

Transformative Adult Education: Transformative learning experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the BA for Personal and Professional Development (ALBA), All Hallows College, Dublin, on completion of their first year of studies.

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Presented in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of PhD.

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Dedication

To all those who have shared with me their stories and experiences of being an adult learner.

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Abstract

Title:

Transformative Adult Education: Transformative learning experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the BA for Personal and Professional Development (ALBA), All Hallows College, Dublin, on completion of their first year of studies.

Educational theory tells us that adults who return to formal education often experience personal transformations as a result of their engagement with the education process. This can have a profound effect on a person's self-concept, their relationships, work life choices and active participation in society. As a practicing adult educationalist I have many examples of witnessing adults experiencing personal change as a result of participation in a programme of study. Within an Irish context, the difficulty has been capturing these personal transformations in an empirical, validated, and trustworthy manner rather than as anecdotal stories. This thesis is a structured systematic research project to capture such transformations.

Through narrative interviews, the transitional and transformative experiences of thirty-two participants on the BA for Personal and Professional Development (ALBA) course were gathered, analysed and referenced to the theory of Transformative Learning and the work of Jack Mezirow. The analysis is able to confirm the existence of transformative learning and personal transformations. The results of this research show an increase in personal confidence along with broader personal, social and academic horizons. As a result of this research implications arise for education providers; most notably; students need assistance in the transition to academia; the provision of a 'Foundations' programme; and ongoing structured supports throughout their study.

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Glossary of Terms

AHC	All Hallows College
ALBA	Bachelor of Arts for Personal and Professional Development (Adult Learning Bachelor of Arts)
ALCE	Adult Literacy and Community Education
AONTAS	The National Adult Learning Organisation
APL	Approved Prior Learning
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BETI	Back to Education Initiative
BPS	British Psychological Society
BSA	British Sociological Association
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
DCU	Dublin City University
DES	Department of Education and Science
DES	Department of Education and Skills (name change in 2011)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EGF	European Globalisation Fund
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
FETAC	Further Education Training and Awards Council
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETA	Higher Education Training Awards Council
ILP	Individual Learning Pursuit
LSI	Learning Style Inventory
MAM	Master of Arts in Management
MBTI	Myers Briggs Type Indicator
NALA	National Adult Literacy Association
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCAIL	Distance Education Centre (DCU)
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
SNL	School for New Learning
SPIDAS	Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme
SRT	SR Technics
TEAGASC	The Agriculture and Food Development Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WBL	Work Based Learning

Introduction

Background to the research

From adult literacy programmes to FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) courses to undergraduate programmes, adult students who engage in education programmes, who achieve personal goals, experience personal joy and contentment. However, these personal transformations are not captured through the normal recording systems. I always felt there was something else that needed to be captured other than the academic achievement. I witnessed a change in people, I saw people grow in confidence, develop new skills and interact with the world in a brighter more secure manner. The question that haunted me was ‘how do you capture this’? After much soul searching, discussion and reading, I decided to undertake research at a PhD level. Research that will definitively tell the experiences of adult learners, research that will capture these personal transformations, research that will bring something new to the field of adult education in Ireland.

The intention of this research is to record the experience of a cohort of adult learners who are enrolled in the BA for Personal and Professional development (colloquially known as ALBA) in All Hallows College, Dublin. I will deal further with the nomenclature in chapter four, but for the ease of reference, I will use ALBA throughout. Using the methodology of ‘Narrative Inquiry’ the research will capture, evaluate and assess the transformative learning

experience by each participant and the impact this learning has on each individual at a personal, academic and social level. The analysis of data received will be conducted in a narrative format, whilst using transformative learning theory as a theoretical underpinning.

For clarity of purpose background to the research is explored under two separate but interlinked headings; personal and professional motivations.

Personal Motivation

Having worked in adult education for over a decade, in a variety of roles, I have been privileged to witness the joy and excitement of an adult learner achieving personal milestones, gaining in self-confidence and discovering the innate intelligence that had lain dormant through lack of opportunity.

