from my thoughts. I extend my sincere thanks to Geoff Danaher who walked beside me in the latter stages and gave sage advice, directions and assurance that enabled me to reach my destination. My enduring thanks to Bobby Harreveld, who from day one has been ever supportive, the provider of clarity and insight in a most patient and intelligent way. Thank-you to Karen Seary for supporting my journey in so many ways and to the defunct Division of Teaching and Learning Services and the recently formed Division of Library and Academic Learning Services for the opportunity to complete this thesis. My appreciation also extends to the defunct Faculty of Education and current Faculty of Arts, Business, Informatics and Education for the research grant that has enabled this thesis to come to fruition. Thank-you also to my critical friends: my brother Mark Ellaway and good friend Jenny Collis who provided me with honest feedback and much encouragement. My heartfelt thanks also goes to Ingrid Kennedy who helped me make this thesis look so good!

Special people have walked this journey with me. My love, pride and thanks go to my daughter Monique for her constant and tireless companionship, for her love, her encouragement and her inspiration. Thank-you to my son Jared for always asking about my thesis and being the free spirit that he is; to my mother and late father for actively encouraging each of their eight children to reach their fullest potential; to family members who have taken an interest and to Alex for his love, faith and confidence in my ability to complete this thesis.

Finally, thank-you to all the brave adults who have engaged in an Enabling program and dare to make changes in their lives – they remain my constant inspiration.
Declaration

I declare that the main text of this thesis is entirely my own work and that such work has not been previously submitted as a requirement for the award of a degree at CQUniversity Australia or any other institution of higher education.

[Signature]

Julie Anna Willans

Date 3/12/10
Glossary of terms

The following terms are defined from within the limits and delimits of this thesis.

**Borderland Discourses:** Borderland Discourses represent the conceptualisation of Discourses as the language and “non-language stuff” (Gee, 2005, p. 5) in synthesis with borderland discourse (Alsup, 2006). This conception represents a means of accounting for the conceptual space that exists between the borders of the many Discourses of which individuals are part. This conceptual space is also known as the “liminal space” (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 2) and has synergies with transformative learning theory in that it represents the space in which long held assumptions and perceptions are challenged or unsettled, leading the individual to make sense of new meaning about themselves and their world. Further elaboration of borderland Discourses is presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

**Constructivism:** Constructivism places an emphasis on the learning that is constructed in the mind of the learner, although external factors may contribute, and there is always a “sociocultural environment” at play (Taylor, 2006, p. 73). Constructivism purports that “meaning is seen to exist within ourselves, not in external forms”, and that our understanding of the world “is a result of our perceptions of our experiences” (Cranton, 2006, p. 23). Essential to a constructivist view is an emphasis that “all knowledge is context bound, and that individuals make personal meaning of their learning experiences” (Knowles, 1998, p. 142). Social networks of the individual inevitably impact on one’s construction of knowledge, for as Cranton (2006, p. 79) points out, “we see the world through a lens constructed in our interaction with our social context.”

**Discourse:** In this thesis, James Gee’s (2005) conceptualisation of Discourse (capital D) is drawn upon. He defines Discourse as “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting and interacting in the ‘right’ places at the ‘right’ times with the ‘right’ objects” (p. 26). Such associations, notes Gee (p. 26), “can be used to identity oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network” (p. 26). Further elaboration of Discourse is presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

**Emotion:** Emotion refers to the affective dimension of what it is to be human. Barbelet (2002, p. 1) informs that when one cares about something, it “registers in their physical and dispositional being” as emotion. Emotion is also a physiological
process for emotional experiences lead the brain to alter our body chemistry and consequently help us to make sense of new experiences (Taylor, 2006). Moon (2004, p. 48) supports a constructivist model of learning and considers that “feelings influence what we actually know about something” and can both help and hinder the learning process. Further elaboration of emotion is presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Enabling program: Enabling programs are often interchangeably referred to as preparatory, access, pathway or bridging programs that provide access into undergraduate programs at University. As the title suggests, they are designed to equip learners with the skills, knowledge and confidence to ensure adequate preparation for university studies. Enabling programs are a sometimes ‘free of tuition costs’ university initiative and conducted prior to the student’s commencement of an undergraduate program. The STEPS (Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies) is an Enabling program referred to in this thesis.

Hero’s Journey: The Hero’s Journey is a metaphor used to seek greater self-knowledge. Based upon Vogler’s (1996) adaptation of Joseph Campbell’s (1993) research into the universality of mythic structures, the Hero’s Journey is comprised of a twelve stages journey, representative of events in our lives that bring change. The stages are: 1. The ordinary world; 2. The call to adventure; 3. Refusal of the call; 4. Meeting with the mentor; 5. Crossing the first threshold; 6. Tests, allies and enemies; 7. Approach to the innermost cave (the second threshold); 8. The supreme ordeal; 9. The reward (seizing the sword); 10. The road back; 11. Resurrection; 12. Return with Elixir (freedom to live).

Humanism: The basic premise of humanism is to assist the mature age learner in realising “her or his potential to the fullest extent possible” (Brookfield, 2002, p. 1). In a humanistic approach, the educator typically advocates for and practises a collaborative and participatory approach, seeking to walk beside his or her students in a “co-learner role” (Cranton, 2006, p. 4). This ideally occurs in a nurturing and supportive environment in which the interests, concerns and needs of the learner are taken into consideration.

Language and Learning course: Language and Learning is one of four compulsory courses in STEPS. It is an academic writing course that builds on the past experience of its learners by acknowledging that prior learning experiences can strongly influence perceptions of self as learners. Writing strategies are employed
to open minds to greater knowledge through the exposure to a New Age discourse that encourages greater knowledge of self and others. This includes an understanding of preferred learning styles and personality types, and how such influence the individual’s view of self, others and the world. *Language and Learning* encourages the students to apply knowledge of their learning skills in a variety of genres but specific focus is placed on the academic essay. Through research, writing and dialogue with others, the students are exposed to past and present social, political and economic influences in contemporary Australia.

**Mature age learners:** In this thesis, mature age learners are those students aged twenty-one years or more who take a program of study in a university context. An assumption has been made that the mature age learners' formal school days occurred a number of years or decades ago.

**Metaphor:** The word *metaphor* is defined as “to carry” (pherein) and “beyond” *(meta)* (Vale & Eckartsberg, 1981, p. xxi). Metaphors provide “a way of seeing something in terms of something else” and refer to “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another” (Soskice, 1985, p. 18). Metaphors are employed both consciously and unconsciously as a way to make sense of how we experience and interact with the physical and cultural environments of which we are part.

**Perception:** In this thesis, perception is taken to mean a belief or an image one has as a result of how one see or understands (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 2000, p. 938).

**Perspective transformation:** Perspective transformation occurs when an event or events cause an individual to question a long held assumption. Through critical self-reflection and discourse with others, time and intuitive processes, an individual engages in meaning making about new knowledge that is at odds with their own long held assumptions. A perspective transformation occurs when the individual comes to conceptualise and act upon a new or revised perspective or worldview. A perspective transformation is an integral, potential outcome of transformative learning.

**STEPS:** Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies, a pre-university Enabling program offered on five of CQUniversity Australia’s regional campuses. It is comprised of four compulsory courses and is offered internally in the full-time (13
weeks) or part-time (26 weeks) mode. It is also offered in the external mode (26 weeks). STEPS is philosophically underpinned by transformative learning theory and adult learning principles and is characterised by class sizes of 20 to 25 students, co-operative learning, group work and peer support. A foundational principle of STEPS is the use of the Hero’s Journey, framed as a metaphor to explain to its mature age learners that the STEPS journey may be typified by trepidation and uncertainty, but rewarded with elation and empowerment.

_Transformative learning theory:_ Transformative learning theory is an organic adult learning theory that has built upon Jack Mezirow’s (1978) description of a ten phase process of personal perspective transformation, first coined in 1975. From these beginnings, transformative learning theory has evolved into a multidimensional and expansive theory of adult learning, comprised of cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, psychological, extrarational and ecological dimensions. Transformative learning theory is described in depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
Chapter 1  Justification for this study

1.1  Background to the study

In recent history, there has been a dramatic increase in higher education participation, in both the global and Australian context (James, 2007). The Department of Environment, Education and Workplace relations (DEEWR, 2008a) estimates that over the decade 1998–2008, total student enrolments in Higher Education in Australia increased by 50 per cent. In 2007, approximately 1 029 846 students were engaged in higher education\(^3\) in Australia (DEEWR, 2007). Of this number, domestic students comprised 756 474 persons, while approximately 273 009 were persons from overseas countries (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 70). Domestic mature age students (21 years or older) represent 66.2% or 682 225 of this cohort (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 70), significant in the sense that the average university student in 2007 was not one who enters university directly upon completion of twelve years of secondary schooling. Of significance in terms of its proportionally low representation is that in 2007, approximately 8 771 or 8 per cent of the total student cohort were enrolled in Enabling courses or programs\(^4\) in Australian universities (DEEWR, 2008b).

The mature age learner’s transition to higher education can be somewhat of a leap of faith, frequently marked by personally unsettling and challenging encounters as he/she navigates a learning environment that may be vastly different from previous encounters with formal learning settings. For many mature age learners, competing life roles surrounding employment, family responsibilities and civic and other social commitments jostle for attention when ‘student’ is added to the list of social roles (see Darab, 2003; Darab & Nilan, 2001; Ramsay, 2004; Stone, 2008; Wilson, 1997). Further problematising the return to formal study can be prior negative schooling experiences that for some learners have resulted in entrenched, limiting perceptions of self as learner (Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007; Jackson, 2003). This can particularly be the case for some mature age learners who begin their induction to a university.

---

\(^3\) Higher education in this instance refers to university study.

\(^4\) The term *Enabling* has been in place in Australian Higher Education since the 1980s. Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004) note such programs were in place to encourage access to preparatory and support programs by members of identified disadvantaged groups. The term *Enabling program* has been used throughout this thesis as a generic term. Since 1991, most Enabling programs have been funded under the Commonwealth’s Enabling Program. However, as there is no agreed use in Australian higher education terminology for such programs, other terms such as ‘bridging’, ‘access’ ‘preparatory’ and ‘alternative entry’ have only been used in this thesis when other authors refer to them in this way.
education via an Enabling program (Cohen, 1997; Munns, Nanlohy, & Thomas, 2000).

The tensions surrounding a return to study can be problematic for many mature age learners in Enabling programs. Often their interactions with fellow students from many and varied demographic, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds expose them to perspectives and practices that may leave them feeling confused and unsettled about some of their long held worldviews and perceptions (Reay, 2000, 2002). In addition, classroom engagement in pedagogical practices and activities that are not reminiscent of earlier schooling experiences can cause the mature age learner to feel somewhat apprehensive (Cohen, 1997; Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007). Lack of confidence is also common, with many mature age learners doubting their cognitive abilities and devaluing past life and work experiences (Cantwell, 2004). Compounding a sense of perplexity may be the anxiety-provoking discursive practices of the educational context, which are manifest through jargon, protocols and expectations where independent learning and the acquisition of skills and knowledge is measured in that attainment of course objectives and outcomes (Askham, 2008; O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

The sense of apprehension alluded to above, however, may well harbour the potential to engage mature age learners in critical reflection that can unshackle them from long held negative perceptions about themselves as learners. New possibilities may be conceptualised, far removed from prior expectations about what they perceived themselves capable of. Being an educator in an Enabling program for eight years has provided me with opportunities to witness the reactions of many mature age learners whose perceptions of self as learner were unsettled or challenged in some way. While rejoicing in the empowerment many of these learners eventually experience, the multi-dimensionality and emotion laden nature of their change experiences has been my frequent observation. Transformative learning theory, discussed more fully in Chapter 3, offers one explanation for the process that ensues when some routine assumptions one maintains are unsettled or contested, and as a consequence, revised and acted upon.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, several theorists in the field of transformative learning theory have researched the very important cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of a personal perspective transformation (Berger, 2004; Boyd, 1989; Cranton, 2006; Daloz, 2000; Dirkx, 2006; 2008; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2003; Weissner & Mezirow, 2000). However, having witnessed the emotional ‘roller
coaster ride’ experienced by many of the mature age learners I have taught, in order to enhance my work with this distinctive cohort, the intention of this thesis is to come to a greater understanding of how personal change is made manifest. The literature review in Chapter 2 reveals that a knowledge gap exists in research related specifically to the sometimes contradictory process in which personal change in perception of self as learner is made manifest by mature age learners in Enabling programs. Furthermore, noticeably absent from the literature is research that employs transformative learning theory to explain the process of personal change as articulated by mature age learners while they engaged in an Enabling program.

1.2 Aim of the study

While transformative learning theory is valuable in its explication of the emotional, cognitive and operative processes that ensue when a long held assumption is challenged and revised, a strong interest in the ways in which the personal change process are made manifest has provided the momentum for this study. The aim of this research therefore, is to gain a greater understanding of how changes in perception of self as learner are made manifest by mature age learners. The intention of specifically situating the research within the context of an Enabling program is that the findings will enhance not only my own pedagogical practices, but those of other educators who engage with mature age learners in Enabling contexts or indeed, in other formal learning contexts. To achieve the aim of the study, two questions were posed:

1. What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners engaged in an Enabling program?
2. To what extent does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?

The first research question has enabled the research to focus on evidence of perceptions of self as learner of the mature age learners and the exploration of any changes in self-perceptions over a fourteen-week research period. Collecting the data as the learners engaged in a thirteen-week Enabling program and the week beyond provided valuable insight into how the mature age learner’s ongoing engagement in the program resulted in changes in their perception of themselves as learners. The second research question permitted the application of a robust learning theory to investigate the process of personal transformation. Applying transformative learning theory enabled me to build on the theory and postulate
about the many dimensions of the theory, while looking for theoretical explanations for the sometimes messy, contradictory and erratic characteristics of personal change.

1.3 Rationale for the study

The rationale for this study is twofold. First, it is to satisfy a personal desire to gain a greater understanding of the intricate nature of personal change with the intention to better meet the needs of the mature age learners who engage in Enabling programs. The relaxing of economic, social, cultural and ethnic restraints in Australian universities over the past three decades has seen many mature age learners enrol in Enabling programs in preparation for university (Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007). On a global scale, more and more mature age learners are returning to formal learning contexts because the massification of higher education is enabling many citizens who may previously have been excluded or marginalised from the context, to experience participation (James, 2007). Many mature age learners, however, may not fully comprehend the significant personal ramifications of their return to study, nor fully appreciate the range of skills and knowledge that a successful return to formal study will require. Thus it is imperative that studies such as this are undertaken to discover more about the experiences of mature age learners in Enabling programs. Such knowledge may play a valuable role in the conceptualisation of meaningful and effective Enabling programs of the future.

The second rationale for this study is more future-oriented. A recent projection of the Australian Commonwealth government is that “from 2010 the supply of people with undergraduate qualifications will not keep up with demand” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xi). One target providing an impetus for this study is “that by 2020, 20 percent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from low socio-economic backgrounds” (Gillard, 2009, p. 3). Significant barriers will be confronted in enacting initiatives to address this target, one of which will be the levels of academic, counselling and financial support required to facilitate the student’s success (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 27). The implications of this strategic target are such that Enabling programs are poised to play a major role in the transition process for many mature age learners who wish to embark on higher education studies, and seek to acquire the necessary academic skills, competence and confidence to do so.
To ensure some degree of success for the mature age learner and simultaneously appease the bureaucratic accountability that inevitably accompanies economic and political imperatives, a comprehensive knowledge of transformative learning theory may be beneficial for Enabling educators. Knowledge of such may facilitate recognition of the sometimes contradictory and erratic ways in which the mature age learner reacts when engaged in an Enabling context. Mindful of such knowledge, Enabling educators could be encouraged to embrace adult learning principles in supportive classrooms in which mature age learners can safely articulate, deconstruct and revise long held negative perceptions of themselves as learners and conceptualise new possibilities.

1.4 Setting and Participants

The Rockhampton campus of CQUniversity Australia is situated in a regional city that is the business hub for the adjacent coal mining region, export of beef cattle, and the gateway for regional tourism (Rockhampton City Council, 2009). Statistics from the 2006 census indicate that Rockhampton had a population of approximately 62,610 persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007a). For those citizens wanting to attend a local institution to gain post-secondary formal qualifications, CQUniversity and the local TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) college represent the only available options. ABS (2007d) statistics as of June 2007 indicate that on census night in August 2006, there were 24,349 persons aged 15 years and over in Rockhampton. Of these, 17.3% reported a bachelor degree qualification (ABS, 2007c), a sizeable increase from 2001 when this figure was quoted at 6.7% (ABS, 2006). This 2007 statistic compares favourably with the whole of Australia statistics of 14.4% (ABS, 2007e) and the state of Queensland statistic of 15.8% (ABS, 2007b).

The research in this thesis was conducted within the context of STEPS, an Enabling program offered at the Rockhampton campus of the then Central Queensland University (renamed CQUniversity in 2008). From a class of twenty-five students, all of whom were invited to participate in my research, nine students volunteered as research participants. Due to the richness of their data in demonstrating transformative learning, this thesis reports on the analysis of data of three participants only, two females and one male. The fundamental objective of the then twenty-year-old STEPS program sought to “provide the necessary pathway to higher education for mature age students, and facilitate their acquisition of the necessary skills, knowledge and self-confidence to embark on tertiary studies”
(Central Queensland University, 2002). The research group, as part of the wider twenty-five member STEPS class, were expected to be present five days per week, from 9am–4pm, attending lectures and tutorials, engaging in workshops and discussions and completing the required assessment of four compulsory courses of study. The data for this thesis were gathered when I was teaching the STEPS academic writing course entitled *Language and Learning* (See Glossary of terms). The research gathering period spanned a fourteen-week period, the final group interview being held in the week subsequent to the participants’ completion of the 13 week STEPS program.

1.5 The research design

With consideration to the research aim of this study, qualitative case study methodology (Stake, 2005) was deemed the most suitable approach for three salient reasons. First, the way in which case study allows for the research to be bounded allowed this study to be confined to fourteen weeks. This enabled the collection of data directly from the site from those who experienced it while they experienced it. The specific unit of analysis was limited to the “I” clauses and phrases the participants uttered in relation to their perceptions of themselves as learners. In terms of data collection tools, case study allowed for the use of group and individual interviews, participants’ pre- and post-STEPS documents and a researcher’s journal. The data generated by these tools were subsequently analysed to identify borderland Discourses (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 2005), representative of the tensions experienced by the participants during their time in STEPS.

A second reason for choosing case study is that while it allowed for the collection of data from nine participants, to ensure a more manageable project in terms of the amount of data generated and the ability to analyse and interpret it, it permitted a specific focus of attention on the data of three participants only. The final reason for using case study is that it allowed flexibility in terms of the amount of time I was able to engage in research with the participants given their heavy study load while engaged in STEPS.

1.6 The significance of the study

This significance of this study lies in its potential to add further texture to transformative learning theory and to enhance teaching and learning in Enabling programs, particularly in light of imminent reforms in the Australian Higher Education sector (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Given the previously
mentioned strategic target the federal government has set in terms of increasing the numbers of those from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds in higher education (see 1.3), and given the fact that most students in Enabling programs are from low SES backgrounds5 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), Enabling programs are more than likely going to feature as very important support structures in facilitating the success of those persons who seek entry to higher education, a percentage of whom will be citizens from a low socio-economic status background. The federal government acknowledges that despite making up 25 per cent of the broader public, “the proportion of low SES students enrolled in higher education in Australia has remained static at about 15 per cent over the last two decades” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 12). This was noted by Ramsay in 2004, when she stated that despite measures to address the equity issue, there has been no significant improvement for fifteen years. Ramsay further states that the articulation6 of students engaged in Enabling type programs over that same time frame was equally disappointing. Thus there is a need to design and deliver Enabling programs in such a way that they optimise the needs of those who enrol in them and fulfil their objective of adequately preparing mature age learners for a their university education.

The delivery and design of Enabling programs will be a significant development in the future of higher education in Australia. Imminent higher education reforms intend to mandate that all institutions receiving federal funds for teaching will be “expected to establish initiatives to increase both the enrolment of, and success of, students from disadvantaged backgrounds” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xiv). Furthermore, the bulk of the allocated funds is to be “distributed to institutions on the basis of their success in enrolling and graduating students from low socio-economic backgrounds” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xiv). Given the thirty-seven public universities, two additional private universities, and approximately 150 providers of higher education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) in Australia, the

5 The current measurement of socio-economic status (SES) of students in higher education is the postcode methodology that matches postcodes with the national Index of Education and Occupation (Martin, 1994). This ranking sees the top 25% as areas of high SES, the middle 50% as middle SES, and the lowest 25% as low SES areas. However, Western, McMillan, and Durrington (1998) see this methodology as problematic in that a variety of income levels can be found in any given postcode area. As a result of its inadequacy in assessing access to participation in higher education for low socio-economic areas, one of the recommendations of the Bradley Review is that the measurement of socio-economic status of students be one that is based on the individual circumstances of each student, rather than their geographic location (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 39).

6 Articulation in this case refers to progression into undergraduate studies.
number of potential providers of Enabling programs in Australia will inevitably
increase. Thus the significance of this study lies in the knowledge it generates in
terms of how mature age learners perceive themselves as learners during their
engagement with an Enabling program and how such knowledge can be utilised in
the design and delivery of effective and meaningful Enabling programs of the future.

1.7 The limitations and delimitations of the study

As with any research, there were limitations and delimitations to this study that
inevitably impacted the scope of the findings. Limitations refer to those aspects the
researcher can control, while delimitations are those the researcher cannot. For
practical reasons, including time and resources, limits were needed to create a
boundary around this research in terms of context and the exploration of theoretical
explanations. This research was thus restricted to a voluntary group of nine mature
age male and female learners who engaged in a full-time, face to face pre-university
Enabling program. The unit of analysis was limited to manifestations of their
perceptions of self as learner during their engagement in STEPS and the week
subsequent and the research was limited to a single site, namely within the context
of the STEPS Enabling program. In terms of the data collection process, time and
resources limited the number of interviews to a total of twenty, comprised of two
group interviews and eighteen individual interviews\(^7\).

As noted on page 5, due to the richness, depth and complex patterns in their data,
my analysis focused on the examination of self-perceptions manifested by three of
nine mature age students who participated in my research; thus I acknowledge that
it is not fully representative of all nine participants engaged in the program and I
acknowledge the very small sample size. However, this is acceptable given the
research methodology chosen in this study. As explained in Chapter 4, the use of
qualitative case study methodology allows for the use of multiple data sources to
generate rich data to construct valid representations of reality. Given the nature of
the research, I also acknowledge the limitations of my role as teacher/researcher,
particularly in terms of subjectivity matters, as discussed further in Chapter 4.

Delimitations are potentially inherent in any research design and in this research the
following are acknowledged:

\(^7\) See Chapter 4 for further details.
• the qualitative research sample in this thesis is non-representative of all mature age learners in Enabling programs and therefore not necessarily applicable to other Enabling contexts nor other mature age learners
• there is the possibility that the mature age participants in this study were pre-disposed to personal change given their choice to engage in an Enabling program and as a research participant for this thesis
• the participants’ voluntary participation in the research may have excluded those individuals less inclined or resistant to articulate their responses.

1.8 The organisation of the thesis

This chapter has so far presented the background, aim, rationale, setting, research design and the significance of the study. The limitations that framed the study have also been presented and the delimitations described. With the research questions in mind, the purpose of Chapter 2 is to contextualise the study by mapping out an overview of the research territory from which the research in this thesis was conducted. It also presents a critique of the existing literature that is of relevance to the research questions in this study, and examines available research that has been conducted with mature age learners in Enabling programs over the past eleven years, in both Australian and international contexts.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and expounds upon transformative learning theory, Discourses, borderland discourse theory and the conceptualisation of borderland Discourses. It also presents a conceptualisation of emotion, integral to an understanding of transformative learning theory, followed by a description of metaphor, included in this thesis to allow for further informed speculation. The theoretical framework presented in this chapter allows me to hypothesise about my data findings in Chapter 5 in terms of the ways in which the participants made manifest their experiences of change in their perceptions of themselves as learners. It also highlights the synergies between transformative learning theory and borderland Discourses, positing the borderland as the conceptual or “liminal space” (Myers & Land, 2005) in which transformative learning may occur.

In order to capture the data that will allow me to theorise about perceptions of self as learner, Chapter 4 presents the research design for this thesis, presenting qualitative case study as the most suitable approach for exploring such. The research questions from Chapter 1 are re-introduced, followed by details of the primary and secondary data gathering tools employed to generate the data that
were analysed to address the research questions. A description is provided of the way in which the data were sorted and categorised to identify borderland Discourses.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the data in such a way that allows for an analysis of the more prominent borderland Discourses that were mobilised by the three participants during their engagement in STEPS. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the case study’s main findings. These findings are taken up in Chapter 6 in terms of their significance for the theory of transformative learning. Based on these findings is an explanation of three implications for policy in Enabling education, followed by an elaboration of four implications for pedagogical practice in Enabling contexts. Chapter 7 concludes this thesis with a personal note and reflections of the learning journey for this teacher/researcher/student.
Chapter 2  Contextualising the study

2.1 Overview

In Chapter 1, it was explained that the aim of this thesis was to investigate more about changes in perception of self as learner. As a way to contextualise the research presented in this thesis, the first section of this chapter begins by defining Enabling programs and establishing their audience and purpose. To provide some sense of the history and various social and political agenda of Enabling education in Australia, the evolution of such is presented through the lens of significant milestones that have shaped Enabling programs over the past two decades. In providing a contemporary contextualisation for this study, Enabling programs are positioned within the context of Australian Higher Education on the brink of significant reform. Features of the imminent Australian Higher Education reforms (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) of significance to this thesis are briefly outlined, with a specific focus on the targets and reforms that have consequent implications for Enabling programs and their delivery. The chapter continues with a discussion of the direction in which Enabling programs appear to be headed, taking into account aspects of the final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) and consequent implications for Enabling programs.

The second section of Chapter 2 presents a critique of the existing literature that is of relevance to the research questions guiding this thesis. It draws from research that has been conducted with mature age learners in both Enabling and undergraduate contexts over the past twelve years, in both Australian and international contexts. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings of the literature critique, identifying gaps and shortcomings that justify the need for the knowledge and contributions generated by this thesis.

2.2 Contextualising Enabling Education

For this thesis, the term ‘Enabling’ education has been chosen to encompass those educational programs that are conducted prior to a university education with the aim of providing students with the skills, knowledge, confidence and first-hand experience of the university context to enable admission to and success in

---

8 Despite the inception of Enabling programs in the early 1970s, much of the literature pertaining to them has been generated from 1997 onwards. This in some ways explains the paucity of research studies, as discussed later in this chapter.
university. In Australia, Enabling education is offered through programs that are variously referred to as preparatory, bridging, foundation, access or alternative entry programs. Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004, p. 3), in outlining the inception of Enabling programs in Australia, refer to a lack of bureaucratic scrutiny and regulation, for historically, Enabling programs have developed “almost entirely in response to local needs under the complete discretion of the institutions concerned”. This has inevitably led to a broad range of programs⁹, confirmed by a recent Internet search that revealed the majority of Australia’s universities offer various forms of alternative entry⁹, some of which represent Enabling programs but may not be referred to as such (See Appendix A). The programs on offer at each university represents an improvement on Cullity’s 2006 findings of only “13 or the nation’s 44 universities” (Cullity, 2006, p. 177), but the disparity may be indicative of varying terms used when referring to Enabling or similar programs.

Enabling programs typically attract a broad range of people who for various reasons may not previously have had the opportunity to attend university. This may have been due to non-completion of secondary schooling, or a delay in a decision to attend university. According to Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004, p. 2) Enabling programs more typically comprise

- members of identified disadvantaged groups or other prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds,
- second chance learners commencing tertiary study for the first time as adults after missing educational opportunities when school-aged,
- first generation learners who are the first in their family to attend tertiary study … and students who are otherwise educationally disadvantaged.

Such learners come from a variety of socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. They may be in paid employment or be in receipt of social security

⁹ Although Australia has an equity framework for higher education in place as a result of higher education reforms under the A Fair Chance for All campaign of the early 1990s, according to Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004, p. 2), “there has been no general agreement as to what constitutes a preparatory program in the Australian higher education context.” Furthermore, the authors believe there are “no regulations or even conventions governing what these programs should look like” (p. 2). This contrasts with other countries such as the UK that are subject to regulation through a national framework.

¹⁰ Apart from Enabling programs, direct entry to university may be gained with: a) an acceptable high school or TAFE qualification; b) prior completion of a university qualification; c) successful completion of the STAT (Special Tertiary Admission Test); d) qualification for entry due to disadvantage; e) or transference from one degree to another (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999).
benefits (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004), come from middle or high income households, or may have completed their high school education at an independent school and delayed their university studies (Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007). They enrol for various reasons including the need to redress career motivations or needs (Flint & Frey, 2003) or to satisfy intrinsic needs such as self-fulfilment and identity. Their decision to enrol may also be due to significant “life-event triggers” (Flint & Frey, 2003, p. 70) such as the loss of a job, a change in personal relationships or a family crisis.

It is generally accepted that Enabling programs comprise mature age male and female learners twenty-one years of age and over; however, younger students are accepted into some Enabling programs. As an educator in the STEPS Enabling program in a regional city in Australia for eight years and through my recent discussions with Enabling colleagues at state and national conferences, I can attest that the profile of the Enabling student in recent years is very diverse. A typical cohort of mature age learners can include male and female retirees fifty years and older, retrenched workers, single and married mothers and fathers, males and females in their early twenties, very recent Year 12 incompletes, and middle income men and women who may be grandparents.

Commonwealth funding arrangements support the provision of Enabling programs. Students in Enabling programs are reported and funded as part of the Commonwealth’s funded load\textsuperscript{11} allocated to each university. In general, the funding arrangements are negotiated between the institution offering the program and the Commonwealth. The current fiscal arrangements are that those domestic students enrolled in Enabling programs are considered to be exempt from making contributions to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)\textsuperscript{12} (May, 2004). While Appendix A indicates that most Enabling programs are free of tuition fees, some Enabling programs do attract a tuition fee, depending on the decision of each university (May, 2004). A financial incentive for Enabling students includes their eligibility for government benefits\textsuperscript{13} while they are enrolled in a full time Enabling

\textsuperscript{11} Funding for the STEPS program is historically based funding that CQUniversity commits to.

\textsuperscript{12} Higher Education Contribution Scheme, introduced in 1989 is a contribution scheme domestic students studying in Australian universities pay for the tuition costs incurred during their university program. It can be paid up front or deferred until the completion of university studies. Deferred payment is via the Australian Taxation system when the gross wage threshold is exceeded.

\textsuperscript{13} Depending on their personal circumstances, Enabling students are eligible for Youth Allowance (16 yrs–24 yrs) or Austudy (25 yrs and older) through Centrelink, an Australian Government agency. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students are eligible for Abstudy.
However, despite this financial incentive, many Enabling students mirror the patterns of undergraduate students and have to juggle their studies around many other responsibilities outside their study time, including household, family or employment commitments (Debbenham & May, 2004; O'Shea, 2007).

Enabling programs provide strategic and social benefits for the institution offering the program(s). The general trend in Australian higher education contexts is that most students articulate into undergraduate studies at the same university in which they completed their Enabling program. Thus it could be argued that Enabling programs represent an effective recruitment strategy and potential economic incentive for the institution, not to mention the social capital such programs can generate in the local community through educated citizens who will contribute more fully to collective community knowledge. Additionally, such programs can build a sense of goodwill in the community and demystify university education, particularly in geographical areas where the proportion of citizens in possession of higher education qualifications may be low.

The conception of Enabling programs

Enabling education has been offered in Australia for over three decades. In 1974, in what appears to be the first Enabling program in Australia, the Open Foundation Program was offered at the University of Newcastle, an Enabling program created as a pathway to university (May, 2004). In her research into the history of Enabling education, May claims that the reformist agenda of the Whitlam Labor government in the early 1970s sought social justice through a more equitable and equal representation of the student demographic. This heralded change within the university sector, such that it opened its doors to non-traditional cohorts of learners, including mature age students. This initiative essentially sought to facilitate access to higher education for those, who for economic or social reasons, were previously excluded or marginalised (May, 2004). This broader inclusion was achieved largely through the abolition of university fees; the introduction of a means-tested living allowance; and the provision of access to individuals other than those from an elite social background (Clarke, Bull, & Clarke, 2004; May, 2004).

14 For Centrelink requirements, full time equates to 18 study hours per week. Thus many Enabling programs are usually on average 18 hours per week. (See Appendix A)

15 May (2004) states that prior to the Open Foundation at the University of Newcastle in 1974, mature age access was possible at the university, with approximately 25 of a possible 1000 enrolment places set aside in 1971. This increased to 30 places for mature age in 1973. May notes that the places were rarely completely filled but offers no suggestion as to why.
Various national reviews of the higher education sector and consequential initiatives have since followed. The year 1984 saw the Hawke Labor government’s social justice policies that called for more equitable access to university for certain disadvantaged groups. During this time, lobbying by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC, 1987) resulted in the expansion of what Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004) refer to as preparatory programs, which were developed largely for women and Indigenous students. In terms of reporting to the federal government for funding, such students were classified as ‘Enabling students’. This special category was one of a limited number of HECS-exempted groups when HECS was introduced (Clarke, Bull, & Clarke, 2004) and remains the same to this day. Of significance to Enabling programs however was the establishment in 1991 of Australia’s Higher Education Equity framework, an initiative recommended in the A Fair Chance for All (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs [DETYA], 1990) campaign, launched to target a more equitable higher education sector that would include those groups under-represented in higher education (Clarke, Bull, & Clarke, 2004; May, 2004; Ramsay, 2004).

At this time the Department of Employment, Education, and Training (DEET)/National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET, 1990) called for universities to adopt strategies to address the disproportionate access to higher education for identified disadvantaged groups. These groups included 1) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people; 2) women in non-traditional studies; 3) people from non-English-speaking backgrounds; 4) people with disabilities; 5) rural and isolated students; and 6) people from low socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ramsay, 2004). During this period, there was a significant growth in Enabling programs (180% between 1989–1999 according to Ramsay, 2008), prompted by the “availability of the Enabling provision and equity funding through Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP)” (Clarke, Bull, & Clarke, 2004).

---

16 For more than fifteen years, there has been a national policy framework that is aimed at ensuring more equal access “to the benefits of higher education for those sections of the Australian community which have been (and continue to be) educationally disadvantaged” (Ramsay, 2004, p. 276). It was the 1991 landmark policy which brought to fruition the ideals of Australia’s higher education equity framework, entitled A Fair Chance for All (DETYA, 1990).

17 Since 1988, the funding of higher education equity programs has been provided in three core areas: Equity Support Funding (previously Higher Education Equity Program funding); Disability Support Funding; and the Indigenous Support Program. In 2004 the Commonwealth Scholarships program was instigated and in 2008 it provided approximately $18million in scholarships to assist with the costs of higher education for low socio-economic status, rural and indigenous students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p. 36).
Seed funding for equity initiatives was available through HEEP in the form of grants and annual allocations to universities.

Since then, two major reviews of the higher education equity framework in Australia have taken place. The first review occurred in 1995–96 and resulted in the release of the report entitled *Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Framework for Higher Education Equity* (NBEET/HEC, 1996). According to Ramsay (2004, pp. 276–277), “students from low socio-economic backgrounds and from isolated communities remained the most under-represented in the higher education student population, with older students from socio-economic backgrounds identified as the most under-represented of all.” Thus, despite the Federal government’s equity initiatives of the early 1990s, increased representation did not occur and the designated cohorts continued to remain under-represented in higher education.

The second major review into the higher education equity framework in Australia occurred in 2001 as part of the wider reforms to the higher education sector. These reforms were presented by the then Liberal Federal Education Minister Dr Brendan Nelson in the document entitled *Our universities: Backing Australia’s Future* (Nelson, 2002). In order to address the finding that the participation rates for students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds was still found to be low\(^\text{18}\), a series of initiatives were instigated to provide pathways to university for low SES background students. However, Ramsay (2004) found that the participation rates for students from low SES backgrounds in the decade 1991–2001 remained well below their population share. Again, despite the rhetoric about initiatives to address inequities, there remained the under-representation of students from some of the disadvantaged groups targeted by the higher education equity framework.

Thus, despite the rhetoric, the equity and equality initiatives of the previously mentioned higher educational reviews have not been met. Ramsay (2004, 2007), who has documented the issue of access to higher education for people from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly mature age students, found articulation to higher education to be problematic because of the financial costs the student faces. In 2004, Ramsay identified such costs as the increase in HECS fees, “the lowering of the repayment threshold, and the increasing numbers and range of fee-paying courses” (p. 278). She also found that despite the rhetoric of more equitable access to higher education of disadvantaged groups, the articulation of students who have

\(^{18}\) James (2002) found that citizens from low socio-economic status backgrounds remained around half that of those in the middle and higher socio-economic status quartiles.
progressed from Enabling programs into undergraduate programs remains disappointing (Ramsay, 2004, 2007). She also suggests that despite the inception of Enabling programs more than three decades ago, high attrition and low retention rates continue to occur in undergraduate study (Ramsay, 2004, 2007). Finally, she reports that the under-representation of women in some fields of study, and at the higher degree level continues (Ramsay, 2004, 2007). Unfortunately, no research could be located that tracks the percentages of students who articulate into undergraduate programs upon the completion of an Enabling programs, graduate upon completion of their degree and take up full employment.

James (2007), whose findings were drawn upon in the 2008 The Review of Higher Education in Australia, or the Bradley Review19 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) as it is referred to henceforth in this thesis, reiterates Ramsay’s claim that very little has changed to address the imbalances and inequalities surrounding access to Higher Education for particular cohorts of learners. Further corroboration of this is provided by Altbach and McGill-Peterson (2007) who, based on an analysis of 2003 data related to entry to higher education for access and equity designated groups, report the uniqueness of Australia in the sense that while other OECD countries reported various reductions in inequality in higher education, Australian statistics revealed “no reduction in social group inequalities ... for a period of almost two decades” (p. 46). The authors of the Bradley Review concede that the past decade has seen very little change to the significant under-representation of some groups in higher education in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 10) and hence their recommendations to address this inequity.

The Bradley Review (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xi) has identified, for strategic and economic purposes, the need to significantly increase numbers of citizens enrolling in higher education. It further notes that while disadvantaged groups covered by previous policies “should continue to be monitored” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 29), Indigenous students, students from a low SES background, and students from regional and remote areas continue to remain “significantly underrepresented” in higher education (p. 29). Accordingly, it is anticipated that the “patterns of access, success and retention” (p. 29) of these three underrepresented groups in higher education will be addressed in the imminent Higher Education reforms. Given that citizens from the abovementioned

---

19 The Bradley Review was the charge of a panel comprised of Professor Denise Bradley, AC, Chair; Mr Peter Noonan; Dr Helen Nugent, AO; and Mr Bill Scales, AO.
underrepresented groups form part of the Enabling student cohort, this has future implications for the direction, design and delivery of Enabling programs in Australian universities, taken up in the next section of this chapter.