As a practitioner of education, I value the role education plays in people's lives. I am conscious, that for some, formal education was halted or not completed at the level they may have wished to have achieved. Yet for all those adults who enrol in education programmes, they share a common desire to learn. The motivations which compel a person to make that first move to return to education are many and varied. For some it is to capture that which was never afforded to them, for some it is to refresh and up skill often to keep up abreast with their children's education, while for others it is a desire to gain a qualification.

There were many occasions during the past ten years when either at education conferences or staff room meetings, professionals like me would recount stories of adult learners who had made significant personal break-through in their learning and how we had witnessed personal transformations. This research is born from a personal desire to present such experiences in an academic format so that the role of adult education will be understood, appreciated and developed within the Irish education system.

Professional Motivations

Amongst professionals involved in adult-, community- and lifelong-learning there is a recurring 'gap' identified; the issue of how to record the personal growth experienced and gained through the very act of participation. How can you capture personal transformations? The difficulty in accurately recording the learner's personal achievements is unanswered. The questions I was left considering was 'How can I record these aspects of learning'? 'How can I confirm if adult and higher education is potentially transformative'?

With a background in career guidance and experience in psychometric testing I researched many and various instruments and tests used with adults. These tests record persons 'Functional Academics'. Functional Academic tests enable adults to be assessed by way of survey interview in areas such as communication skills, daily living skills and socialisation skills. For example the Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System (ABAS) examines the person's

ability to write their name and address, read menus, find a telephone number in the directory. The K-FAST test for reading and arithmetic tasks relate to everyday activities such as understanding labels on medicine bottles, following a recipe, doing a monthly budget, and making price comparisons between products. These and other similar tests focus on and identify the individual's skills in academic ability and also in the other adaptive skills areas e.g. quality of life, home living, health and safety.

While each test has positive merits, they did not, in their totality, meet the specific needs of this research. Still of the opinion that such a test was necessary, I then undertook training with the British Psychological Society which would enable me to devise my own specific test. This option would be a worthy exercise, (and possibly a separate PhD research idea), but would still not capture the internal nature of the transition experience of the adult learner.

The dilemma was to find a way to capture the personal experiences and transformations of adult learners. Standardised testing was not meeting the needs of this research. The theory of transformation and transformational learning provided a way to access the conversation regarding the experience of adult learners. Further reading discovered that narrative research had become an accepted way to conduct research, particularly in the field of adult education. And so it was that the idea to conduct research into the experiences

of a cohort of adult learners, through a method of narrative research informed by the theory of transformational learning, was developed.

The Research Focus

The focus of the research was developed to explore and to understand, the experiences of adult learners on the ALBA programme, to capture their experience if any of personal transformations and of transformational learning.

Through the narrative methodological approach, the research question would explore and discover, in a free, unfiltered way, the lived experiences of adult learners. It would allow for examination of the theory of transformation with the data from the individual narratives. It would present to the academic world findings as to whether transformational learning is experienced and personal transformations are experienced through engagement in this particular education programme. Accordingly, the research focus was designed as:

Transformative Adult Education: Transformative learning experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the BA for Personal and Professional Development (ALBA), All Hallows College, Dublin, on completion of their first year of studies.

Methodology

The methodological approach for this research is narrative inquiry as it was deemed to be best suited to capture people's experiences and is an established methodology within the field of adult education. Research by narrative

inquiry has in recent years become an accepted research methodology in various disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology and education. It is increasingly used in the area of education, adult education and lifelong learning. Thus it is an appropriate method to employ in this research. A full explanation of the methodology employed, how the research was conducted and the criteria for participation are further explained in chapter five.

Aims

In undertaking this research it was the aim of this researcher to capture the self reporting of the learners, their perception of experiencing transformational learning while participating in a specific adult learning education programme. In analysing these personal experiences, I will be looking for evidence of transformational learning in accordance with transformation theory, as framed by Mezirow, in personal, academic and social spheres.

The first aim is to establish, whether the learners recognise and/or articulate the existence of personal, academic or social transformations. Transformational theory tells us that such personal transformations take place. It is the aim of this research to ascertain such transformations from a cohort of adult learners. In discerning if such transformations took place the research will be using Mezirow's theory of transformation as the theoretical framework on which to adjudicate the findings.