The future direction of Enabling programs

In light of the Bradley Review, it is likely that the provision of Enabling education will be an important focus of many universities. The demand for a more knowledgeable workforce in our contemporary, globalised world has resulted in unprecedented numbers of Australian citizens turning to higher education for the knowledge and skills required in today’s knowledge society\(^{20}\). As outlined in 1.1 of this thesis (Background to the study), total student enrolments in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in higher education in Australia have increased by almost 50 per cent. However, despite these significant increases in numbers of higher education students over recent years, the federal government considers that such numbers are not sufficient to meet future demands of Australia’s rapidly moving globalised economy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). In fact, the prediction is made that from 2010, “the supply of people with undergraduate qualifications will not keep up with demand” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xi). As such, Australia is said to be facing a “critical moment” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xi) in higher education history, leading the federal government to commit to a series of significant higher education reforms to address recommendations of the Bradley Review. Two targets in particular, agreed to by the Commonwealth government, have specific relevance for the future role of Enabling programs. The first target is “that by 2020, 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds will have attained at least a bachelor-level qualification” and the second target is “that by 2020, 20 percent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from low socio-economic backgrounds” (Gillard, 2009, p. 3).

A major finding of the Bradley Review is that higher education in Australia is “losing ground” and “falling behind other countries in performance and investment in higher education” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, Executive Summary, p. xi). In a public response at the Australian Financial Review Conference in March 2009, Gillard (2009) acknowledged Australia’s flagging performance in relation to other OECD countries in terms of the percentage of the population with degree-level

\(^{20}\) The knowledge society can be objectified as a society that utilises knowledge as “a major resource in the production of commodities and services” (Jarvis, 2007, p. 77).
qualifications\textsuperscript{21}. Thus future implications for the design and delivery of Enabling programs surround the target agreed to by Gillard (2009), who has made clear the federal government’s intention to “increase the proportion of the population which has a higher education degree...[and] ensure that the benefits of higher education are genuinely available to all” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xiii). To achieve this outcome, the numbers of citizens participating in higher education is to be increased by those groups currently under-represented within the system.

In addressing both the target of increasing the population of citizens with higher education qualifications and the target of increasing the participation by under-represented groups, Gillard (2009, p. 1) has admitted to the need for a structural overhaul of the higher education sector. As in past higher education reforms, the issue of equity has once again emerged. Another major finding of the Bradley Review was that as of 2008, “the total amount provided for equity programs in higher education represents only 1.2 per cent of the government expenditure on teaching” and that this dismal amount has resulted in “insufficient headway in improving participation for under-represented groups” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 36). Findings from the Bradley Review indicate that under-representation of students from low SES backgrounds is not due to their lack of academic skills. In fact, evidence has shown that low SES background does not impede chances of successful completion of a university course (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Marks, 2007; Ramsay; 2004).

Nevertheless, a student from a low SES background remains disadvantaged when it comes to access to higher education. The Commonwealth of Australia (2009, p. 30) indicates that about one-third of this cohort are likely to participate in higher education when compared with citizens from high SES backgrounds (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, in 2007, despite comprising 25 per cent of the Australian population, only 15 per cent of people from low SES

\textsuperscript{21}According to the Commonwealth Government (2009, p. xi), OECD rankings put Australia at 9th out of 30 when it comes to the proportion of our population aged 25 to 34 years with degree qualifications. Twenty-nine per cent of Australian 25 to 34 year olds have degree-level qualifications but in other OECD countries targets of up to 50 per cent have already been set. The Australian statistic does not compare favourably with other OECD countries such as Sweden, which has almost achieved its target of 50 percent of all people up to the age of 25 participating in higher education; the UK with 43 per cent of its 2010 target of 50 per cent participation rate of those aged 18 - 30; and Ireland with 55 percent of its 72 percent target of those participating in tertiary education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Gillard, 2009).
backgrounds were represented in higher education (DEEWR, 2008). The Bradley Review has acknowledged that the large majority of Enabling students are from low SES backgrounds (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 31). Given the target to increase students from low SES backgrounds, Enabling programs will therefore be significant in terms of their role in facilitating wider access into higher education.

**Implications of the reforms**

A significant finding of the Bradley Review relates to lack of institutional financial support as a possible reason for the under-representation of low SES students in higher education. As such, findings related to the inadequacy of the current levels of income in supporting the participation and success of students from low socio-economic (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xv) has resulted in the Federal government’s mandate to see funds distributed to institutions “on the basis of their success in enrolling and graduating students from low socio-economic backgrounds” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xiv) into undergraduate programs. Furthermore, it has been established that all tertiary institutions receiving federal funding allocations for teaching will need to establish initiatives aimed at both increasing the enrolment of, and the success of students from low SES backgrounds (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 33).

The personal financial circumstances of the low SES individual student have also been taken into consideration in the reforms. To make higher education more affordable and realistic for many students, it is proposed that significant reforms\(^\text{22}\) will be implemented to elements of Australia’s welfare and income support system. Thus, with an increase in allocated funds and the easing of financial restraints for the student, there are significant implications for Enabling programs, for as more and more citizens seriously consider the option of undertaking higher education studies, Enabling programs will be positioned as a viable avenue into the sector.

With any promise of fiscal allocation, however, comes the inevitable issue of accountability. As previously mentioned, Enabling programs have flown beneath the radar somewhat in terms of regulation and bureaucratic scrutiny. The higher education reforms may well change that in the Bradley Review’s call for “a

---

\(^{22}\) One of the recommendations of the Bradley Review is that the Australian government introduce a package of reforms to the student income support system. These include changes to: (a) the parental income test threshold; (b) parental income test indexation; (c) parental income test taper rate; (d) personal income test threshold; (e) personal income test indexation; (f) age of independence; (g) change of eligibility conditions for independence (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xviii).
strengthened accreditation and quality assurance process” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 7) to ensure the best possible education for each student. Thus included in the recommendations from the Bradley Review is the establishment of an accountability framework for a new higher education funding system that: a) places primary accountability for performance with the provider’s governing body; b) provides for accountability that is uncomplicated and transparent where funding follows student demand; c) ensures negotiated targets (in relation to performance-based findings) are reflected; and d) monitors accountability for other specific-purpose funding that reflects transparent guidelines (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xxv). Thus, given the prominent role they look set to play, a further implication for Enabling programs is that they will more than likely become subject to a higher level of official scrutiny and regulation than previously subjected to.

It is inevitable that barriers and challenges will arise for both the institution and the student when it comes to the imperative to increase the number of citizens in the higher education sector. The Bradley Review has identified such barriers as the potential student’s standard of previous educational attainment, the student’s general lack of awareness of the long-term benefits of higher education, and upon enrolment into Higher Education, the levels of academic, counselling and financial support required to facilitate the student’s success (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 27).

What is the real agenda of Enabling programs?

As previously noted, Enabling programs were first offered in the early 1970s as a socially just way to broaden access to higher education to a wider demographic, and thus address issues of equity and equality in higher education (May, 2004). However, according to Clarke, Bull, and Clarke (2004), the changing roles and perceptions of Enabling programs since then have been influenced by the bureaucratic and institutional agendas they have had to reflect. Such agenda have included Enabling education as (a) a major equity strategy; (b) an effective university recruitment tool; (c) a basis for educational research; and (d) as a revenue earner (Clarke, Bull, & Clarke, 2004). In many ways, these agenda have reflected a response to market driven forces (Clark, Bull, & Clarke 2004) which therefore may be seen to foreshadow the equity and equality initiatives previously deemed as so important.
This market driven force has been made manifest through the massification and commodification of higher education\textsuperscript{23}, the somewhat hackneyed mantra of lifelong learning and enrolment of a more diverse range of learners than ever before (many with non-traditional entry qualifications). The Bradley Review reports the problematic consequences of this movement from an elite to a mass system, and due to what they refer to as “outdated national quality assurance mechanisms” and “unacceptably high” staff-student ratios (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xii), indicate that the quality of the educational experience in Australia is deteriorating. The lack of “assurance mechanisms” has had implications for Enabling programs in that they have not been “subject to the usual academic policies, reporting requirements, monitoring or outcomes, or quality assurance processes” (Ramsay, 2008, slide 19). Without this scrutiny, the broader area of Enabling Education continues to remain marginalised (Ramsay, 2008). As a result, Enabling educators tend to be attributed low status within the university hierarchy, have scant opportunities for research, and they generally experience limited career paths. To illustrate this point, a review of the literature shows that for the period 1997-2008, approximately ten published research projects (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke, 1999; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997; Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007; Darab, 2004; O’Shea, 2007; Ramsay, 2004; Stone, 2008) have been reported upon in a publication. Furthermore, only one four year longitudinal research study (Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004) has been conducted.\textsuperscript{24} Based on empirical findings, some authors have written specifically on the STEPS Enabling program\textsuperscript{25} or included aspects thereof in their publications or conference presentations.

The lack of status often attributed to Enabling education by many institutions could in part be explained by Ramsay’s (2008) point that Enabling education is often misconceived as being remedial and only for the ‘needy’. It was only as recently as

\textsuperscript{23} Massification of higher education refers to the large number of citizens embarking on higher educational institutions over recent decades. With the phenomenon of massification has inevitably come its commodification and marketisation or as Altbach and Mc Gill-Peterson quantify, “the selling of higher education through commercial ventures” (2007, p. 29). Jarvis (2007, p. 125) informs of the reality that universities are “being forced to market” their course and programs through whatever means necessary to generate financial income in the “learning market.”

\textsuperscript{24} Paper presentations from the third Enabling Conferences in Australia (2009) can be located at http://www.usq.edu.au/eec

2004 that the significance of Enabling programs in Australia and those who educate in this area were officially acknowledged. This was marked by the inaugural Australian Enabling Educator’s Conference, hosted by the University of Newcastle, the site of the previously mentioned first Enabling program in Australia. The decision to hold an Enabling conference every two years and the subsequent formation of the National Australian Enabling Educators (NAEE) officially registered and recognised Enabling Education and Enabling educators in Australia’s higher education sector; however, despite the formation of NAAE and two bi-annual conferences at which research and discussion papers have been presented, research about Enabling education remains scant.

Ideological tension surrounds the current notion of Enabling programs. This has arisen in light of past agenda that sought to address social inequity and the economic imperatives that underpin the agenda of imminent higher education reforms. While Gillard (2009, p. 2) portrays equity in higher education as “an important moral issue”, the over-riding agenda is the “urgency” of citizens from many backgrounds to “meet the demands of a rapidly moving global economy” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. xi). Thus, on the one hand it seems that more equitable access to higher education is being framed in an honourable way to ensure greater inclusivity to previously disadvantaged groups, yet on the other, the goals of economic prosperity and an exponential increase in the skilled workforce suggests economic imperatives may more significantly underpin the proposed higher education reforms.

**Summarising the findings**

As outlined in this section of the chapter, given the imminent Australian Higher Education reforms, Enabling programs look set to be an important feature of the sector as an avenue through which a growing number of citizens will be encouraged to commence their university education; however, this will not occur without the bureaucratic regulation typically missing throughout the history of Enabling education. While this has enabled a degree of flexibility and creativity in Enabling education, it has led to the marginalisation of Enabling education and Enabling educators within the Australian higher education sector.

Appendix A clearly illustrates the broad diversity and range of Enabling programs, their diverse audiences, delivery modes and methods. Their differences in costing illustrate their ‘point in time’ creation, indicative of each university’s response to local
needs and conditions when establishing their own, idiosyncratic Enabling programs. This disparity is best reflected in the absence of a generic term to encompass and consolidate the many Enabling programs on offer. There remains debate about whether Enabling programs have served their purpose of providing access to higher education for disadvantaged social groups as reforms to improve higher education will continue to be underpinned by economic, political and social imperatives.

Having contextualised Enabling education within the Australian higher education sector, the next section presents an overview of literature specifically related to Enabling contexts or similar. Given the previously mentioned limited corpus of data about such, research related to mature age learners in international Enabling and undergraduate contexts in both Australia and overseas has also been included due to its tendency to bear strong similarities.

### 2.3 Examining the relevant literature

This section presents a broad overview of the relevant research findings from Enabling and other contexts and the researchers who generated the reported findings. Table 2.1 on the following page encapsulates this overview. Of particular interest to my research are studies about changes in identity and self-perceptions of mature age learners who have engaged in Enabling programs. However, given that these concepts were explicitly mentioned in only five Australian studies by Cantwell (2004), Cantwell and Grayson (2002), Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997), Cullity (2005, 2006, 2007), and Munns, Nanlohy, and Thomas (2000), I have also drawn from other studies of mature age learners in undergraduate studies (Grant & Trimmingham-Jack, 1996; O'Shea, 2007). Due to the fact that these combined studies fail to represent an expansive corpus of knowledge about self-perception and identity of mature age learners, I have also included six international studies that document research on these areas (see Askham, 2008; Bennetts, 2003; Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill, 2003; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Spreadbury, 2007). Similar to the Australian studies, some international authors report on research related specifically to pre-university programs, while others report on research about mature age learners who have articulated from such programs into undergraduate studies. Studies about the importance of support of family and friends for the mature age learner are also included in the following section due to their relevance to this thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The significance of support from family and friends</td>
<td>Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, and Godfrey (2004); Cullity (2005, 2006, 2007); Cantwell and Grayson (2002); Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997); Darab (2003, 2004); Darab and Nilan (2001); Debbenham and May (2004); Munns, Nanlohy, and Thomas (2000); Ramsay (2007); Stone (2008); Wilson (1997); Bennetts (2003); Reay (2000, 2002); Reay, Ball, and David (2002); Spreadbury (2007)</td>
<td>Australian International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Articulation of Enabling students to undergraduate studies</td>
<td>Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, and Godfrey (2004); Cantwell, Archer, and Bourke (1999); Cantwell and Grayson (2002)</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What follows now is a critique of literature related to the first two themes presented in Table 2.1.
Issues of self-perception

Limited educational backgrounds of the mature age learner can evoke issues related to self-perception due to uncertainty and anxiety that can be experienced in formal educational contexts. In their small-scale mixed method research project with seven mature age women in an Australian Enabling program, Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) used quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the deep and surface learning patterns of their participants over one semester of study. Using Bigg's (1993) Measures of Approach to Learning and Chan's (1994) Causal Attributions in the first and last weeks of the semester, and focus groups at the beginning and end of semester, Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) found that most women expressed feelings of alienation from aspects of the learning environment, manifested by their sense of inadequacy and anxiety, as well as fear of “possible humiliation” (p. 1). Furthermore, according to the researchers, the women “experienced a shift from personal control to self-blame for failure attributions (Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997, p. 1).

There were, however, some positive findings from this study. The analysis of interview data pointed towards identity regeneration and an apparent significant growth in personal identity and insight. These findings have some relevance to my research focus in exposing impacts of engagement in an Enabling program on the mature age learner’s perception of self as learner. Despite the small sample size and the single gendered nature of the research, the “mixed methods” research approach adopted by Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) appears useful in generating a variety of data that provided valid evidence of how the participants perceived themselves as learners.

Perceptions of prior educational and other failures can have significant bearing on the perception of self as learner for the mature age learner. Using a mixed method research approach with two hundred and seven students undertaking Enabling programs at three different sites, Cantwell and Grayson (2002) employed self-efficacy, self-concept, self-regulatory control, approaches to learning and causal attributions to investigate the psychological and metacognitive changes in their research with mature age learners over one semester of study. Conducted at the commencement and the conclusion of the first semester, findings from Cantwell and

---

26 Cantwell and Grayson used five questionnaires: Rosenberg’s (1979) self esteem scale; Wood and Locke’s (1987) academic self-efficacy scales (ASE-s and ASE-m); the causal attributions questionnaire by Chan (1994); Biggs’ study process questionnaire; and the strategic flexibility questionnaire (Cantwell & Moore, 1996).
Grayson’s research indicate that the impacts of prior experiences of failure for mature age Enabling learners can have a negative impact on their individual perceptions of themselves as learners, and that different types of learning demanded in the university environment can fuel the notion of personal uncertainty.

Cantwell and Grayson identified possible limitations to their research. They disclosed that the data were not conclusive in exploring possible differences in psychological and metacognitive attributes of the three different groups of students, and they suggest a longer time frame of investigation for future studies. The fact that they conducted their research at the beginning and end of the first semester of a two semester program highlights the value that a third set of data gathered at the completion of the Enabling programs may have provided. While not referred to by Cantwell and Grayson, it is possible that the ability to comprehend the complexity of some concepts and terminologies presented in the various questionnaires they utilised with their mature age research participants may have been problematic.

Anxiety and self doubt about their inadequacy in a new context can confront mature age learners who engage in an Enabling program. In his paper presentation at the 2004 National Enabling Educators Conference, Cantwell (2004, p. 12) discusses the influence of affect and portrays the interplay of emotions that the mature age learner in an Enabling context can experience when he/she places his/her "private and public ‘neck’ on the line" when stepping into the “intellectual unknown” (p. 12). Likewise, in her findings from interviews with ten staff and twenty-five mature age alternative entry graduates from four different Australian alternative entry programs (AEPs), Cullity (2006) found that self-doubt was the commonest cause of anxiety. Based on the findings of a case study for her doctoral research, Cullity (2007) also uncovered the complex interplay of “attitudinal, academic and social” dimensions that affect the mature age learner’s preparation for undergraduate study (Cullity, 2007 p. 11). She suggests that to reduce anxiety and self-doubt, AEPs should provide a means of gradually immersing students into the academic culture, allowing time for the development of these three dimensions.

However, while Cullity’s (2006, 2007) studies sought to reveal insight into how the mature age learner’s preparation for university occurs on many different levels, some unintended bias may have been present given that her research was conducted with mature age learners who had been specifically chosen by the program managers of each of the four different AEPs. Furthermore, the responses of the participants were gained after the completion of their AEP, and are therefore
retrospective rather than gathered as they engaged in the AEP. As such, perceived changes in self-perception articulated by the mature age participants and the force of their emotional engagements during their time in the AEP may not have been fully recalled.

To summarise, limited educational backgrounds and perceptions of prior educational experiences can evoke self-perception issues for the mature age learner when they engage in a formal educational context. As a consequence, anxiety and self-doubt can arise for the learner who is part of an unknown context that is typified by unfamiliar attitudinal, academic and social dimensions. Nevertheless, empirical and documented research has shown that elevated confidence can be an eventual outcome of engagement in such contexts.

**Elevated confidence levels**

When mature age learners become more familiar with the expectations and culture of the formal learning context, confidence levels can be elevated. Many of those who teach in Enabling programs anecdotally attest to this, the knowledge of such having been the focus of recent NAEE conference presentations specifically related to Enabling education. In their quantitative research with two undergraduate cohorts – the first consisting of mature age learners who had completed an Enabling program, and the second consisting of traditional entry students, Archer, Cantwell, and Bourke (1999, p. 51) found that the first cohort reported more confidence “to solve problems that arise in their lives, were more confidence to plan a desired course of action and more [showed] confidence to appraise accurately their strengths and weaknesses.”

Firsthand experience of the university culture can increase the confidence of the mature age learner in the higher education context. Cullity’s (2006) previously mentioned qualitative case study of four AEPs found that experiencing academic culture significantly assisted the majority of mature age students to adapt to university life and improved their confidence and interaction with lecturers. She attributes the enthusiasm and confidence displayed by the mature age learners to their authentic experiences of the academic culture; however, Cullity (2006) also notes the converse effect of poor lecturer-student relationships and the

---

27 See page 23. Two NAEE conferences (2004, 2007) have seen paper presentations refer to the confidence experienced by students as a result of their experiences in an Enabling program, such as one by this author and her co-author, selected for special editions of *The Australian Journal of Adult Learning* in 2004 and 2007.
marginalisation of mature-age student needs. This resonates with many other studies (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004; Askham, 2008; Bamber & Tett, 2000; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Cullity, 2006; Debbenham & May, 2004; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Wilson, 1997) that report similar findings. Consequently, there is a collective call by these researchers for institutional awareness of factors that can encourage or inhibit the mature age learner’s participation in higher education studies.

Spreadbury (2007) is another researcher, who in her qualitative research with eighteen working-class, Harvard graduates two years after their program completion, also reports on increased confidence levels. She observed an increase in confidence in the student identities of her participants as a result of their time in higher education. These observations were based on the participants’ claims of passion for academic pursuit and aspirations to engage in further study. Spreadbury alludes to the transformative experience of education and the profound changes it can trigger in one’s self-perceptions and perceptions of their world. She reports her participants as having achieved “a greater sense of confidence that permeated all aspects of their lives” (Spreadbury, 2007, p. 85). However, it is possible that given her participants (recipients of a bachelor’s degree) had graduated one to two years prior to conducting the interviews, the participants may not have fully recalled the intensity or authenticity of the experiences of the time they engaged at university. Similar to Spreadbury is Stone’s (2008) research findings. Stone, an Australian researcher, found the undergraduate university experience for twenty male and female mature age undergraduates (eighteen of whom had previously engaged in an Enabling) experienced increased confidence as a result of their engagement in an Enabling program. Her research participants demonstrated increased opportunities for the future and a sense of fulfilment of life dreams and ambitions (Stone, 2008).

In summary, the mature age learner can experience elevated confidence levels as a result of their inclusion in the university context. This can be due to the changes education can make to one’s self-perception as well as firsthand experience of the academic culture. However, lack of institutional awareness of practices that can inhibit or encourage the mature age learner’s educational experience can be problematic, one of which is the recognition of identity reconstruction.
Identity reconstruction of the mature age learner

In addition to elevated confidence levels and awareness of the culture of higher education contexts, the identity of the mature age learner has been found to be affected by their experiences of re-engaging with formal education. Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003) drew from predominantly qualitative data with fifty-six Scottish adults and young people\(^{28}\) who re-engaged with formal learning, and to allow for experiences in the context of wider lives, they included in their study thirty-three respondents who were not enrolled in formal learning. Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003) used the notion of learning careers (a combination of concepts developed by Becker, 1970; Barley, 1989; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) to examine the ways in which the social identity of the learner can be reconstructed, changed and strengthened. Of specific interest to my research is Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill’s (2002; 2003) suggestion that changes in self-perception and commitment to the role as learner can be “contradictory and volatile”. Furthermore, they note that the pattern of personal change does “not travel in one direction alone, but can go into reverse, not once but many times” (p. 65). Such illustrates the erratic nature of transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003).

The vulnerability of identity represents another theme found in the literature. Askham’s (2008) two year longitudinal research explored the learning experiences of twenty-two UK mature age undergraduate students who completed their undergraduate study part-time in the distance mode. His qualitative analysis, based on a broad range of sources\(^{29}\), enabled him to make claims about the impact of context and identity. These include the “fragmented and contradictory” (p. 89) ways in which the mature age learner constructs his or her identity upon their return to study, and the significance of others in constructing the “motivations, barriers to learning and the support needs of the adult learner” (p. 89). Askham acknowledges the small size of his participant group and generalisability issues due to the participants’ particular learning characteristics\(^{30}\). Other limitations of Askham’s research include the fact that it was not conducted with mature age students engaged in an Enabling program, nor was their participation in higher education in

\(^{28}\) No breakdown of the ages of the participants was provided.

\(^{29}\) Askham used group interviews undertaken at intervals spread over two years; individual interviews before, during and after the course; student logs recording their experiences; two reflective writing pieces, one at the beginning and one at the end of the course as part of the course module.

\(^{30}\) Askham (2008) reports that his participants were all mature age, work-based, non-traditional learners.
the internal mode that required their daily presence and interactions with other students. Nevertheless, Askham’s findings provide some insight into “what it is like to be a student” (p. 95), not to mention the “emotional intensity” attached to the experience of learning that is “often overlooked (p. 94) and the important role of context in the identity reconstruction experience. Askham’s findings related to context and identity have relevance to this thesis.

Findings about identity shifts by mature age students in higher education were similarly reported upon by others. Based on her research of the experiences of twenty-three mature age UK working-class students in a college program, Reay (2002) found that some of the learners experienced “feelings of being an impostor” in a context that posed as a threat “to authenticity and a coherent sense of selfhood” (p. 404). O’Donnell and Tobbell (2007), who conducted empirical research with seventeen voluntary male and female learners in a UK Enabling program, explored the self-perceptions of the mature age learners and the practices that served to “include and exclude them from participation” (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, p. 326). Their analysis of semi-structured interview data revealed that the mature age learners identified themselves as “peripheral participants”, citing that bureaucratic and academic practices “sometimes undermined their feelings of legitimacy” (p. 312) as students. Of relevance to this thesis is O’Donnell and Tobbell’s (p. 312) finding that the participants’ feelings of marginalisation were reconciled by “individual, shifting identities and a sense of belonging” and that these shifts enabled fuller participation in their studies. Also important to this thesis and for the design of Enabling programs, is O’Donnell and Tobbell’s (p. 326) finding that “concomitant identity shifts” may have positive implications for fuller participation in higher education for the mature age learner.

In summary, identity shifts and reconstructions can occur for the mature age learner who engages in a formal learning context. This complex process can be erratic and fragmented, requiring support and recognition from others; sometimes institutional practices may serve to undermine the identity of the mature age learner. As the next section of this chapter will suggest, the significance and support of family and friends can also have an impact on the identity of the mature age learner.

**The significance of support from family and friends**

The support of family and friends can play a significant role in ensuring a positive experience for the mature age learner-turned-student. In their mixed method
longitudinal research with undergraduates, some of whom had completed an Enabling program and some of whom had not, Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, and Godfrey (2004) contend that strong family support is one of the most important factors outside the university in ensuring persistence and success in higher education studies. This substantiates earlier findings by Wilson (1997), whose qualitative research with seventy male and female mature age students indicates that strain/support related to domestic lives appeared to impact significantly the mature age learner’s adjustment to and success in university life. In a similar vein, Cantwell and Mulhearn’s (1997) small study with female participants found that lack of family support posed as a negative influence on some of the mature age females’ ability to cope while engaged in an Enabling program.

The values and goals inculcated during their upbringing inevitably impacts on the aspirations of the mature age learner who engages in formal study. Munns, Nanlohy, and Thomas (2000) confirmed this in their qualitative study with eleven Enabling students who returned to university later in their adult lives. The three researchers found that for their participants, histories of incomplete schooling or a decision to delay university studies after school had precluded previous study as an option. Family beliefs and implicit expectations, coupled with the inability of parents to afford education expenses were also instrumental in the decision to delay study. However, despite low aspirations displayed by some family members of the research participants, the authors found that the participants’ inclusion in an Enabling program was instrumental in “critical accommodations, adjustments and sacrifices” made by the learners, who as a result, “refashioned their educational identities” (Munns, Nanlohy, and Thomas 2000, p. 175) in a positive way.

Cullity (2006) likewise found that the various life circumstances of mature age learners can influence their aspirations of higher education and can actually discourage some mature aged students from attending university. Spreadbury (2007) also found that low aspirations of family members impacted on the majority of the mature age students in her study. She found that when her eighteen working-class participants were able to reflect retrospectively on their time at university, the majority admitted to receiving “discouraging or ambivalent messages” from family and friends (Spreadbury, 2007, p. 77). According to Reay (2002), rejection from family and friends is a very real outcome for some mature age learners who choose to undertake formal learning. Reay reports that when her UK working class research participants reconnected with formal learning, many were at risk of being ostracised
by family and friends. Reay refers to the emotional struggle and tension the participants appeared to experience in trying to avoid identity shifts “that would open up a distance between themselves and the working-class communities they saw themselves as part of” (Reay, 2002, p. 412).

A major obstacle for many mature age learners surrounds tension in their relationships with family members. Stone (2008) found that a major difficulty faced by the participants in her study was their having to deal with changes in relationships with partners and children. Interestingly, her research showed that study time for the male participants was reported as being generally accommodated within the family routine, whereas the female students reported that they had to accommodate their study time around other family and domestic responsibilities to ensure their study hours did not “impinge on family time” (p. 279). Stone (2008) concludes that lack of family support confronts women in particular when they undertake formal study. Although the details required to substantiate this finding are beyond the parameters of this thesis, lack of family support can result in a lack of available study time, impact on time management skills\(^{31}\), challenge the maintenance of the balance between the needs of study, home and family, and result in changed family relationships (Stone, 2008).

Other issues related to the lack of family support can impact on a woman’s engagement in formal study. As well as their educational enrolment and for some, paid work commitments (Darab, 2004), many of the day-to-day domestic issues that include responsibility for family care and the carrying out of the majority of domestic, household chores and child minding responsibilities are predominantly carried out by women (Debbenham & May, 2004). Additional challenges for the mature age female learner can surround the emotional and psychological dimensions associated with age and life cycle stage, degrees of emotional and economic support, (Darab, 2003, 2004; Darab & Nilan, 2001) and possible feelings of inadequacy and anxiety (Cantwell & Grayson, 2002).

Although not set within a higher education context as such, Bennetts’ (2003) interpretive research utilised an open-ended questionnaire that examined the

\(^{31}\) King and Richardson (1998) provide an interesting perspective in their contention that much of the literature pertaining to the mature age learner’s return to formal learning is problematised. When it comes to time management, the authors argue that adults have been time managing for a long time and many are very good at it. The research presents an interesting perspective in seeking to de-problematise adult learning and shift the focus from adult’s supposed limitations to a focus on the strengths they bring to the learning context. This notion is explored in Chapter 6.
experiences of personal change of one hundred and ninety-seven voluntary UK male and female adults who indicated that they had benefited from a return to study by means of a Fellowship Scheme. Bennetts’ findings bear similarities to Stone’s (2008) in the sense that when the mature age student returns to study, it impacts relationships with the whole family. As Bennetts (2003, p. 475) claims, it can be very unsettling for the family, for “no-one within the immediate and extended family unit is immune to the effects.” The family is caught up in the learning and having to cope with new situations, whether they choose to or not. Nevertheless, this need not be a negative experience, as evidenced by findings from Reay’s (2000) small scale qualitative study of twelve women from a low socio-economic background in the UK. Reay’s findings revealed that the women’s re-entry to study and persistence in completing their study was motivated by their desire to act as role models for their children, although as Kasworm (2003, p. 8, a higher education teacher of mature age learners professes, such an endeavour can be “both a major inspiration and a major deterrent to participation.”

In summary, the support of family and friends can be pivotal to the success of the mature age learner who engages in formal learning. However, for some mature age learners, the tensions related to domestic lives, the age and life cycle stage and family relationships can significantly impact on the adjustment to and success in university life, particularly for the female mature age learner. Family beliefs and implicit expectations, alongside the risk of being ostracised by family and friends, can be significant deterrents for some mature age learners. The impetus to persist with study, however, can also be motivated by the desire to act as a role model for other family members.

2.4 An intersection of the literature

A critique of the literature pertaining to Enabling programs presented in this chapter has revealed that many of the studies have been conducted retrospectively and thus can only be representative of recall of lived experiences. Some have been conducted post-undergraduate education and others post-Enabling education. Studies that include both genders in the research group have been reported on, as have studies that have focused on female participants only. In terms of methodologies, the majority of the studies relied on qualitative research practices

---

32 Bennetts (2003) acknowledges the voluntary nature of the participants as problematic because the students were self-selected and as such, those with less positive experiences chose not to respond. The 197 participants who did respond represent approximately 20% of the target group (Bennetts, 2003, p. 461).
such as case study and interpretative studies, although a few studies relied upon mixed method research. These studies employed questionnaires, problematic in the sense that expectations were made about the cognitive abilities of the participants. Given the complexity of terminologies utilised in some questionnaires, the generation of accurate data may have been impacted on by these.

While the literature presented in this section of the chapter portrays the various ways in which the mature age learner is impacted upon as a result of their engagement in a formal learning context, the studies did not report on research conducted with participants as they engaged in an Enabling program. While some studies discuss the ways in which the identity and self-perceptions of the mature age learner can be impacted on as a result of their inclusion in an Enabling program, again, the findings were not reflective of the learners’ experiences of the program from start to finish. Finally, a number of studies were conducted in a comparative, evaluative way with findings of participants who had not actually engaged in an Enabling program, but rather in undergraduate study. Such studies focused on justifying or evaluating the effectiveness of Enabling programs per se.

The intention of the third and final section of the chapter is to critique examples of where transformative learning theory (see Glossary of terms and Chapter 3) has been used as a theoretical framework to explain the personal changes experienced by mature age learners enrolled in Enabling or similar programs. May (2004, p. 15) points out that despite the anecdotal and empirical evidence suggesting that many mature age students who undertake Enabling programs do experience “profound transformation”, studies of staff teaching in or administering such programs are minimal in the Australian context. Nevertheless, the following section draws on available literature that is specifically related to transformative learning theory and mature age learners in Australian Enabling contexts. It also looks to the international context for similar evidence.

**Perspective transformation with Indigenous Australians**

In their four year longitudinal study of twenty Aboriginal men and women undertaking tertiary studies, Grant and Trimingham-Jack (1996) used transformative learning theory to explain the process of change in beliefs and actions of their research participants. The researchers examined the ways in which their

---

33 As will be explained in Chapter 3, transformative learning theory seeks to explain the multi-faceted process of examining and transforming a long held perspective one holds.
participants negotiated new demands on their time and new challenges surrounding their various life roles. Upon analysis of annual semi-structured interviews and the participants’ written narratives, over a four year period, Grant and Trimingham-Jack found that transformative learning was a useful framework in explaining the ways in which the participants successfully reconstructed themselves as students. The researchers call for “mutuality and equality of relationships” from families and communities (Grant & Trimingham-Jack, 1996, p. 178).

In his paper presentation at the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, Hodge (2008) positions transformative learning as a vehicle to enhance teaching practice in the VET (Vocational Education Training) sector. Hodge suggests that if VET programs can adopt authentic teaching practices, then practitioners can enhance their teaching practices by identifying learning conditions that promote and support personal change. Hodge draws on Cranton’s (2006) notion that authentic educators\(^{34}\) can show empathy for students and their needs and that transformative learning can be supported through the learning group or class; however, he laments the strong focus on the industry needs and economic imperatives of the VET sector and their effect on “the quality of contemporary VET pedagogy” (Hodge, 2008, p. 1). He concludes by suggesting that if practitioners of Australian VET programs choose to act as a catalyst for transformative learning, they may enhance their effectiveness through a greater understanding and promotion of transformative learning. To achieve this, he endorses Cranton’s (2005a, 2005b, 2006) and Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004a, 2004b, 2005) practices of teacher authenticity and the fostering of group support and learner networks in the formal program setting.

**Using multiple intelligences for critical reflection**

An illuminative study in the United States by Cohen (1997) reports how a group of male and female vocational education mature age learners changed their perspectives of themselves as learners. Basing his findings on research conducted with mature age learners who engaged in an English writing course, Cohen (1997) utilised Gardner’s (1983) notion of Multiple Intelligences to encourage his mature age students to focus on the skills they possessed, rather than lament the ones they did not. Given the opportunity to critically reflect on their many accomplishments

\(^{34}\) According to Cranton (2006, p. 116), authentic educators are those who have a good understanding of themselves and bring that understanding to their teaching contexts. They relate to their learners in a meaningful way and “model the transformative process itself.”
and skills, the mature age learners, many of whom had problematic academic histories, came to value and respect these as expressions of intelligence. In so doing, opportunities opened up for them to reject what others had told them about their intelligence, leading to a reconceptualisation of themselves as learners. As Cohen (1997, p. 68) states, “through transformative learning, they found in themselves their intelligences, their strengths, their ability to say yes to the full expression of themselves and to life in spite of everything.” Cohen (1997) also briefly alluded to the transformation he experienced with every transformative experience that came to his students, a point taken up in Chapter 7 about my own transformative experiences. Although Cohen’s findings are based on one class of students only, the power of transformative learning theory as a way to explain personal change over a set period of time was powerful.

**Critical reflection on long held assumptions**

In their United Kingdom study, Bamber and Tett (2000) employed qualitative case study that drew data from a series of informal interviews with eighteen working-class male and female students who were working part-time in their local communities while studying a part-time bachelor program. Other stakeholders were interviewed, but the main focus of the research findings was on the student learning experience. Similar to that observed by Cohen (1997), Bamber and Tett (2000) were interested in the work experiences the participants brought to their studies and the application of such in an academic context. Drawn from the work of Caffarella and Merriam (1999), Bamber and Tett (2000) consider that learning must be understood “within an appreciation of how the context shapes learners, educators and the learning transaction itself” (Bamber & Tett, 2000, p. 60) and must not be separated from the context in which it happens.

Bamber and Tett (2000, p. 74) highlight that many non-traditional students confront an alien environment upon their entry to higher education institutions and suggest the need to “negotiate a series of attitudinal transformations in order to build on and integrate their learning.” As a way for the participants to re-conceptualise themselves as learners, Bamber and Tett draw on Mezirow’s (1991) cognitive, rational conception of transformative learning, specifically engagement in critical reflection as a way to examine and change the assumptions the participants previously constructed about themselves as learners. Bamber and Tett highlight the

---

35 Only fifteen completed as three withdrew from the program.
important role the university context can play in facilitating this process, but given the high costs of the program the participants in their research engaged in and the substantial levels of support the participants received during their study, the researchers do not anticipate seeing this model “replicated on a wider scale” (p. 74). They therefore, like many other educators of mature age learners, call for fundamental pedagogical and institutional change to better suit the needs of this unique cohort of learners.

**Transformation as a series of transitions**

Although not set within a higher education context, but included in this review because of its utilisation of transformative learning as a framework to explain personal change, is Bennett’s (2003) previously mentioned study (see page 34) with recipients of a benevolent fund. Bennett suggests that the personal learning some of her participants experienced had consequent effects on not only the participants themselves, but on their close relationships and local communities. Bennett (p. 461) justifies her use of an open-ended questionnaire as an appropriate tool to elicit data from the participants, some of whom had received the funding to study up to ten years previously.

In evaluating the extent to which her inquiry into adult change can be explained through transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), Bennett (2003) found that the process of personal transformation was not so much a sequential process for the mature age learners, but a somewhat erratic one, typified by a series of emotional highs and lows. She also found that the participants experienced “a more definable self-image, a sense of place within a community, and a desire to help others” (p. 475). Her data showed that for the participants, transformation and greater fulfilment were experienced in their personal and working lives.

### 2.5 Summary

The intention of this chapter was to contextualise the study undertaken in this thesis. The chapter began by explaining what Enabling education is and for whom it was created, and then provided an historical overview of the milestones that have marked the past and present of Enabling education in Australia. The future of Enabling education is explored in view of imminent higher education reforms that look set to have significant implications for the design, delivery and monitoring of Enabling education. In pursuit of a more highly educated citizenry that is aimed at satisfying economic, social and political imperatives, Australia is following
international counterparts with higher education reforms. A specific target is an increased representation of citizens from low SES backgrounds in Australian higher education. However, problematising this target is the nature of the classification of low socio-economic status and the history of the last three decades of equity initiatives that have failed to address the issue of increased representation in higher education for low SES background citizens.

This chapter has also shown that the literature related to mature age learners in Australian Enabling programs focuses more specifically on the ways in which the learner’s inclusion in such contexts is problematised, identified largely by the many challenges such learners confront as a result of their inclusion. These challenges are multi-dimensional in nature, encompassing the emotional and the cognitive as well as the more pragmatic aspects of being a mature age learner who fulfils multiple social roles. Second, it also highlights the significant influence that family aspirations can exert and how support or lack thereof from family and friends impacts on the mature age learner. Third, many of the research findings critiqued in this chapter share the desire for a greater implementation of adult learning principles in institutional strategic and pedagogical processes. In the final section of this chapter, an intersection between transformative learning and mature age learners in Enabling or similar contexts was provided, the purpose being to highlight transformative learning theory as a valid way to explain the process of personal transformation. However, it is apparent that little research focuses specifically on the transformation of perception of self as learner for the mature age learner as they engage in an Enabling program.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, examines the theoretical framework for the thesis. It describes the history and varied conceptions of transformative learning theory as a way to explain the process of personal transformation. Then, the construct of emotion is described due to its important relationship to transformative learning process and metaphor is described as a strategy to make sense of new meaning. Given that the analysis of data for this thesis relies upon discourse analysis, the defining features of Discourses, borderland discourse analysis and borderland Discourses are described.
Chapter 3  The theoretical framework

3.1  Overview

Chapter 1 indicated that the aim of this thesis is to gain a greater understanding of how changes in perception of self as learner are made manifest by mature age learners in an Enabling program. The rationale and significance for the study were stated, along with the research questions and explication of the research design. To reiterate, the research questions asked:

1. What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners in an Enabling program?
2. In what ways does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?

The chapter continued with details of the setting, the research participants, and a declaration of the limitations and delimitations of the study. In Chapter 2, the study was contextualised, emphasising the significant role Enabling education is set to play in the near future. Relevant literature pertaining to the mature age learner’s experiences in Enabling programs or similar contexts, alongside literature with a specific focus on the intersection of transformative learning theory and Enabling programs was critiqued and synthesised.

This chapter begins by describing transformative learning theory as one way to conceptualise adult learning and explain the personal change process mature age learners can experience when their long held self-perceptions are challenged. A presentation of the more seminal moments in the history of transformative learning theory is presented, the purpose being to portray the organic nature of the theory and offer some reason for the equivocation of terms that has occurred over time. The chapter continues by explaining the traditional, cognitive-rational conception as espoused by Jack Mezirow (2003), followed by two alternative conceptions of the theory, namely: 1) the constructivist-developmental conception (Daloz, 2000; Kagan, 2000; Taylor, 2006), and 2) the extrarational conception (Boyd, 1991; Dirkx, 2006; 2008). Following this is an interpretation of Cranton’s (2006) conception of transformative learning theory, a combination of features from the cognitive-rational conception, the constructivist-developmental conception and the extrarational conception. This conception most closely informs the theoretical framework that has been developed to underpin and guide this thesis. Given the role that emotions play
as expressions of extrinsic and intrinsic experiences and the powerful role they play in making manifest aspects of the transformative learning process, the chapter continues by recognising emotion as an expression of feeling, a medium through which individuals communicate their subjective feelings and perceptions of self. In addition, metaphor is described as a meaning making strategy in the transformative learning process.

The chapter continues with a description of discourse analysis as the chosen method for analysing the data gathered in this thesis. More specifically descriptions are included for Gee’s (2005) conception of Discourses, Alsup’s (2006) and Anzaldúa’s (1987) theorisation of borderland discourse theory. In synthesising the two, borderland Discourses is conceptualised. This conceptualisation has been drawn on to allow for subsequent articulations between transformative learning theory and borderland Discourse theory. These articulations will inform and ‘nuance’ my conceptualisation and interpretation of transformative learning theory.

3.2 Transformative learning theory

Just over three decades ago, during the women’s movement in Western democracies, many women were entering or returning to higher education. Intrigued by the educational experiences of his wife, Jack Mezirow (Mezirow, 1975) published a study about the experiences of women returning to formal learning. Using data gathered through interviews, Mezirow applied grounded theory to examine the women’s experiences of personal change. Integral to the learning processes of his study participants was a process that was found to involve stages of a learning cycle that began with a disorienting dilemma and resulted in a changed perspective (Mezirow, 2000). Such a process, it was theorised, could be typified by uncertainty and threat, as long held assumptions the women held about themselves and their society were challenged and critiqued (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow came to identify personal perspective transformation as “a structural reorganization in the way that a person looks at himself [sic] and his [sic] relationships” (1978, p. 162) with others, claiming perspective transformation to be a fundamental dynamic of adult learning and development.

Less than ten years later Mezirow (1985) related perspective transformation to self-directed learning and perceived education as a means of fostering the process of articulation, contextualisation, validation and action upon assumptions. Six years later Mezirow (1991) re-framed perspective transformation to ‘transformative
learning theory’. Almost two decades later, he (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58-59) defined transformative learning as

learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions.

Equivocation of terms

While ‘transformative education’ is reserved for descriptions of the work educators and others can and do undertake to foster transformative learning, as a consequence of the chronological redefinition of transformative learning outlined in the previous paragraphs, a degree of slippage has come about in some literature between the terms ‘perspective transformation’ and ‘transformative learning’. Taylor (1997, p. 53) alluded to this equivocation of terms well over ten years ago, noting that “one of the most elusive concepts of transformative learning theory is the definitional outcome of a perspective transformation.” In his 2007 update of transformative learning theory, Taylor (2007) concludes that transformative learning theory remains the preferred term, which situates perspective transformation as the “central learning process occurring in personal development” (Mezirow, 2000, p. xi) through which transformative learning occurs. Also compounding confusion and efforts to develop an inclusive terminology in the field is the inconsistent use of terms such as transformation, transformative learning and transformative education.36

In a very organic and collegial way37, transformative learning theory continues to be re-defined and re-conceptualised by new knowledge in the field, building on or challenging the traditional cognitive, rational conception that relies heavily on critical self-reflection and dialogue with others. Alternative conceptions are those that more

36 Patricia Cranton (personal email, 6 November, 2003) explained that “transformative learning cannot truly take place without some form of perspective transformation.”
37 The purpose of the International Transformative Conference, held every two year was, and still is, to expand and elaborate on transformative learning theory.
explicitly acknowledge the emotional and extrarational dimensions\textsuperscript{38} of transformative learning. Thus, adding to the cognitive-rational conception (Cranton, 2002, 2004, 2006; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000, 2003; Taylor, 2000) are:

- the ecological concept (O’Sullivan, 2003)

Taylor (2008) offers a slightly different categorisation of the conceptions of transformative learning theory, referring to them as the:

- psychocritical (Mezirow, 2003)
- psychoanalytic (Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Cranton, 2000; Dirkx, 2000)
- psychodevelopmental (Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1994)
- social emancipatory (Freire, 1987; Friere & Macedo, 1995).

In demonstrating further conceptualisations of the theory, Taylor (2008, p. 8) adds what he refers to as “additional views” that have lately emerged in the field. These include the:

- neurobiological (Brooks, 2000; Janik, 2005; 2007)
- cultural-spiritual (Tisdell, 2003, 2005)
- race-centric (Williams, 2003; Johnson-Bailey and Alfred, 2006)

It is apparent that there exists a certain amount of blurring and overlap between the various conceptions.

\textbf{A cognitive-rational conception}

A cognitive-rational conception of transformative learning can be described as a change in meaning perspective, involving a process of disorientation, critical reflection on long held assumptions, discourse and dialogue with others and revision of and action on new meaning perspectives. Transformative learning involves a deep shift in consciousness that alters one’s cognitive, emotional and operative functioning and it can be experienced in an epochal (occurring suddenly)

\textsuperscript{38} In his update of transformative learning theory from 1999-2005, Ed Taylor (2007, pp. 174–75) critiqued 41 peer-review journal articles and found that the literature divided into two orientations: 36 studies used a theoretical framework conceptualised by Mezirow, while the remaining five drew from other conceptions of transformative learning, including depth psychology (Boyd & Meyers, 1988, Cranton 1992, Dirkx, 2000), critical theory (Friere, 1970), and identity development (Wenger, 1998).
or cumulative (unfolding over time) (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000) way. According to Mezirow (2000), ten phases mark a cognitive-rational conception of transformative learning, six of which are concerned with critical self-reflection. Mezirow perceives transformative learning to follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified. The ten phases are:

1. a disorienting dilemma
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. planning a course of action
7. acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. provisional trying of new roles
9. building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

The transformative learning process is initiated by a disorienting dilemma causing one to question prior habits of mind. A habit of mind is defined as “a set of assumptions – broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). Habits of mind include social and moral norms and customs; conscience; learning styles; philosophical beliefs; personality traits, values and attitudes; and aesthetic values and tastes (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). A habit of mind is one dimension of a “frame of reference” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16), a frame of reference being “the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Encompassing the cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions, frames of reference influence the way we interpret experiences, both consciously and unconsciously. As such, they represent both collectively held frames of reference and those inculcated through our primary caregivers (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17).

The other dimension of a frame of reference is that which ensues when a habit of mind is expressed. This is referred to by Mezirow (2000, p. 18) as a point of view, and is comprised of “clusters of meaning schemes … which commonly operate outside of awareness.” They are a type of lens through which one views the world,
and through which one automatically looks unless engaged in critical reflection. In the transformative experience, one comes to reformulate frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of assumptions and their context (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19) and the consequences of holding them. Critical reflection, then, is a “key element” (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000, p. 334) of transformative learning because assumptions on which our perspectives are constructed can become reformulated. Critical discourse with others is said to assist in this process of making meaning from our experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Discourse is defined by Mezirow (2003, p. 59) as “dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings and values” and transformative learning occurs when one transforms a “problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable … by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20).

**Limitations of the cognitive-rational conception**

Limitations of the cognitive-rational conception of transformative learning include its focus on transformation as a primarily rational process, the foregrounding of individual transformation ahead of social transformation and a lack of attention to contextual considerations. Despite Mezirow’s (2003) more recent conceptualisation of the theory to include the importance of interpersonal skills, social relationships and emotional intelligence, Taylor (2008, p. 7) contends that Mezirow’s psychocritical approach has paid little consideration to the role of context and social change, with its strong focus on individual, analytic thought in the transformative learning process. As a result, Taylor (2008) notes that some theorists have been prompted to adopt a more social-emancipatory conception, where “people are viewed as subjects, not objects… constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation” (Taylor, 2008, p. 8) for the betterment of their world. Fostering this view of transformative learning theory entails critical reflection, more liberating approaches to teaching that encourages the posing of problems rather than the transferral of information, and “horizontal student-teacher relationships” (Taylor, 2008, p. 8), whereby the teacher works on an equal footing with their students, as well as acting as their political agent.

In terms of the problematic issue of the lack of attention to context and its role in the transformative learning process, Taylor (2007, p. 174) insists that contextual considerations remain an area needing greater consideration, calling for more exploration of the nature of the triggers for transformative learning. In drawing
attention to another shortcoming of the cognitive-rational conception, Taylor (2007) also acknowledges the lack of attention to the more emotional aspects of transformative learning, and calls for research that focuses on the role of alternative ways of knowing, such as the role of emotion and intuition.

**A constructivist-developmental conception**

A constructivist-developmental conception to transformative learning is implicit in Mezirow’s cognitive-rational conception of transformative learning, but for those who aspire to a more explicit constructivist-developmental conception, a central framework for understanding transformation as growth is provided (Dirkx, 1998). Building on Mezirow’s work, yet placing more emphasis on reflective acts and more holistic, intuitive processes, Daloz (2000) believes that in the process of personal transformation, changes in one’s epistemology are “developmentally related” (p. 104). Daloz (p. 104) cites the importance of “environmental and cultural forces” that impact on the individual’s potential for transformation, with social contexts being of great significance in this process. He believes that the ability to make sense of personal experiences relates to the developmental movement of an individual’s life and notes that many mature age learners who re-engage with formal education find themselves in between phases of development. As Dirkx acknowledges, a move into a new development phase requires the mature age learner to construct new meaning structures in order to make sense of their changing world.

Another proponent of the constructivist-developmental conceptions is Kegan (2000), who places transformative learning in the context of adults in the process of acquiring increasingly complex and more complete epistemologies. Kegan does not consider that an activating event is necessary for initiating the process of transformation as such, but rather suggests that the contemporary world necessitates meaning making through individual daily experiences. He perceives development and learning as a lifelong process wherein the individual traverses “a succession of increasingly more elaborate bridges” (p. 58). Furthermore, he considers the constructivist-developmental conception to allow for not only transformation in the form of our knowing in adulthood, but believes transformation might be better understood through greater discernment of the nature of the learner’s individual needs for transformational learning. This, he states, might be better understood not only through the learner’s “present epistemologies but the epistemological complexity of the present learning challenges they face in their lives” (Kegan, 2000, p. 59).
Kathleen Taylor (2000), another proponent of the constructivist-developmental conception, suggests that individuals need not abandon their values and beliefs, but simply broaden them and come to see that values and beliefs of others, though different from their own, are equally valid. To optimise opportunities for this to occur, she suggests that a supportive learning environment is necessary for the mature age learner’s negotiation and consideration of other points of view. She posits “developmental intentions”\(^\text{39}\) (Taylor, K, 2000, p. 158) as specific instructional methods helpful in supporting adult educators who may wish to encourage transformative outcomes for their learners. However, she acknowledges the repercussions of significant personal change that can result for the adult learner, acknowledging that while they may be exhilarating for some, this experience can be “traumatic and overwhelming” for others (p. 160).

The problematic nature of significant personal change is also reflected in Berger’s (2004) interpretation of the constructivist-developmental orientation. Berger’s research about the personal change experiences of a small group of teachers enrolled in post-graduate study at a United States university revealed that their experiences portrayed a broad range of emotions as they tried to make sense of new meaning about themselves as teachers. Berger raises issues about the need for meaningful teaching and support networks to assist students who are “dancing on the threshold of meaning”\(^\text{40}\) (p. 336) to find the courage to transform.

Within the scaffolding\(^\text{41}\) that is characteristic of a constructivist-developmental conception, educators can take their learners to “the edge of their knowing” (Berger, 2004, p. 338). However, the best intentions of educators to coax and encourage

---

\(^\text{39}\) Taylor explains developmental intentions as strategies to encourage experiential learning whereby learners learn by doing, rather than depending on receiving information about something. Educators provide appropriate support to actively challenge the learner to explore new ways of doing and being and “move learning to new ways of thinking and knowing” (Taylor, K, 2000, p. 163).

\(^\text{40}\) Berger (2004, p. 338) uses this term to explain the “edge of knowing... a precarious – and – important transformative space.” In this conceptual space, she perceives that one can “come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits.”

\(^\text{41}\) The constructivist practice of scaffolding is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and refers to the “temporary assistance that teachers provide for their students in order to assist them to complete a task or develop new understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone” (Primary English Teaching Association [PETA], 2001, p. 3). The pedagogy behind the construct of scaffolding is that through a sequencing of learning activities, teachers support, guide, and challenge their students’ learning. This has the potential to extend students “beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding, and it is then that learning occurs and students are able to ‘internalise’ new understandings” (PETA, 2001, p. 3).
their mature age learners to examine personal perspectives requires caution given the emotional complexity typically associated with personal change, not to mention the ramifications those changes may have on both the mature age learner and others within their world. As Cranton (2006, p. 174) rightly points out, “our modernistic assumption that growth is always good and needs to be cultivated leaves some questions unanswered.” Who and by what authority or mandate decides what is best for mature age learners?

To conclude, the constructivist-developmental conception of transformative learning allows for the theorisation of “the negotiation of developmental transitions” (Cranton, 2006, p. 77), or the process of moving from one stage of development to another. It allows for the unfolding of time over which mature age learners can engage in the process of conceptualising new knowledge about themselves as learners.

**An extrarational conception**

Making sense of meaning is not exclusively cognitive or developmental. It involves the emotional dimension as well. An extrarational conception of transformative learning supports a holistic approach to transformative learning that seeks to acknowledge the more emotional aspects of personal transformation. Such aspects include emotion, spirit, soul, intuition and imagination in the transformative learning process. Based on depth-psychology informed by Jung, Boyd (1991) is a proponent of this conception and perceives transformative learning to be an intuitive, emotional-spiritual process that is psychosocial in nature. Boyd’s conception is based on transformation as a personal journey wherein transformation is seen as individuation, involving intuition as symbols and signs from the individual and collective unconscious are integrated into our consciousness. The extrarational conception of transformative learning allows for consideration of the emotional dimensions of transformative learning theory. Dirkx (1997, p. 3) calls for the holistic and conscious integration of expressive or emotional-spiritual dimensions into daily experiences, and considers intuitive, emotional-spiritual process to be integrated “holistically and consciously” within the fabric of our daily lives. Dirkx (1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2008) focuses on the nurturance of soul in

---

42 Boyd’s (1991) study of Carl Jung led him to formulate a view of transformative learning that was grounded in Jung’s concept of individuation. He draws on Jung’s definition of individuation as “a process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated … having as its goal the development of the individual personality” (see Jacoby, 1990, p. 94).
adult learning\textsuperscript{43}, perceiving such to focus on “the concreteness of the here-and-now” in the labyrinth of relationships with self and others (Dirkx, 1997, p. 83). His suggestion is that nurturing soul is “an attempt to embrace the messiness and disorder that is adult learning” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 84) and allows for emotion as a manifestation of how transformation ‘feels’ at all stages.

In drawing from the work of Briskin (1996), Dirkx (1998) perceives the experience of soul as a way to appreciate our multiple selves, allowing for emotions and feelings as a way to help us learn about our relationships with the broader world. In terms of strategies for educators who choose to nourish soul, Dirkx (1998, p. 83) advises the use of story, song, myth, poetry, and everyday life experiences. In more recent work, Dirkx (2006; 2008) explores concerns related to the role of emotions in relationship to transformative learning, suggesting that educators can tailor their pedagogical strategies based on their interpretations of emotions manifested by their students (p. 17).

**Limitations of the constructivist-developmental conception**

The developmental nature of a constructivist-developmental conception may be problematic for educators of mature age learners in Enabling programs due to time constraints. It can be difficult in the one semester or less time frame they generally have with their mature age learners to create learning environments in which in which transformative learning can be promoted, fostered and sustained. Additionally, the varying nature of development across mature age learners may be difficult to cater for in the institutionalised setting where the pragmatic focus is on the relay of knowledge and information within somewhat rigid time frames. Another limitation associated with the constructivist conception can be the emotional tension that arises regarding the assimilation of new and sometimes troublesome knowledge (Meyers & Land, 2005) presented to mature age learners in their various educational courses. A final challenge of a constructivist-developmental conception of transformative learning theory relates to the role of educators in understanding development well enough to “recognize which dimensions are most relevant to particular groups of learners in a particular learning situation (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998, p. 172).

\textsuperscript{43}Dirkx (1997) explains that he grounds his discussion of learning through soul within the idea of archetypal or soul consciousness espoused by Hillman (1989), Moore (1991), and Sardello (1992).
Limitations of the extrarational conception

Some limitations are inherent in the extrarational conception of transformative learning. These largely surround contextual challenges within institutionalised settings, such as the focus on rational thought rather than the expression of emotion in Western thinking, somewhat rigid evaluation and assessment protocols and unfavourable power ratios between educators and students. Quite typically, the expression of emotion is problematised in many higher education contexts and pedagogical and assessment practices do not reflect the principles on which the extrarational conception of transformative learning is premised. According to Kleinman and Copp (1993), emotion is viewed as suspect in the ideology of science to a large extent, and for educators who choose to espouse theoretical frameworks that purport learning dimensions such as emotion, their best efforts can be penalised (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 6). As Cranton (2006, p. 67) points out, it is common for educational contexts to be constructed as places where rational practices occur and emotional outbursts are smoothed over or downplayed.

A second limitation of the extrarational conception of transformative learning theory concerns the premise that transformative learning entails emotional, spiritual and soul dimensions; however these often unconscious processes problematise formal assessment in the higher education setting. Compounding this is the lack of a “distinct and clearly articulated framework” (Dirkx, 1998, p. 4) espoused in this conception, resulting in the difficulty of promoting suitable pedagogies and models to support and enhance transformative learning.

Finally, power issues are inevitably embroiled in the well intentioned practices of educators who coax their mature age learners to embrace an extrarational conception of transformative learning. The educator’s values and beliefs are unconsciously relayed through their pedagogical and other classroom practices, and as such impact on the mature age learner’s experience of transformative learning. The pervasiveness of power in contemporary society (Cranton, 2006) is such that power exercised by people “on themselves and others in their lives” (Brookfield, 2001, p. 1) can act as a constraint on truly collaborative constructions of knowledge. Thus the institutional setting in which the mature age learner exercises degrees of self-surveillance (Foucault, 1991) and control may not be conducive to the extrarational conception of transformative learning that may best suit less institutionalised learning environment.
Nevertheless, the constructivist-developmental and extrarational conceptions of transformative learning theory have significant application to this thesis in their attention to dimensions other than the cognitive-rational. Such a focus allows for the full application of the research questions to interrogate the perceptions of self made manifest by the participants and the ways in which transformative learning theory might explain these changes. The conceptualisation of transformative learning as a constructivist-developmental and extrarational process also allows for the emotional manifestations of what it may have ‘felt’ like for the mature age learners while they engaged in an Enabling program. In combination, the two conceptions also allow for the theorisation of the full expression of the sometimes messy and contradictory process of personal change.

**An inclusive conception**

Having discussed three similar but overlapping conceptions of transformative learning theory, namely the cognitive-rational, the constructivist-developmental and the extrarational, when aspects of each are combined, an inclusive conception that more fully explains the many dimensions of the theory can be understood. In her latest theorising of transformative learning, Cranton (2006) makes little reference to her earlier facets of perspective transformation (2002) but does acknowledge her adaptation of Mezirow’s ten phases to reflect her own thinking, observations and conversations with students. She, however, prefers to describe transformative learning from the perspective of “how people feel when they work outside of the realm of cognitive rationality and find deep, powerful shifts in the way they see themselves and the world” (Cranton, 2006, p. 77).

Cranton (2006) advocates that enhanced personal knowledge by the learner, such as a greater understanding of their individual learning styles is integral to the description of transformative learning theory. Cranton proposes Jung’s psychological type theory as a lens through which to glimpse when viewing the process of transformative learning (Cranton, 2006, p. 80). She impresses that given the fact that individuals learn in many different ways, changes in contexts, learners and teachers can affect the experience of transformative learning for the mature age learner.

Cranton believes that personal transformation can occur in ways other than “a reasoned, critically reflective progression” (2006, p. 70) and that the transformative experience can be instantaneous, a deep and thoughtful moment, or a gradual
“unfolding of the creative process revealed nonverbally and moving from tacit to explicit” (p. 71). Based on Mezirow’s (1991) ten phase model of transformative learning, Cranton refers more broadly to three phases:

1. Disorienting event;
2. Questioning assumptions and perspectives; and
3. Discourse, dialogue and support.

A disorienting event

Similar to Mezirow, Cranton (2006) posits a disorienting event as the trigger for the transformative learning process. In what may be reflective of her acknowledged personal circumstances related to a series of bereavements over recent times, Cranton’s earlier use of the term ‘activating events’ (Cranton, 2002, p. 65) has been replaced with the term “disorienting” event. Cranton (2006) suggests that a disorienting event may be a) a traumatic event that initiates a careful, reasoned exploration of values and beliefs that leads to a changed perspective; b) a traumatic event that lies dormant for a long period and only gradually leads a person to transform; c) a deeply felt, positive experience or a series of positive experiences leading one to question either personal habits of mind or perspectives of the world; d) a sudden disturbing experience that leads to an immediate and non-rational switch in beliefs; e) a gradual, unnoticed and perhaps not conscious process of change over time, only recognised in retrospect; f) a series of small changes that lead incrementally to a revision of a perspective over time; or g) a deliberate, conscious effort over time to change a perspective. She also refers to the influence of exposure to social and cultural norms other than our own, as well as “larger societal and political events” (Cranton, 2006, p. 62) as possible disorienting events.

Questioning assumptions and perspectives

A period of disequilibrium ensues after the disorienting event occurs while one searches for meaning to explain the unsettled or disoriented feeling one is experiencing. This leads to the questioning of a particular assumption or assumptions one may have held for a long period. This is a very personal experience, for our assumptions are “part of the fabric of who we are” (Cranton, 2006, p. 64) and we act on them quite spontaneously and unconsciously. Maintaining our assumptions provides us with safety, for to question them is to question our “assimilated ways of knowing, believing, and feeling” (Cranton, 2006,
p. 23), to contest our “taken-for-granted beliefs about the world, and our place in it” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 2). To question our assumptions is to perhaps admit that we might be wrong about how we view certain aspects of the world, and to perceive new explanations or possibilities involves a degree of risk and elements of fear for many individuals. The search for meaning is therefore a multi-dimensional process. The cognitive, rational dimension is at play, interlaced with emotion and intuition as the individual either laments, resists or rejoices in the experience of exposing and examining personal assumptions that have been disoriented or unsettled in some way.

Some degree of critical self-reflection inevitably occurs as the individual takes the locus of control for reflecting on his/her own experiences, assumptions, actions and behaviours, looking inwardly for answers. This involves the individual questioning the origin of long held personal assumptions and speculating as to why it may be that such have been so uncritically accepted and acted upon. In her conceptualisation of critical self-reflection, Cranton (2006) believes it is the responsibility of educators to assist learners in the process of articulating and examining beliefs and assumptions that may have been assimilated without question. She suggests that “uncomfortable questions” (p. 137) can promote critical self-reflection, but only if the learner is “willing and ready to consider the questions” (p. 137). She also suggests strategies such as questioning, consciousness-raising experiences44, journals, experiential learning, critical incidents45 and arts-based activities as strategies that can open up new perspectives and challenge existing assumptions and points of view to encourage reflection and transformative learning. These activities represent a move to the less ‘academic’ pursuits of higher education in shifting away from the rational-cognitive dimension, yet their more creative and innovative focus is believed by Cranton to be gaining momentum amongst those educators who seek to promote transformative learning.

**Discourse, dialogue and support**

Transformative learning entails one being open to alternative viewpoints, a tentative process that can be met with varying degrees of resistance or acceptance.

44 Cranton (2006) draws from Brookfield’s (2005) conception that consciousness raising is “breaking free from one-dimensional thought, understanding and unmasking power structures, recognizing hegemony, and critiquing social ideologies” (Cranton, 2006, p. 143).
45 Critical incidents are used as a way to promote critical reflection and involve the individual reflecting back on an experience, noting the positive and negative aspects of the experience, and insights gained. Cranton (2006) suggests the educator engaging in this practice makes it easier for their learners to do likewise.
However, Cranton (2006, p. 143) considers that becoming aware of other ways of knowing and being may actually allow one to see “familiar things from a different perspective.” As a way to promote this, consciousness raising through exposure to new information and alternative viewpoints that are “discrepant with our currently held points of view” (Cranton, 2006, p. 143) can be actively promoted by educators who lead their learners to understand that there are valid perspectives other than their own. Such critical self-reflection and questioning can occur alongside discourse and dialogue with and support of others, thereby opening up opportunities for conversations and discussions that have the potential to expose learners to a myriad of alternative perspectives and new ways of perceiving reality.

Cranton (2006, p. 125) departs from Mezirow’s (2003) more rational definition of discourse, suggesting that casual dialogue with others can provide opportunities for individuals to make sense of new meaning. In explaining things to others, they can come to a greater conceptualisation of new meaning themselves. Furthermore, Cranton cites value in the fact that individuals can use each other to reflect back their point of view and therefore offer different alternatives. Support in the form of good listeners, sympathetic and authentic educators, and opportunities for dialogue to flourish, is also considered by Cranton (p. 66) to be very instrumental in maintaining “a good sense of self” at a time when the self-perceptions of the mature age learners are unsettled.

Cranton’s (2006) conceptualisation of transformative learning allows for its portrayal from the perspective of the person engaged in the process. To complement this process, she draws inspiration from the extrarational conception of transformative learning, particularly the work of Dirkx (1997), which, she admits, initially caused her some unease when it came to the utilisation of emotion and imagination to express herself. She admits to now being convinced of the significance of promoting “images and feelings in fostering transformative learning” (Cranton, 2006, p. 68), believing that transformative learning can be cultivated through “soul work, imagination and emotions” (p. 67). As a way to promote such, Cranton advocates the use of certain pedagogical practices, including the use of journal writing, images and artistic projects as potential ways in which the mature age learner can experience personal transformation. Indicative of her particular personality, Cranton does, however, acknowledge the personal tension that can arise for the educator when the more negative emotions are expressed by learners in formal learning contexts. She suggests that support from others in the group may be helpful in addressing such
instances and calls for educators to be “sensitive to the individual and the context” (2006, p. 180) that has shaped that person.

Cranton (1998, 2006) perceives that a better understanding of individual differences, by both the learner and the educator, can promote transformative learning. In regard to the individuality and uniqueness of each individual and the ways in which individuals are both influenced by and influence their world, Cranton calls for a greater understanding of personality and personal learning styles as a way to promote transformative learning. Drawing from the work of Jung, Cranton suggests that knowledge of psychological types provides a “powerful and comprehensive” (2006, pp.98–99) way of comprehending individual differences. Her call for a better understanding of individual differences, particularly in encouraging critical self-reflection and self-knowledge is important, especially given the rational language of Mezirow’s conception of transformative learning theory, and the fact that learners may not best respond to the logical, analytical nature of this interpretation of transformative learning theory.

The pros and cons of an inclusive conception

Cranton’s (2006) conception of transformative learning theory provides an expansive theoretical framework that can be employed in this thesis to investigate the process of change in perceptions of self as learner. A developmental, constructivist interpretation is implicit in Cranton’s conception, and her emphasis on the more emotional dimensions of transformative learning and pedagogy, allows for a more holistic exploration of transformative learning. This conception has enabled the research questions in this study to be addressed in a systematic and theoretical way, first, by investigating the various perceptions of self as learner that were made manifest by the participants and secondly, by providing a framework within which the theorising of findings in relation to the theory of transformative learning could occur.

In accepting that Cranton’s conception of transformative learning theory offers a valid framework for this thesis, some limitations of her work needs to be acknowledged. First, her theorising adds greater depth to transformative learning theory, perhaps due to her acknowledged recent personally traumatic
experiences\textsuperscript{46}, and does provide poignant insight into the role trauma can play in the transformative learning process. Nevertheless, as with any personal experience, regardless of the number of times one may explain it to others, and describe the cognitive, emotional and other processes attached to a significant personal transformative experience, such an experience can only truly be understood through the experience of living it. Even then it will be experienced and interpreted in a way distinctive to each individual. This means that caution must be taken when trying to interpret the transformative learning experiences of others and view them as that – experiences of others.

Another limitation of Cranton’s conception is that the literature she has generated about transformative learning theory is based on her research and teaching experience in Canadian and American contexts, more specifically in ‘return to study’ and other similarly formal adult learning contexts. Thus her findings and theorising have been based on research and experience with specific cohorts of learners from two of the most developed countries in the world. In acknowledgement of her extensive work in the field of transformative learning, however, Cranton (1994, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2005b) and Cranton and Carusetta (2004a, 2004b, 2005) have drawn from extensive teaching experience and longitudinal research to portray the experience of transformative learning, not only from mature age learners’ perspectives, but also from that of the educator. Furthermore, similar to the context of Enabling programs, the many classrooms Cranton (2006) reports on or writes about are classrooms composed of many mature age learners who, for various personal and other motivations, are consciously ready to enact change in their lives. As such, they could be said to be ‘ripe’ for transformation, and thus represent a receptive audience.

The process of personal change of the mature age learner returning to study and the messy and erratic way in which this may happen is implicit in Cranton’s conception of transformative learning theory. She most certainly acknowledges that emotions are intricately tied to the process of transformative learning, and personally testifies to this. She also explores the notion of individual differences and how they can influence the transformative learning process. However, her exploration of the interplay of emotional manifestations and the projection of multiple

\textsuperscript{46} Patricia Cranton (2006, p. 63) shares her personal experience of losing a partner and two beloved pets within a very short period of time and explains that sometimes cumulative events build up, leading one to question long held personal perspectives.
identities that come into play by those who articulate their experiences of personal change while they are being experienced is not as yet specifically focused upon.

Thus, while Cranton (2006) writes of the uncertainty and ambivalence that can occur for those mature age learners who experience transformative learning, research findings that validate the haphazardness and 'messiness' that can accompany this process while the learners are engaged in the learning context remains largely unexplored. This thesis hopes to more fully investigate this and build on some of the findings highlighted in the contextual literature in Chapter 2. These findings (Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004; Munns, Nanlohy, & Thomas, 2000; O'Shea, 2007; Reay, Ball, & David, 2002; Spreadbury, 2007) strongly indicate that when mature age learners return to formal learning contexts, the experiences of personal change create new tensions in their lives. These tensions can unsettle both the individual and those close to them as new ways of knowing are assimilated, and belief systems re-established. The emotion surrounding such tensions for some mature age learners can represent a veritable roller coaster ride as each disorienting dilemma has the potential to activate transformative learning. The next section presents a description of emotion, given its important role in making manifest the process of transformative learning.

3.3 Emotion

As stated in the overview of this chapter, emotions are an integral element of transformative learning, the means by which subjective feelings can be communicated to others. Emotions can signal changes in elements of one's environment that are of concern to them (Barbelet, 2007, p. 1376) and individuals differ from each other in their emotional experiences. A defining feature of emotions notes Barbelet, an Australian sociologist who has written extensively about the sociology of emotions (2004, p. 247), is “that they perceive the world from the perspective of the emoting subject’s needs or preferences” and some emotions can even present as a “shock to the system.” They can, therefore, not be “readily assimilated and may even be resisted” (Barbelet, 2004, pp. 8-9).

Emotional reactions inevitably differ from individual to individual and from time to time, and according to Edwards (2001, p. 236), a UK Professor of Psychology, are frequently defined “in contrast to rational thought ... [yet] conceived to be natural bodily experiences and expressions, older than language, irrational and subjective, unconscious rather than deliberate, genuine rather than artificial, feelings rather
than thoughts.” Edwards (2001, p. 236), whose research focuses on the ways in which common sense psychological states such as emotions are accounted for by people in their everyday lives, also concedes that emotions can be “treated as sensible and rationally based” (p. 236). He suggests 47 that “emotion talk” is integral to “how people live their lives, rather than some kind of abstracted amateur theorizing” (Edwards, 2001, p. 245) and notes that emotions are often constructed in contrast to cognition and rational thought.

Emotions are impacted on by culture and context and can be manifested through physical processes. The object of any emotion is inevitably influenced by prevailing meanings and values as are the ways in which emotions are expressed (Barbelet, 2007, p. 1375). Emotional practices are contingent upon “cultural cues and interpretations” (Barbelet, 2007, p. 1375), for in certain societies and certain contexts, the role of emotion is not given much credence. Physical processes that manifest emotion can play a vital role in the experience of personal transformation. Barbelet (2004, p. 2) cites the process of weeping for oneself as a “facilitating mechanism” implicated in changes to self-concept. He also perceives weeping to be a form of “internal communication” that can signify the transformation the self has undergone (pp. 11-12,). This stance resonates somewhat with the extra-rational conception of transformative learning as espoused by Scott (1997, p. 48), where “grieving for the loss of the old self” is accompanied by a sense of loss. However, as Barbelet (2004) cautions, not all transformations of self are registered by tears.

Emotion affects what is learned and what is retained (Wolfe, 2006). Of particular relevance to the analysis of the data in this thesis is that the manifestation of emotion is a way to make sense of the inconsistencies, contradictions and fuzziness (Edwards, 2001) individuals can experience during personal transformation. Zull (2002, p. 75) notes that emotions “influence our thinking more than thinking influences our emotion.” Thus displays of emotion may be interpreted as what ensues when an individual’s long held perspectives and assumptions of self as learner are unsettled, critiqued and transformed. Concentration on some of the emotional manifestations of the participants in this study is therefore justifiable in

47 Edwards (2001, p. 245) believes emotion talk is “part of how people live their lives, rather than some kind of abstracted amateur theorizing”
providing insight into what it might 'feel' like for the mature age learner who participates in an Enabling program.\textsuperscript{48}

Emotions can signal underlying beliefs, thoughts and expectation. Haggan (2000, p. 432) notes that although the individual “may feel driven by emotions” he contends that “they actually create them, often do not want to acknowledge them, and may tend to blame them on poor behaviour.” Emotions thus becomes a “double edged sword, with the ability to enhance learning or impede it” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 40), for tense or threatening contexts can result in a diminished capacity to think rationally (Wolfe, 2006). As Barbelet (2002, p. 3) asserts, “not only do emotions provide instant evaluation of a circumstance, they also influence the disposition of the person for a response to those circumstances”. Emotions can be manifested through the mobilisation of metaphors, a description of which now follows.

\textit{Metaphors}

Metaphors\textsuperscript{49} are a cognitive strategy that individuals use both consciously and unconsciously to make sense of new knowledge about themselves and their world. In drawing from the work of Harre (1983), Edwards (2001, p. 238) contends that emotion metaphors are “conceptual resources... available for discursive deployment.” He suggests that metaphors are the means by which certain things can be uttered and not just perceived (Edwards, 2001) and acknowledges their historical and social construction. Nelson (2009) situates metaphors in the “realm of the nonrational unconscious mind”, stating that through the use of metaphors, the educator can assist their learner in the process of transformative learning. One example is the use of the Hero’s Journey as a metaphor to explain the experience of personal transformation.

A metaphor of interest in this thesis is that of the “looking-glass self”, the parallels of which can be drawn to the process of transformative learning. Based on the work of 20th century sociologist Charles Cooley (1964), the metaphor of the looking glass is

\textsuperscript{48} The collection and analysis of data over the thirteen-week STEPS program and week beyond was able to document the emotional manifestations of the participants as they progressed through the program.

\textsuperscript{49} The word \textit{metaphor} means “to carry” (\textit{pherein}) and “beyond” (\textit{meta}) (Vale & Eckartsberg, 1981, p. xxi) and is “a way of seeing something in terms of something else”, or understanding “one domain of experience in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, p. 117). We need to comprehend events through ways that we understand in clearer terms, such as through spatial orientations, objects, and so on. Thus, individuals tend to “conceptualize the non-physical in terms of the physical” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, p. 59).
based on the contention that our sense of self is created by our imagination of how we appear in the eyes of others. We see ourselves through the eyes of others and incorporate their perspectives into our own self-concept. Thus the individual’s self perception and self-feeling “derives from their apprehension of how others perceive them” (Barbelet, 2007, p. 1377). In his conceptualisation of the looking-glass self, Cooley (1922/64) did not perceive an entirely self-centred individual but rather one who is acutely aware of the very characteristics of those individuals in whose minds one imagines the self. Mobilisation of the looking glass self can occur due to anxiety and confusion. Given that perceptions of self as learner are embroiled in social identities, and that the ways in which these are executed are expressions of what is important to us, mobilisation of the looking glass self metaphor has the potential to be a powerful indicator that long held perceptions of self as learner have been unsettled and examined. The mobilisation of such can be known through the construction of particular Discourses.