The second aim of the research, again based on the Mezirow's theory of transformation, is to establish if transformational learning had taken place as a direct result of being on the ALBA course. The theory of transformation, through the lens and the work of Jack Mezirow (1978, 1985, 1990, 1991, 1997) tells us that transformative learning leads to students trying out new skills, developing wider social awareness, developing social conscience and implementing learning into action. Transformational learning is not passive; thus, if it has taken place it will be experienced by the individual. Through this research, such evidence will be established under the guidelines of the theory of transformation.

Objective

The objective of this research is primarily to provide current data of the lived experience of adult learners within an Irish setting. It will provide insight into the personal and academic learning processes that take place, thus confirming or opposing Mezirow's theory of transformation and transformative learning. As a result of gathering this information and presenting it as validated data through the process of academic research, it is envisaged that the finding will influence future education programmes established to cater for adult learners.

As the ALBA programme in All Hallows College is new to Ireland (first intake of students was in 2009). This research will discover which aspects of the ALBA programme and which personal experiences enabled or inhibited

transformational learning. In knowing this information the research will be able to provide accurate and relevant information to adult education course providers, information which will inform the structure, content and methodology of such programmes.

Justification for the research

There is undoubtedly a need within higher education and lifelong-learning for the recording of the lived experience of adult learners and the presence of transformative learning. This information will be a valuable resource within the field of adult education, as many of the current reporting systems in place focus primarily on the traditional measurable outcomes, such as certification and progression. By conducting this research at PhD level, it is my hope to be able to place meaningful research data into the public arena, thus expanding the debate on how to represent the impact of adult/higher education on an individual.

The choice of narrative inquiry as the methodology for this research is particularly appropriate, as this form of research is widely used when carrying out research in the field of education, particularly adult education (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). It is also widely used as the research methodology in sociological studies with marginalised and disadvantaged people (Elliot 2005, 2008).

Limitations and Parameters

With every piece of research there are natural and imposed limitations. This research is set in a particular place and time. While it is robust in its methodology and validity, it can not (nor does it set out to) cover all aspects of adult higher education. This research is conducted within Ireland, which has a relatively recent history of adult education, most of which has developed from community and women's-based projects. It is research within the field of adult higher education, which is but one discipline within the wider field of education. The research is focused on one specific programme of education, namely the Adult Learning BA, in one specific college, All Hallows.

There is delimitation too regarding the cohort of students interviewed as part of this research. Criteria were set that both included and excluded students. Of those who met the criteria less than half (thirty-eight percent) were interviewed, chapter five explains in detail the criteria, the total number of students who met the criteria and the number interviewed for this research. The research does not address sociological or historical questions regarding adult education in Ireland. It does not discuss the sociological background of the interviewees or focus on their personal lives. The focus is on their experience of being in an education programme designed for adult learners. Adult or mature students studying on traditional undergraduate courses are not part of this study.

At a more personal level, as a researcher I must acknowledge my own limitations. This is the first time I have used narrative research methodology. Given that I am working full-time while studying part-time. There are time and financial constraints on my availability as a researcher. With regard to the ALBA programme, I was a member of both the ALBA programme board and the ALBA advisory committee for two years prior to ALBA enrolling their first students. I subsequently resigned from these positions when deciding to undertake this research. I believe strongly that ALBA is a model for adult education programmes to follow. I acknowledge that I have invested time, energy and emotion into the development of ALBA. I am passionate in my belief that this model of education is effective. I have on two occasions visited DePaul University, Chicago, to witness and study how the School for New Learning runs its undergraduate programmes (the model on which ALBA is based). I am bringing this passion and belief with me into this research (issues of ethics and personal limitations are discussed in chapter five).

The parameters of this research are detailed in chapter five and concern themselves mainly with the decision to limit the research to one set of students in one specific education programme, namely ALBA. A full description of criteria and selection are recorded in chapter five, research methods, along with a detailed discussion on the limitations and parameters of this research.

Research Outline

The introduction to this thesis outlines the background to the research, the personal and professional motivations. The research question is outlined and explained as is the justification for conducting the research. The Limitations and Parameters are introduced along with the chosen methodology.