3.4 Discourses

In this thesis, Discourse (capital D), or the way words and actions are used to identify ways of acting and being is drawn upon. Individuals are constantly creating new Discourses, changing old ones, contesting others and pushing the boundaries of others, and tension inevitably arises between and within the multiple identities or Discourses of which an individual is part (Gee, 2005, pp. 29–30). In his conceptualisation of Discourse, Gee combines “how language is used ‘on-site’ to enact activities and identities” (discourse) with the “non-language stuff” (Gee, 2005, p. 7) to create

socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting and interacting in the ‘right’ places at the ‘right’ times with the ‘right’ objects (associations that can be used to identity oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network”. (Gee, 2005, p. 26)

He further contends that Discourses are “social practices and mental entities, as well as material realities” (Gee, 2005, p. 32). Thus, from this perspective, discourse analysis is concerned with “analysing language as it is fully integrated with all other elements that go into social practices (ways of thinking or feeling, ways of manipulating objects or tools, ways of using non-linguistic symbol systems, etc.” (Gee, 2005, p. 9). Gee posits four crucial elements as integral to his conceptualisation of Discourse. These include:

1. situated identities;
2. ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities;
3. ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places and times;

Individuals are each members of many different Discourses that are embedded in social institutions, each with its own ‘rules’ and ‘kits’ that allow us to live out our social lives “as different and multiple kinds of people, different for different times and places” (Gee, 2005, p. 33). Gee (2005, p. 21) contends that various Discourses comprise each of us as people with identities that are constantly changing that are often not fully consistent with each other; thus the “concomitant ways of talking, acting, and interacting” associated with each identity “may well conflict with each other in some circumstances ... as well as in the person's own mind.” When different individual identity ‘kits’ come into conflict with each other, dissonance can occur. One example is when the mature age learner enters an Enabling program, adding the identity kit of ‘student’ to their repertoire of existing ‘kits’. At the individual level, each ‘kit’ jostles for the individual’s attention, while at a social level, the ‘kits’ of other individuals may be at odds or contrary to one’s own, and tension can emerge within and between those Discourses. Such tension leads to the mobilisation of new Discourses.

Gee’s (2005) conception of Discourse as outlined above provides a way to explain how new Discourses are constantly created as old ones are changed or contested. Furthermore, his conceptualisation of Discourse provides for the identification of the slippages that can occur between the various Discourses of which individuals are part as they play out the various social roles attached to their various identity ‘kits’. It also provides a lucid way to account for the tensions and instances of dissonance that can occur for mature age learners who engage in an Enabling context and comes to new conceptualisations of themselves as learners. The tension and instances of dissonance can be explained through borderland discourse theory, a description of which now follows.

**Borderland discourse theory**

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa published *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, and gave voice to what it was like to be a lesbian woman of colour who was caught
between the discourses of her Mexican parentage and the America in which she was raised. Anzaldúa’s life work was involved with creating cultural and political spaces for the voices of women of colour and she conceptualised the Chicana borderland world as composed of the integration of cultural, sexual, physical and spiritual discourses. Anzaldúa (1987) conceptualised the borderland as a place of inhabiting multiple identities, contradictions and ambiguities that are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (p. 19). Anzaldúa’s conception related to the issues of culture and ideologies of her personal life experiences, relating her encounters of living in the borderland. Potentially, her theory has application to the borderland experiences of mature age learners in Enabling programs as they too may inhabit spaces in which they experience tension and contradiction surrounding perceptions of themselves as learners.

In her book entitled Teacher identity discourses – Negotiating personal and professional spaces, Janet Alsup (2006) draws upon Anzaldúa’s conceptualisation of the borderland and ‘borrows’ Gee’s (1990) theorisation of borderland Discourses as a way to account for the tensions and intersections of the various types of discourses that unravelled in her research with six pre-service teachers as they transited from trainee teacher to registered teacher. According to Alsup (2006, p. 15), borderland discourse allows for a more holistic understanding of personal and other identities and the intersections and contradictions that occur among them. Understanding these, she believes, can be “realized through the expression of borderland discourse that facilitates the critical interrogation of conflicting subject positions or expressions of self which can be primarily emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual.” Similar to Anzaldúa, Alsup (2006, p. 15) perceived that the participants in her study found themselves “living at the intersection of multiple worlds and multiple ways of knowing”, yet in a borderland that offered a space in which they could “experience a richer, fuller, and more complex understanding of self and other”.

The borderland however, is not to be simplified as the mere crossing of one boundary through the identification or rejection of another. Nor, argues Alsup (2006,
p. 70), does it mean the “elimination of any conflict or ideological tension” or as representative of a simple divide between the here and there. Rather, it is a space in which individuals experience the tension between their multiple subjectivities and come to express themselves through discourses that allow them to “build new bridges” or “find connections” between old and new ways of knowing (Alsup, 2006, p. 71). The borderland is not so much a unitary type of discourse that is easily identified by linguistic features, but rather a “complex discourse reflecting metacognition or critical reflection” (Alsup, 2006, p. 36). Meyer and Land’s (2005, p. 2) conception of the “liminal space”\(^{51}\), the Latin \textit{limen} meaning boundary or threshold, shares similarities with the concept of the borderland. They describe the liminal space as a “not-so-sure” (p. 5) place of meaning making in which personal transformation occurs through the altering of one’s state to another. This, the authors explain, occurs as a result of the acquisition of new knowledge and subsequent new personal status that can be problematic for the individual, who is not positioned “fully in one category or another” (p. 3).

**Borderland Discourses**

For the purposes of the analysis of the data in this thesis, Gee’s (2005, p. 7), conceptualisation of Discourses as “the language and “non-language stuff” to enact specific identities and activities”, and Alsup’s (2006) conceptualisation of borderland discourse have been synthesised to conceptualise the notion of borderland Discourses\(^ {52}\). This amalgamation represents a legitimate means of accounting for the “liminal spaces” (Myer & Land, 2005, p. 2) that exist between the borders of the many Discourses of which individuals are part, the “in between ground...the place of becoming, the space of ambiguity and reflection” (Alsup, 2006, p. 9). As each Discourse butts up against the other and jostles for the attention of the individual, cognitive and emotional dissonance generates new Discourses. Borderland Discourses may therefore be perceived as expressions of what it is like to inhabit the intersection “of multiple worlds and multiple ways of knowing” (Alsup, 2006, p. 15). In this thesis, Borderland Discourses have been named and can be viewed as indicators of the dissonance experienced by the mature age participants as their

---

\(^{51}\) See Land and Meyer (2003, 2006) for a detailed description of the liminal space.

\(^{52}\) Gee (1990) first used borderland Discourse theory in reference to his research with adolescents and the Discourses they constructed and mobilised between the borders of home and school. The Discourses they mobilised were defined by the “conflicts and oppositions” (Gee, 1990, p. 169) between their school-based Discourses and the Discourses developed by the adolescents outside school.
multiple contextual understandings and personal perceptions and expectations were integrated as part of the transformative learning process.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework for this thesis has been fundamentally drawn from the theories of transformative learning, Discourses and borderland discourse. The latter two have been synthesised to conceptualise borderland Discourses to account for new Discourses that emerge from the borderland spaces between the many Discourses in which one engages. The elusive nature of transformative learning does not permit an easily observable and navigable description as the categorisation into various phases presented earlier in this chapter might suggest. The very process of personal change is multidimensional and complex, comprised of conscious and unconscious dimensions, overt and covert dimensions, and rational and non-rational dimensions. However, transformative learning theory provides an internal language of description to make sense of the moves of the participants in this study through the provision of a multi-dimensional interpretation. In addition, it provides the impetus to highlight any undeveloped dimensions of the theory that may warrant further exploration, such as the random and ‘emotionally messy’ way in which it can be made manifest.

At the borders of the multiple Discourses of which one is part, a conceptual, “liminal space” (Myer & Land, 2005, p. 2) occurs in which meaning may be negotiated about long held perceptions of self. As such are reviewed or viewed and analysed for the first time, new perceptions of self as learner can conceptualised. This process can be very disorienting, erratic and contradictory, made manifest through the construct of emotion that allows for the identification of emergent Discourses.

3.5 Summary

While Chapter 1 provided the aims, rationale, significance and limitations of this thesis and presented the research questions, Chapter 2 contextualised the study to an Enabling program in the higher education sector. A critique of relevant literature about mature age learners in Enabling and similar contexts was also presented. This chapter has presented the theoretical framework, laying the foundation for the research methodology discussed in the next chapter, the research design chapter.
Chapter 4  The research design

4.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design. As outlined in Chapter 2, mature age learners in Enabling education represent a unique cohort of learners in university settings. The purpose of this study was to gain some understanding of how such an engagement impacted on the perceptions of self as learner for such learners. It was therefore vital that the research design was capable of guiding me, the researcher, in the generation, categorisation, interpretation and analysis of the data to generate meaningful and relevant findings and suggestions about mature age learners who engage in Enabling programs.

My philosophical assumptions have inevitably influenced the research in this thesis. Thus, this chapter commences by explicating the philosophical basis on which the research design for this thesis is premised. With this in mind, justification for assumptions I make about reality, the role of the researcher, the methods of inquiry and the data analysis techniques utilised is provided. Next, a qualitative paradigm is established as the orientation to research that guides the research design. Following that, case study methodology is posited as the most suitable way to gain an understanding of how mature age learners in an Enabling program perceived themselves as learners. Then, the research questions are re-introduced and the chapter continues with a discussion of the data collection tools and schedule. This is followed by a discussion of the data analysis process, including a discussion of how borderland Discourses were operationalised in the data analysis in Chapter 5. Finally, commensurate with any qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is addressed, alongside an acknowledgement of the ethical and political dimensions of the research.

The research design presented in this chapter aims to make clear the relationships between the theoretical framework, the methodology and the data collection methods and analysis. The following diagram encapsulates the important features of the research design.
Ontology & Epistemology: I am what I study

Qualitative research paradigm

The methodological choice – Case study

The Research Questions

1. What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners in an Enabling program?
2. In what ways does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?

Data collection tools & schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi-structured interviews:</th>
<th>Participant selections:</th>
<th>Researcher’s journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-individual</td>
<td>-Pre-STEPS document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-group</td>
<td>-Final week reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data organisation and analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indexing the data</th>
<th>Categorising the data</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Discourse analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Trustworthiness | Ethical considerations |

Figure 4.1: The research design
Ontology and Epistemology: I am what I study

As the researcher in this thesis, the choices I made about what to research and how to conduct such reflects a great deal about me as a human being. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the position taken when I view the world, for my writing is inevitably “positioned within a stance” (Creswell, 2007, p. 179). Thus I acknowledge my heterosexual, middle-class, white background and the influence such attributes have had on my choice of the research design and the object of research, for “our identities and life experiences shape the political and ideological stances we take in our research” (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 11). Given that I speak “from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21), I also acknowledge the reflexivity and the non-neutrality of my research, and admit that my findings are not purely objective or without bias.

My ontological belief is such that I cannot claim to capture the absolute truth of reality. My claims can only be “partial, situated … and relative” (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 12) for there is “no single ‘truth’ [as] all truths are but partial truths” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 212). Furthermore, being situated in a particular place and time, my claims can only be contingent and therefore do not have “the status of stable and enduring truth” (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 319).

My beliefs about the knower and the known and how they interact and shape one another, are best reflected by an interpretative epistemology. In adopting this perspective, I hold that the aim of conducting research for this thesis was to explore meanings about personal change and their significance and not so much to “predict and control” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994, p. 3). As a researcher, I make no claims about my research being easily replicable and I acknowledge my own relationship as the teacher-researcher to the research. Furthermore, my individual perspectives, worldviews and assumptions about reality inevitably impact on any analysis I undertake, and for this reason, my study cannot be exactly replicated by any other individual, for multiple realities and truths about the nature of the world exist and mine is but one. The research questions and formulated interview questions could, however, be replicated and similar cohorts of mature age learners in Enabling programs could be sourced as potential research groups to investigate changes in perception of self as learner. Who and what I am
reflects how I have conceptualised, researched and written this thesis and ideologically position me most comfortably within a qualitative research paradigm.

**Qualitative research paradigm**

Qualitative research is as the name implies – research that has a focus on the quality of the data, and not on the quantity. The research is thus focused on “non-numeric data in the form of words” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 130). As Lewis (2000, p. 2) points out, qualitative research “concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations.” Essential to this process is the involvement of people whose stories are encouraged in a nurturing environment. Most qualitative research, according to Richards (2005, p. 62), “has no clear beginning and no predetermined schedule” for often the questions being asked do not clearly indicate “what data you need to answer it” (Richards, 2005, p. 35). The focus of attention in this thesis lends itself to the qualitative research paradigm because of the centrality of individual experiences in the transformative learning process. It allows for the tapping into “human tendencies where attitudes and perceptions are developed through interaction with other people” (Lewis, 2000, p. 2) and focuses on human interactions in the field. Thus it has the potential to yielding insightful and authentic knowledge about personal change as articulated by those who experienced it as they experience it.

A qualitative research paradigm allows for multiple data sources as records of what it is one wishes to research. Such sources are used as evidence of complex and contested interactions and observations and can be referred to as “messy records” (Richards, 2005, p. 34). In this thesis, a qualitative research paradigm allowed for the generation of rich data that enabled a good understanding of transformative learning theory by examining the ways in which perceptions of self as learner were manifested by the participants. Within this paradigm, qualitative case study is a research methodology than can allow for this exploration, a description of which now follows.

**4.2 Research methodology – Case study**

The case study approach was chosen as a way to describe in detail the experiences of change in perception of self as learner for a small group of mature age learners who engaged in a thirteen-week, face-to-face Enabling program. According to Yin (2003), case study is a particularly useful approach for investigating the how and why aspects of real life phenomena while Stake (2005, p. 136) considers it to be
“both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.” The case reported on in this study had characteristics typical of a qualitatively oriented case study. It was bounded by time (14 weeks), by the number of participants (four males and five females aged 19 – 47 years), by the singular setting (an Enabling program) and the development of its own “thick description” (Stake, 2005, p. 450). Case study allows the researcher to decide what will be included in the report; thus the data of only three participants will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Case study proved to be an appropriate methodological approach in that it allowed for the systematic observation, documentation, analysis and interpretation of the data in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the ways in which the mature age students perceived themselves as learners. It necessitated a specific focus, for as Stake (2005, p. 203) intimates, “certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside.” Thus with its descriptive nature, case study allowed for the use of multiple data sources to generate rich data to construct a valid representation of how the mature age participants variously perceived themselves as learners over the duration of the Enabling program. Such data included: 1) the words articulated by the participants during semi-structured individual and group interviews; 2) documents written by the participants both before and after STEPS; and (3) documented notes in a researcher’s journal.

Literature explored in Chapter 2 indicated that while adult learning and the process of personal transformation has been generally well represented in research studies in US and UK contexts, the mature age learner’s experience of personal transformation in Enabling programs in Australia has not been well documented. This lack validates the case study approach chosen in this thesis, for my intention was not to build theory or seek to explain an “abstract construct or generic phenomenon” (Stake, 2005, p. 445), nor try to understand a general collective, but rather to investigate the ways in which mature age learners in an Enabling program made manifest their perceptions of themselves as learners. While the research was bound by specific characteristics as outlined above, the findings generated in this thesis will inevitably share similarities and differences with case studies of a similar focus and highlight implications for pedagogical and design features of Enabling programs; however, as Stake (2005, p. 460) cautions, the purpose of a case study is to represent the case, not represent the world".
Shortcomings of case

As with any methodological approach to research, case study has its shortcomings and limitations. Researcher bias and subjectivity are ongoing issues the case study researcher must be very mindful of given that case study is generally “the empirical study of human activity” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Thus researcher diligence needs to be maintained not only during the selection of data, but prior to that in the way the study is conceptualised, conducted, in the choice and design of the data collection tools, and in the way the data are selected, analysed and interpreted. Data collected directly from the site inevitably involves issues of subjectivity and the case study researcher must provide the basis for validation of “both the observation and the generalization” (Stake, 2005, p. 456) of what it is they research. Thus, it was essential to be mindful of Stake’s (2003, p. 150) advice about placing my intellect into “the thick of what is going on … and being ever reflective” as a way to ensure issues related to subjectivity were minimised.

A further limitation of case study relates to the potentially vast amounts of data that can be generated. As Stake (2005, p. 456) notes, the researcher has to choose “between telling lots and telling little.” Deciding on which data sets to report on in the case can be an onerous challenge for the novice researcher. In this thesis, this was overcome by allowing the research questions to place limitations on the data selection process. However, although case study poses some challenges for the researcher, in this research study, it allowed for an investigation of a particular focus in an authentic manner. The conceptual structure of a case study is generally organised around a minimum of research questions.

The Research Questions

As explained above, in this thesis, case study is the methodology chosen to discover more about the perceptions of self as learner of a small group of mature age learners who enrolled in an Enabling program. The research questions guiding the thesis are:

1. What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners in an Enabling program?
2. In what ways does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?

The following section includes a description of the multiple data collection tools utilised in the case study to generate data for analysis and discussion.
4.3 Data collection tools

There is a fair degree of latitude in terms of the data collection tools available to the case study researcher. Although Yin (2003) suggests that as many as six different types of information should be utilised in the data gathering process, in this study, individual and group interviews were chosen as the primary data collection tools, while two different participant documents and a researcher’s journal represented the secondary data collection tools. These multiple data sources allowed for “different bearings” (Gillam, 2000, p. 29) in the data gathering process, further details of which appear in later in this chapter. The intent of employing these particular tools was to yield “richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p. 179) data related to changes in perception of self as learner. The following diagram summarises the data collection tools.

![Diagram showing data collection tools]

**Figure 4.2: The data collection tools**

As indicated in Figure 4.2, eighteen individual and two group interviews were conducted with the participants. These interviews were scheduled around STEPS classes and conducted in a classroom with tea and coffee available. The individual interviews were conducted between each of the nine participants and me in week seven and week eleven at an allocated time on a negotiated day. Each individual interview took approximately twenty minutes. The first of the two group interviews was conducted in week four with eight of the nine participants and the second in

---

53 One participant was absent due to illness.
week fourteen, with seven of the nine participants\textsuperscript{54}. Each group interview took approximately forty minutes during which time each participant was invited to respond to the questions. The amount of questioning at each interview was kept to a minimum. In each interview, the same two or three open-ended questions were asked of each of the participants, heeding Gillam’s (2000, p. 65) caution about the necessity to trim questions until only those essential for the research remain, or otherwise face mountains of data. A further advantage of only asking three questions during each interview was to allow more time for spontaneous discussion and questioning.

In terms of the logistics of the data collection phase, all data were gathered from the one site over a fourteen-week period, namely during the thirteen-week STEPS program and the week after. Gaining access to the setting is integral to the interviewer’s success, yet can be somewhat difficult as the researcher decides on a strategy to seek entry and develop a relationship of trust with the participants (Gillam, 2000, p. 62). As teacher/researcher of this study, this posed no real problem due to my daily contact with the participant group, although this presented other problems related to subjectivity, an issue discussed later in this chapter. The data collection took place in a systematic way with clear expectations of what each data source would provide. Table 4.1 on the following page presents the schedule and foci of the data collection tools. Following this is a detailed description of the primary data gathering tools, namely the semi-structured individual and group interviews, and the secondary data collection tools, comprised of pre- and post-STEPS participant documents and a researcher’s journal.

\textsuperscript{54} One participant was absent due to work commitments and the other due to illness.
Table 4.1: Schedule and foci of the data collection tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>What was asked?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participants (Ps) pre-STEPS</td>
<td>To gain some idea of Ps perception of self as learner pre-STEPS.</td>
<td>1. Information about reasons for seeking entry to STEPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>application letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Group interview</td>
<td>To identify some of the major challenges identified by P in the first three weeks of STEPS and establish some idea of the self-concept of the Ps. To investigate Ps incidences of personal change</td>
<td>1. What issues have challenged your thoughts so far in Language &amp; Learning (L&amp;L)? 2. What do you feel you have to offer the L&amp;L course? 3. Do you feel any of your views have changed in any way as a result of our discussions in L&amp;L?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>To gain some insight into how P’s placed value on their classroom contributions and reflections on any changes in their worldviews</td>
<td>1. How do you feel your views contribute to the L&amp;L discussions we have? 2. Have your views been challenged in any way as a result of our L&amp;L course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>To gain some insight into the perceptions Ps had about self To examine how challenges were articulated by Ps</td>
<td>1. What do you want to do post-STEPS? 2. Can you share some of your reflections of L&amp;L and the challenges you have confronted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hero’s Journey Reflection</td>
<td>To have Ps theorise their journey of personal change and gain a greater understanding of change in their lives</td>
<td>Participants used the metaphor of the Hero’s Journey in a written reflection of their journey through STEPS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Group interview</td>
<td>To have Ps reflect on new abilities and articulate challenges to worldviews and perceptions of self</td>
<td>1. How has L&amp;L helped you? 2. In what ways has L&amp;L challenged you? 3. Reflect on any personal changes you may have experienced throughout the course. Can you share them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-14</td>
<td>Researcher Journal</td>
<td>To capture day to day classroom and other occurrences, ideas, thoughts, casual observations about my practice; interpretations</td>
<td>Ongoing reflections; where, when, why, how, who questions; theorising; field notes; observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary data gathering tools

As previously mentioned, the primary data gathering tools consisted of semi-structured group and individual interviews; further elaboration on each now follows.

Semi-structured group interviews

Semi-structured group interviews represented a data source in this thesis, utilised to generate a perspective on the data that was not available through the individual interviews. Group interviews have the potential to yield substantial amounts of rich data as well as offering a legitimate, economical, flexible and ethical option for data generation. Two group interviews were conducted during the research period, each taking approximately forty-five minutes to conduct. Table 4.2 iterates the questions asked at each group interview:

Table 4.2: The semi-structured group interview questions and schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>What was asked?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>What issues have challenged your thoughts so far in L&amp;L?55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you feel you have to offer to the L&amp;L course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you feel any of your views have changed in any way as a result of our discussions in L&amp;L?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>How has L&amp;L helped you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In what ways has L&amp;L challenged you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflect on any personal changes you may have experienced throughout the course. Can you share them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each semi-structured group interview was strategically positioned within the research period. The timing of the first group interview coincided immediately subsequent to classroom activities that engaged the participants (as part of the wider class) in self-discovery about personal learning style preferences and temperament types. The intention was that these meta-learning activities would be a stimulus for conversation in the group interview to encourage articulations about

---

55 L&L refers to the Language and Learning course. The choice to locate the research within this specific course was chosen not just because I was the teacher and had easy access, but it provided a learning environment in which the participants, as part of the wider class, were able to engage in discussions that exposed them to perspectives and worldviews that may have had the potential to challenge some of their long held assumptions and perceptions of themselves as learners.
perceptions of self as learner. As indicated above, the first group interview was conducted in week four of the participants’ engagement in STEPS. It was hoped that in articulating their thoughts about how they had been personally challenged to date, and how they perceived they personally contributed to Language and Learning, some idea of how the participants perceived themselves as learners might be uncovered. It was also hoped that in identifying ways in which their personal worldviews had changed, changes in perception of self as learner might have been manifest by the participants.

The second interview was conducted in the fourteenth week, the week after the conclusion of the STEPS program. During this interview, it was intended that in articulating about the impact of new knowledge, the participants might make manifest new perceptions of themselves as learners. In terms of the intention and timing of the second group interview, it was my expectation that in the week subsequent to the completion of STEPS, the participants might be less subjective in their articulation about any personal challenges experienced during their time in STEPS. The second group interview also provided a sense of closure to the research project, not to mention an opportunity for me to personally thank the participants for their contributions to my research.

The open ended responses in the group interviews were chosen to provide the participants with a certain amount of freedom and control in responding to the questions asked. This called for interviewer skills in re-focusing the direction of the participants back to the research questions. Being the teacher/researcher of the participants can afford many advantages in terms of the rapport and trust that can be established with the participants. This rapport can facilitate the group interviews in that the participants may feel comfortable in the researcher’s presence, notable in the easy ways some will share their various personal issues and reflections.

**Limitations of the semi-structured group interview**

There are limitations related to administering semi-structured group interviews. Group dynamics, while sometimes instrumental in the success of the semi-structured group interview, can prove very testing for the interviewer. There is the chance that some participants continually dominate the discussion and thereby silence the voice(s) of others through the creation of a “groupthink” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705). This was experienced on one occasion in this study, requiring the need to draw on diplomatic skills to ensure opportunities were provided for all voices
to be heard and acknowledged. Another challenge encountered on more than one occasion during the research gathering phase was keeping the focus of the interview on track, for the spontaneity and flexibility alluded to as benefits of the semi-structured group interview can also result in focus being lost. To address this, constant referral back to the interview questions proved useful although at times there was some personal consternation about my tendency to re-direct the participants back to the interview questions when they were keen to diverge to other sometimes related issues. Addressing this required the researcher’s cognisance of the voices and body language of the participants and ability to gauge the benefits of allowing certain conversations to take their due course.

Tension between participants themselves and between researcher and participant(s) can arise when conducting a group interview. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 642) state, the interview is never neutral; it is “a negotiated text – a site where power, gender, race, and class intersect.” Thus while being aware of the status of myself as the researcher/teacher of the participants, in trying to show my human side (Fontana & Frey, 2005), at times it seemed I walked a fine line in not showing my feelings and maintaining neutrality in light of some of the private information divulged by some of the participants. Another area of tension arose during the group interviews, when on two occasions, the perspectives and worldviews of one participant were clearly problematic for other participants, opening up avenues of heated discussion. This called for researcher skills of diplomacy, which alerted me to my lack of experience in conducting group interviews. In providing another perspective though is Gillam’s (2000) contention that such instances can actually elicit “tensions and reveal groupings not apparent in an individual interview” (p. 78). A final challenge of the semi-structured group interview surrounds issues related to the maintenance of an atmosphere amenable to open communication. Despite attempting to create an informal atmosphere during each group interview, while it may have benefited some participants, for others the perceived power differential between researcher (or in my case the teacher) and the participant/student may have impinged on some of the participants’ responses.

**Semi-structured individual interviews**

Interviews and discussions are key data collection strategies in case study research, relied upon for the collection of data that cannot be gathered in other ways (Lewis, 2000, p. 2). Given that the intent of the research in this thesis was to find out more about perceptions of self as learner, semi-structured individual
interviews were deemed appropriate in eliciting information directly from the mature age participants. Due to the potential spontaneity and flexibility of semi-formal interviews, as well as the rich face to face communication they can generate (Gillam, 2000, p. 62), they fundamentally provide a way “to understand our fellow humans” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 699). For this study, each individual interview was conducted in an environment that sought to encourage the participants to articulate about their experiences, feelings and opinions in a frank and open manner. Table 4.3 reiterates the semi-structured individual interview questions and schedule:

Table 4.3: The semi-structured individual interview questions and schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>What was asked?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 7     | How do you feel your views contribute to the L&L discussions we have?  
             | Have your views been challenged in any way as a result of our L&L course? |
| Week 11    | What do you want to do post-STEMS?  
             | Can you share some of your reflections of L&L and the challenges you have confronted? |

It was intended that the first interview question would probe the participants’ perceptions of themselves as learners by asking them to evaluate the contributions of their worldviews to the classroom. In asking them to identify the ways in which their views had been challenged, further probing into perceptions of self was intended. This also allowed some comparison with challenges identified in the Week 4 group interview. The second individual interview was conducted in Week 11, the purpose of which was to probe the participants for further challenges as a way of finding out if previously identified challenges remained or if new ones had emerged.

One of the main advantages of the semi-structured individual interview in this thesis was that in addition to the set interview questions as iterated above, flexibility allowed for the follow through on unexpected responses, allowing the interviews to explore other relevant conversations raised by the participants. Another advantage of using the semi-structured individual interview was that it provided a more intimate
context in which some of the less than confident participants were not silenced by others.

Limitations of semi-structured individual interviews

Despite being a popular data collection tool in case study, issues can arise for the researcher who utilises semi-structured individual interviews. First, although the researcher may claim neutrality and take steps to achieve such, “taking a stance is unavoidable” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696) and issues of power can arise between the interviewer and the participant. Thus, as the interviewer I needed to be mindful of this, respecting the fragility of trust between myself as the interviewer/teacher of the participants. Secondly, I concur with Gillam (2000) that interviewing can be a very tedious process, not only in terms of conducting each and every interview, but in terms of the time allocated to transcribe the corpus of generated data. This took a huge amount of time as twenty interviews had to be personally transcribed and accompanied with comments, notations, reflections and annotations. However, the value of conducting my own transcribing rather than outsourcing it was in the close familiarity I was able to maintain with the data and the substantiations I was able to make in consultation with notations recorded in my researcher’s journal.

As previously noted, three secondary data collection tools were utilised to supplement the interview data. These included two documents written by the participants, one being their pre-STEPS application letter and the other being their end-of-STEPS reflective writing. Each document captured aspects of the before and after stories as told by the participants themselves. The third data collection tool was the researcher’s journal, compiled for the duration of the research period. A discussion of each secondary data collection tool now follows.

The secondary data gathering tools

The secondary data gathering tools were comprised of the pre-STEPS application letter, the end of STEPS document (Hero’s Journey reflective writing) and a researcher’s journal, further descriptions of which now follow.

Pre-STEPS application letter

As part of the formal, administrative application process to STEPS, potential students are required to complete an application letter. In this letter the applicants are required to address questions related to their prior schooling experiences,
recent employment history, aspirations for the future, and their reason(s) for applying to STEPS. Upon the submission of the application letters they are kept on file in the STEPS administrative area. Thus, when the research group for this study was formed in week one of the fourteen week research period, it was an easy task to make a photocopy of each application letter, and thus the data collection began\textsuperscript{56}. The application letters represented a rich data source in terms of the insight provided into how each participant perceived themselves as learners prior to their entry to STEPS. Acknowledgement is made at this point that the participants may have employed certain discursive strategies to compose their application letters given their intent to construct themselves in a way that might enhance their chances of acceptance into the STEPS program.

\textit{End of STEPS document}

A final summative task for each STEPS student who completes the program is a reflective writing activity designed to encapsulate their experiences while in STEPS. The written reflection is premised on the twelve stages of the Hero’s Journey (See Glossary of terms). In completing this task the students are able to consult personal diaries compiled for the duration of their engagement in STEPS. For this study, upon completion of the Hero’s Journey reflective writing activity, a copy was made of each participant’s document and added to the by then large corpus of data. Although the reflective writing document represents a rich data collection source in this study, subjectivity issues, however, must be taken into consideration given the highly emotional state of some of the participants on the final day of STEPS. Nevertheless, this data collection tool represented a rich source of information about how the participants perceived themselves as learners while engaged in STEPS, not to mention their personal experiences of change.

\textit{A researcher’s journal}

While interviews and participants’ documents can generate useful data, a researcher’s journal can be invaluable as a data collection tool for the researcher/teacher. As both teacher and researcher of the participants, it is inevitable that reflections upon pedagogical practices and annotations about daily interactions, particularly those with the participants, will be recorded in some place. In the case of the research gathering period reported on in this thesis, contact with the participants for five days each week over a thirteen week period meant that I

\textsuperscript{56} See Ethics section for the formalities surrounding this.
was constantly thinking about them at odd hours of the day throughout the research period, and indeed, during the time afterwards as I mulled over data and wrote this thesis! As Kleinman and Copp (1993, p. 8) lament, “sometimes it feels as if they [the participants] are living inside our heads.”

Using a researcher’s journal was considered to aid in the trustworthiness of this study because it proved particularly helpful in providing a repository in which reflections, comprehensive and detailed notes, casual observations, comments and questions could be recorded in a systematic way. It also posed as a self-reflective tool but most importantly, allowed for the capture of contextual details and the daily occurrences in the classroom soon after they happened. Gillam (2000, p. 46) makes the point that research participants may profess to say and write certain things, but it is what they actually do in reality than can be a very powerful source of data for the researcher. Thus the use of on-the-spot field and journalistic notes to accompany each interview, collated in a reflective, interpretative and explanatory way, were invaluable for later recall. They also represent an audit trail for those who may have an interest in the research being reported.

When re-visiting the interview data, on several occasions I found information documented in the researcher’s journal to be most useful in validating and triangulating details from the interviews and the pre- and post-STEMS documents. Annotated notes facilitated the recall of particular events and acted as a prompt when reading the transcribed interview data relating to specific classroom incidents to which the participants may have made reference. This allowed for the recording of details related to any overt emotional manifestations of the participants, but naturally enough, researcher subjectivity and speculation about the meaning of words and actions manifested by the participants required caution. In my case, this was achieved by annotating incidents, casual observations and journalistic notes in a factual way, and adopting caution with regards to any speculation made about the interpretation of the words and actions of each participant.

4.4 Organisation and analysis of the data

While the schedule and foci of the data collection tools and procedures have been explained, the following section describes how the data were organised, including identification of the data source and categorisation into themes. Following these descriptions, the way in which the data were analysed is presented.
Identification of the data source

The data sorting and data analysis occurred in an iterative way. While the data collection schedule generally demanded a lot of energy, organisation and enthusiasm, it proved to be enjoyable and exciting as I continually scanned data as it accumulated. In terms of the twenty taped interviews, as soon as possible after each interview I transcribed the audiotapes, recording verbatim what was said between each participant and me. For each transcription I used a three column table to record (1) the spoken words; (2) themes/ideas arising; and (3) my notes. Occasionally included in the notes column were brief descriptions of the more overt intonations or emotive expressions of some participants, including exaggerated laughs, agitated tones, or other overstated expressions that seemed relevant at the time.

Given the anticipation that a large corpus of data would be generated, it was important early in the data collection phase that some way of identifying each data source was established, so a rudimentary indexing system was devised to code the data. Each interview transcription was assigned the letter ‘I’ to indicate interviews, the first letter of each participant’s pseudonym, and a numerical number to indicate the interview series (e.g. BI2 for Barb’s 2nd interview). The letter ‘A’ preceded by the participant’s initial was used to denote data from the participant’s application letter to STEPS (e.g., BA for Barb’s application letter). At the end of the research period, when the reflective writing data was gathered, RW was used to indicate reflective writing data, preceded by the first initial of the participant’s pseudonym (e.g., BRW for Barb’s reflective writing). RJ was added to denote data from the researcher’s journal. In the analysis chapter, Chapter 5, to signify the words of each participant, I have in most instances, indented the section of transcription chosen for inclusion, and secondly, italicised such sections. In other instances, for example when part of a sentence, the words of the participants are indicated by the use of italics. Throughout Chapter 5, notes from the researcher’s journal are denoted by an inset box.

The data sorting was an ongoing, intuitive process, reflected in Table 4.4, an overview of the data sorting processes and procedures.
Table 4.4: Overview of the data sorting process and procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Data sorting processes &amp; procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Read; noted constructions of self as learner; began file for each participant; began indexing documentary sources: A= Application letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-STEPs application letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Transcribed data; transcriptions; identified emergent themes; Categorised into various themes; began indexing interview: I1 = first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured group interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Transcribed data; added to existing themes; identified new emerging themes; categorised themes; continued indexing data: I2 = second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured individual interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Transcribed data; added to existing themes; identified new emerging themes; discarded some themes; combined themes; categorised themes; continued indexing data: I3 = third interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured individual interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Transcribed data; added to existing themes; identified new themes; further integration of themes; refining of themes; discarding of themes; continued indexing data: I4 = fourth interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured group interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Read; highlighted areas of interest, quotes; emerging themes; added to existing categories; continued indexing data: RW = reflective writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero's Journey reflective writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 1 – 14</td>
<td>Recorded information; day to day reflections; casual observations; added to existing themes; new themes; continued indexing data: RJ = researcher’s journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher's journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Categorisation into themes**

In quite a serendipitous way, the data categorisation and first level analysis began alongside the data collection phase. This is indicative of Stake’s (2005, p. 453) advice regarding the lack of clear stages in case study research, where “issue development continues to the end of the study, and write-up begins with preliminary observations.” The iterative process of categorising the data continued with “a certain blind faith” (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 38) and from the first transcription to the last, there was experimentation with ways to categorise the data.
Mind maps were constructed to visually record the data in a graphic, connected way. This strategy was employed with each interview transcription, for as new data were added to existing themes, groups of themes were integrated, and themes were discarded as the continual search for relationships and generalities across and between themes continued. In addition, throughout this process various quotes or sections of text that caught my attention for one reason or another were highlighted for ready reference if needed.

Repeated reading of the transcriptions and listening to the audio tapes took the analysis to another level, and the categorisation of recurring and emergent themes and patterns became more robust. These themes provided impetus and direction for my literature search, which in turn facilitated my analysis and interpretation of the data. However, while the categorisation of the data into recurring and emergent themes represented a method to sort the data, it in no way represents the often intuitive and erratic path such categorisation took, somewhat analogous to the often erratic and ‘messy’ process of transformative learning. Having categorised the data into themes, the next stage required me to gain the confidence to let the data tell its story, so I took Bassey’s (2001, p. 81) advice and turned to my research questions to judiciously guide the next stage of the study, the data analysis.

**Data analysis**

Although the data gathering schedule was executed in a systematic way, the analysis of the data for this study was by no means undertaken in a sequential, linear process. It was more reminiscent of Creswell’s (2007, p. 153) observation that the data analysis process occurs simultaneously with the data collection. As previously mentioned, first level data analysis occurred as the data were gathered and categorised into recurring and emergent themes. Upon compilation of such however, a more sophisticated level of data analysis was required. Thus Gee’s (2005) and Alsup’s (2006) conceptualisation of discourse analysis were drawn upon to provide a framework that allowed for the identification of emergent borderland Discourses.

As explained in Chapter 3, Discourse is constituted by the ways in which identities and ways of performing are recognised. It entails ways of coordinating and being coordinated by others, “by tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times” (Gee, 2005, p. 33). A Discourse is also constituted by characteristic ways of “acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-
knowing-speaking-listening” (Gee, 2005, p. 33) and can involve multiple identities. Borderland Discourses can therefore be identified as those instances where the actions and words mobilised by the participants made manifest their experiences of personal change during their engagement in STEPS. More particularly, it allowed for the identification of the tension and dissonance they experienced as they engaged in thinking that was “new, original, and transformative” (Alsup, 2006, p. 38) wherein long held assumptions about themselves as learners were unsettled and challenged.

In this thesis, the way in which the data were analysed to detect borderland Discourses was to search for instances that primarily demonstrated tension between the participants’ personal subjectivities and their student subjectivities. This included tensions surrounding their (a) perceptions of themselves as learners; (b) personal relationships; (c) relationships with the STEPS curriculum; and (d) tensions with other class members. To enable such identification, the units of analysis were those “I” clauses and phrases uttered by the participants that expressed how they negotiated the various Discourses of which they were part. As these Discourses bumped and jostled against each other, new Discourses emerged as expressions of what it was like to occupy those conceptual spaces. Those Discourses are known as borderland Discourses. Discourse analysis framed in this way thus provides a way of approaching and thinking about the meaning behind the data, allowing the data to speak for itself and relay the story about how the participants perceived themselves as learners and experienced personal transformation while engaged in STEPS. Such analysis called for a high degree of trustworthiness, discussed in the following section.

4.5 Trustworthiness, research ethics and the researcher’s roles

An important role of the qualitative case study research design is establishing the trustworthiness of claims, guaranteeing the assurance that the collection, interpretation and evaluation of the collected data is performed in a reliable, dependable and consistent way. At the commencement of this chapter, the issue of researcher bias was acknowledged, stating that one’s past experiences, worldviews and other orientations cannot but shape each and every stage of any research project. In this thesis, the issue of trustworthiness has been addressed in a number of ways. First, this has been achieved through the systematic documentation of the
data; second by peer reviewing; and third by triangulation\(^57\) of the data. Further measures to ensure trustworthiness include ensuring the dependability of the research design and the inclusion of identifiable case study features.

**Ensuring trustworthiness of the data**

Systematic documentation of the data was one way trustworthiness was ensured. Audio-recordings of the twenty interviews meant that verbatim conversations were captured as they occurred, while the comprehensive transcription process following each interview ensured that the conversations were recorded in the written form, word for word. Accompanying this process for the entirety of the research phase were stringent efforts to maintain documentation in the researcher’s journal. Another way of assuring trustworthiness was through peer review. A colleague, who had full access to the data, acted as a peer reviewer to keep me “honest” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). This was achieved through the systematic way she challenged my documented interpretations about the data and in my responses to her requests for greater substantiation about some of the claims I was making.

The use of multiple sources to enable triangulation of the data also ensured trustworthiness. As previously mentioned in this chapter, multiple data sources included group and individual interviews, a researcher’s journal and two different forms of student documents. These sources were chosen due to the multiple perspectives they might provide about the participant’s perceptions of themselves as learners.

**Dependability of the research design**

The dependability of the research design can assure another measure of trustworthiness in terms of how reliable it may be regarding the validity of claims being made. In this thesis, the use of the data collection tools in a systematic, scheduled fashion proved to be a reliable way to generate a corpus of rich, thick data that related to the participants’ perceptions of themselves as learners at various times during their engagement in STEPS. Furthermore, despite some flexibility for spontaneous lines of questioning, in all interviews the participants were asked the same set questions, thus ensuring some consistency of their responses.

\(^{57}\) In case study, triangulation is generally deemed as a process of “using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Drawing on the work of Flick and Silverman, Stake adds that triangulation also serves the purpose of clarifying meaning by “identifying different ways the case is being seen ... [it] helps to identify different realities.”
Particularly useful as a consistency check of occasions when the participants hinted about how they had or had not changed some aspect about themselves as learners was systematic documentation in the researcher’s journal.

**Case study features**

Another way of establishing the trustworthiness of research findings is by checking for the inclusion of features integral to the case study approach. In following Creswell's (2007, p. 219) suggestions, this was achieved by (a) clearly identifying the case of perception of self for mature age learners engaged in an Enabling program; (b) ensuring a clear description of the case is provided; (c) identifying themes in the case; (d) ensuring assertions and generalisations are made from the case analysis; and (e) as the researcher, being reflexive about positions taken in the study. While the findings in this thesis will not be universally generalisable, a final test of the trustworthiness of the findings lies in the opportunity for other researchers to make their own conclusions about the generalisability of my findings to similar contexts.

**Research ethics**

It is unavoidable that collecting personal data imposes ethical issues for, as Robson (1993, p. 30) observes, “ethical dilemmas lurk in any research involving people [and the researcher is often forced into making] value judgements and moral dilemmas.” This section of the chapter outlines the necessary research ethics including a) following the necessary protocols; b) issues of power and politics; and c) respect and confidentiality of the participant. It also describes the roles of the researcher in terms of being aware of subjectivity, building up trust and thinking on different levels.

An ethical approach to research is paramount. Christians' (2005) recent challenges to the role of conventional research guidelines associated with betrayal, deception and harm in qualitative research necessitates an acknowledgement of his call for a more collaborative social science research model that makes the researcher responsible to those studied. Such a framework, argues Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 37), “reorganizes existing discourses on ethics and the social sciences” and adds to the changing tapestry of ethics and qualitative research. In some ways exacerbating the ethical and political considerations of the research in this thesis was my duality of roles as both teacher and researcher of the research group.
Within the context of the classroom, I was constantly afforded close interaction, casual observation and spontaneous discussions with the participants. Given that they were the “objects of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 715), utmost care was required to ensure I avoided any harm to them (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 215).

Therefore, it was necessary for the participants in this study to be fully informed about my research project and the role we would each play. The importance of gaining informed consent from the research participants and assuring them of their right to privacy and voluntary participation was thus a vital first step. It was important to assure the participants of the protection of their identities and the safeguarding of confidentiality, although I was mindful of Christians’ (2005) contention that with much qualitative research, “watertight confidentiality has proved to be impossible” (p.145). The following section outlines the measures taken to ensure that the rights of the participants in the study were upheld. These measures included following the protocols in terms of gaining ethical clearance and fully informing the participants of aspects of the research, and making choices about which data to include for analysis and interpretation. Being mindful of power and political issues between the researcher and the researched and ensuring respect for each participant were other measures taken to ensure the participants’ rights were maintained.

**Following the correct protocols**

Two research protocols were addressed in this thesis. First, in recognition of the conventional ethical and political protocols at the time of conducting the research in this thesis, ethical clearance was sought and granted by the Human Ethics Research Review Panel at the then Central Queensland University (see Appendix B: Ethical Certification Statement) prior to commencement of the research. Following the success of this clearance, those participants who indicated a willingness to be part of the research group were given an *Information sheet* that clearly informed them of the intent of the research project and the role they would be asked to play (see Appendix C: Information Sheet). The participants were also asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix D: Consent form) and I reassured them that they were free to leave the research project at any point without any disadvantage or penalty whatsoever.

The second research protocol addressed in this thesis relates to the heavy reliance on the words of the participants to relay their perceptions of themselves as learners. Recent literature reveals ethical concerns related to interviews as a data collection
tool. According to Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 715), as well as controversy over issues such as “overt/covert fieldwork” and the “veracity of the reports made by researchers”, the issue of the researcher’s degree of involvement with the group under study is also of ethical concern. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 39) cite that there has been an increase in scrutiny in some parts of the world, represented by increased monitoring, censuring, and policing of research projects.

Thus, in an ethical and careful way, incisive decisions were required in this thesis in terms of which data would be recorded and selected for the data analysis and which would not. As Stake (2005, p. 459) warns, “The value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to the person exposed.” Thus honesty was also required in transcribing word for word what the participants conveyed during interviews, while the data analysis process meant that careful choices had to be made to ensure the overall representation of the data. Caution was also needed in writing up the research, with care being taken regarding speculation about claims made by the participants as statements of truth (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). I needed to be aware that I could dominate the way in which understandings were constructed (Bishop, 2005, p. 123).

**Issues of power and politics**

An awareness of the power differential between the rights of the researcher and the rights of the participants is an issue to be mindful of when conducting research. Smith and Hodkinson (2005, p. 923) assert that power and politics “are part of the process of judgement and always have been.” Thus I had to ensure I did not take advantage of any possible power differential between the participants and me, perhaps not so much consciously imposed by me as the researcher/teacher, but imposed more insidiously by discursive practices of the particular institutionalised context in which the research was conducted. I also had to be aware that the participants’ responses may not have always been reflective of their genuine feelings but rather words they may have felt obliged to utter at a particular place and time. As such, their truths were partial and situated.

**Respect and confidentiality of the participant**

From an ethical perspective, I needed to respect my participants at all times during the data gathering and analysis phases. Stake’s (2005, p. 459) advice that “qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world [and] their
manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” was heeded. I also considered Fontana and Frey’s (1998, p. 73) missive that “each individual has his or her own social history and an individual perspective on the world”, idiosyncratic differences of which I had to be respectful. It was also important to remain ever aware of the confidentiality owed each participant. Throughout the research period, I remained cognisant that the STEPS program typically attracts a high percentage of students from low SES backgrounds, the majority having had minimal opportunities to pursue higher education. Caution was therefore adopted in actively encouraging the participants to engage in critical self reflection without my having to delve into the personal lives of the participants. Thus interviews procedures followed those proposed by Stake’s (2005, p. 459), such as avoiding “low-priority probing of sensitive issues” and thus protecting the privacy of each participant.

Maintaining the confidentiality of each participant requires the correct recording and appropriate storage of data. Christians (2005, p. 145) cautions that it is “professional etiquette” that the participants should not experience any “harm or embarrassment as a result of research practices.” As the sole researcher in this study, it was therefore necessary to take responsibility for the confidential recording and storing of the corpus of data. Thus, all audio-taped interviews, when not being transcribed or listened to for analysis purposes, were recorded on a disc, backed up on another and kept in a locked filing cabinet in my university office. In addition, as generated, all word processed transcripts of the interviews were recorded and stored with the abovementioned discs. Data were also backed up on a USB device that was stored in the same locked cabinet. The researcher journal, when not in use, was locked in the same cabinet, alongside each participant’s documentary sources.

Roles of the researcher

The role of the researcher can be multifarious with different areas of responsibility. In the next section, subjectivity issues that can arise for the qualitative researcher when researching others are presented, alongside the importance of building up trust with one’s research participants. Completing this section is a discussion of the complexity of the researcher’s role in making sense of the research process.
**Being aware of subjectivity**

Undertaking qualitative research necessitates the researcher working and learning alongside her/his research participants. This gives rise to subjectivity\(^{58}\) issues. The responsibility of the qualitative researcher is to maintain a degree of objectivity and respectable distance from the research group. While Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates (2001, p. 321) advocate for a more “outsider” approach, in my research impartiality was particularly difficult given my duality as teacher/researcher of the participants, physically situated as I was amidst the research participants (as part of the wider class group) for two hours a day, five days a week for thirteen weeks. Being immersed in the everyday lives of the research participants can be problematic for the researcher in terms of the ability to remain objective, especially when witnessing first-hand some of the more overt emotional manifestations demonstrated by individual participants. As teacher/researcher, the inevitability of becoming too absorbed in the lives of the participants was a very real possibility, with the fear of generalising about the researcher’s perception of what appears to be happening, rather than letting the data tell the story.

**Building up trust**

Another area of responsibility, though not always easy to achieve, is the building up of trust with one’s research participants. Mutual respect and trust between the researcher and the participants is important (Pring, 2000). Without this trust, many complications can potentially exist in the exchanges of the two parties (Fontana & Frey, 2005). As a way to address this responsibility in this study, during all interviews, certain steps were followed. These included (a) wording all interview questions concisely and clearly; (b) being respectful and non-judgemental towards the participants; (c) concentrating on taking a neutral stance; and (d) creating a non-threatening environment in which the participants felt they could freely and honestly converse with me and others.

**Thinking on different levels**

Further responsibility for the researcher entails the development of a repertoire of organisational and reflexive skills. While gathering the data requires a certain level of organisational skills, more systematic and analytical dexterity is required for

---

\(^{58}\) Subjectivity in this thesis refers to “one of multiple possible identity positions that varies dependent on context and an individual’s perceptions. Subjectivities are brought to a discursive act and are also affected by it” (Alsup, 2006, p. 206).
keeping on top of the data mountain and conceptualising how the data will be categorised, analysed and interpreted. Another skill relates to the teacher/researcher’s ability to be reflexive during the research project in the sense that research methods and practices are continually reflected upon for efficacy. As the researcher/teacher of this research project, intuition was often drawn upon to respond to changes in direction that some of the interview questions took. Finally, with regards to the corpus of data and the choices made about specific data selection, recognition of my own worldviews, biases, perspectives, assumptions, philosophies and other subjectivities, was paramount.

4.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain and justify the research design undertaken as a way to investigate perceptions of self as learner for a small group of mature age learners who engaged in an Enabling program. Following the acknowledgement of my epistemological and ontological beliefs, qualitative case was positioned as the methodological choice that best suited this investigation. The research questions guiding this study were re-introduced and the primary and secondary data collection tools were described and justified as suitable choices to generate the data. Following this, it was explained that categorisation of the data represented the first level of analysis. Subsequent levels of analysis relied upon discourse analysis as a framework that would allow for the emergence of borderland Discourses. Research ethics were discussed and measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the study were presented. The chapter concluded with a description of the various roles of the researcher. The following chapter, Chapter 5, presents the analysis, discussion and data findings.
Chapter 5  Analysis and discussion

5.1 Overview

Chapter 1 indicated that the intention of this study was to gain a greater understanding of changes in perception of self as learner of mature age learners who engage in Enabling programs. It was also indicated that the findings from this thesis would enhance my teaching practices with adults and also be of value in assisting other educators who work with this unique cohort of learners. In Chapter 2, the context in which this study was conducted was established, while Chapter 3 framed transformative learning theory and borderland Discourse theory as an explanation of how mature age learners experience personal change. Chapter 4 described the research design for the study, positing case study as a suitable methodology. The data collection tools and analysis were elaborated on and ethical considerations were described.

Directing this thesis have been two research questions, namely:

1. What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners engaged in an Enabling program?
2. In what ways does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?

What follows in this chapter is an analysis and discussion of the more prominent borderland Discourses that each participant made manifest as they engaged in STEPS. These Discourses are representative of their multiple subjectivities, tensions and expressions of self, indicative of how their perceptions of self as learner transformed. The merging and clashing of Discourses provided a conceptual space that enabled the participants to experience transformative learning. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the borderland is not the crossing of a simplistic boundary from one conceptual space to another, but a fluid space in which contrasting identity positions are constructed by the learner, a place of complexity, ambiguity and reflection where metacognitive processing gives rise to emotional and cognitive dissonance. This, Alsup (2006, p. 36) believes, can lead to “cognitive, emotional, and corporeal change”, a place of relative unease where “goals have been met, life lessons have been learned [and] growth has been achieved.”

59 Corporeal in this sense relates to or involves the physical body rather than the mind of spirit.
In order to illustrate how perceptions of self as learner for each of the three participants presented in this chapter changed during their time in STEPS, a particular focus has been placed upon how each spoke about themselves as learners. Their “I” clauses or phrases and slippages in their usage of pronouns are representative of cognitive and emotional articulations that enabled my substantiation of claims about transformative learning theory. This systematic way of presenting the data analysis by no means intends to simplify the multi-dimensional process of personal change, nor portray personal change as simplistic or temporal. It seeks to illustrate how Discourses can jostle for attention, become blurred, blended and transformed, and allow for the emergence of new Discourses as expressions of how the participants perceived themselves as learners.

The remainder of this chapter presents the analysis and discussion of data related to Barb, Bert and Ella and concludes with a presentation of the important findings to emerge from the data of each.

5.2 Barb’s borderland Discourses

Barb identified herself as a forty-one year old mother of two sons, one aged five and the other eighteen (BA). She indicated that for an extensive period of time, she been self-employed in the fashion industry. She referred to herself as single with an out-of-town partner (BA) with whom she co-habited on weekends. She wrote that her motivation for undertaking STEPS was to gain self fulfilment (BA) through the acquisition of academic qualifications that would formalise what the world of work had taught her. Testimony to the complex nature of transformative learning (Cranton, 2006), Barb’s engagement in STEPS set in motion a web of events. There were however, specific events that activated Barb’s appraisal of long held perceptions of herself as a learner. These particular events were activated by 1) her commencement in STEPS; and 2) the impact of her week three engagement in classroom meta-learning activities. Table 5.1 presents a visual overview of the borderland Discourses to emerge from Barb’s data. Following this is the analysis and discussion of those Discourses.
Table 5.1: Barb’s borderland Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unworthiness</td>
<td>Would anyone know I was just a lowly shopkeeper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BI1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronisation</td>
<td>I was the flippety gibbet and my views were not counted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BI1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
<td>That’s the big thing that I’ve learnt that’s giving me confidence to go on … to realise that no, I’m not stupid. (BI1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>“Hey! I’m not putting up with this! This is my time now!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BI3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fervour</td>
<td>I go home and tell him everything about the course!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BI3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disenchantment</td>
<td>I sat last night and I couldn’t get going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BI3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An unworthiness borderland Discourse

Would anybody notice that I was just a lowly shopkeeper? BI1

Barb’s inclusion in STEPS caused her to reflect on herself as a learner. Data showed that tension arose between subjectivities surrounding her ‘business woman self’, framed by her reputed prior work successes, and her newly emerging ‘student self’. In her pre-STEPS data Barb disclosed that for twenty years she had managed stores for companies, trained as a company buyer and was promoted to a state supervisor/buyer [and] had a lot of responsibility and eventually went on to own [her] own store (BA). Upon her commencement in STEPS, however, tensions
surrounding Barb’s newly emerging student identity and her past professional identity arose. Askham (2008, p. 89) notes that many work-based mature age learners enter the formal learning context with a “readily constructed identity” based on their various work roles that can come into conflict with the new identity of student. Barb experienced a mismatch between her past personal knowledge of herself as a learner and new knowledge.

As a consequence, framing Barb’s Borderland Discourse at this time was the notion that she was an unworthy STEPS student:

> Feelings of doubt filled my head...would anyone notice that I was just a lowly shopkeeper trying to masquerade as a higher more intelligent being. I looked to see if anybody would say, “You can’t do this; haven’t you looked in the mirror lately? You’re blonde, forty-one, sickly child and frankly, I don’t think you’ll cut it.” (BI1)

New knowledge about herself and her perceived lack of capabilities in the educational context of STEPS caused Barb’s to re-conceptualise her perception of intelligence, thereby challenging her previous perceptions of herself as a learner. The doubt and ambivalence underpinning her words are indicative of borderland Discourses that emerge from spaces where cognitive and emotional dissonance (Alsup, 2006) between multiple perceptions of self abound. The dissonance Barb experienced between her perceived understanding of expectations and responsibilities related to her ‘student’ self and past perceptions of herself as a successful fashion retailer was made obvious in the language she mobilised. Furthermore, her slippage between pronouns is significant in the sense that she revealed the internal dilemma she was experiencing in self-judging about her ability to experience success within the new context.

A unworthiness borderland Discourse was obvious in the way Barb constructed herself as an ‘impostor’ (Reay, 2002), perceiving that her true identity as a business woman from the fashion industry would be devalued or even mocked in the formal educational setting. As such, she delegated her business expertise to the lower levels of the hierarchy, and positioned the skills she might acquire in the formal learning context at the opposite end. The “fragmented and contradictory” ways (Askham, 2008, p. 89) in which Barb constructed her identities at this time gave an indication that some reflection on long held assumptions about herself as a learner had been at play. In trying to make sense of new meaning, Barb drew upon the
metaphor of the mirror to reflect upon herself and her abilities. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 3), metaphors are “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action”, used both consciously and unconsciously to make sense of our lives. Barb mobilised Cooley’s (1922–64, pp. 184–85) notion of “the looking-glass self”. Such is premised on the notion that an individual’s self perception derives from the tension they experience about how others perceive them.

In metaphorical terms, the mirror is a symbol of reflection, an unconscious or conscious cognitive strategy. Her mobilisation of this metaphor occurred in the borderland space in which her engagement in meaning making allowed for a connection between her abstract philosophies about learning and her growing bank of concrete experiences as a student. Her reference to masquerade and mirror revealed the tension she was experiencing as she engaged in the educational context, wherein her professional self was somewhat at odds with her student self. Thus Barb’s use of the mirror metaphor indicated that her self-evaluation and feeling were derived from her anxiety about how others might perceive and judge her (Barbalet, 2007).

Barb’s lack of confidence and the devaluation of past work and life experiences are not uncommon for mature age learners who return to formal learning contexts. Askham (2008) notes that when mature age learners are confronted with the unfamiliar context of formal education, many become less confident. Barb’s engagement in STEPS was problematised by the anxiety she experienced. Barnett (1999, p. 38) refers to such as “existential anxiety”, a state of mind that can be experienced by the mature age learner who confronts leaving one life world to enter the intellectual world of learning. Research findings reported in Chapter 2 revealed that many researchers (e.g., Askham, 2008; Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merriam, 2003, O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Reay, 2002; Ross-Gordon, 2003;) attest to such issues related to anxiety, identity and confidence that confront the mature age learner who re-engages with formal study after a period away from such.

Issues of lack of confidence were further evidenced in Barb’s reference to her age and hair colour, physical manifestations that she presented to excuse or account for the personal shortcomings she perceived others to have noticed. Compounding this and adding further tension to her perception of herself as a learner may have been the threat of her disclosure of lack of knowledge (Askham, 2008) and, given her
metaphorical use of the looking glass self, her perception of how this lack might make her appear to others.

By the conclusion of STEPS, despite indications of Barb having critically reflected upon long held perceptions of herself as a learner and coming to more positive reconceptualisations, an unworthiness borderland Discourse re-appeared. This time it surrounded her perception of herself as a STEPS student and her contemplation of becoming an undergraduate student. Similar to moves made upon her commencement in STEPS, she constructed her future opportunity to engage in the university context as a privilege not a right:

*I thanked the Lord for giving me my life, my children, the country in which I live … the Australia that lets a 41 year old woman go to university so she might have more than what she has now.* (BR)

Barb’s re-construction of the unworthiness borderland Discourse was most noticeable in her personal re-positioning of herself to the event. Rather than accept her opportunity to attend university as a right she had earned, she expressed her absolute gratitude for an opportunity she perceived to be granted to her by more powerful others. In a religious yet subservient tone, she alluded to a metaphysical dimension, sensing a higher power in her life. Representative of Barb’s appeal to abstract concepts was her positioning of herself in relation to a metaphysical construct (God, the Lord) and Australia.

**In summary**

The unworthiness borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. This was evidenced by the anxiety Barb expressed (*feelings of doubt; trying to masquerade; would anyone notice*) and the pessimistic language she mobilised (*can’t do, don’t think you’ll cut it*). It was also manifest in her constructions of herself (*just a lowly shopkeeper, blonde, forty-one year old woman with a sickly child*) and in the acquiescent way she perceived her opportunity to attend university as a privilege rather than something she had rightfully earned.

**A patronisation borderland Discourse**

*I was the flippety-gibbet and my views were not counted.* BI1

Another borderland Discourse to emerge from Barb’s data was that of patronisation. Early in STEPS, Barb’s data revealed her perception of how her birth family of
parents (deceased mother, ailing father) and two older female siblings constructed her intelligence. Evident in Barb’s articulation about descriptions of her family was her perception that business activities and careers were valued as important family pursuits:

Like I come from a very serious family, mother like way before her time, running her own business... She was also a nursing sister. My father also had a business and they were very serious people. My two sisters have very serious careers. One sister deals with the premier. They didn’t even know where I came from and I was the flippety-gibbet and my views were not counted. BI1

Barb’s disclosure about her birth family revealed her perception that serious was synonymous with business-oriented operations, and activities aligned to commercial initiatives and high status political figures were respected by her family.

Yet, in a paradoxical way, despite previous claims about her personal successes in the fashion business world, Barb perceived that such pursuits did not qualify for the serious expectations of her family, claiming that that they didn’t even know where I came from with my career in fashion (BI1). Due to her previous career choice, Barb perceived that her serious family ignored her, rendering her as an unknown entity whose very presence within the serious family was problematic. To her way of thinking, her family considered her career in fashion as frivolous, revealing a somewhat traditional view of Barb’s perception of the hierarchy of occupations. This was evident in her comparative reference to her family’s serious careers and her own professional identity as a lowly shopkeeper. In a discursive move that projected her sense of ostracism from her serious family, Barb perceived her birth family to view her as the flippety-gibbet [whose] views were not counted (BI1). Barb’s reference to a

---

Researcher’s journal 25/8

With Barb, it is clear that personal appearance is very high on the agenda. She is always so well dressed and well presented, wearing the latest trendy clothes. Her hair and nails are immaculate and she looks great. Her long, blonde hair frames her carefully made up face and she seems keen to portray a certain image. She is always bright and talkative and appears keen to please. She often has a fixed smile on her face and I can’t help but wonder what is going on in her head as lots of new information swirls around her.
career in fashion is of interest, for even though she referred to her career in fashion, she perceived the idea of fashion as being a frivolous, less than serious pursuit. This very construct was caught up in the role of appearances that embodied the subsequent moves she made, as revealed by notes in the researcher’s journal.

In her pre-STEPS data, Barb mobilised the language of her birth family, saying she would take STEPS very seriously and give a serious commitment to the program (BA). Alsup (2006) points out that the lessons we learn from parents and close family members, our earliest teachers, stay with us and often affect our actions without our conscious awareness until we subject them to critical reflection. Barb’s instinctive use of serious reflected her perception that inclusion in STEPS would fulfil the lack of seriousness attached to her previous career, and thereby elevate her standing in the eyes of her birth family. In her pre-STEPS data, Barb constructed herself as a successful businesswoman and by default, serious. However being conceptually positioned in the borderland between her businesswomen self and her student self enabled her to critically reflect on her inner feelings about her birth family and her perception that they did not take her or her pursuits seriously. Barb’s perception about her own intelligence was other directed rather than being self-directed; however it was the borderland that provided the conceptual space in which Barb could reflect on long held assumptions about herself as a learner and articulate new explanations for her perceived or real difference to her birth family.

A patronisation borderland Discourse was evident in the way Barb made manifest her feelings when with her birth family. During her Week 4 interview, Barb revealed that when in their company, she wouldn’t even give an intellectual view and tended to sit back for she perceived that she wasn’t educated like them (BI1). In both physically and metaphorically positioning herself in the background, Barb’s perception of being subordinate to and separate from her family, became evident. Her perception that they had low expectations of her and her comment that they spoke with these big words, sometimes purposefully just to patronise me (BI1) indicated that she perceived her family’s use of sophisticated language was to exclude her. Thus Barb’s perception about her own intelligence tended to be based on her perception of how others viewed her rather than on how she viewed herself. However the borderland provided a conceptual space in which Barb was able to reflect on long held assumptions about her status within her birth family and come to articulate new explanations about her perceived exclusion.
In summary

The patronisation borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. These were made manifest through Barb’s inferior positioning of herself in relation to her birth family, constructing herself as not educated like them; as the flippety-gibbet whose were not counted; they didn’t know where I came from; purposefully patronise me) and her business-like framing of her family (nursing sister; deals with the premier; very serious family; running her own business; serious careers; father also had a business). The patronisation borderland Discourse was also evident in Barb’s belittling of her fashion career background despite her attention to physical appearance and portrayal of a fashionable image. Critically reflective moments were obvious in Barb’s articulation of how she perceived her family to talk down to her and in the recurring deficit way in which she referred to herself.

A revelation borderland Discourse

*That’s the big thing that I’ve learnt that’s giving me confidence to go on … to realise that no, I’m not stupid. BI1*

New knowledge about herself as a learner proved to be a surprise for Barb. Literature in Chapter 2 supports the notion that as a result of their inclusion in formal educational contexts, empowerment and increased confidence are definite outcomes for many mature age learners (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Bennetts, 2003; Cohen, 1997; Cranton, 2006). An interesting shift in Barb’s perception of herself as a learner was evidenced in Week 4 data after her engagement in two particular classroom activities. The first activity was related to a routine classroom practice in which all the STEPS students in the class were invited to engage in specific tasks to assist them in gaining explicit information, insight and knowledge about themselves as learners. Using the Soloman-Felder Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (Soloman & Felder, n.d.), the students investigated their own learning style preferences and were encouraged to identify their own particular learning strengths, in addition to recognising ways to compensate for personal learning shortcomings. In a second activity, all students were encouraged to complete the Keirsey Temperament Sorter – II (Keirsey.com n.d.), simply as a means to gaining a rudimentary insight into their own particular temperament type(s) and individual characteristics.
Barb’s data indicated the positive experience of gaining greater self knowledge, a harbinger of change in how she perceived herself as a learner:

Here [STEPS] I feel part of something and I’ve learnt that wow, I’m just not their [family] personality type … I’m just a different personality. The left and right thing got me [brain-related research], ‘cause we are all part of something and we all need flippety gibbets just like we need really serious people like my parents were and my sisters were and that’s the big thing that I’ve learnt that’s giving me confidence to go on … to realise that no, I’m not stupid. (BI1)

Barb attributed this gaining of new knowledge about herself as a learner to have involved the re-training of her brain … thinking in a different way, think[ing] about something totally different than I have before in my life (BI1). In becoming more aware of her own uniqueness and learning potential, the process of individuation (see page 53) seemingly allowed for a transition in not only how Barb perceived herself to be positioned within her birth family, but in how she perceived herself as a learner.

Upon becoming aware of holding a previous limiting view (Cranton, 2006) about herself as a learner, Barb was able to open herself to alternative perspectives. She was able to visualise new abstractions about her learning potential and contemplate alternative explanations to account for her problematic relationship with her serious birth family. In the borderland, critical self-reflection enabled Barb to engage her own “inner critic” (Karpiak, 2000, p. 35) and conceptualise a new perception about herself as a learner, a transformed perspective that included possibilities for the practical application of new found knowledge about herself. She was able to speculate about a new perspective regarding her birth family and their particular idiosyncrasies, and in so doing, begin to debunk her perception that she was inferior to them. In her deployment of the plural pronoun we, Barb displaced her own experience into a more general reflection, suggestive that she was still coming to terms with new meanings and perceptions about herself as a learner. This is typical in the borderland, “not a place of complete ease or unattenuated joy [but] a space of enhanced wisdom where one arrives only after experiencing pain” (Alsup, 2006, p. 14).

Despite the fact that a great deal of literature problematises the mature age learner’s return to formal education, Barb’s data in the first half of STEPS revealed
many positive aspects of her re-engagement with formal study. Expressions of delight underpinned Barb’s comprehension of what new knowledge offered her:

*I love the L&L [Language and Learning] activities and just listening to others ... you get to listen to other people’s views and something clicks. But just what I don’t know about structuring sentences and paragraphs, what I don’t know about that, that’s is challenging me to do better and better and learn from when I get things back.* (BI1)

Chapter 3 presented Valerie Grabove’s (1997) metaphor of an individual “being at the edge of their meaning, the edge of their knowing and the edge of their worlds” (p. 340) in the process of conceptualising new meaning. This theme is reiterated in Alsup’s (2006, p. 15) theorising of the borderland space, the place in which one can experience “a richer, fuller, and more complex understanding of self and other.” The fervour Barb displayed on various occasions over the fourteen weeks concurs with Grabove’s (1997) assertion that for some people, “the edges of meaning seem to be frightening and unpleasant, whereas for others, the growing edges feel exciting and energizing” (p. 343). For Barb, there was a sense that the latter appeared to be the case at various points of time during her engagement with STEPS, demonstrating that the borderland can be a place of growth and pleasure.

In week eleven data, the application of new knowledge about herself as a learner enabled Barb to make personal meaning of her learning experiences (Knowles, 1998, p. 142). Displaying a high degree of enthusiasm, Barb could see the pragmatic application of new knowledge:

*I’m thinking in a different way, thinking about something totally different than I have before in my life. This is totally different. I love it. I understand the concept of the mind-map and I can see how I learn and put things together.* (BI3)

Her enthusiasm and repetitive use of different revealed her receptivity to alternative viewpoints and possibilities. Furthermore, her *put[t]ing* things together revealed her preference for constructing new knowledge, while her use of the mental verbs thinking, listening and understand alluded to the cognitive processing that was occurring for Barb in her assimilation of new meaning about her learning potential. Before she was a *flippety-gibbet* and wasn’t educated and now she is *thinking in a different way, thinking about something totally different that I have before, feeling*
part of something, I'm just a different personality and that's okay. In Cranton's (2006) terms, these data depict critically reflective moments for Barb.

Despite the obvious euphoria Barb expressed about her new perception of herself as a learner, a sense of ambivalence underpinned her words. While she acknowledged the need for flippety-gibbets, she did not really challenge the implicit hierarchy that positioned ‘serious people’ above her. Nevertheless, in questioning her perception of the way her family positioned her, Barb was able to reject previous long held assumptions about such and construct a new perception about herself as a learner. This new knowledge empowered Barb in the sense that she transferred the locus of control about her perception of herself as a learner from her birth family to herself. In saying: Maybe they were threatened by my openness and my ability to take off and just do anything (BI1), Barb mobilised a new stance and apportioned blame towards her birth family for the ways in which she considered them to have influenced her negative perception of herself as a learner:

That's the funny thing, 'cause since I’ve been coming here [STEPS] I can look back and see that it was them [family] that were at fault … they were critical of me yet I never criticised them, no matter what was wrong with them. I don't think they liked that I could take off and just do anything. (BI1)

In saying she could look back, Barb’s language suggested that the borderland had provided a conceptual space that allowed her to critically reflect on her perception of her family’s positioning of her, and come to perceive birth family members as being remiss in their inability to accept her differences to them. This new positioning of herself as not stupid acted as a force in liberating Barb from the distorted meaning perspective that had previously positioned her as marginalised. It is also possible that she experienced a sense of anger or regret (Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006) in coming to a realisation that for many years she had allowed her previous perception to restrict her learning potential.

In coming to a new perception of herself as a learner, Barb visualised herself as being open to flight, evident in the way she configured herself as able to take off and just do anything. This in some sense is consistent with the fashion-conscious, flippety-gibbet manifestation of her identity, as referenced earlier and later in this chapter. No longer bound by long held perceptions of how her family positioned her, Barb was able to consider alternative explanations. In so doing, she constructed herself as a learner more confidently and in a less restrictive way. The power
differential Barb perceived to exist between her and her birth family was no longer referred to. Berger (2004, p. 338) reflects the opinion of many adult developmentalists when she says that “to begin a transformative journey is to give up an old perspective, to actually lose a sense of the former world before the new world is fully articulated.” As Barb gave up old perceptions of herself as a learner, she was able to consider new possibilities.

In summary

The revelation borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. This was characterised by Barb’s mobilisation of language to express the ways in which the acquisition of new knowledge impacted her perception of herself as a learner: (thinking in a different way; I love it; I understand; something clicks). Furthermore, her use of ocular metaphors (I can look back and see; I can see; peoples’ views) provided insight into how she made sense of new meaning and her recurring use of different reflected her perception of new knowledge about herself. Barb’s use of proactive language (wow, better and better) also illustrated the positive way in which she responded to new knowledge about herself, thus enabling her to reject some previous subjective stances. However, Barb was unable to reject her conception of the hierarchy of careers (inculcated by her birth family) and on occasion, her displacement of her own experiences to a more general reflection (cause we are all part of something; we all need flippety-gibbets; we need really serious people) was indicative of the “delicate balance between the borders of established, status quo discourses and seemingly conflicting discourses” (Alsup, 2006, p. 39). Critically reflective moments are evidenced by Barb’s use of language (I can look back and see; something clicks; thinking in a different way; this is totally different; I can see how I learn and put things together; I’m not stupid after all).

An assertiveness borderland Discourse

Hey! I’m not putting up with this! This is my time now! (B13)

As previously noted in Chapter 3, transformative learning can be a cumulative experience that proceeds in a somewhat cyclical way, rather than subscribe to a linear or predictable pattern (Cranton, 2006). Barb’s data from week eleven onwards illustrated that as her confidence continued to cement her student self, she concurrently experienced discontent in the roles she played out in the context of her
immediate family. That this should happen comes as no great surprise, given the research referred to in Chapter 2 (Debbenham & May, 2004; Fairchild, 2003; Compton, Fox, & Laanan, 2006; Reay, 2002) about how the ‘mother turned student’ creates ripples that precipitate a series of changes in personal family relationships and roles.

Engagement in an Enabling program involves the mature age learner “taking on an identity that transcends the family or primary socializing group” (Gee, 1990, p. 152). For Barb, a juxtaposition of her life roles was in itself an activating event for transformative learning as she pursued her entitlement to fulfil her role as student. As STEPS neared its end, Barb’s data demonstrated that changes had occurred in how she perceived she should play out her familial roles. In terms of establishing her priorities, Barb’s pre-STEPS application had previously indicated that it was her intention to apportion equal value to her studies and her familial roles:

I hope to balance my home life and STEPS life successfully to make it easy for my family. (BA)

At the outset of STEPS, Barb did not perceive the possibility of putting her own needs before those of her family. Her interview data from Week 11, however, revealed that rather than trying to balance her family life roles, tension had arisen as a result of her re-positioning within her immediate family context. She re-prioritised her goals:

I’m very much a ‘put everyone in front of me’ person and I am now standing my ground and saying “Hey! I’m not putting up with this, and hey this is my time now”! My partner has seen me doing this with my children … and even he has had to be put back on his backside. (B13)

Discord arose for Barb as tension emerged between her familial roles and the forcefulness underpinning her now more firmly established and validated student role. Research by Bennetts (2003) and others (Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997; Debbenham & May, 2004; Heenan, 2002) attests to the impact that personal change can have on the lives of the mature age learner returning to formal learning and the subsequent unsettling effects the family can experience. In putting her needs before the needs of her family, Barb’s data exemplified a foregrounding of her perception of herself as student, representing a shift in her identity trajectory (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Her forcefulness may have been due to her perception
that she did not have the support of her family, and, as such, gave rise to a sense of entitlement that she perceived was being denied her.

Of interest in the Week 11 interview data is the language employed by Barb that provided insight into the tension and re-positioning that was occurring as Discourses of her domestic life butted up against Discourses associated with her student life. In these borderland spaces, her mobilisation of locational metaphors and positions, such as *put in front, standing my ground, putting up, doing this, putting in front* and *put on his backside* were resolute and metaphorically physical. This is an indication of how Barb perceived and understood events, situations and people around her (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). She typically deployed a language of coercion and force, including close family intimates to be those who needed to be aware of the rigorous stance she was taking with her study. Her overtones demonstrated that a more determined Barb, with her identity as a learner becoming steadily stronger, no longer intended to acquiesce to the needs of her family solely above her own.

Barb’s persistent use of physical language, of having to put her partner *back on his backside*, is representative of a slippage from the more formal Discourse of the STEPS context to that of the less formal language associated with familial Discourses. As Gee (2005, p. 30) would say, one Discourse was infecting another, typical of what occurs in the borderland between Discourses. Alsup (2006, p. 37) advises however, that borderland discourse is not merely the “subsuming of one discourse into another” but instead the creation of a new discourse with “characteristics of both of the earlier ones as well as new characteristics.”

In the closing weeks of STEPS, it was apparent that as Barb’s student identity gained more momentum, some personal relationship issues intensified. There was further re-positioning in her relationship with her partner and changes in the way she constructed her relationship with him. These changes appeared to be comprised of contradictions and tensions, reflecting the at times chaotic and complex relationship between people’s personal development and the people, roles and events in their lives (Ross-Gordon, 2003). Barb appeared nonchalant about her relationship with her partner and the tension she perceived him to be experiencing:

*My partner is not getting as much attention now and is a little bit jealous and worried about what the future holds and is worried that if I get more educated I might not want him anymore. (BI3)*
Barb perceived that because of her inclusion in STEPS and her resultant student identity, one cause of her partner’s tension and fear might be due to his anticipation that their relationship would be compromised. Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997, p. 4) caution that for a majority of mature aged students, the experience of university involves significant impositions on relationships. As Bennetts (2003, p. 475) notes, “no one within the immediate and extended family unit is immune … learning is not taking place in isolation from the family … the whole family is learning to cope with new situations and are finding new strategies for getting by.” Perhaps it was that in alluding to the insecurities she perceived her partner to be feeling, Barb may in fact have been projecting her own inner tensions about how she perceived the state of their relationship to be in light of the changes in her self-perceptions and the more forceful position she was now taking.

One outcome of addressing relationship issues with her partner was Barb’s shift of the cause of tension to him and his inadequacies and insecurities. In seeming to psycho-analyse him, it was Barb’s perception that his shortcomings in an educational environment were the cause of some tension between them. In demonstrating somewhat of a contradiction however, despite Barb’s earlier complaints about the judgemental behaviour her parents and siblings had imposed upon her, Barb exacted judgement on her partner. In a somewhat patronising way, she speculated:

\[ \text{I think that his insecurity is that he doesn’t know education … He thinks that if I get more educated that I will fly off away from him. He doesn’t understand what it is and I’ve had to explain what it is. (BI3)} \]

Barb’s positional metaphor of fly away was interesting in perhaps demonstrating a deeper level of reflection, yet also resonated with her earlier reference of being a flippety-gibbet who was able to just take off and do whatever I want (BI1).

These moves in Barb’s data hinted at a sense of discontentment, perhaps reflective of a yearning to be liberated from certain familial relationships or responsibilities. As she came to terms with new perceptions of herself as a learner and the entitlements these exacted, there was transference of her own perceptions of discontentment to her partner:

\[ \text{He’d like a change too. He’s jealous ‘cause he wants to be doing what I’m doing. He earns big money but he is not happy. He feels stuck. (BI3)} \]
In suggesting her partner was experiencing a lack of satisfaction and fulfilment, this may in fact be a further manifestation of the discontent Barb internalised about her own situation. The physical overtones of feeling stuck were representative of how Barb perceived her partner to be, and how through education, he too might experience some degree of personal change.