Chapter One, Adult Education: Mapping the Terrain discusses and explores the concept of adult education, its historical and philosophical foundations. It also introduces the reader to the seminal thinkers and emerging themes within this field, in particular, the work of John Dewey, Eduard Lindeman, Paulo Freire, Malcolm Knowles and Jack Mezirow. Transformational learning is introduced here as one of the emerging themes and is developed further in chapter three.

Chapter Two, Adult Learning explores the issue of what it means to be an adult, the developmental issues and understanding intelligence within the adult context. How adults learn and the various methodological understanding and approaches are examined and presented within the context of the overall sphere of adult higher education.

Chapter Three, Transformation in Education details his phases of transformation and highlights the key elements within transformation theory; particularly the concept of changes in a person's meaning perspectives, habits

of mind and meaning schemes and transformative learning, with particular reference to the work of Jack Mezirow.

Chapter Four, Setting the Scene: The Situational Context the focus of this chapter is to present the situational context for the research. Having earlier, in chapters one and two, discussed the nature of adult education, the attention now is to focus on the Irish context. Particular reference is focused on the development of the ALBA course in All Hallows College, the links that All Hallows College has developed with Dublin City University (DCU) and De Paul University, Chicago, USA.

Chapter Five, Research Methodology sets out how the data collection consisted of narrative, qualitative interviews with students enrolled in the Adult Learning BA, in All Hallows College. It explores the use of narrative as a methodology and outlines its advantages and limitations. This chapter gives a very detailed account of how the research was conducted, the handling of the data and the analysis process.

Chapter Six, Research Findings and Analysis presents the findings of the research in a narrative format, drawing on the reported experiences of the interviewees. The findings are presented under a number of themed headings, for example motivation for returning to study, the impact of being a student, and students' experience of the ALBA programme. Findings relating to

transformation are examined under three major areas: personal, academic and social, reflecting the theoretical perspectives of Mezirow's transformative learning theory.

Chapter Seven, Conclusions and Recommendations nine conclusions are presented, drawn from interpretation of the findings. The seven recommendations lay out clear challenges for ALBA and other higher educational providers as a result of this research.

Conclusion

This introduction has set the ground map for the research. There is a clear relationship between each chapter, with each one building on that which precedes it. The introduction sets out the background and motivation for conducting the research and a brief description of each of the chapters. The following chapters will now explore first the world of adult education, followed by the theory of transformation and transformative learning. The context of the research is set out both in an exploration of adult education in Ireland and All Hallows College and through the discussion on methodology. Finally the process of data analysis along with the presentation of findings, conclusions and recommendations are laid out in a clear and descriptive manner which is appropriate to the narrative research methodology.

Having presented the 'road map' of this research it is time to begin the journey into the world of adult education and first explore the meaning of this term and adopt a working definition for the purpose of this research. Chapter one will provide us with an overview of adult education; what it is, who the main theorists are and what are the emerging themes which need to be understood.

Chapter One: Adult Education: Mapping the Terrain

1. Introduction

This brief introduction presents the broad picture regarding the nature and context of adult education. It provides a ‘setting of the scene’ of the landscape that is adult education. It establishes and recognises adult education as an independent body within the world of education and academia. In providing a ‘backdrop’ this chapter is building the foundations for that which will follow: a deeper analysis of aspects of adult education, most notably adult development and learning in chapter two followed by in-depth review of literature as to the nature of transformation theory and transformative learning in chapter three.

The first section of this chapter (through discussion on the nature, definitions and distinctions of the term ‘education’) is an attempt to answer the question “what is adult education?” It includes a working definition as an understanding of adult education for the purpose of this research. This section also considers the context in which adult education has developed and been understood. This is carried out by looking at the historical and the philosophical foundations of adult education. The second section concentrates on the seminal thinkers appropriate to this research, starting with Dewey, Lindeman, Freire, Knowles and Mezirow. Section three focuses on the themes emerging from the first two sections of the chapter. A short description of each is offered as a consensus view drawn from the theorists and authors studied.

In presenting this context of adult education, various definitions are presented along with the historical and philosophical development. The seminal thinkers and theorists within the field are introduced as are emerging themes within adult education.