**In summary**

The assertiveness borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. Evidence can be found in the physical overtones of Barb’s language (not putting up with this; my time now; I am now standing my ground; put back on his backside; fly away from him; might not want him) and the self-assured stance she took with her partner (I’ve had to explain; he doesn’t understand; he doesn’t know education; he is not getting as much attention now; he is worried about what the future hold; he thinks I might not want him any more; he’d like a change too; he’s jealous; he is not happy; he feels stuck; he doesn’t know education). Barb’s mobilisation of such language was indicative of the cognitive and emotional dissonance that occurred between her multiple cultural-contextual understandings, expectations and responsibilities of her mother/partner role and those of her student role. Critically reflective moments are depicted by Barb’s repetitive use of now (I am now standing my ground; this is my time now; not getting much attention now) as she reconceptualised her perception of herself as a learner and her relationships with significant others.

**A fervour borderland Discourse**

*I go home and tell him everything about the course! (BI3)*

As testimony to the erratic path that personal change can take, despite the previously mentioned tension surrounding her relationship with her partner and children, in a cumulative way, Barb’s discursive membership in STEPS empowered her, so much so that she perceived the need to disclose all new knowledge or education to her partner. Her revised perception of herself as a learner apparently enabled her to do so:

*I go home and tell him everything about the course and what I learnt. I tell him that I am just challenging him, not changing myself, that it is broadening us. I asked him” Why don’t you do something for yourself”? He is okay with it now. (BI3)*
Research by Reay, Ball, and David (2002) indicates that many mature age students are eager to pass their education on to other family members. Those in the home Discourse community of the mature age learner have significant influence on how the learner feels and thinks about their new role as student (Alsup, 2006, p. 106). Within the context of her own home, Barb constructed herself as a pedagogue, and upon discovering a world that her partner did not know, felt the need to impart new knowledge to him. In taking this stance, Barb was validating herself in terms of her relationship with the STEPS program and the educational institution that gave her the status or position from which to make judgements about her partner’s education. Finally, her intention to tell him everything illustrated that Barb’s identity as student and perception of herself as a credible learner had become even stronger.

There may of course be a more pragmatic reason for Barb explaining education to her partner and telling him about what she was learning. It may be the case that she felt comfortable in being able to experiment with her new knowledge in the non-threatening environment of her home context (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Mezirow (2000) asserts that engaging in discourse is integral to the transformation of a perspective, involving one engaging in meaningful conversation with others. In so doing, one is better placed to “consider alternative perspectives and determine their validity” (Cranton, 2006, p. 36). In talking to her partner, Barb’s own understanding may have been improved through her explanations to another (Cranton, 2006), enabling her to arrive at explanations that made sense to her (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). However in verbalising to her partner about her experiences in STEPS, Barb was incorporating the program, curriculum and institutional values into her life outside the university context. In a paradoxical way, in bringing the alien STEPS Discourse into her home context, Barb in fact created a somewhat threatening environment for her partner as one Discourse infected the other.

Barb’s perception that the sharing of her knowledge with her partner was broadening them, and that her partner was good with it now [her emphasis], indicated previous tension in her relaying information, something she remained silent about. Furthermore, despite her belief that relaying new knowledge to her partner had been of concern to him and was causing him to be a bit worried, it did not appear to be Barb’s perception that it was the change her partner had witnessed in her that was the cause of his anxiety. Although Barb protested that I tell him I am just challenging him, not changing myself, when asked in the same interview if she thought she had changed much as a person, in a complete contradiction, she
exclaimed: Oh! I’ve changed incredibly! In fact, in quite an overwhelming way! (BI3)
And when asked if anyone else had noticed, she said: Oh God yeah! My partner, very much so! Yet, she did not really seem to appreciate that the anxiety associated with her partner’s concerns about their relationship could have been attributed to her having changed in some way. In fact, Barb appeared to downplay the issue of her partner’s anxiety, instead justifying her perception that imparting new knowledge to him was beneficial to their relationship.

Barb inhabited the borderland between her mother/partner role and her student role. Her erratic re-positioning of herself and her problematic relationship with her partner was made manifest in the confusion underpinning her data when, despite her saying she had assured her partner she was not changing, she admitted to having changed overwhelmingly. She then disclosed that her partner had noticed changes in her. This gave some insight into the contradictory process assuming new identities can be, and emphasises Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill’s contention (2003, p. 65) about the extremely fragile nature of learning identities. As the borderland space allowed Barb to exercise power and experiment with new identities, some sense of the haphazard nature of change in personal identity, integral to personal transformation, was portrayed. Barb was silent about both her partner and their relationship in the final interview.

In summary

The fervour borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. These are captured in Barb’s moves surrounding the imperative to share new knowledge with her partner (tell him everything; just challenging him; broadening us) and the tensions and contradictions arising from this (he’s okay with it now; not changing myself; I’ve changed incredibly; in an overwhelming way; Oh God yeah!). The borderland afforded Barb the opportunity to negotiate and integrate the social roles associated with her personal life and those of her student life, and in so doing, mobilise a new Discourse that demonstrated a changed perception of herself as a learner. Critically reflective moments are evident in the expansive language Barb used (broadening; incredibly; overwhelming; everything) in light of new knowledge about herself as a learner and in her projection of her partner’s existential needs (he’d like a change too; he feels stuck; he wants to do what I’m doing; he is not happy; he doesn’t know education; he doesn’t understand).
**A disenchantment borderland Discourse**

I sat last night and I just couldn’t get going. (B13)

In Week 11, when Barb was asserting her student role in her relationship with her partner, she gave vent to other frustrations, and a disenchantment borderland Discourse emerged:

I sat last night and I just couldn’t get going. I’m feeling pretty run down at the moment. I can’t do the maths and the language at the same time. I can’t concentrate. I think the old legs are giving out. (B13)

Her references to the physical manifestations of fatigue such as feeling run down; couldn’t get going; and the old legs are giving out provided poignant insight into the emotion attached to the physical and mental dimensions embroiled in Barb’s experiences as a mature age learner, albeit one nearing the end of a somewhat hectic thirteen week learning journey. The emotion in her data was palpable, betraying some sense of disillusionment as well as physical and mental fatigue. This was substantiated with notes from the researcher’s journal relating to the difficulties I perceived Barb to be confronting at this time.

Underpinning Barb’s data during this same period was an indication that her toleration of other class members had reached its limit. Contrary to her week seven claims about how she had learnt to accept anybody that’s a bit to the left or the right or whatever they are (B12), she was challenged by what she perceived to be the inappropriate behaviours of others:

*Being in a class with adults, all doubting themselves, emotions flying all over the shop, is stressful in itself... pig headed people, cock sure people, shy*
people, arrogant people, selfish people and of course truly beautiful beings. I went back into myself about week six, as I find it difficult to be in an aggressive, disruptive atmosphere. Thank God we had a week off! (BI3)

The hierarchies Barb constructed revealed the diverse way she positioned other class members, again constructing herself as learner in a somewhat judgemental way. The recurring positioning metaphor mobilised by Barb set up a categorisation of people along a continuum, the centre point being the fulcrum of normality, possibly where she perceived herself to be located at this time; however, in embodying the stresses of other class members, rather than removing herself from them, Barb set herself up in terms of her discursive position for various subsequent actions, one being her need to separate herself from the class. Barb’s articulation about an all encompassing perception that her classmates were all doubting themselves, was indicative of the personal difficulties she was experiencing at this time, alluded to in the researcher journal entry on the previous page. Furthermore, in utilising the location metaphor emotions flying all over the place, Barb projected some sense of the lack of control she experienced at the personal level when class members displayed certain emotional behaviours that unsettled and disheartened her.

Barb’s overture of aggression hinted at the frustration that can occur in a formal learning context in which debates and discussions with others opens up many opportunities for dialogue with peers and others (Cranton, 2006; O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). As Dirkx (1997) notes, in hearing the experiences of other individuals, we can recognise ourselves, and for Barb, this brought a mixture of pleasure and pain. The emotional manifestations her classmates displayed at various times became too overwhelming for her, intimated by her defensive moves in taking refuge from what she perceived to be a maelstrom of human emotion.

This need to withdraw from her perceived highly ‘emotional’ classmates was the antithesis of Barb’s earlier moves when she expressed a sense of intimacy, representative of a counter-position documented in Enabling research about the benefits of the supportive nature of the group. Barb referred to the class group in very familial and benevolent terms:

I’m intrigued by every single person in class; it’s like my new family group ’cause that’s how I look at the class. I have a tendency to get close to just everyone on every level, or try to. (BI1)
Barb’s reference to other class members in such familial terms was not only related to how she ‘felt’ about the class, but how she viewed the class. Her reference to on every level connected to the recurring positional construct manifested throughout the data, and her reference to get close, indicated she had positioned herself intimately as the one to provide the support she perceived other class members to require. Ironically, it may have been she who yearned affirmation and support at this time, yet empowered herself to provide it for others.

Barb’s week eleven data continued to reflect a move away from the ‘class as a family’ construct, to a more self-focused, reflective perception of her needs as a learner:

I’m finding now that I want to be alone and not have people coming and asking me questions. Some people can work groups, but I can’t. I want to do things myself now. (BI3)

Barb offered various justifications for her need to remove herself from the group:

I’m trying to do it for next year by myself … My effort will be mine … I don’t work well in an aggressive, disruptive atmosphere. (BI3)

It was her perception that she needed to prove that she could succeed on her own, for when it came to her attitude towards classmates, more and more the learning journey appeared to become one of restraint and burden for Barb. She was keen to establish herself as an independent learner.

By the conclusion of STEPS, Barb’s perception of her relationship with classroom members bore very little resemblance to the maternal positioning she assumed at the outset of the program, and her disillusionment remained evident:

My greatest challenge, I think, was being locked in for 13 weeks with people who were at times stressed and Grrrr! Grrrrr!, and all that bit was happening. I set myself back and thought, “That was because of this”. (BI4)

In reflecting back over her time in STEPS, Barb’s utterance gave poignant insight into the frustration, annoyance and perhaps helplessness she experienced at times. In perceiving herself to have been locked in, Barb’s discursive move revealed a sense of entrapment, fear that she was in a place that offered no escape. This resonates with an earlier reference to her partner being stuck in his high income employment and is contradictory in light of earlier references to taking flight.
the discomfort and disillusionment that Barb made manifest, at this point in time she was only able to locate the source of her stress in inexact terms.

In summary

The disenchanted borderland Discourse was characterised by Barb’s mobilisation of language that portrayed the personal, cognitive and physical tensions she experienced (feeling pretty run down; couldn’t get going; can’t do the maths; can’t concentrate; old legs are giving out; went back into myself; find it difficult) as STEPS neared its conclusion. The disenchanted borderland Discourse was further evidenced in the ambivalence underpinning Barb’s emotional portrayal of others (doubting; pig headed; cock sure; shy; arrogant; selfish; beautiful; disruptive; aggressive). The personal disappointment she experienced as she faced her own physical and cognitive limitations, coupled with social behaviours she had no control of are indicative of the borderland as “a space of enhanced wisdom where one arrives only after experiencing pain” (Alsup, 2006, p. 14). Critically reflective moments were evidenced in the language Barb’s deployed (I’m finding now; I went back into myself; I set myself back and thought) as she grappled with the physical, cognitive and emotional challenges associated with transformation of her old and new ways of knowing.

5.3 Borderland Discourses of Barb’s transformation

In summarising the analysis of Barb’s borderland Discourses, the varying ways in which she articulated her perception of herself as a learner indicates that transformation had occurred. This claim can be substantiated by the trajectory and characteristics of the at times contradictory Discourses that she mobilised and the complex range of emotions she made manifest as she variously transformed how she perceived herself as a learner. The ‘messiness’ of personal transformation was made evident through the mobilisation of the broad range of emotions exemplified by each borderland Discourse.

The following distinct issues emerged that were related to the transformation of her perception of herself as a learner:

- The trajectory and characteristics of the borderland Discourses to emerge from the Barb’s data attest to the erratic and contradictory path transformative learning can take. Broadly speaking, the erratic path of her personal transformation was depicted by the order of the borderland
Discourses that were mobilised: from unworthiness and patronisation, to revelation, assertiveness and fervour, to disenchantment and a return to unworthiness. This range of competing borderland Discourses provides a depiction of what can transpire when existing frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000) are challenged, reflected upon, and transformed, allowing the individual to come to new perceptions of self as a learner. However, while the contradictory trajectory of Barb's borderland Discourses was demonstrated, a somewhat cyclical pattern was evident in that the unworthiness borderland Discourse mobilised at the commencement of STEPS was remobilised at the conclusion of STEPS; interestingly, this pattern was not unique to Barb; Ella (presented later in this chapter) was another, who in the closing weeks of STEPS, remobilised a borderland Discourse that was constructed earlier. This return to an earlier borderland Discourse demonstrates that for some mature age learners, transformative learning may lead to the remobilisation of previously demonstrated borderland Discourses thus illustrating the erratic process it can be.

- Barb's borderland Discourses are indicative of her engagement in meaning making related to new knowledge about self as a learner. The mobilisation of contradictory borderland Discourses illustrates that the conceptualisation of new knowledge is contingent upon the passage of time. This substantiates claims by O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007, p. 315) that adult learning is a "process distributed across person, time, place, and activity". This finding also reflects the premise of the constructivist-developmental conception of transformative learning theory that entails the viewing of personal transformation as "the negotiation of developmental transitions – the movement from one stage ... of development to another" (Cranton, 2006, p. 77).

- Barb's borderland Discourses are characterised by a complex range of emotion. Emotion was the conduit through which each borderland Discourse was made known, and for Barb, the anxiety, self-doubt, insecurity, astonishment, frustration, anger, empowerment, disillusionment and joy that she made manifest during her time in STEPS were expressions of what her transformative learning experience(s) 'felt' like.

- Barb’s unworthiness and disenchantment borderland Discourses indicated the important role context can play in the transformative learning
experience. Context present as both a positive and a negative force in the transformative learning process.

- Barb’s disenchantment borderland Discourse revealed that while the collective mature age learner group can provide great support to each other in times of personal transformation, the formal learning group can also act in a counter pattern, thus creating some negative consequences for the mature age learner.

The next section of this chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the data related to Bert.

5.4 Bert’s borderland Discourses

Bert self-identified as a forty-six-year-old male who, from the age of sixteen, had worked in a variety of manual jobs ranging from *mowing lawns* ... to *working as a shift worker and as a supervisor in a coal wash plant in the mines* (BtA). He indicated that he had been unemployed for over twelve months prior to STEPS. He was married to Maureen, who had completed STEPS two years previously and they had a twenty-year-old son and an eight-year-old daughter. Similar to Barb, borderland Discourses that emerged from Bert’s data revealed the contradictions and tensions that arose for him as he constantly re-positioned himself across and within the Language and Learning curriculum of the STEPS program.

Table 5.2: Bert’s borderland Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td><strong>Now I’m being told I’ve got to get in touch with the little boy again!</strong></td>
<td>(BtI2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escapism</td>
<td><em>It’s kinda’ like getting the little boy back into part of something and that sort of stuff.</em></td>
<td>(BtI2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarmourment</td>
<td><em>You may not have noticed as I put on a brave front.</em></td>
<td>(BtI2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conflict

What’s beating me right now is the major essay.

(BtI3)

Empowerment

I know I can achieve anything now!

(BtI4)

As Table 5.2 illustrates, Bert’s borderland Discourses were marked with uncertainty and lack of confidence, reflective of Crossan, Field, Gallacher and Merrill’s (2003, p. 58) contention that when a non-traditional learner engages in a formal learning context, they “are often if not always initially tentative about engaging in this process.” The following section elaborates on the borderland Discourses from Bert’s data.

A resistance borderland Discourse

Now I’m being told I’ve got to get in touch with the little boy again! (BtI2)

In coming to terms with his perceptions of himself as learner, Bert’s data revealed tension between his personal and student subjectivities. Similar to findings outlined in Chapter 2 related to the anxiety experienced by many non-traditional adults on their return to the classroom (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Cullity, 2005, 2006, 2007; Reay, Ball & David, 2002), Bert’s data revealed a persistent resistance to many of the writing genres that he encountered in the Language and Learning classroom. However, in his pre-STEPS data, Bert indicated his intention to enrol in a degree in creative writing upon the completion of STEPS (BtA). Interestingly, a resistance borderland Discourse emerged when Bert was required to engage in classroom activities that focused specifically on creative writing activities.

One particular activity that mobilised strong resistance from Bert was the utilisation of Gabriele Rico’s (1983) strategy of ‘clustering’\(^{60}\). The rationale behind the use of

\(^{60}\) Clustering is a non-linear process encouraged to produce natural writing, wherein the writer uncovers and records random, unrelated ideas and thoughts that spontaneously come to mind. Based on her research with students at Stanford University, Rico (1983, p. 17) maintains that clustering enabled the students’ writing to dramatically improve as they learned to “flow with rather than fight the natural cooperative rhythms of the hemispheres of the brain.”
clustering is that it provides students with a strategy to generate random thoughts to stimulate their creative writing. This activity was clearly problematic for Bert:

Julie: Why do you think you identify clustering as a challenge for you?

Bert: ‘Cause it’s something I never did before.

Julie: Do you find it hard to just let your mind go?

Bert: I keep pulling it back to logic because I was always told, “Don’t be silly; think more clearly. You’re not a little boy any more” and stuff like that! And now I am being told you’ve got to get in touch with the little boy again! Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. (Bt1)

Bert’s expressions of frustration and annoyance signalled his shift to the borderland where he was “walking new terrain” (Alsup, 2006, p. 107) and negotiating the tension between institutional practices and his own personal philosophies and practices. His tense relationship with this aspect of the writing curriculum indicated an instance of where his personal subjectivities clashed with his student subjectivities.

At this point, it is important to make note of one of two metaphorical strategies that were frequently employed by Bert. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 3), metaphors are “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” and that we use them both consciously and unconsciously to make sense of our lives. Bert’s manipulation of the self in physical ways is evidenced in the extract above by his pulling it back and having to get in touch. He unconsciously perceived himself as an object that could be manipulated by the writing curriculum, and in so doing, he positioned himself in an inferior way, allowing the writing curriculum to threaten and disempower.

The borderland space provided Bert with the opportunity to question the value of having to engage in creative writing activities. His perception of what the Language and Learning writing course would impart was challenged, for it is possible that Bert expected more instrumental, objective knowledge from STEPS given its goal of preparing mature age learners for undergraduate studies. He may not have perceived the benefits or purpose of his engagement in creative writing activities. Many adult learning theorists (e.g., Fairchild, 2003; Foley, 2000; Knowles, 1968, 1970, 1980, 1984, 1998; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam, Cafarella &
Baumgartner, 2007) concur that mature age learners need to see purpose and reason for studies that have relevance to their life circumstances. Furthermore, the same educators generally concur that adults learn best when their learning reflects their immediate life needs, and tend to be most motivated when their inner needs are fulfilled. Whatever the case, frustration underpinned Bert’s resistance to having to think in ways other than logical, evidenced by his exclamation of *grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr*, an expression of the limits of his patience.

An equally valid scenario may be that Bert’s resistance masked feelings of anxiety about engaging in “unfamiliar territory” (Askham, 2008, p. 94). His perception of himself as a less than capable learner in the educational context may have been responsible for diminishing his confidence. As well as worrying about not having the adequate skills and knowledge, he may simply have been concerned about “getting things wrong” (Askham, 2008, p. 92). As Reay (2002) enlightens us, the risk of academic failure and shame can be a very real part of the formal learning context for the mature age learner, and for Bert, despite early claims about wanting to pursue further studies in creative writing, tension clearly arose when he was asked to express himself through creative writing.

Further elaboration of Bert’s resistance borderland Discourse was evident in the way he positioned himself to the writing curriculum. That he associated expressing himself through writing with having *to get in touch with the little boy again*, hinted at a perceived return to a place of powerlessness and vulnerability, and may in part explain Bert’s clear projection of resistance. He associated having to be creative and spontaneous as representative of returning to a childlike state and issues related to gender may also have been at play. Bert perceived that his engagement in such juvenile activities would disempower him as an adult male and might construct him as being *silly*, incoherent and childlike. To his adult male sensibilities, this possibly presented as belittling or offensive, and rather than compromise his masculinity, his resistance enabled him to negotiate between “safety and challenge” (Reay, 2002, p. 412). For Bert, resistance emerged as a borderland Discourse when his personal subjectivities and ideologies clashed with those of the Discourses associated with STEPS.

Data from Bert’s second interview revealed a possible source of his tension with the writing curriculum. By virtue of their lived years, personal makeup and varied experiences, many adults bring ‘baggage’ to the formal learning environment, their coping mechanisms a product of their “own emotional or affective history” (Cantwell,
2004, p. 12). Bert’s recount of what appeared to have been an emotionally traumatic experience from his primary school years provided elucidation of his resistance to communicate about himself. Tension surrounded his perception of a long ago incident:

*I’ve never really expressed my views and probably that goes back to grade 4 and the humiliation I felt then. My grade four teacher made me stand on my desk for a long period for something I had written about something. I never wanted to go through that terrifying experience again so I never opened up and gave my views about what I thought about something. It’s something I’ve been trying my whole life to overcome.* (BtI2)

In referring to this experience as *terrifying* and confiding that it was something he had been trying his *whole life to overcome*, Bert portrayed the emotional intensity of the long ago negative, personal experience. Perry (2007, p. 27) asserts that adverse learning contexts in one’s childhood may affect the adult learner’s capacity to learn throughout the lifespan. Bert’s repetitive use of *never wanted; never opened* indicated his firm resolve and non-negotiation about expressing his thoughts, a defence mechanism that he perceived would safeguard him from experiencing more shame. In a defensive way, Bert mobilised blame behaviour, apportioning culpability to a teacher from his distant past who he remembered as shaming and humiliating him, the consequences of which seemingly bore great influence on aspects of his life. Cozolino and Sprokay (2006, p. 14) observe that for many mature age learners, the classroom can trigger “memories of failure and shame that might have once driven them from school”, and this appeared to be the case for Bert.

Mobilised in Bert’s words is a second metaphorical strategy that was to recur throughout his data, namely the plant metaphor. This was employed by Bert on numerous occasions, representing the ways in which he variously positioned himself while trying to make sense of new meaning about himself as a learner. When he said he *never opened up*, he metaphorically projected the image of a plant, that due to lack of nourishment, was stunted and unable to blossom or reach its full potential. That Bert had some misgivings about his abilities to *open up* in creative writing activities is feasible in light of the personal limitations alluded to in his data above, not to mention the distortion of past events that may have magnified his anxieties.
The negative effect of Bert’s *terrifying experience* of the distant past quite possibly clouded his perception of his ability as a learner. This resonates with Cohen’s (1997, p. 62) metaphor about one spending their life in a “room with a lowered ceiling”, which after a long enough time, can result in one accepting the “twisted condition as natural.” Perhaps it was that Bert expected any forays into self-expression would inevitably result in humiliation and hurt, and he deemed it safe to remain resistant. Cranton (2002, p. 65) points out that often “we expect what has happened in the past to happen [again, and it] is easier and safer to maintain habits of mind than to change [them].” This was the case for Bert as he examined his perception of himself as a learner.

It was apparent, however, that in being able to articulate to others about the humiliation and hurt he experienced with a previous negative educational experience, Bert was able to critically reflect upon and articulate about a deeply held and possibly distorted perception of himself as a learner. Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003, p. 58) note that previous life experiences and the part they play in giving the learner little confidence about engaging in the process of formal learning, may “well be tentative, and engagement, if it does develop, will only emerge over time”. This was the case for Bert, who for the duration of STEPS, continued to mobilise resistance to other writing activities. While his reference to the *terrifying experience* of the past in some sense accounted for his resistance, quite possibly his reference to the *something I had written about something*, and for which he had been publicly chastised, may have actually been an attempt at the very genre he was problematising in the Language and Learning classroom. Bert’s vagueness about both the content and the purpose of what he had actually written so long ago was significant in the sense that for various reasons, either he was resistant to recall the specific details of the incident or that the passage of time had allowed him to bury or forget its minutiae.

Bert’s data indicated that at the conclusion of STEPS he was finally able to articulate more objectively about his perception of his previous *terrifying experience* and the way in which this had caused him to transfer his feelings of vulnerability to the Language and Learning (L&L) classroom:

> Actually I was a bit frightened of L & L when I first came to STEPS. I didn’t know what to expect. I was fearing it because I thought I’d be entering areas of my mind that I had blocked off for over thirty years. I thought, “This is going to open something and I don’t want to be embarrassed or ashamed or
stuff like that”, so that was a big step for me. I’ve enjoyed it. I’ve actually felt nurtured all along. My wife says that I write quite well and I don’t need some sort of tuition. (Btlt4)

Fear, notes Cozolino and Sprokay (2006, p. 14), “is easy to learn and difficult to forget”, and this is particularly so for many mature age learners when it comes to re-entering formal classrooms.” However, the extract above clearly indicates that through critical reflection, Bert arrived at a new perception of himself as a learner. He revealed a displacement from the physical-institutional space of the classroom to the psychological space of the mind and his re-mobilisation of the plant metaphor revealed he had experienced considerable personal growth.

Bert’s transformed perception of himself as a learner could be attributed to the specific Enabling context. His thirteen week inclusion in an encouraging and supportive classroom environment underpinned by humanist philosophies encouraged him to reach his fullest potential. Alsup (2006, p. 107) writes that the home Discourses or “ecological niches” can be created by family and friends to “create bridges” for those integrating new roles and constructing new Discourses. The constructivist nature of the interactions between Bert and his teachers in STEPS were bridges played out in the emotional and intellectual scaffolding that supported Bert in coming to new perceptions of himself as a learner. Evidence of such was Bert’s further deployment of the plant metaphor and his feeling of having felt nurtured all along.

In summary

The resistance borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. This was overtly manifest in the negative stance Bert took with his writing (I never opened up; I never really expressed my views; I never wanted to go through that) and in his frustration (Grrrrrrrrrr; don’t be silly; and now I’m being told). The resistance borderland Discourse was further characterised by Bert’s mobilisation of the plant metaphor (I never opened up) and the tension associated with his reticence to express himself to others. Critically reflective moments can be known from Bert’s data by the way in which he reflected on present learning in light of past learning (now I’m being told; get in touch with the little boy again; I was always told; I’ve never really expressed my views) and the associated emotion he was able to recall (terrifying experience; trying my whole life
to overcome; humiliation; never opened up) followed by the emotion surrounding the transformation he experienced (feeling nurtured; big step for me; enjoyed it).

An escapism borderland Discourse

*It’s kinda’ like getting the little boy back into part of something and that sort of stuff* (BtI1).

Literature findings in Chapter 2 attest to the often haphazard and fragmented way in which many mature age learners experience their return to formal education (Askham, 2008; Cohen, 1997; Crossan, Field, Gallacher &Merrill, 2003). As testimony to the often contradictory and erratic ways in which Bert variously constructed himself during STEPS, in the same interview that saw him mobilise resistance to creative writing strategies, in a paradoxical way he was keen to portray himself as an unconventional thinker:

*I’ve been told that I’m a lateral thinker. I’m not an average … like most people will come out of one direction. I’ll come out from behind or the side and come up with a totally different approach or idea on it* (BtI2).

Such moves in the ‘left field’ are often associated with creativity and flair; however, rather than taking personal ownership for observing this specific characteristic, Bert attributed it to be the claim of other people.

The irony of this is that the creative writing strategy of ‘clustering’ required that Bert be divergent and spontaneous, yet he problematised the strategy and declared it to be one of [his] main challenges (BtI1). As an indication of how he positioned himself in relationship to the Language and Learning writing course at this time, the positional metaphors he mobilised, including *come out from behind or the side and come up*, disclosed a sense of confusion and contradiction as he tried to make sense of new ways of thinking. Further incompatibility of claims about his creativity yet a lack of willingness to engage in activities to encourage such were demonstrated three weeks later when Bert admitted to finding great pleasure in imaginative prose:

*I like to read to challenge my imagination and creative side rather than to get knowledge. See, I love things like science fiction fantasy books, like Harry Potter. It’s kinda’ like getting the little boy back into part of something and that sort of stuff.* (BtI2)
Despite previously expressing frustration and resistance about having to engage in what he perceived as childish activities, in a contradictory way, Bert indicated that he was more than keen to lose himself in make believe and whimsical behaviours, referred to by him in abstract terms, as *that sort of stuff*.

Bert’s vagueness and lack of articulation were indicative of an infantile or imaginary place where he perceived he could be *part of something*. His inarticulacy revealed that he was either unsure of what that *something* might represent, or that he was perhaps reluctant to elaborate on *all that stuff*, for it may have been his perception that to engage in fanciful conversation would compromise his masculine identity.

From a lifelong learning perspective, there is evidence of a rupture between Bert’s childhood, articulated in terms of fantasy, fear and humiliation, and his status as an adult male. Underpinning Bert’s articulations was evidence of a negotiation of this rupture and his experiences as an interrupted learner. His variant move into the borderland did however make it possible for him to explore a childlike fantasy dimension of his personality, which is representative of the erratic pattern the experience of learning can take (Askham, 2008).

Bert’s second reference to the *little boy* revealed a sense of vulnerability related to his return to an educational setting. This discursive move revealed further evidence of variance, his childlike fantasy dimension representative of a rupture he experienced in making sense of his identity as a mature age learner. According to de Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006, p. 21), in times of coping with changes, troubles, or life-time transitions, “discursive processes of identification also imply a search for new meanings and new representations of self and others.” Bert’s mobilisation of an escapism borderland Discourse revealed his subjection to a rupture between a persona retrieved from long ago (the little boy) and his current identity as a male, mature age learner.

An important practice in helping mature age learners make sense of new meaning about themselves is through dialogue with peers and others (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003; O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). As Bert partook in classroom activities designed to encourage and foster his writing prowess and engaging in conversations with others about how he felt regarding the various writing challenges he encountered, he could examine and revise some long held perceptions of himself as a learner. Through critical reflection, he came to new perceptions about the potential consequences of any moves he made to *open up*. The confusion and vacillation Bert displayed about openly expressing himself to others represented the
time during which he engaged in meaning making about the rationale for and relevance of creative writing activities. For Bert, this meaning making period, the time in the borderland, was characterised by avoidance and diversion as he assimilated new knowledge about himself.

Although Bert’s data revealed an ongoing tension with his ability to engage in creative writing strategies, he re-positioned himself as he progressed through STEPS, envisaging new possibilities about himself as a learner. Post-STEPS data revealed that when asked what aspects of Language and Learning challenged him the most, it seemed that Bert had completely forgotten or dismissed the frustration and angst he experienced with creative writing. He proclaimed:

*I didn’t struggle with any of the creative writing, the poetry or anything like that. STEPS has helped me open up and L&L has definitely allowed my creative side to come to the fore. I’ve grown and I see things differently now and coming to STEPS has forced me to look at some things I have never looked at before.* (BtI4)

The passage of time in the nurturing environment of STEPS provided Bert with scaffolded opportunities that took him out of his comfort zone. This led him to critically reflect on a negative schooling incident of so many years ago and revise the assumption that *opening up* equalled *humiliation*. Bert’s continuation of the plant metaphor substantiated the positive growth he had experienced. That he should applaud the fruition of his *creative side* indicated the development of a multi-dimensional perception of himself that allowed personal growth to occur. This is representative of how for some mature age learners, the passage of time can allow for a transformation of perception of self as a learner.

A more pragmatic explanation for Bert’s changed perception is that he simply came to conform to the writing protocols expected of him within the educational institution. This demonstrated the way in which individuals conform to and perpetuate particular modes of conduct (Barker & Galasinski, 2001) in the contexts of which they are part. Thus, any further tensions about creative writing activities that Bert may have wished to make known, could have been silenced. It may also be possible that he came to confront new challenges, foregrounding these as more worthy of concern, for subsequent data indicated that he continued to problematise other writing genres presented in Language and Learning, and that his relationship with the writing curriculum continued to be tense.
In summary

The escapism borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. Bert’s proclaimed preference for creative pursuits (my creative side; imagination; science fiction fantasy books; totally different approach or idea) provided a way to deal with the confusion he was experiencing in light of the previously mentioned resistance to creative writing. The escapism borderland Discourse was also recognisable in Bert’s mobilisation of language related to non-specific elements (imagination; creative side; fantasy; that sort of stuff; part of something) and his use of childlike states (the little boy) to explore dimensions of his personality. Bert’s positioning of himself in contradictory ways (I keep pulling it back to logic; and I love to challenge my imagination and creative side) was indicative of the tension he experienced in the process of conceptualising new meaning about himself as a learner. Furthermore, his use of locational metaphors and strong emotion to describe his thinking were evidence of critically reflective moments (direction; behind; the side; different approach) and his figurative language (lateral; creative; imagination; fiction; fantasy; something; stuff) was indicative of the making meaning he was engaged in.

A dis armourment borderland Discourse

You may not have noticed as I put on a brave front. (Bt13)

Much contemporary literature about the mature age learner’s return to formal studies is either non-gendered or includes research findings related specifically to the female student. Little research can be found that focuses exclusively on male mature age learners and the issues and challenges they confront or the personal transformation they experience upon their return to Enabling or other educational contexts. Mid-way through STEPS Bert articulated one issue that was personally challenging for him:

My main challenge is just opening up. I’ve put so many blocks up there. My wife says that I never open up, that I am always closed up. Like, she asks me a question and I say “No, I’m not thinking about all that”. (Bt12)

Bert’s reluctance to express himself to others quite evidently extended beyond the classroom context into his domestic arena. He metaphorically alluded to the self-imposed positioning of protective barriers or gates that he had erected around himself within his home Discourse. The persistent way in which Bert maintained that
he had remained closed when it came to expressing himself, and his assertion that he was not thinking about that at all, was clearly a self-protective strategy behind which he could safely hide. That Bert’s wife should get such a rebuttal from him is significant, in relation to the strong feminised culture of STEPS, with three of his four teachers and twenty-one of his twenty-five classmates being females.

Bert’s defence mechanisms surrounding his personal subjectivities however, are not unusual for males in Australian society. It is not as yet mainstream practice in Western society for men to express themselves to others, particularly those beyond family and, more particularly, to females. A summary of West’s (2006, p. 2) research about Australian men and their masculinity indicated that work represents a significant issue for men and that being healthy is perceived as a challenge. West (2006, p. 2) also reports that men are lonely and hide it “in a hundred different ways”; thus many men struggle in their relationships and the expression of their own needs, and they find difficulty “in having real friends who support and encourage them.” Thus, Bert’s claim about not being able to open up, demonstrated a traditional masculine characteristic, not desiring or needing to confide in females, including one’s wife. However, his inability to open up was more than likely attributed to his fear of revealing himself as being weak rather than not desiring or wanting to confide in females, although these are not necessarily unrelated.

The confusion Bert was experiencing was made manifest through an interesting gender slippage with data indicating that Bert based his identity and self-value on his wife’s comments about him. While it is traditional for wives in Western cultures to base their identities on their relationships with their husbands, Bert’s wife was clearly an influential force in his life. Throughout his data, several references to his wife could be found: my wife; my wife says I’m a perfectionist; my wife reckons I’m happier; my wife says that I write quite well and I don’t need tuition; my wife did STEPS; my wife says, I said to my wife. In very affectionate terms, in his final reflection he referred to her as my darling wife. It was possible that her successful completion of STEPS and her encouragement provided a positive role model for Bert, not to mention the emotional and other support it appears she offered her husband. Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite, and Godfrey (2004) cite such support as being one of the most important external factors in ensuring the persistence and success of the mature age learner in higher education contexts.

---

61 Bert’s wife had completed the STEPS program two years prior.
However, it is possible that the success Bert perceived his wife to experience may have caused him to feel subordinated, framing her accomplishment as a challenge to his masculine identity. Bert was exerting pressure on himself to achieve, perhaps even surpass his wife. Askham (2008) cautions that while family influence can be vital in promoting the success of the adult student, it can also act as an inhibiting factor, for family become perceived as stakeholders, adding further pressure to the adult learner’s goal to succeed. Bert’s emotional reaction that one of my greatest fears is failing life and my family (BtR) attests to the degree of pressure he exerted upon himself at this time. Thus compounding Bert’s deep seated sense of inadequacy was the fear he felt should his wife know that beneath his “male” façade was a person wracked by insecurity.

In somewhat of a paradoxical way however, despite Bert’s mobilisation of masculine overtones, it was in the feminised Discourses of the STEPS program that the borderland provided a conceptual space in which Bert could map out a move from one place to another. In week eleven of STEPS, he articulated a significant change in his perception of himself as a learner:

*I’ve opened up a lot and it’s getting me out there and opening into something I haven’t been doing for many years. It’s a great experience and I’ll recommend it to anyone. I’m not so self conscious about what I write now and when other people read it, now, so yeah it’s helped me a lot … really picked up my self-confidence. You may not have noticed as I put on a brave front (BtI3).*

Bert’s deployment of physical verbs, such as opened up a lot, getting me out, opening into something and nurtured saw a re-mobilisation of the plant metaphor, suggestive of a blossoming that had occurred in his perception of his ability to express himself. In admitting to this feminine practice, it became apparent that a disarmourment borderland Discourse was mobilised by Bert as he moved between the binary opposites of masculinity and femininity and his defence mechanisms became demobilised. Bert’s engagement in STEPS may have been reflective of Shapiro’s (2009, p. 90) notion that in the Jungian schema, midlife is a time of great growth potential, a time in which many women may integrate their more “masculine” side while “many men develop their more relational, affective, and ‘feminine’ side.”

It is also feasible to suggest that the change in Bert’s perception came about because over his time in STEPS, the humanist philosophies espoused in the adult
learning context provided a supportive and safe environment in which he could test the boundaries of his masculinity without fear of humiliation. For thirteen weeks, Bert was immersed in a program that had a particular emphasis on humanist and feminine values, such as pastoral care, nurturance and empathy. The Discourses associated with these characteristics were formally and informally invoked by both staff and students through the various curriculum activities and other extra-curricula events. A New Age discourse of spiritual enlightenment and emancipatory objectives underpinned the program, evoked to some extent in the creative and reflective writing narratives of Language and Learning. Such gendered values are significant in the broader theme of transformative learning. In this ‘safe’ context, Bert was provided with ample opportunities to reflect on some of his long held perceptions about himself as a learner, engage in dialogue with others, and come to consider alternative perceptions. Additionally, his frequent references to his wife represented a means of embracing the feminine in ways that were safe and did not compromise his masculinity, for she acted as his significant other. As a result, in combining his student self with his personal self, Bert was able to conceptualise new perceptions of himself as a learner and as a result, experience significant personal growth.

This growth was made manifest in Bert’s post-STEPS data when he disclosed his personal circumstances prior to STEPS. He revealed that he had put on a brave front (BtR), metaphorically referring to the wearing of a disguise to obscure his perceived sense of failure. This resonated somewhat with Barb’s reference to herself as a lowly shopkeeper masquerading as a higher more intelligent being (B11). A sense of despair permeated Bert’s reflection on his past:

Before STEPS, my whole world was made up of low achievements and failures. I was unemployed for twelve months and found it a challenge to just get out of bed. My confidence was down near rock bottom. There were many disappointments through unsuccessful job applications and failed job interviews. I was just sitting at home doing basically nothing. (BtR)

Bert’s perception that his whole world was made up of low achievements and failures, gave some indication of the all encompassing despair he had confronted prior to STEPS. Furthermore, the depth at which he metaphorically positioned

---

62 See STEPS in Glossary of terms.
63 See Humanism in Glossary of terms
64 See Language and Learning in Glossary of terms.
himself when reflecting back revealed the hopelessness and futility he experienced during this period. Often such events act as the trigger or activating event (Cranton, 2006) that sets in motion the mature age learner’s quest to seek personal change. Bert, who admitted to have given up hope to ever succeed in anything again (BtR), attributed his wife to be the one who noticed his confidence just draining away and depression taking a firm hold and it was their long and hard talk about what I need to do (BtR) that he believed has been the catalyst for his application to STEPS. Thus, although Bert’s data revealed masculine traits of possessiveness and a traditional but affectionate position with his wife, he simultaneously positioned himself as very dependent on his wife’s comments, affirmations and opinions, and to some extent, he embraced feminine practices.

In summary

The disarmourment borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. The initial ways in which Bert resolutely projected his inability to express himself to others (never open up; always closed up; I’m not thinking about that; so many blocks up there) contrast significantly with his more benevolent articulations after thirteen weeks in STEPS (opened up a lot; opening into something; great experience; I’ll recommend it to anyone; not so self-conscious; really picked up my self-confidence). Critically reflective moments are indicated in the despairing way Bert was able to frame his life prior to STEPS (never open up; always closed up; not thinking about all that; low achievements; failures; unemployed; rock bottom; failed jobs; unsuccessful job applications; sitting at home doing basically nothing) and how in more positive, feminised terms (I’ve opened up a lot; getting me out there; opening into something; great experience; not so self-conscious now; helped me a lot; really picked up my self-confidence) he was able to reflect on the impact of his time in STEPS.

A conflict borderland Discourse

What’s beating me right now is the major essay! (BtI3)

As Bert progressed from creative writing activities to more formal academic genres, he maintained an ongoing tense relationship with the writing curriculum. However, week 11 data indicated that rather than mobilising the resistance borderland Discourse as he did with creative writing strategies and issues of opening up, his academic writing challenges now appeared to be more related to cognitive
limitations rather than resistance to unfamiliar writing strategies. Murphy and Fleming (2000, p. 82) advise that the specific protocols of essay writing can cause significant problems for mature age students, many of whom have little previous experience of higher education and whose anxiety is often caused by “not knowing what [is] expected of them.” Bert’s data communicated that this was the case for him:

The research assignment was definitely a big challenge for me to start with. I could get conclusions very easily. The introduction was an absolute nightmare for me but I eventually got the introduction okay by looking at my conclusion but then I looked at the body of the research assignment and…. It’s not there! (Laughs) and I thought “Oh no! What’s going on”? It looked just like a jumble of words… I just don’t know what the problem is here. (BtI3)

In constructing academic writing as very difficult; a real challenge; and just like a jumble of words, his description of what this genre required of him highlighted the difficulties Bert was experiencing in conceptualising the academic essay. In light of his description of the essay as a jumble of words (BtI3), his attempt to explain how he structured his research assignment indicated that his perception of what was required of him was skewed. His laughter more than likely masked his anxiety and associated feelings of failure.

A conflict borderland Discourse persisted in Bert’s data throughout the closing weeks of STEPS. This was made manifest by Bert’s various references to the academic essay as his biggest struggle, definitely a big challenge (BtI3), and in his admission that what’s beating me right now is the major essay (BtI3). His likening of the introduction as an absolute nightmare points to the intensely overwhelming experience the academic essay represented for him. Bert’s appraisal of the task confronting him resulted in an overwhelming lack of confidence in his ability to meet this challenging task and his negative self evaluation positioned him with “clear expectations of failure” (Cantwell, 2004, p. 14). In his pre-STEPS data, Bert indicated that he did not complete his secondary education. Like many young men of the early 1970s, Bert took up blue-collar employment at a time when the labour force participation rate for 15–24 year olds was around 70% (ABS, 2001, p. 3). His working class background more than likely denied him the opportunity for educational advancement, for despite being a youth in a transformative era that professed “secondary schooling for all” (ABS, 2001, p. 13), actual participation and success in the public secondary schooling at that time “were highly differentiated by
social geography and gender” and there were lower school completion rates for those students attending schools in the working class suburbs”.

Thus it may be that Bert completely underestimated the complexity of the academic writing task and as well as his own capabilities (Haggan, 2000), for further evidence of the metaphorical physical relationship Bert assumed with his writing was manifested in his admission of defeat, saying what’s beating me right now is the major essay. Again Bert surrendered to the writing curriculum and constructed himself as disempowered, and defeated. His inability to conquer his writing inadequacies acted as a further reminder of his shortcomings as a learner in an academic context, and self-doubt and low self-esteem appeared to hamper his perception of himself as a learner. But in demonstrating the interplay and interconnectedness of the multiple dimensions of Bert’s life, he was not only experiencing mental and emotional challenges, but physical, existential challenges as well. Researcher’s journal entries around this time noted other stresses that Bert shared with me while we talked about the challenges his academic essay was confronting him with. These actualities were obviously playing on his mind.

**In summary**

The conflict borderland Discourse has characteristics that enable it to be known from the text. Characteristic of this borderland Discourse was the way Bert problematised his relationship with the curriculum (definitely a big challenge; a problem; a nightmare; a struggle) and the negative language he mobilised (don’t...
Critically reflective moments were crystallised in the adversarial way Bert initially positioned himself to the writing curriculum (beating me; big challenge; problem; it's not there; what's going on) followed by his mobilisation of proactive language (I could get conclusions very easily; I eventually got the introduction okay; looking at my conclusion; I looked at the body) to indicate that a change in perception of self as learner had occurred.

An empowerment borderland Discourse

I know I can achieve anything now! (BtI4)

In the closing stages of STEPS, moves in Bert’s data revealed that a significant personal transformation had occurred for him at the personal, existential level and he conceptualised himself as a learner in bold, new ways. His discursive patterns took on a philosophical bent:

Coming into STEPS has forced you to look differently at some things you have never looked at before. If you don’t change you break and in STEPS, this change has just been multiplied. How you react to things relates to where you are in life and with everything you hear, you must change. It may loosen you up and listen to someone else’s opinion but still be able to stand by yours. The thing is though, that 13 weeks has made you a stronger person. It has made all of us stronger. Every single person who has done STEPS is a stronger person. (BtI4)

Although Bert continued to mobilise language of the conflict borderland Discourse in perceiving that the collective group had been forced to embrace certain perspectives, he took a less defeated stance in saying that as a result of the group’s time in STEPS, they had all become stronger and were able to stand by and defend their opinions. Bert’s discursive moves relayed a sense of victory and force, and his attribution of strength to the collective was more than likely indicative of the personal strength and hope he came to experience towards the end of STEPS. Of course, Bert may also have been inadvertently referring to the strength gained by significant others, such as family and those close to him. His comment that if you don’t change you break gave poignant insight into the fragility of his mental state prior to and perhaps at certain times during STEPS, not to mention the degree of critique and critical reflection that had occurred for Bert to articulate this particular perception.
However, his consistent use of the second person “you” suggests he was other-directed.

In Bert’s final written reflection, a sense of optimism and greater self-awareness permeated his data and he claimed changes in perception for himself:

I’ve grown and I see things differently now. I feel stronger and happier for my STEPS experience. I know I can achieve anything now and I am only restricted by me, no-one else. I shall conquer all my fears and achieve my dreams through my own efforts and failures. I don’t fear the future so much anymore as I feel hope. (BtR)

In saying that he felt stronger and happier for [his] STEPS experience and that he knew that he could achieve anything now and that he was only restricted by [himself], no one else, it was Bert’s perception that some events of the past no longer constrained him, and he took the locus of control for his own actions. However, in saying he felt stronger rather than admitting to being stronger, Bert’s ambivalence was obvious as he danced on the threshold of meaning (Berger, 2004, p. 336), trying to make sense of new meaning about himself as a learner and the possibilities this entailed.

Bert’s data clearly revealed that he had taken more control over his life, similar to the move Barb made when she took the locus of control for her learning. As insight into the impact of the challenges Bert had confronted during STEPS, he took the upper hand and demonstrated the strength to conquer all his fears and achieve [his] dreams through [his] own efforts and failures. Although remobilising the conflict borderland Discourse, this time he assumed a dominant, masculine position, for in a metaphorically physical way, his newfound strength enabled him to envisage ways to vanquish his uncertainties and overcome personal challenges. Such confidence was further exposed through his reference to abstract constructs:

I feel hope now ... this newfound hope I hold for the future and the excitement I feel (BtR).

Bert’s perception of hope as a precious entity was revealed in the way he objectified such in cherishing terms, deploying a physical metaphor as a vehicle through which he could tangibly hold hope. This abstract dimension resonated with his previous reference to his psychological habit of mind (Cranton, 2006), that if you don’t
change you break, and spoke more about the fragility of Bert’s identity at various times in STEPS.

Optimism and anticipation were evident in Bert’s final interview, where he again mobilised an abstract concept to express a perception about himself and others as learners:

My STEPS group was like an extended family to me and I saw it happen a lot with everyone in the group. If someone missed a day the others were always very supportive of them, collecting papers and that sort of stuff. Our friendships will go right into university. Even though we are all going to be doing different courses, we will still be there for each other … Like an extended family. It’s going to go past uni and it’s really great to see. (BtI4)

Bert projected a sense of compassion and intimacy with his STEPS groups, a complete contrast to the commencement of STEPS when he repeatedly mobilised a resistance borderland Discourse for fear of making a fool of [himself] in front of [his] peers (BtR). Unlike Barb, whose early weeks in STEPS saw her perceive the class like my new family group (BI1), yet by the end of STEPS, withdraw herself from that construct, Bert revealed an opposite trajectory. His ability to project his feelings was illustrative of a shift in his perception of his own masculinity and his potential as a learner.

In following the metaphor of the plant to its fruition, in the analysis of Bert’s final interview, discursive patterns revealed a sense of growth and blossoming:

You have to have an open mind. If you don’t have an open mind nothing’s going to penetrate. You find your thoughts and attitudes change as you get older. I’ve grown and I see things differently. At the end of STEPS your growth is multiplied. (BtI4)

In perceiving his growth to have bloomed so exponentially, Bert’s data exemplified the state of an entity becoming physically stronger (Kovcses, 2005, p. 209) as it reaches its optimum growth. Just as a plant might open its roots for sustenance, Bert perceived nourishment for him was by way of an open mind, for without it, nothing’s going to penetrate. (BtI4) The openness evident in his anticipation borderland Discourse is in stark contrast to his earlier references to himself as being closed and finding opening up as very problematic. The new growth he alluded to
was a transformation, a metamorphosis in which one form is changed for another. Bert became what he previously feared – open.

**In summary**

The empowerment borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. Evident in the data was Bert’s deployment of positive language (*stronger and happier; achieve anything; conquer; dreams; don’t fear; feel hope; really great to see; open mind; grown; multiplied*). Further characterisation of the empowerment borderland Discourse was the confidence and significant personal development that underpinned Bert’s philosophical musings (*I’ve grown; see things differently now; have to have an open mind; growth is multiplied; like an extended family; don’t fear the future so much; only restricted by me*) and the way in which he framed the benefits of new knowledge about himself as a learner (*achieve anything now; achieve my dreams; own efforts and failures; I see things differently*). Critically reflective moments are evidenced in Bert’s data by the positive way in which he came to deploy the plant metaphor (*grown; stronger; open; multiplied; change; penetrate*) and the positive emotional manifestations of his meaning making (*happier; achieve; don’t fear so much; feel hope; be there for each other; really great*).

**5.5 Borderland Discourses of Bert’s transformation**

In summarising the analysis of Bert, the borderland Discourses that emerged from the data indicate that he experienced a transformation in how he perceived himself as a learner. This claim can be substantiated by the contradictory Discourses he mobilised, attesting to the personal tension he experienced when his long held perception of himself as a learner was challenged, critiqued and transformed. The trajectory and range of the Discourses that Bert mobilised provides tangible evidence of the tension he experienced as various phases of transformative learning were experienced. The demonstration of this transformation over a period of time exhibits the developmental nature of transformative learning. Transformation of his perception of himself as a learner highlights three distinct considerations:

- Similar to the progression of time over which Barb’s experience of personal transformation was made manifest, the replacement of the resistance and conflict borderland Discourses with the disarmourment and empowerment borderland Discourses demonstrated that Bert’s experience of transformation was contingent on the passage of time. The escapism
borderland Discourse represented a time of uncertainty as Bert came to terms with new meaning. These borderland Discourses reflected not only the importance of the passage of time while Bert engaged in STEPS, but are also reflective of the rupture between his child status and his present adult status.

- The tensions surrounding Bert's experiences of personal transformation were noticeably evident in the contradictory and adversarial ways in which he constantly re-positioned himself in relation to the Language and Learning curriculum. That this relationship was accompanied by a compelling range of emotion, there is little doubt. Embroiled in this gamut of emotions were the various subjectivities bound up with Bert’s other life events and experiences.

- Bert's transformative learning experience highlights the significance of context in the process of transformative learning. The negativity surrounding the resistance and conflict borderland Discourses when Bert problematised his relationship with the Language and Learning course were replaced with the more positive borderland Discourses of disarmourment and empowerment. This transformation could be largely attributed to Bert’s inclusion in a feminised, supportive and nurturing classroom context wherein he could safely experiment with new ways of thinking about himself without any reprisals.

The following section presents the analysis and discussion of the data related to Ella.

5.6 Ella’s borderland Discourses

While Bert made manifest his problematic relationship with the STEPS writing curriculum, and Barb vacillated between her multiple identities, Ella was a participant who, upon entry to the university context, experienced a degree of dissonance when some of her long held perceptions about traditional family values, conventionality and the moral code she and her family espoused were challenged. In her pre-STEPS data, Ella described herself as a forty-three year old married woman with four children, whose ages ranged from six to fifteen years (EA). She also divulged that she had worked part-time for twenty-two years as a supermarket night-filler, and seven years as a supply teacher-aide in the early primary school (EA) context. Ella wrote that she would love to go and complete [her] education as a fully qualified teacher (EA). Similar to Bert and Barb, various borderland Discourses emerged from Ella’s data, outlined in the following.
A conventionality borderland Discourse

*You have to be married and do the right thing!* (Ei1)

Ella’s data were dominated by her projection of her stereotypical, familial status and the respectability she perceived it to endow upon her. Her conventionality was played out in the way she constructed herself and her family in a defensive way, particularly practices surrounding her conventionality came into conflict with certain social practices exposed to her in the STEPS context. Three particular events could be pinpointed as triggers that problematised Ella’s perception of herself as a learner. The first event occurred in Week 3, entailing a spontaneous classroom discussion about the contemporary practice of pre-marital sex. This discussion occurred spontaneously between several class members during a routine Language and Learning class. Ella’s recount revealed her conventionality:

*I thought I was open actually, but um I think this twenty year age gap between the younger ones [in the class] and me … I think I really noticed it the other day when they had that reading about the man being in the bed or the lady being in the bed. The views of the young ones – I think I’m just*
yeah, totally narrow-minded, you know, you have to be married and do the right thing. (EI1)

Ella’s ambivalent claim that she thought she was narrow-minded is representative of a defensive move, one that masked the limitations of her naïve perception, and although she appeared to be self-deprecating about it, her tentativeness and low modality of I thought I was open actually; I think this twenty year gap … I think I really noticed … and I think I’m just yeah illustrated a lack of conviction and a degree of doubt and confusion for Ella. Her repeated use of I think gave insight into the meaning making Ella engaged in when her long held perceptions about pre-marital sex were challenged as she tried to make sense of a social practice inconsistent with her value system.

Ella’s inclusion in classroom activities and discussions that exposed her to perspectives, viewpoints and social practices incongruent with her own provided her with authentic opportunities to call into question those assumptions. As theorised in Chapter 3, “our assumptions are deeply embedded in our childhood, community, and culture” (Cranton, 2003, p. 67) and Ella’s assumption that you have to be married and do the right thing reflected her deeply held, inherited beliefs about pre-marital sex. This moral stance was consistent with Ella’s construction of herself as a traditional and respectable wife and mother who espoused the conventional interpretation of the institution of marriage. Ella was keen to distinguish herself as a person who placed high value of conforming to stereotypical social norms. This need to obey the social rules in various contexts was caught up in both the personal arenas of Ella’s life as well as in the STEPS context where she constructed herself as respectable and dependable:
Coming from a secure upbringing of Mum, Dad and four girls I have had life pretty easy. I have been happily married to my husband Fred since 1987. We have three boys and one girl and I have always been in a secure job. To assist me with the 13 week commitment, I have the backing of my husband and also the help of my parents when it comes to after school care for my children. (EA)

Adding force to a conventionality borderland Discourse was Ella’s construction of her traditional upbringing and her happy, stable nuclear family. Further evidence could be found in the support of her parents and husband.

Ella’s conventionality borderland Discourse was further played out in her role as a compliant STEPS student. Researcher’s journal entries noted her unfailing punctuality in class, her committed attitude to her work, her diligence, her strong work ethic and her very pleasing assessment results (RJ). Gumperz (1982) reminds us that people draw on discursive practices to organise their conduct and that there are ways of doing things in particular talk practices which guide people and order Discourse. As an example, at various points of time over her thirteen week engagement in STEPS, Ella mobilised context appropriate vocabulary such as pedagogy, methods, formulate, editing, sentence construction, autonomous learners, self reflection, interpersonal development and individualism. This discursive patterning reflects Gee’s (2005, p. 11) point that we use language to recognise us as acting in a specific way, to build a certain type of identity “at the
right times and places to make it work”. It also reflects Ella’s need to “stay close to the norm, to fit in, to be accepted and approved” (Cranton, 2006, p. 109).

When Ella tried to make sense of new meaning about social practices at odds to her own, her inability to accept those of others challenged her conventionality. This was evidenced by the contradiction in her language, for in the same interview in which she mused about her narrow-mindedness, she simultaneously projected an image of herself as being amenable to other opinions and practices:

*I can keep my mind open to everybody else and not make judgements on anyone else but I can still have the opinion that I don’t need to change to go with everyone else. I’ve still got my opinion and I can still keep myself open and not judge anyone.* (EI1)

Ella appeared keen to project a sense of inclusivity and acceptance of others and still maintain her sense of individuality and independence, yet her reaction to the particular classroom discussion revealed that her rhetoric was not consistent with her perception of herself as being open and non-judgmental. In searching for ways to make sense of her unsettled perception of herself as a learner, Ella’s data would suggest that she struggled for explanation. She put forth her age as justification for why she was not able to accept certain contemporary social practices and attributed the social acceptance of such to be the exclusive domain of the younger generation.

In demonstrating the tension she experienced with regards to the discussion about pre-marital sex, Ella positioned herself in a way that revealed a move from the mental process of thinking she was open actually to becoming what she referred to as totally narrow minded. In articulating this assumption, it appeared that Ella’s perception of a certain social practice had been critiqued but perhaps not changed, more than likely due to her “deep urge to stand by [her] principles and ‘truths’” (Cranton, 2006, p. 96).

The conventionality borderland Discourse was played out in another classroom discussion, this time about the social practice of males dyeing their hair. Ella articulated her disdain about this practice and assumed an authoritative stance towards her family:

*I’ve got three boys and a husband and a little girl and my boys are just not allowed to do anything with their hair. That’s a girlie thing to do! That’s just the way I’ve been brought up and that’s what we do.* (EI1)
Ella positioned her family members as individuals over whom she appeared to exert significant control, and in constructing herself in a matriarchal way, her stance appeared non-negotiable, somewhat incongruent to the stereotypical wife and mother construct she projected in her conventionality borderland Discourse. In referring to males dyeing their hair as a girlie thing to do, she demonstrated a very traditional vernacular. It was apparent that the practice of a male changing the colour of his hair was at odds with Ella’s conservative construction of the traditional, stereotypical male. Her defensive claims of that’s just the way I’ve been brought up and that’s what we do reflected her traditional upbringing, one that demanded and received obedience from children to parents. In this regime, despite societal challenges to many female stereotypes, the practice of males dying their hair or engaging in such feminine practices was largely unheard of and characteristically viewed as a socially inappropriate action. In the framework of Ella’s data, the ideology of the family Discourse that shaped her upbringing was perpetuated by the same practices in her own nuclear family.

In summary

The conventionality borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. This was caught up in the traditional vernacular Ella used (the man in the bed; the lady in the bed; my boys; a girlie thing to do; my little girl) and her construction of herself in light of the tension she experienced regarding social practices incongruent to her own (I don’t need to change; I’ve still got my opinions; that’s the way I’ve been brought up; have to do the right thing; just not allowed; that’s what we do). Critically reflective moments were evidenced through language that indicated that emotional and cognitive processing (keep mind open; not make judgments; have the opinion; not judge) and critical self-reflection (I thought I was open actually; I think I’m just totally narrow-minded; I can still keep myself open; not judge anyone) had occurred.

A betrayal borderland Discourse

I took for granted all other students’ integrity. (E12)

Throughout her time in STEPS, Ella’s conventionality borderland Discourse was persistently in conflict with other Discourses of the STEPS context. Alsup (2006, p. 107) notes that occasionally home Discourses can impede an individual’s access to the educational context due to social class or family responsibilities. Ella’s
engagement in STEPS was problematised by some of the incongruities between her family ideologies and some of those in the STEPS context. This was made manifest in her highly emotional reaction to the third event that exposed her to another social practice different from what she ascribed to (Cranton, 2006). Ella’s data indicated that this incident significantly unsettled and challenged her moral code and sense of propriety. From the borderland between the various Discourses Ella engaged in, emerged a betrayal borderland Discourse.

Data showed the significant personal affront Ella experienced as a result of what she perceived to be the inappropriate action of a fellow student:

I took for granted all other students’ integrity. When this safety was broken, I learnt that not everyone in the world holds the same values and morals that my family and the people I choose to associate with do. I struggled through this. (E12)

An extract from the researcher’s journal captures the significance of the incident for Ella, relayed to me in a meeting she requested. Her reaction to the personal affront revealed that her somewhat naïve expectations about the morals and values of all other people had been significantly challenged. The adversarial way in which she positioned herself to the subject of her anxiety, coupled with her likening of this experience to an arduous journey, is evidence of the physical burden this indiscretion represented. Her experience of affront and betrayal were evidenced by her perception that a safety was broken.

As a result of this perceived breach, Ella constructed a binary relationship between her family and the people [she chose] to associate with, and those who did not hold

---

65 As the Campus Coordinator for STEPS during the research phase, all STEPS students were able to request a meeting with me about any personal or other issues they may have needed to discuss.
the same values and morals of her exemplary moral code. Her defensive reaction reflected a naivety in her assumption of the universal acceptance of values and moral codes, and selectivity in her projection of how she would determine those who would and would not be admitted to her own and her family’s circle of acquaintances. Ella’s stance was contradictory to earlier claims that she could keep [her] mind open to everybody else and not make judgements (EI1). Her claim that she took for granted all other student’s integrity demonstrated that some degree of reflection on the issue of values and morals had occurred; however, Ella chose to remain firm about her own ideals. As Mezirow (2000) notes, one can transform a particular perspective through critique of a long held assumption, and in finding it to still hold true, maintain that same perspective.

It was unmistakable that the abovementioned incident evoked high emotion for Ella who revealed that she seriously thought about withdrawing at this time and found it very stressful … but I struggled through. (EI2) Ella’s emotions, expressed as feelings, provided an example of how she felt and what she perceived she needed to do about it, or as Edwards (2001, p. 43) explains, “how you unaccountably feel, and what you accountably do”. Although Ella’s consideration of withdrawing from the program could be interpreted as somewhat reactive, it provided authentication of the position she took on moral codes and reflected her strong belief in her set of principles. While it appeared evident that her point of view may have been shaken, it was clear that she intended to adhere firmly to her own values and moral code, and those of her family and close friends.

Choosing who we wish to socialise with is quite within the realms of normal practice and family and friends can be instrumental in creating a bridge for an individual in their progression from being non-students to students (Alsup, 2006). Ella relied heavily on family and friends for support and for the remainder of her time in STEPS she distanced herself somewhat from her class members, physically and emotionally. She was in the borderland between Discourses of her traditional upbringing and conventional sensibilities and various Discourses of STEPS.

Ella’s perceived betrayal and physical and emotional withdrawal from the mainstream class group may have been exacerbated by the multiple roles that by her own admission precluded her social interaction with the rest of the class. In her post-STEPS data, Ella recalled:
The pressure of time, from working at night, being a wife and mother with household duties and children with sporting commitments was pretty hard. I found that I stuck to myself a lot and didn’t have time to give to the class. My social life away from uni is quite full and this did not allow time for me to be there for newly made acquaintances after hours. (ER)

Nevertheless, in a move similar to the one Barb made in the closing weeks of STEPS, yet contradictory to Bert’s experience of embracing the group in the final stages of STEPS, Ella mapped out a move that saw her distance herself even further from the group, referring to them in a formal, detached manner. That this signals her withdrawal from the group at this time is significant by its counter claim in literature that highlights the importance of the peer group in the mature age learner’s experience of success (Abbot-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). An entry in the researcher’s journal at this time substantiated Ella’s apparent withdrawal from the group and her shift to an alliance with June, another participant who also mobilised a strong conventionality borderland Discourse throughout her time in STEPS. However, while Ella’s data indicated a physical and emotional withdrawal from the group, June’s did not.

In summary

The betrayal borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. First and foremost was Ella’s use of abstract physical language (took for granted; safety was broken; holds the same values; struggled through) which gave some sense of the emotional toil the incident evoked. The emotional overtones (very stressful; pressure; broken; holds; seriously thought) further substantiated the betrayal borderland Discourse. Critically reflective moments were caught up in the evidence of cognitive processing (I seriously thought; I found; I learnt; I took for granted) and in the ambivalent way Ella foregrounded the collective (you need to let go; not everyone in the world; my family and the people I choose to associate with; my social life; newly made

Researcher’s journal 27/9

Ella seems to have moved on from the offensive email incident but I think it has resulted in her detaching herself somewhat from the group. She seems to be spending time with June who incidentally, also berated the sender of the offensive email. Ella is still putting in 100% effort and never complains about the juggling of roles that she does. She keeps pretty much to herself these days.
acquaintances) to mask the tension she was experiencing in coming to terms with new perceptions of herself as a learner. Further masking the hurt surrounding her betrayal and consequent withdrawal from the group was evidenced by the way in which she apportioned blame to competing social roles (pressure of time; working; being a wife; mother; children; social life away from uni).

A presumption borderland Discourse

* I can give all views. (EI2)*

On occasion, Ella raised the ire of some of the females in the STEPS class, especially when she presumed to know what it was like to experience life in family constructs dissimilar to her traditional, nuclear family. When asked in our second interview how she felt she had contributed to the Language & Learning class, she replied:

*Hopefully I contribute an optimistic viewpoint coming from a happy and secure environment and experiencing having a strong relationship with a helpful husband and four pretty good kids. I feel from this that I have been able to see the positive viewpoints from both the female and male perspectives. A lot of the women, I find in our group, because they have had bad relationships, can only see the negatives. Being a full time mum and a working mum ... I can give different views about women returning to the workforce. I can give all views. (EI2)*

Her use of discursive strategies to construct her nuclear family as happy, secure, strong, and helpful projected a sense of security and self-assurance, giving meaning and force to her perception that she was qualified to speak with a certain amount of superiority on lifestyles she had not personally experienced, yet presumed to have an understanding of. She could only have perceived the situation from her own lived experiences, and thus her perspective was narrow and selective. However, as Cranton (2006, p. 79) notes, “we see the world through a lens constructed in our own interaction with our social context ... and we are individuals with important differences among us in the way we live, learn, work, and develop.” Thus Ella projected her personal interpretation of events.

In taking a somewhat ubiquitous position by claiming I can give all views, Ella made many conjectures about relationships or roles that, due to her traditional marital background (happily married to my husband since 1987, BA) she had more than
likely not directly experienced. In articulating her perception of such, she mobilised an ocular metaphor to reflect her evaluation of the situation, and positioned herself as an outsider qualified to offer valid *viewpoints from both the female and male perspectives*, as one who could see many things that others could not. In fact, in taking on the omniscient perspective of the God-like figure, it was Ella’s unrealistic perception that she could *give all views*. While she perceived herself to be sympathetic and unbiased, or in a neutral position when it came to her viewpoints on certain relationship issues, in a contradictory move she articulated a biased perception about intimate relationships different from her own. In generalising that *a lot of the women* in the group had had *bad relationships*, Ella positioned herself as judge and jury in presuming to construct such a label and assume her inclusion with those who knew what a *bad* relationship entailed.

Given the discursive patterns Ella previously mobilised surrounding her happy and contented life, it is highly improbable that she could begin to understand what a *bad* relationship might present as. Her choice of *bad* perhaps derived from the conventionality she made manifest, and as such, *bad* operated as the antithesis of all Ella held to be good and right. In making this presumption about the relationships of the other women, she inadvertently marginalised and stigmatised single mothers, creating a discursive hierarchy in which she was privileged over widows, separated and deserted wives and single, unmarried mothers. Ella perceived that her traditional family structure was representative of the accepted societal norm, and the family structures of some of her class peers, by definition, were not. She discursively constructed standards against which she judged others.

*Researcher’s Journal 27/9*

Last week Ella seemed to get a few of the students’ backs up with her comments about what it is like for some of the women from broken relationships. I think she has changed a little though in how she sees other relationships because she seems almost apologetic about her ‘traditional’ marital status. I sense she had been silenced a bit by the group. When you look at the demographics of the group, she is a minority, with only three students still married to their first partner, four in a second marriage or de facto relationship, one widowed and the rest single.
However, in light of notes in the researcher’s journal at this time, it is possible that Ella’s broad presumption about a lot of women displaying negative attitudes may have been representative of her own feeling of being overwhelmed by social interactions incongruent to her own. She alluded to her misguided perception that the majority of people pursuing STEPS might be like her. However, upon witnessing the multiple relationship constructs within the STEPS context, she was taken aback by the reality that she was actually in the minority when it came to the marital status of those in her STEPS class. Substantiating this is a researcher’s journal entry noting that Ella almost felt the need to apologise for her traditional marital status.

**In summary**

The presumption borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. These include Ella’s broad generalisations about others (a lot of women in our group; female and male perspectives; women returning to the workforce) and in her construction and fore-grounding of her own marital status as the preferred social norm (married; happy; secure; helpful; strong; good). Further evidence of the presumption borderland Discourse was indicated by her repetitive assumptions of knowledge about certain social aspects (optimistic viewpoint; see the positive viewpoints; give different views; give all views; both female and male perspectives). Critically reflective moments in Ella’s data surround her repetitive use of ocular metaphors that indicated the cognitive dimension of Ella’s processing of new knowledge. Her adoption of a ‘helicopter’ stance (give all views; see the positive viewpoints; give different views) and the ambivalence she experienced at this time (hopefully I contribute; I feel from this; I find) masked the tension she experienced when her perception of herself as a learner was challenged.

**A defensiveness borderland Discourse**

_They think I don’t know ‘cause I haven’t been there._ (EI3)

Ella’s ongoing tension between Discourses of her upbringing and the Discourses she confronted in STEPS was indicative of what can transpire when one’s unquestioned habits of mind (Cranton, 2006, p. 28) are challenged by a new or different perspective. As Ella tried to assimilate alternative perspectives related to certain social practices, contrary to earlier positioning of herself and her family as the preferred social norm, she mobilised a defensiveness borderland Discourse:
**Julie:** How have your views been challenged by Language and Learning?

**Ella:** My views have been challenged by people who keep a closed mind and who experience traumatic relationships. A few of the women in our group have been through traumatic times and a couple of times I have spoken up but get shot down. They think I don’t know ‘cause I haven’t been there. (EI3)

Embedded in Ella’s words was a sense of emotional intensity. Noticeable was her repeated use of *traumatic* when describing the relationships of other class members, an indication that classroom dialogue had enabled her to perceive what it might be like to experience marital relationships different from her own. In metaphorical terms, she likened this experience to an arduous trial, and in drawing on such combative language – *challenged, closed, traumatic, shot down,* she unconsciously exposed her perception about the inability of some of the women to accept her claims. It is interesting that she interpreted *challenged* in a negative, threatening manner rather than as something she might have been advantaged by. In this respect, she was markedly different from Bert who initially seemed to be threatened by challenge, yet over time became transformed.

Ella’s reference to getting *shot down* when speaking up in class about certain issues indicated her perception that she had been silenced by some class members. This may have related to perceived feeling of contempt regarding Ella’s projection of a position of privilege surrounding her traditional family, and her presumption to know what a *bad relationship* was like. Rather than positioning herself legitimately and honestly and admitting to having no firsthand knowledge of what a *bad* relationship might be like, became defensive and apportioned blame to others. She expressed indignation at the possibility that others might think she did not know how they felt. Again, Ella was confronted with a perspective outside her own realities, and rather than acquiesce and accept her shortcomings in this area, she positioned herself in a defensive way. Her reaction to this disorienting event exposed a discrepancy between what she had always assumed to be true (Cranton, 2002, 2006) and what she was observing.

A statement from Ella’s final interview was indicative that some critical self-reflection had occurred for she came to revise or broaden her somewhat narrow perception of contemporary family units:
I have learnt about the diversity of uni lives – what I thought was a normal home life and family structure was found to be the minority in general. (ER)

Further moves in Ella’s data revealed that being exposed to the social relationships of others in her class was problematic for her:

There was a lot of bickering and lack of tact being displayed in our classroom. There were a lot of needy people in our group and I found that I didn’t have time to give to them. (E13)

A researcher journal entry at this time captures the tension she was experiencing:

Ella appeared quite affronted by some of the conversations with her class peers today and seems to be a little isolated by the group. She seemed ill at ease and isolated herself by moving to another classroom table.

Data findings above suggest that Ella was transferring some of her own misgivings and anxiety to her perception of what was occurring within the class group in terms of relationship dynamics. In lamenting that she didn’t have time to give to them, it was perhaps the gendered processes of caring for others (Reay, Ball & David, 2002, p. 17) that operated powerfully in Ella’s perception that the needy people both wanted and needed her help, and that she had a certain responsibility in having to care for them. Similar to Barb, her perception of classroom dynamics gave rise to tension.

Ella’s move is consistent with the omniscient role she configured earlier; however, in this instance, she constructed a physical and ideological distance between herself and the needy people, and in an objective way, perceived it as yet another task that needed to be accommodated in to her busy schedule. Ella’s perception of deprivation may have been an indication of a heightened sense of awareness that her own stress was manifesting at this time in coping with the end of STEPS pressures and tensions. Her “limited emotional capital” (Reay, 2000, p. 16) was by no means uncharacteristic of many mature age learners who engage in formal study contexts (Fairchild, 2003; Reay, 2000) and try to make sense of new meaning about self and others.

In summary

The defensiveness borderland Discourse has certain characteristics that enable it to become known from the text. These can be found in Ella’s deployment of emotive...
language (closed mind; traumatic relationships; traumatic times; shot down) and her self-focused articulations (I have spoken; they think I don’t know; my views have been challenged; what I thought was normal). Further evidence of the defensiveness borderland Discourse was manifested by Ella’s privileging of her domestic status (normal) to stigmatise the status of some others (needy). Critically reflective moments are evidenced through Ella’s dramatic language (challenged; closed mind; traumatic; shot down) as her perception of herself as a learner was challenged and transformed (I have learnt; what I thought; found to be).

5.7 Borderland Discourses of Ella’s transformation

In concluding this analysis and discussion section related to Ella, evidence of transformed perspectives of self as learner were evident in the contradictory Discourses she mobilised, in addition to the intense emotion she made manifest when long held perceptions of herself as a learner were challenged, critiqued and transformed. These contradictory Discourses provided evidence of the confusion and uncertainty she experienced when her perception of herself as a learner was unsettled, a phase integral to personal transformation. While Ella’s perspective transformation was not as evident as Barb and Bert’s, this may have been due to her conservative family background and her more reserved nature. However, there are clear parallels to findings related to Barb and Bert, in addition to other findings:

- The role of context played an important part in Ella’s experiences of personal transformation. However, rather than focusing on the supportive context that Bert experienced, for Ella, immersion in the STEPS context exposed her to social norms incongruent to her own, setting in motion a series of incidents that unsettled and challenged many of her long held perceptions of herself as a learner. Her conventionality borderland Discourse added momentum to the defensiveness borderland Discourses and the betrayal borderland Discourse indicated that Ella did not ultimately experience STEPS in the positive way Bert did.

- Similar to findings about Barb’s and Bert’s experiences of personal transformation, Ella’s learning journey was characterised by contradiction and strong emotion when some of her personal subjectivities conflicted with some of the subjectivities of her class peers. The betrayal and defensiveness borderland Discourses emerged to make known Ella’s affront and confusion about moralistic issues. Unlike Barb and Bert, Ella expressed little overt joy or empowerment as a result of her engagement in STEPS but
her silence about more positive aspects does not mean she did not experience transformative learning.

- Ella, like Barb, preferred to work alone as she integrated her role of student into her multiple life roles. In the final stages of STEPS, Ella, like Barb, withdrew from the class group, focusing on her necessity to complete STEPS in a solitary way. This need for independence and solitude was somewhat at odds with Bert, who, in the closing weeks of STEPS, found great solace and support in the group, positioning the class as akin to family. Nevertheless, it highlights the issue that the contemporary focus on group work should not override the need for attention on pedagogical practices that cater for the diverse learning needs and preferences of all mature age learners.

- In a noticeable way, the presumption borderland Discourses revealed that one cannot possibly claim to have firsthand knowledge of an experience unless one has truly lived it. Even then, each individual will experience ‘it’ in a different way. Claims made about knowing what an experience might be like without having been ‘in’ the experience thus hold no substance. Experiences are stored in memory, and memory is “the embodiment of emotion tied to an experience – not just “what happened” but ‘how my body reacted to what happened’” (Taylor, 2006, p. 79). Thus one has to be ‘in’ the experience and not presume, as Ella did, to know what it actually felt like, which is significant in terms of the phenomenological dimension of learning.

5.8 Discussion

This chapter has presented the analysis and discussion of data related to three participants who engaged in the thirteen week STEPS program, and for research purposes, the week beyond. It has also briefly discussed a number of commonalities across the three participants. Transformative learning theory and the borderland Discourses have provided a theoretical lens through which the research questions have been addressed. The first research question asked 1.) What perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by a group of mature age learners engaged in an Enabling program? The second question asked: 2.) In what ways does transformative learning theory explain these perceptions?
In terms of the first research question, the perceptions of self as learner were made manifest by the three participants in their words, actions and silences. As the participants’ personal subjectivities came into contact with their student subjectivities and other Discourses of the STEPS context, borderland Discourses were created, indicative of the various tensions that ensued for each participant. These borderland Discourses therefore represent valid depictions of the transformative learning processes entailed in re-conceptualisations of self as learner that were experienced by each participant as they built bridges between their old and new ways of knowing (Alsup, 2006). Table 5.4 recapitulates the borderland Discourses that were mobilised by each participant as manifestations of self as learner.