1.2 Adult Education

Just as our understanding of humankind and society has developed throughout history, so too has our understanding of the education of adults. Historical events and societal changes are reflected in the changing nature of adult education. Today when we refer to adult education, we can be referring to a myriad of educational aspects within the field of education; e.g. ongoing education, further education, continuing education, basic education, education and training amongst others.

There is a general consensus amongst adult educators that the year 1926 could be considered the foundation stone of modern adult education. It is this year that saw Lindeman's (1926) seminal text, '*The Meaning of Adult Education*' published. That year also saw the establishment of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE). The importance of 1926 can be summed up by Peters and Jarvis (1991):

Although writings on the education of adults have appeared throughout history, the year 1926 can be argued to have been central to the establishment of the adult education professional literature in North America...the founding of American

Association for Adult Education...the publication of Lindeman's book 'The Meaning of Adult Education' (1991:122).

While 1926 may be a reference point for a current (Western) discussion on adult education, many authors and theorists reference the development of adult education throughout history, to include Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Warnock 1977), ancient Egypt (Merriam and Brockett 2007), and the Christian Bible. What can be drawn from this is to acknowledge that the education of adults has been part of society in varying forms throughout the history and development of human kind.

According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), adult education is usually perceived as something related to basic skills, leisure activities or job training (2007:78). This reflects the traditional view of adult education being synonymous with skills and training, as noted by Jarvis (1985) who recalls Jensen (1964) claimed that adult education is focused more on the practical skills rather than the theoretical. Peters and Jarvis (1991) acknowledge the two dimensional aspects of adult education:

Adult education is both a field of practice and a field of study, but these two aspects of adult education are not altogether separate (1991:15).

Continuing with the dual dimension of adult education, Rogers (1996) explored the relationship between adult education and the formal education

system. He asserted that (a) adult education is a form of extension of the formal education system, to help those who ‘missed out’, and (b) that adult education is concerned with personal fulfilment (1996:34).

These two aspects reflect the strong tradition that has developed in the West regarding an understanding of adult education. However, adult education is much more complex, subtle and diverse. Courtney (1989) suggested that we can explore adult education from five basic and overlapping perspectives.

1. The work of certain institutions and organisations.
 2. A special kind of relationship that requires conscious effort to learn.
 3. A profession or scientific discipline, an emphasis on training or preparation.
 4. Stemming from an historical identification with spontaneous social movements... developing activities...political parties...women’s movement.
 5. Distinct from other kinds of education by its goals and functions.
- Courtney (1989:17-23)

Lindeman (1926) too speaks of the central role of adult education as to ‘discover the meaning of experience’ (1926:33). This leads to a further aspect of adult education, which is attributed to Malcolm Knowles (1992), the development of ‘andragogy’, the teaching and learning of adults through acknowledging their experience as having a central role. As Knowles says: ‘To adults, their experience is who they are’ (1992:58). The theme of andragogy is developed in a later section of this chapter. What is needed at this point is to present a working definition of adult education which will guide this

research. Brookfield (1995) emphasises the need to relate to adult learners as adults and to find ways to assist them to critically reflect on their experiences.

1.1.1 Definitions of Adult Education

Adult education to understood in the broadest possible way; includes all aspects of lifelong learning activity, whether formal or informal, institutional or personal, cultural, religious, individual or societal. However a working definition that is slightly more prescriptive with specific reference to the participation of adult students in an organised programme of study. This working definition is:

The process of conscious engagement in an adult higher education programme

Schuller and Megarry (1979), referring to the United Kingdom, use the term ‘adult education’ to indicate an ‘extension of general education into adult life....’ (1979:257). Jarvis (1983) suggests education can be defined as:

Any planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participants learning and understanding (1983:5).

Later in his 2002 writings, Jarvis puts forward the meaning of adult education to refer to:

any educational process undertaken by adults, whether liberal, general or vocational, and located in the spheres of adult, further or higher education or outside the institutional framework entirely (2002:22).

Houle (1972:32) speaks of adult education as ‘improving’ either the individuals or society. This idea of education being about change is taken up by Courtney (1989) who asserts that adult education is an intervention, which results in change in knowledge or in competence. Change is also the aspect taken up by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) when they propose adult education as being concerned with:

Learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills’ (1982:9).