**Table 5.4: The participant’s borderland Discourses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barb</th>
<th>Bert</th>
<th>Ella</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unworthiness</td>
<td>resistance</td>
<td>conventionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronisation</td>
<td>escapism</td>
<td>betrayal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
<td>disarmourment</td>
<td>presumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>conflict</td>
<td>defensiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fervour</td>
<td>empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disenchantment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second research question asked in what ways transformative learning theory may explain the varied perceptions of self as learner manifested by the participants. The research findings suggest that transformative learning theory, in the main, has proven to be a valid framework to explain the learners’ transformations in how they perceived themselves as learners. Evidence of the three phases espoused by Cranton (2006), namely: 1. a disorienting event; 2. questioning assumptions and perspectives; and 3. discourse, dialogue, are evident in the findings of the research in this thesis. However, transformative learning theory does not fully account for the emotional manifestations each participant made known during their transformative learning experiences. The borderland Discourses presented in Table 5.4 depicts the
diverse range of emotions experienced by the participants during their time in STEPS. Each borderland Discourse reflected how the participants ‘felt’ when various disorienting events (Cranton, 2006) unsettled their perceptions of themselves as learners. As each participant came to critique long held personal assumptions and perceptions and engage in discourse and dialogue with others (Cranton, 2006), they came to conceptualise new knowledge and meaning about themselves as learners. This was found to occur over varying periods of time, substantiating the claim by those who aspire to the constructivist-developmental conception of transformative learning theory, such as Cranton (2006), Daloz, (2000), Kegan (2000) and Kathleen Taylor (2000).

A further finding in this study relates to individual trajectories of personal change. The borderland Discourses mobilised by the participants are testimony to the erratic, contradictory and ‘messy’ nature of transformative learning (Dirkx, 1997). These borderland Discourses are conceptual representations of the emotion that accompanied the meaning making process as each of the three participants’ long held individual perceptions were challenged, critiqued and transformed. Borderland Discourses thus serve to illustrate that emotions are the overt conduit through which the meaning making that accompanies transformative learning may be made known.

The borderland Discourses presented in Table 5.4 attest to the significantly personal nature of transformative learning. While this experience was empowering for Barb and Bert, at times it was also frustrating and anxiety-provoking for them. For Ella, and at times for Barb, it was somewhat of a solitary journey. For all three participants, there were risks and tensions as they negotiated the tensions between their personal Discourses and Discourses of STEPS. The borderland Discourses also evidenced the contradiction and defensiveness that was manifested in varying degrees by each of the participants as their perceptions of themselves as learners became transformed. Ironically, despite the very personal nature of transformative learning, findings in this thesis indicate that the participants were not always cognisant of their own personal transformations; often it was others who first noticed their transformation.

The findings of this research have also exposed some commonalities with previous research related to the learning experiences of mature age learners in Enabling programs or similar contexts (See Chapter Two). These commonalities include:
• an acknowledgment that when they become ‘students’, many mature age learners typically experience tension between their multiple social roles and identities
• engagement in an Enabling programs impacts on the mature age learner in terms of their perceptions of self as learner
• the role of family and friends in ‘making or breaking’ the study experience for the mature age learner is significant
• lack of confidence can be experienced by mature age learner upon their engagement in an Enabling program
• engagement in an Enabling program can be an emotion-laden experience for some mature age learners.

In addition to the commonalities iterated above, some points of departure have emerged from the research in this thesis. These findings are that:

• the passage of time is pivotal to the mature age learner’s ability to assimilate new knowledge about self as learner while engaged in an Enabling program.
• experiences of personal change for mature age learners can entail a broad range of emotion
• some mature age learners who engage in an Enabling program show a strong preference for a more solitary formal learning experience and are less inclined or willing to embrace the peer learning group.
• some social practices associated with traditional gender roles are not always accurate in determining the ways in which the mature age learner’s will engage in an Enabling program
• context is a vital consideration in creating ‘safe’ environments in which ample opportunities exist for mature age learners to examine perception of self as learner without threat or fear.
• the transformative learning trajectory of the mature age learner in an Enabling program can be contradictory, erratic and ‘messy’.

5.9 Summary

The problem of identifying what is and what is not transformative learning remains contested in the field. However, the analysis and discussion of the data presented in this chapter has revealed that for each of the three mature age participants, the process of transformative learning was evident. Personal transformations were manifested in the participants’ contradictory and often complex articulations of
perceptions of themselves as learners, in their reactions to the personal and social challenges confronted during their engagement in STEPS and in their multi-dimensional responses to challenges imposed by the broader realm of the institutionalised educational context. While not necessarily new findings in the field of transformative learning, the integral role of emotion in transformative learning, the need for the passage of time in which to make sense of new meaning about self as learner, the erratic and contradictory pattern of transformative learning and the significant role that context plays in the transformative learning process, have all been found in this thesis to substantiate transformative learning theory as a valid means of explaining personal change in mature age learners.

Findings from this thesis indicate that borderland Discourses represent a conceptually effective way of demonstrating the emotional tension that surrounds the meaning making process when long held perceptions of self as learner are challenged, critiqued and transformed. Emotion may be conceptualised as the conduit through which transformative learning can be made manifest. Furthermore, the identification and analysis of borderland Discourses in this thesis provides some sense of the erratic, contradictory, messy and highly personal learning journey that transformative learning can be.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, begins by taking the findings established in this chapter and describing their significance to the theory of transformative learning. Following this is an elaboration of four implications for practice in Enabling programs.
Chapter 6  Conclusions

6.1 Overview

This thesis is based on a case study that examined the perceptions of self as learner for a small group of mature age learners engaged in an Enabling program. From the analysis and discussion in Chapter 5, this chapter presents the significance of the findings of the case study for transformative learning theory. Premised on such knowledge from the case study, the chapter also explains three implications for policy in Enabling education and then describes four implications for pedagogical practices in Enabling programs.

6.2 Theoretical significance

The inclusive conception of transformative learning theory as espoused by Cranton (2006)\(^{66}\) has allowed for the application of the research questions in this thesis, namely to explore the manifestations of perceptions of self as learner and to investigate how transformative learning theory accounts for those perceptions. Four findings in this thesis add further texture to transformative learning theory. First is in-depth knowledge about the important role emotion plays in the transformative learning experience; second is the erratic and contradictory trajectory that transformative learning can undergo; third is the passage of time for making sense of new meaning about self in the transformative learning experience; and fourth is the important role that context can play in transformative learning. More detailed descriptions of each of the four findings and their significance to transformative learning theory now follow.

The first finding in this thesis is that emotion has been systematically validated to be an integral element of transformative learning. Others (Bennetts, 2003; Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 1997, 2008; Scott, 1997; Taylor, 2001) have attested to the importance of the emotional dimension of transformative learning theory. In this thesis, the borderland Discourses were portals through which transformative learning experiences could be observed and emotions were the conduits through which the experience of transformative learning was made known. As described in Chapter 3, borderland Discourses are so named because they occur on the borders of other types of Discourses and associated subjectivities (Alsup, 2006). In this thesis, the presentation of borderland Discourses has allowed for the explication of emotion as

\(^{66}\) See page 51.
it was manifested by three participants who experienced transformative learning. In short, borderland Discourses told the story of what transformative learning ‘felt’ like by those who experienced it.

A second finding of this study is the erratic, confusing and contradictory personal nature of transformative learning. There may be typical patterns surrounding the transformative learning phases of a) disorienting events, b) questioning assumptions and perspectives and 3) discourse, dialogue and support (Cranton, 2006); however the borderland Discourses identified in this thesis depict the personal tension associated with the vacillation, confusion and contradiction that can be experienced by mature age learners as they negotiate the intersections of their multiple worlds and “multiple ways of knowing” (Alsup, 2006, p. 15). Similar to Alsup’s (2006) personal experiences in her study with pre-service teachers, I discovered that having so much personal knowledge and involvement with the participants during their thirteen week engagement in STEPS enabled me to identify times when I suspected they engaged in transformative learning. This was substantiated by the range of borderland Discourses that reflected the tension and dissonance experienced by the participants in light of new knowledge about themselves as learners. These borderland Discourses revealed that coming to transformed perceptions of self as learner was not necessarily a straight forward process and that as new Discourses merged with old, borderland Discourses were created to allow the participants to "build new bridges" (Alsup, 2006, p. 71) between their old and new ways of knowing. Engaging in this process entailed ambivalence and contradiction and was akin to critical reflection and meaning making, elements integral to most conceptions of transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003).

The third significance of this study for transformative learning theory is that the passage of time is vital in the meaning making process that accompanies a transformative learning experience. While this may span varying periods of time, the process may be just as much an unconscious one as a conscious one and may best be conceptualised as an unfolding, gradual process, comprised of contradictory layers of meaning, that when peeled back, reveal yet more and more layers of complexity. The range of borderland Discourses that were created over the time the participants were in STEPS is testimony to the ‘back and forth’ process of conceptualising new meaning about self and the processing of the personal implications of this new knowledge. However, it is at the delicate borders of
established Discourses and “seemingly conflicting discourses” (Alsup, 2006, p. 36) that transformative learning can occur.

The use of metaphor was found to be integral to the participants’ meaning making processes during their transformative learning experiences, albeit at a perhaps unconscious level. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 233) assert, “a large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives”. Over the passage of time the participants engaged in STEPS, it was found that the metaphors they employed provided insight into some of the tensions related to their transformative learning experiences. Most noticeable was Bert’s deployment of the plant metaphor and how, over time, it relayed his tense story of personal transformation and his “deep, powerful” (Cranton, 2006, p. 77) shift in how he viewed himself and his world.

The fourth point of significance for transformative learning theory is the importance of context. While this has been a focus of many others (Compton, Cox & Laanan, 2006; Cranton, 2006; Cullity, 2006; Grant & Trimmingham-Jack, 1996; Stone, 2008; Taylor, 2000), a learning environment premised on constructivist and humanist philosophies has been highlighted in this study in terms of how it can serve to enhance the mature age learner’s transformative learning experiences. However the study has also revealed the tensions that such a context can create for some mature age learners, thereby substantiating the findings of others (Cohen, 1997; Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2000). But, as Alsup (2006) points out, it is at the boundaries of the multiple Discourses in which individuals engage and come into contact with that transformative spaces can occur. This may account for a finding of significance in this study that suggests there may be gendered implications related to some individual transformative learning experiences and educational contexts premised on humanist-constructivist principles. While this is not the focus of this particular study, it does represents an area with potential for future research.

In light of the theoretical findings described above, the following section of this chapter presents implications for policy and practice in Enabling education, beginning with three implications for policy in Enabling education in Australia.

6.3 Implications for policy in Enabling education

As outlined in Chapter 1, an imminent reform of The Review of Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) relates to the target of a more equitable representation and increased participation rates by citizens from low SES
backgrounds. It is feasible to suggest that a portion of those citizens will access university via an Enabling program. Thus the key theoretical findings in this thesis have significance for the policies of Enabling education in Australia, explained as follows:

1. Policies outlining appropriate guidelines and procedures must be devised to ensure Enabling programs deliver not only the technical skills and knowledge needed to maximise opportunities for success in higher education, but also rigorous opportunities to enhance confidence through greater knowledge of self as learner.

2. Priority needs to be placed on policies that take into account the unique learning characteristics of mature age learners and ensure the provision of meaningful and effective Enabling programs that adequately prepare them for the variety of higher education learning contexts they are likely to encounter. The curriculum of Enabling programs will therefore require continued collaborative consultation with university executive, lecturers, tutors, Enabling educators, mature age learners and community stakeholders who might include potential Enabling students. In consultation, the curriculum of Enabling programs could be conceptualised, trialled, adapted, implemented and evaluated. This would require policies that ensure a financial and strategic commitment by universities offering Enabling programs, operationalised through internal or federal funding. Without such policies, the status and recognition that has been lacking in Enabling education may persist.

3. Policies surrounding research opportunities for Enabling educators need to be aligned with those of their university colleagues. This could allow for an increase in research about exemplary curriculum and pedagogical practices in Enabling contexts. Potentially, the findings of such research would be instrumental in informing policies related to the design and delivery of future Enabling programs. Ideally, this may result in institutional acknowledgement of a) the important role emotion plays in the conceptualisation of new knowledge about self as learner and b) the importance of ‘safe’ and supportive contexts in which learners can reflect on their perceptions of self as learner and gain a greater understanding of the transformative learning they may personally experience.
6.4 Implications for practice in Enabling programs

While the findings in this thesis have significance for transformative learning theory and implications for policy in Enabling education, there are also some implications for practice in Enabling programs. In light of the borderland Discourses named in this study, the following section presents some implications for the design and delivery of Enabling programs in Australia. To assist in the conceptualisation of this, Figure 6.1 *Emotions, borderland Discourses and implications* outlines the most obvious emotions that made each borderland Discourse known. However the emotions are not mutually exclusive to each borderland Discourse.

Table 6.1: *Emotions, borderland Discourses and implications*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions of the Discourses</th>
<th>Borderland Discourses</th>
<th>Implications for practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>confusion; anxiety; fear; frustration; self-doubt; powerlessness; lack of confidence; uncertainty; confusion; vulnerability; contradiction; despair; ambivalence; uncertainty; hopelessness; confidence; pride; fear</td>
<td>resistance conflict escapism conventionality disarmourment defensiveness</td>
<td>1. Adoption of curriculum and pedagogical practices premised on developmental-constructivist principles that allow time for meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustration; confusion; hurt; mental &amp; physical fatigue; disempowerment; fear; low self-concept; anger; personal affront; disbelief; low self esteem;</td>
<td>uncertainty disenchantment ostracism betrayal unworthiness conflict</td>
<td>2. Use of pedagogical tools and curriculum that inform mature age learners that encourage transformative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ignorance; pride; disdain confusion; frustration; contradiction; aggression; low self-concept; anger; rejection</td>
<td>presumption assertiveness patronisation</td>
<td>3. Acknowledgment by educators and institutions of tensions related to multiple social roles many mature age learners fulfil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excitement; acuity; hope; pride; safety; elevated confidence; increased self-esteem; contradiction; positivity; trepidation</td>
<td>anticipation revelation fervour empowerment</td>
<td>4. Provision of formal learning contexts that optimise the potential of all mature age learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section elaborates on each of the four implications for the design and delivery of Enabling programs. It is only through the experiences of the mature age
learners I have witnessed in STEPS over eight years that I am able to propose those implications. Such experiences have led me to believe that it is through transformation of self as a learner that mature age learners are going to be able to confidently embark on higher education.

**Curriculum and pedagogical practices premised on developmental-constructivist principles that allow time for meaning making**

The borderland Discourses described in this thesis indicates that the passage of time plays a significant role in the provision of opportunities for the mature age learner to make sense of new knowledge about themselves as learners. Meaning is filtered through the memories that individuals have accumulated over their lifetime of experiences, complete with the ruptures and conflicts that have accompanied some of those life experiences. Time in the discursive borderland provides the ‘space’ in which old ways of knowing clash with new meaning of self, leading to the critique and revision of long held perceptions. Cognitive development is a continuous process (Kegan, 2000) and as Daloz (2000) reminds us, many mature age learners who re-engage with formal education are between phases of development. Furthermore, mature age learners in Enabling programs typically come from vastly different backgrounds, each with different cognitive abilities, methods of learning and time frames in which they will experience competency and success in the formal learning context (Cantwell, 2004). Thus, more flexible courses of study that are not restricted by time schedules could be advantageous in allowing the mature age learner to conceptualise new knowledge within more personal parameters. Taking care not to overload the curriculum is a step in that direction.

Other significant measures to allow for the period of time for meaning making can be embedded in classroom pedagogical practices. This acknowledgement of personal issues such as age and life cycle stage (Darab, 2004) is important for educators to consider. Curriculum matter could be shaped in a less prescriptive, objective way to allow for opportunities to build on the interests, prior knowledge, skills, experiences and motivations of the mature age learner. The *Language and Learning* course in STEPS is designed with this in mind, the focus being the engagement of its mature age learners in relevant, meaningful learning. With a strong concentration on contemporary social issues, *Language and Learning* encourages and actively engages learners in the exploration and critical appraisal of many and varied perspectives on societal issues. While there is some formality around assessment dates, there is flexibility and negotiation for those learners
needing extra time, assistance or consideration. Such an approach addresses Dirkx’s (1998, p. 4) claim about a lack of “a distinct and clearly articulated framework” and difficulties surrounding the promotion of suitable pedagogies and models to support a less rational conception of transformative learning.

**Use of pedagogical tools and curriculum that inform mature age learners that encourage transformative learning**

Emotions are inextricably entwined in the process of assimilating new knowledge about self as learner. Emotional highs and lows (Bennetts, 2003) can both cause and be caused by the “contradictory and volatile” (Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill, 2002, p. 65) ways in which many mature age learners respond when processing new perceptions of themselves as learners. Thus educators in Enabling contexts need to make their mature age learners aware that at times their learning engagement will more than likely be problematic and confusing, yet will also be personally rewarding. Furthermore, educators need to assure their learners that this can be a typical pattern in the personal change process. Such an explanation may be reassuring for the mature age learner who can be encouraged to see that learning is a holistic experience comprised of cognition, emotion, spirit, soul, intuition and imagination. Such an appreciation of our whole selves, argues Dirkx (2001, 2006) helps us to learn about our relationships within the broader world. The STEPS approach to accept emotional manifestations as part of the learning process to some extent addresses concerns by those such as Dirkx (1997, 2001, 2008) who laments the lack of attention to learning environments that promote an extrarational conception of transformative learning theory.

A more active approach to catering for the emotional dimension of learning can be achieved if educators enhance the learning experience by being authentic (Cranton, 2006) in their teaching practices. Grant and Trimingham-Jack (1996, p. 178) suggest “mutuality and equality of relationships” between educators and their mature age learners. They also call for accessible, open and honest communication, citing these as advantageous in creating authentic learning contexts. This may in turn draw the educator’s attention to their own unconscious values and beliefs and the pervasiveness of their power (Cranton, 2006) in the classroom. Such a plan of action addresses limitations of the constructivist-developmental conception of transformative learning in that it raises concerns related to the strong focus on rational thought in higher education classroom settings and power issues in the educational setting.
Finally, in embedding adult learning principles in their pedagogical practices and classroom interactions, educators may be able to reduce emotional stress for their mature age learners. By grounding new concepts and knowledge in meaningful, relevant experiences that the learner can relate to and build upon, mature age learners can see the value in the study in which they invest time and energy. This in some ways would address the concerns of Cullity (2006) and Debbenham and May, (2004) whose concerns relate to the lack of awareness of mature age learning attributes in higher education. Furthermore, the use of contemporary social issues for classroom discussion and debate, opportunities for individual and group work and strategies to gain more insight into learning preferences can be also be meaningful learning experiences for the mature age learner. When given opportunities to build upon their existing skills and knowledge they also have opportunities to build their confidence. One way of encouraging critical self-reflection for the mature age learner can be through the use of metaphors such as The Hero’s Journey as a way to explain that periods of significant personal growth and change are more often than not accompanied by challenge and tension. Mature age learners could also be encouraged to identify and deconstruct some of the metaphors they use both consciously and unconsciously when reflecting on their learning experiences and transformative learning.

**Acknowledgment by educators and institutions of tensions related to multiple social roles many mature age learners fulfil**

Undertaking an Enabling program can set up tension for many mature age learners who are busy juggling the complexities of their multiple life roles and associated identities. Many contend with issues described in Chapter 2, such as lack of time, maintaining a balance between the needs of study, home, family, civic duties and other responsibilities, and in the case of the findings in this thesis, changes in family relationships. Compounding these issues can be the apprehension and fear that many mature age learners experience upon their re-engagement with a formal learning context (Cantwell, 2004; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Cullity 2005, 2006, 2007). The findings in this thesis show that collectively or individually, such issues can create emotional stress for the mature age learner. Thus the curriculum of Enabling programs should ideally be relevant and effective and the flexibility of multiple entry or exit points should, within reason, accommodate the interruptions to study caused by the tensions surrounding other life roles and responsibilities fulfilled by the mature age learner.
For various reasons, many mature age learners who enrol in Enabling programs have not typically completed formal schooling. Thus pedagogical approaches and classroom environments need to be designed to ensure those teaching and learning practices that may have rendered some learners' prior schooling experiences as negative are not replicated. Instead, mature age learners can be encouraged to deconstruct any negative perceptions and expectations of classrooms of the past and maximise their opportunities to engage more positively within the Enabling learning context. Furthermore, options that suit the learning needs, styles and preferences of the mature age learner can be accommodated in pedagogical practices and assessment regimes whenever possible, rather than the imposition of rigid time frames and confining assessment structures. The Language and Learning course represents exemplary practice in focus on encouraging students to reflect on past learning experiences and through the identification and consolidation of existing learning strengths and preferences, conceptualise new learning potentials.

The challenge for institutions in creating effective Enabling programs for mature age learners entails the organisation of a better ‘fit’ between academic protocols and the higher education needs of mature-age learners. Given that many Enabling contexts are largely comprised of mature age learners and the fact that many universities still tailor their marketing and social activities to a younger demographic, thoughtful consideration of more inclusive strategies could be beneficial in catering to the mature age learner cohort.

Finally, educators and university administrators need to be mindful of the effects of heavy study loads and assessment expectations when designing Enabling curricula. This includes a consideration of mismatches that can occur in the lack of exposure some Enabling students have to the kinds of learning demanded in Enabling programs. To address this issue, systematic strategies are required to continually evaluate pedagogical and bureaucratic practices. Adaptations to curriculum and assessment may occur through critical review to ensure that coursework has meaningful and practical application. An example of this is the annual STEPS retreat\(^\text{67}\) when all those teaching in the STEPS program converge to discuss

\(^{67}\) Held yearly, the STEPS retreat brings together 32 STEPS educators from Rockhampton’s regional campuses for a three day period. During this time, administrative and pedagogical practices are evaluated and discussed. Curriculum matters are discussed in a collegial, collaborative way. Necessary changes are made to assessment items, literature used in instruction is updated and feedback from students regarding curriculum and other STEPS related matters are discussed and taken into consideration.
possible improvements, additions and adaptations to the curriculum of the four courses.

Provision of formal learning contexts that optimise the potential of all mature age learners

The range of borderland Discourses discussed in this thesis indicates that context plays a vital role in facilitating the transformative learning process. Integral to the process of challenging perceptions of self as learner is a context that espouses adult learning principles and provides support and encouragement to assist the mature age learner in experiencing both challenge and safety. Facilitating this can be pedagogical activities and foci that expose mature age learners to worldviews contrary to their own. Complementing this would be daily interactions, discourse and dialogue with class members who may be from different socio-economic, religious, cultural and other backgrounds. In such a context, the mature age learners’ perceptions can be challenged and stretched in terms of their long held beliefs and perceptions about themselves and their world.

While supportive contexts and friendship and assistance from classroom peers can be highly valued (Stone, 2008), this may not always the case. Some mature age learners may not initially be drawn to a nurturing classroom environment but move progressively into the supportive context, ultimately coming to experience significant transformation in how they perceive themselves as learners. Conversely, other mature age learners may initially embrace a nurturing context, yet by their very transformation may withdraw somewhat from the class group, opting for a more solitary learning experience. The various ways in which mature age learners experience Enabling programs requires educators to be fully cognisant of pedagogical and other practices within the institution that both empower and disempower the mature age learner. Some practices encourage active and meaningful participation, but for various reasons, other practices may inhibit mature age learners in their study participation. Thus mature age learners can experience feelings of marginalisation in the learning context (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). This calls for a balance and variety in pedagogical strategies to address the different learning preferences and needs of the mature age learner.

Finally, worthy of consideration is the distinctiveness of the mature age learner. Research in the field has a tendency to problematise the shortcomings of mature age learners, but more emphasis on the “wealth of life and work experiences”
(Compton, Cox & Laanan, 2006, p. 77) this particular cohort brings to the learning environment could be beneficial. This includes their dedication, wisdom and confidence (Richardson & King, 1998). Additional to this is recognition that some mature age learners are quite adept at examining and exploiting their prior experiences in order to capitalise on and make sense of new information and situations (Compton, Cox & Laanan, 2006). Another way to focus on the uniqueness of the mature age learner is through the use of learning theories such as Howard Gardner’s (1993) Multiple Intelligence as a way to critically reflect on their many accomplishments and skills, and come to value and respect these as expressions of intelligence (Cohen, 1997).

6.5 Summary

Based on the discussion of findings in the final section of Chapter 5, this chapter has presented the significance of the findings for the theory of transformative learning. In summary, the role of emotion, time and context have been found to have significant bearing on the process of transformative learning. Also significant is that transformative learning can follow a somewhat erratic and contradictory path. Based on these theoretical findings, the second part of this chapter presented three implications for policy in Enabling education, followed by an elaboration of four implications for practice in Enabling programs. The next and final chapter, Chapter 7, concludes this thesis and presents reflections on the journey for me, the researcher.
Chapter 7  Reflections on the journey

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. If I had the opportunity to retrace my steps and travel the journey of this thesis again, there are some things I would do differently and some that would definitely stay the same. In terms of personal challenges, it may have been easier without a change in marital status, without moving house, without travelling to overseas conferences, without writing academic papers, without working full time and without trying to juggle multi-roles as mother, daughter, sister, friend, partner and so on. However, the identity embroiled in each of those roles makes me who I am, and ultimately, influenced how this thesis came to be. I would probably choose not to research those whom I taught and had frequent contact with if I had my time over again. The subjectivities around this were problematic in the sense that I found it very hard to divorce the ‘unofficial’ data uttered in more relaxed settings from the ‘official’ data generated by the formal data collection methods. Compounding this has been the intermittent contact with one of the participants over seven years since the inception of this thesis.

If I was packing essentials to take on the journey again, I would pack the same data collection methods that I utilised. The semi-structured individual and group interviews generated useful data in terms of finding out how the participants experienced their time in STEPS as it happened. However, I would include an option that allowed for a written response to the interview questions to allow the participants time for critical reflection and introspection. Not everyone responds best in the spoken interview. I would include the pre- and post-STEPS documents again, as being composed by the participants at the commencement and conclusion of STEPS yielded valuable information in terms of the changes that occurred in their perceptions of themselves as learners. And, I would definitely include the researcher’s journal, although I would adopt measures of some description to ensure a more systematic approach to ensure data from my perspective were gathered consistently across the entire research period. At times my reflections lapsed.

In making sense of the data, I would definitely include discourse analysis again, despite the trepidation and vacillation I experienced when it came to theorising about the data analysis. I knew intuitively how I wanted to analyse the data, but conceptually, I could not locate the method or means. I didn’t know what ‘it’ looked like and I felt the road map that had been guiding my journey so helpfully to that
point of the thesis had been taken by the wind. I felt like I was at the edge of the forest, hovering, not wanting to enter for fear of being totally lost. In retrospect, I can now recognise that I was in the borderland between what I was relatively comfortable with, namely the pragmatics of this thesis, and the "head hurting" stuff, the theorising and deeper level thinking that was required to analyse and make sense of the mountains of data I had managed to generate. I was perched on the threshold, unable to move forward or backwards.

For some time I wandered around in the borderland, in denial, looking for alternatives, answers, a clear road ahead. I tried many roads that looked like they were heading in the right direction, but they led to dead ends. When I finally came across borderland Discourse theory I immediately knew I was on the right track. What I knew intuitively suddenly appeared conceptually and I immediately perceived its synergistic relationship with transformative learning theory. I now had the 'clout' to account for the emotional expressions that the participants had made manifest during their learning journeys as they came to new perceptions of themselves as learners. I also had the means to make legitimate claims about the nature of that learning journey ... akin to my own learning journey ... contradictory and erratic in nature ... a bit like watching the erratic flight path of a butterfly ... gliding in to perch on the velvety petals of a flower, hovering, flitting from flower to flower in an indiscriminate, back and forth pattern ... returning to the first flower ... flying high, flying low ... and then flying away. At many times during the journey of this thesis, I have thought about the metaphor of the butterfly. Jackson's (1968, p. 166) likening of the educational process to closely resemble the flight of a butterfly rather than that of a bullet" encapsulates what ensues in transformative learning. Her analogy has been a permanent thought at the edges of my consciousness throughout my research journey.

Practical additions to my suitcase for a retrace of the research journey would include technical improvements such as more familiarity with the use of audio technology, for problems did arise with the recording of one interview, requiring re-scheduling. Electronic categorisation of the data may have been instrumental in sorting the corpus of data in a more efficient and effective way, although I doubt I would have had the same intimacy with the data had this been the case. Finally, a better system regarding version control, storing of thesis drafts and formatting of the thesis would definitely be performed more efficiently if I had my time over.
Nevertheless, as I record final thoughts I am reminded that my thesis journey is all but over but many learning journeys will follow. The irony is that as I researched and witnessed transformation in my mature age learners, I too experienced change in how I perceived myself as a learner. Other educators have noted a similar experience. Alsup (2006, p. 191) tells of the transformation she experienced as a result of researching for her book based the teacher identity development of six preservice English education teachers. She talks of this experience as sometimes “powerful and life-changing” and other times as stifling her growth, admitting that her heightened awareness of her ‘teacher self’ and its connections to her core identity were changes she experienced, thus making her a better teacher. Cranton (1997) too tells of her experiences as an educator in an adult education graduate program and how, as a result of lively conversation with her students in analysing and pondering the meaning of transformative learning theory, changed the way she worked with learners.

Cohen (1997) too is an educator who tells the story of his experience of transformative learning as a result of teaching vocational students over a semester of study. As he encouraged his students to discover strengths in their many skills and multiple intelligences that enabled them to visualise new possibilities, Cohen revealed that for every transformative experience that came to his students, it was a transformative experience for him. As he said, “as each life grew, I saw all life grow” (p. 68). In reflecting on her own transformative learning experiences, Neese (2003) talks of her transition from clinician to educator. She perceived that her formal preparation as an academic came to transform her definition of teaching, leading her to the realisation that she was her “own best resource in teaching” (Neese, 2003, p. 258) due to the personal transformation she had personally experienced.

Other educators have written of their transformative learning experience as a result of research or teaching. Upon reviewing findings of her research about identity constructions of ethnically diverse student teachers, Shaw (2007) explored the ways in which she had unknowingly neglected their unique needs. In reflecting on the barriers of her “lenses of priveleged, white, middle-class eyes” (p. 302), she became aware of the need to to advocate for ethnically diverse teachers of the future. Consequently, she made changes in her own teaching practices, giving sage advice that teachers need to be “as minful of what we are not saying and/or doing as what we consciously say and do!” (p. 302).
Spreadbury (2007) is another author who experienced transformation through research and education. She admits to being “privileged to document the transformational effect” (p. 87) of education for her research participants and speaks of the transformation she too experienced through education that “triggered a profound change in [her] view of [herself] and the world.” Although not explicitly referring to a transformation as such, Hyde’s (1994, p. 176) reflections on the process of engaging in organisational research highlights the personal difficulties she experienced in “making order out of chaos…managing emotions…[and] juggling voices, yet also conveys the transformation she experienced. She writes: “I then understood that through the journey, I had found my voice” (Hyde, 1994, p. 187).

As I conclude this thesis, I am reminded that it is always good to have an end to journey towards, but in the end, it is the journey that matters (LeGuin, 1969). This thesis has been a transformative journey for me. Not only did the participants who partook in my research transform their perceptions of themselves as learners, but I too, the teacher/researcher experienced a similar transformation in how I perceive myself as a learner. The lens through which I view the world has been significantly coloured by the privilege of walking beside a small group of mature age learners as they engaged in an Enabling program and made manifest their experiences of personal change. Such has added further dimension to the theory of transformative learning.
References


Central Queensland University. (2002). STEPS Language and learning – Immigrants into a new time. Rockhampton, Qld, Australia: Learning Support, Division of Teaching and Learning.


Coombes, P., Brennan, M., McConachie, J., & Simpson, J. (1997). “STEPS to meeting client requirements: Learning styles and open learning in an Australian university bridging course. In J. Osborne, D. Roberts, & J. Walker (Eds.), Open, flexible and distance learning: Selected papers from the 13th biennial forum of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (pp. 70–75). Launceston: The University of Tasmania.


O’Shea, S. (2007). Well, I got here ... but what happens next? Exploring the early narratives of first year female students who are the first in the family to attend university, *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association*, no. 29, April.


Rockhampton City Council (RCC). (2009). *Rockhampton community services directory 2009*. Rockhampton, Qld, Australia: RCC.


Appendices
Appendix A: Enabling/Preparatory/Bridging programs in Australian universities
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Program(s) offered</th>
<th>Length of program</th>
<th>Delivery mode</th>
<th>Study mode</th>
<th>Cost of program</th>
<th>Age requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>UPS</td>
<td>52 hours tuition</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>$795</td>
<td>1 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batchelor Institute</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Darwin</td>
<td>TEP1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Sturt</td>
<td>Pathways Program</td>
<td>2 x 17 weeks</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>fees</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQUniversity</td>
<td>STEPS LIFT WIST TEP</td>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtin</td>
<td>Uniready</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>online</td>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Cowan</td>
<td>Uni prep course</td>
<td>6 months or 1 year</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flinders</td>
<td>Foundation course</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>4 units</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>$125 per unit</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>SEET prep courses; Certificate programs</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCU</td>
<td>Uniprep</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Mature age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrobe</td>
<td>Maths &amp; Chemistry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murdoch</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>12-20 weeks</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>As for Wollongong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Offered</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Intake</td>
<td>Other Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Cross</td>
<td>Preparing for success</td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
<td>Internal &amp; external</td>
<td>Full time or part time</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine Coast un</td>
<td>Tertiary Prep Pathway</td>
<td>6 or 12 months</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Full or part-time</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>17 years and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swinburne</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Uni Prep Program</td>
<td>1 or 2 semesters</td>
<td>Internal or external</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>Mature age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UniSA</td>
<td>Foundation studies</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Internal or external</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>18 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USQ</td>
<td>TPP</td>
<td>1 or 2 semesters</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>Mature age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTS</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>3 days per week</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Mature age or 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Uni Access Program</td>
<td>14 weeks</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>$2340</td>
<td>open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Communications Learning Centre (2009) CQUniversity, Rockhampton, Queensland.
Appendix B: Ethical Certification Statement

Central Queensland University
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

The Human Research Ethics Committee is an approved institutional ethics committee constituted in accord with guidelines formulated by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and governed by policies and procedures consistent with principles as contained in publications such as the joint Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and NHMRC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice.

The Committee has considered the project described in a Request for Ethical Clearance and as detailed in this Statement, is pleased to grant ethical clearance for the nominated period of certification.

First-Named Principal Researcher: Willans, Ms Julie
Title: Degrees of participants' prospective transformation in the Language and learning course of the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) university preparatory program at CQU R'Ton Campus.

Clearance Number: 03/07-90
Period of Certification: 4 September 2003 to 31 December 2004

NOTES:

(1) This statement remains current for the period of certification on the condition that the research techniques and procedures as described in the approved Request for Ethical Clearance and attendant documentation remain unchanged. Any revisions or amendments must be brought to the attention of the Committee which will determine whether ethical clearance should continue.

(2) A further Request for Ethical Clearance must be considered and approved by the Committee in order for the project to continue after the end-date noted above. Where research is conducted without a current certification statement, an investigator will be in breach of the University’s Code of Conduct for Research and the subject of allegations of research misconduct.

Acting Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Date: 4 September 2003

Any written information provided to a participant or subject must contain the statement, "Please contact Central Queensland University's Office of Research (tel 07 4923 2607) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project."
Appendix C: Information sheet
Participants’ perspective transformation in the Language and Learning course of the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Skills (STEPS) university preparatory program at Central Queensland University’s Rockhampton campus.

Investigator
Doctor of Education Candidate
Division of Teaching and Learning
Central Queensland University
North Rockhampton, Qld. 4702
Tel: (07) 4930 9294
email: j.willans@cqu.edu.au

Supervisors
Dr Patrick Danaher
Associate Professor and Head Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development Centre
Division of Teaching and Learning Services
Central Queensland University
North Rockhampton, Qld. 4702
Tel: (07) 4930 6417
email: p.danaher@cqu.edu.au

Dr Roberta Harreveld
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Education and Creative Arts
Central Queensland University,
North Rockhampton, Qld. 4702
Tel: (07) 4922 0146
email: b.harreveld@cqu.edu.au
Dear [Name],

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of my study is to research the ways adults experience change in perspectives whilst being enrolled in the Language and Learning course of the STEPS program and how these changes may be displayed. The following will provide you with information outlining the background of the study, the procedures that will be adopted and any possible risks or side effects associated with the study.

Introduction and significance of the study

Some mature age adults who have completed STEPS tell how the course has transformed some of their personal perspectives and various aspects of their lives. The purpose of this study is therefore to document the ways in which perspective transformation are displayed by a small group of participants as they progress through the Language and Learning course of the 13 week STEPS program.

Methods

This study will be undertaken over the 13 week STEPS program in the Language and Learning course, and may extend two weeks beyond the end of the course. You will be requested to keep a daily journal or diary with your thoughts and feelings about content, ideas and information that you encounter throughout the Language and Learning course. Only you will have access to this document, but you will be encouraged to share any reflections you are comfortable with. Whenever possible, you will be requested to attend the Language and Learning lectures, tutorials, discussion groups and learning circles. You will be asked to record responses to a specific set of issues prior to and at the completion of your course. You will also be requested to participate in both individual and group interviews and discussion groups, and be willing to share your thoughts, experiences, opinions and worldviews.

Owing to the demands of your full time STEPS program, whenever possible, interviews and discussions will be within your normal hours at university, but there will always be room for flexibility to work around your needs. At random times throughout the course I will be making observations of you. These will not be obvious, and intend no anxiety or tension. It is not anticipated that this study cause
you any anxiety, embarrassment or regret, and anonymity will be of the utmost importance throughout the project. To ensure this, in the compilation of this study I will substitute your name with a pseudonym (alias name) chosen by you. If you should experience any degree of anxiety or tension with regards to your participation in the research, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your name will NOT be recorded for any purpose. **Furthermore, your participation or non-participation in the project will not affect your academic standing in any way.**

Thank-you for your participation in this study and I look forward to an open, honest relationship, one in which you will feel at liberty to record and relay reflections, responses and conversations about your learning journey.

Julie Willans

STEPS Coordinator

Central Queensland University

Rockhampton North, 4702.
Appendix D: Consent form

Anonymity

The anonymity of the results of this study is assured. Under no circumstances will your name appear in publications associated with this research. Your interview transcripts will be available to you in written form with no one else being given your interview transcripts unless you request it.

Throughout the course of the proposed research program, you are free to withdraw at any time for whatever reason.

Enquiries

Any enquiries or concerns about the proposed research can be directed to the researcher by ringing at work (07) 4930-9294, by e-mail at j.willans@cqu.edu.au or by writing to: Julie Willans, STEPS Coordinator, Division of Teaching and Learning, Central Queensland University, North Rockhampton 4702.

Freedom to Withdraw

I have read the above information. The nature, demands, risks and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I knowingly assume the risks involved, and understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit to myself. In signing this consent form I am not waiving my legal claims, rights or remedies and my participation or non-participation in the project will not affect my academic standing in any way. A copy of the signed consent form has been given to me.

NAME: ________________________________________________________________

CONTACT DETAILS: ____________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

SIGNATURE: _________________________________________________________

DATE: __________________________________________________________________
Please contact Central Queensland University’s Research Service Office (phone: 4930-9828) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project.

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and the possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised and have witnessed the above signature. I have also provided the participant with a copy of this signed consent form.

NAME: ________________________________________________________________

SIGNATURE: __________________________________________________________

DATE: __________________________________________________________________