Knowles (1980) identifies adult education in its broadest sense as:

The process of adults learning... as a set of organised activities carried on by a wide variety of institutions for the accomplishment of specific educational objectives (1980:25).

Merriam and Brockett (2007) suggest that adult education is what happens when you are working with adults in an organised activity:

Activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults (2007:8)

This notion of the activity being purposeful, undertaken by adults is also found in Rogers (1996) when he speaks of adult education as;

All planned and purposeful learning opportunities offered to those who are recognised and who recognise themselves as adults in their own society and who have left the formal initial educational system (or who have passed beyond the possible stage of initial education if they were never in it), whether such learning opportunities are inside or outside the formal

system, so long as such learning opportunities treat the learners as adults in decision-making, use appropriate adult learning methodologies and types and allow the learners to use the experience for their own purposes and to meet their own needs (1996:28)

and again;

Adult education then is a process by which adults, who are already engaged in continuous learning, adapting to changes in their circumstances, engage in more structured programmes of learning in a planned and purposeful way at different times throughout their lives (1996:29).

A more open flexible description of adult education can also be found in Knowles (1980) when he talks of the ‘mission’ of adult education and/or the adult educator’s responsibility to:

Help individuals satisfy their needs and achieve their goals’...with the ultimate goal being ‘human fulfilment’ (1980:27).

Brookfield (2010) who champions both the concept of andragogy and the self-directed nature of adult education – issues explored in more detail later in this chapter – believes that adult education must be learner centred and based on learner experience. Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as the process of individuals taking responsibility to decide what it is they need to learn and how they will achieve their aims. Mezirow (1990, 1991), who champions the transformative nature of adult education, speaks of adult education as enabling transformative learning, critical self-reflection and

reflective learning. These concepts of andragogy, self-directed learning and transformational learning are explored in more detail later in this chapter.

One thing on which there is general agreement on is that adult education is an activity which involves ‘adults’: people who either self-define or are defined by society as having the rights and responsibilities of an adult. It is, however, the activity of these adults, that has been the cause of much debate as to what is the nature of adult education.

From these definitions, certain themes or aspects of adult education may be deduced; adult education is the concern of adults, it is organised, has a purpose and involves the aspect of change and transformation and these can occur at any stage of a person’s life.

1.1.2 Historical foundations

As mentioned above, some commentators will trace the development of adult education through the history of philosophy returning to ancient Greece, Egypt, China, India and the Islamic World. In the United Kingdom an historical timeline can be traced from 1699. It was then that the first mention of the Church of England’s formal teaching of adults to read and the development of Sunday Schools throughout the 1700’s. In 1798 there was the development of an adult school in Nottingham, England, to meet the needs of factory workers. Pole (1816) records the existence of adult schools in London

in 1814 (Smith 2004). In 1867 James Stuart, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, delivered lectures regarding higher education for women. 1903 saw the establishment of the Workers Education Association, founded to promote higher education to working men. The Education Act of 1944 made local authorities responsible for providing lifelong learning and in 1947 the Universities Council for Adult Education was formed (Jarvis 2002).

Parallel to these developments in Europe, there were developments taking place in the United States of America; from a library tax in 1833 to the establishment of the Vocational and Adult Education State Boards in 1911. In 1918 the first State Supervisors for adult education was appointed in New York. By 1924 the growth in this new and emerging area of adult education can be seen with the creation of Department of Adult Education under the auspices of The National Education Association. In 1926 the American Association of Adult Education was formed followed in 1951 by the formation of the Adult Education Association of the USA and in 1966 the Adult Education Act was introduced. The period between 1972 and 1974 saw the establishment of the National Adult Education Think Tank Project. It was during this period (1972) that DePaul University, Chicago, established its School for New Learning (SNL). It is from the DePaul School for New Learning programme that All Hallows College, Dublin, developed Adult Learning BA (ALBA). The development of ALBA and the links between the two colleges is developed in detail in chapter four.

The two World Wars appear to be common reference points for many writers when discussing the historical development of adult education. Stubblefield and Rachal (1992) put forward the proposal that three events occurred after World War 11 which popularised the term ‘adult education’: (a) a British publication reviewing the status of adult education was published, (b) the World Association for Adult Education was formed and (c) the Carnegie Corporation became actively involved in establishing adult education. For Jarvis (2002) it was not until after the Second World War and the adoption by UNESCO that the term ‘Adult Education’ became popular, with the many publications that body supported. He references the ‘Faure Report (1972) which advocated that education should be both universal and lifelong, but suggests that it is not until 1976 that lifelong learning ‘comes of age’ with the publication of the Lifelong Learning Act in the United States (Jarvis 2002:24).

1.1.3 Philosophical Foundations

John Dewey’s book *Democracy and Education* (1916) placed education at the very heart of social reform and could be understood as the driving force behind the growth in interest in twentieth century study of education. He was certain that education would flourish if it took place in a democracy. From Dewey and other educators there emerged a philosophy of education, with specific reference to adult education.

For Lindeman (1926, 1989) the whole of life is learning, that 'education can have no end', this he refers to as adult education (1989:4-5). For him the aim of adult education is to improve the individual and society. He speaks of the purpose of adult education to 'put meaning into the whole of life', and he places what he refers to as the 'resource of highest value' experience as the key to this form of education (1989:4-7). Knowles (1998) attributes Lindeman (1926) as laying the foundations stones regarding the philosophy of adult education, the improvement of both the individuals' life and of society. Freire (2009) in his ground breaking writing of 1970 is clearly in agreement with this philosophical understanding of adult education as he speaks of 'conscientisation', of the learner becoming aware of their social, political and economic contradictions, that the goal of education is to affect change.

Brookfield (2010) too, like Dewey, Lindeman and Freire, when speaking of the philosophical practice of adult education refers to the importance of the 'fundamental human or social purpose' that education is meant to serve: the facilitation of learning through; the adult developing determination, control and autonomy for their learning. Mezirow (1990, 1999, 2000) further develops these philosophical underpinnings of adult education with his championing the role of critical reflection and transformative learning which bring about epistemological, psychological and sociological transformations.

Lawson (1991) suggests that philosophy and education are intertwined with each other. The accepted aim of all philosophy is to try and make sense of the society in which it develops. Thus a philosophy of education will try to explain and understand the aims, objectives and role of education at a given point in time.

According to Elias and Merriam (1995) philosophies of adult education are concerned with the most general principles of the educational process. The philosophies explore the relationship between theory and practice, each reflecting the society and history in which they develop. They propose six major categories of influence. These are: liberal adult education; progressive adult education; behaviourist adult education; humanistic adult education; radical adult education and analytical philosophy of adult education. See appendix one for a full description of these philosophical influences.

The philosophical influences on adult education reflect the historical and socio-cultural context in which they emerged and developed. In chapter four of this research the Irish context of adult education will be explored with specific reference to development of the Adult Learning BA in All Hallows College.

1.2 Seminal Thinkers

In presenting an understanding of adult education it is important to present and understand the theorists who have shaped and developed adult education as we

understand it today. This section will examine such theorists in a chronological fashion as each theorist builds on the knowledge which they inherited and subsequently developed.

1.2.1 John Dewey

Dewey's understanding of education was set out in *Democracy and Education* (1916). He believed firmly that education was a direct agent for social change. Throughout his career, Dewey's work promoted practical aspects of reflective thinking and non-reflective thinking, of continually trying to show how the abstract was part of the experience of every day life. One of his major contributions to the development of adult education was his promotion of 'hands-on', 'experiential' learning, rather than the traditional authoritarian approach. He wanted to see education move away from this authoritarian model and be an agent which would help people, through reflective education, to become more valued, equal and effective members of a more democratic society. He believed that education was a social process and therefore society needed to reflect this reality.

Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a particular social ideal... A society which make provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder (2007:76).

On the subject of experience Dewey sees a key role for the educator to be people who can help the adult student understand, reflect and draw meaning from experience.

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by enviroining conditions, but that they also recognise in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while (1997:40).

And again;

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had (1997:39).

However, Dewey sounds a word of caution when he differentiates between experience and education not being synonymous:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education can not be directly equated to each other (1997:25).

In 1897, Dewey published a pedagogical creed: *'My Pedagogic Creed'* in *The School Journal*. The creed sets out the guiding principles that govern Dewey's educational philosophy, it speaks about the duality of education: individual and societal, the centrality of experience, the development of democracy through

education, the role of the educationalist and the educational environment. For a full version of the creed see appendix two.

1.2.2 Eduard Lindeman

Lindeman (1926) set out to show the academic world that adult education was a legitimate philosophical approach to education, that it had purpose and responsibilities that would bring about both personal and social change.

Education will become an agency of progress if its short-time goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-time, experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order. Changing individuals in continuing adjustment to changing social functions – this is the bilateral though unified purpose of adult learning ([1926] 1989:104).

For him the purpose of education was to give meaning to a person's life, throughout their entire life. That this form of education was to be based on the person's experience, real life situations from which the adult needed to learn. He asserts that it is at this point that education begins. That experience is what Lindeman calls the 'resource of highest value' in adult education.

Every adult person finds himself in specific situation with respect to his work, his recreation, his family-life, his community-life, et cetera – situations which call for adjustments. Adult education begins at this point (1989:6).

If education is life, then life is also education (1989:6).

This clearly shows the twofold nature of adult education: individual and social. As Smith (1997, 2004) comments; Lindeman has a vision of education not

bound by the physical constraints of the classroom or formal curricula., but rather a concern for educational possibilities of everyday life.

As a contemporary and colleague of Dewey, Lindeman too understood adult education to be an agent of social justice and democracy. It was the 1926 text '*The Meaning of Adult Education*' which popularised the notion of adult education and social change. This book is still considered the seminal text and the foundation for our understanding today of adult education. It is here that he sets out this new and fresh approach to adult education when he writes;

The whole of life is learning, therefore, education can have no endings. This new venture is called adult education not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity, defines its limits... (1989: 4-7).

He further contends that the curriculum of adult education be built around the students needs, interests and experience, asserting that:

The resources of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience (1989: 4-7).

There is no doubting the importance of Lindeman as an important figure in the history and development of adult education. Today it is not possible to research the world of adult education without referring back to his 1926 text and so it was for this research too.

1.2.3 Paulo Freire

Freire is regarded as one of the leading and most influential figures in the pedagogy of adult education. He developed his theories while working with illiterate labourers in Brazil. This background of oppression influenced his work and his subsequent writings calling on adult education to be a radical process involving social change. He talked of the need for education to have relevance for the learners.

The publication of his work *'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed'* (1970) has had a long and profound influence on the development of adult education. Coming from the social context of poverty, and illiteracy, Freire introduces the concept of a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' exploring the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. Freire included the education system that prevailed as another oppressor of the locals. He tells us that this new pedagogy will lead people to freedom from oppression, through an education process that:

Makes oppression and its cause's objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation... (2008: 48).

This introduces a central theme of Freire, reflection and action. Again he asserts that there are two distinct stages to this pedagogy:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression that through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In

the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation' (2008:54).

Freire speaks of how traditional education transmits or 'deposits' knowledge from the teacher down to the learner, which he calls 'banking' and suggests that it maintains the oppression. He wants to see education as a mutual process which allows people to become more fully human. In the 'banking' system, Freire sees the act of oppression continuing, the learner is seen as 'object' rather than the 'subject' of learning:

Education thus becomes an action of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling and storing the deposits (2008:72).

Other major themes of Freire's 1970 work are 'dialogue', 'praxis' and 'conscientisation' a major core element.

Dialogue, for Freire, is the true essence of education, awakening critical consciousness, and the practice of freedom. It is through dialogue that Freire envisages the educator and the learner discovering a new learning from each other, a partnership of equal and reciprocal learning.

Through dialogue, the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teacher (2008:80).

The action which follows from the dialogue he names as 'Praxis'. The concept of praxis is to enable learners to question and reflect on their reality, to begin to see that reality in a different, more critical way, which in turn leads to them taking action. Related to this proposition of reflection and action is his concept of 'conscientisation'; this is the process whereby the educator must 'tune into' the world of the learner: vocabulary, symbols, and culture. Stressing the need to enter into that dialogue of educator-educate, Freire believes conscientisation to be a core element in the education process as it enables people to engage in the search for 'self-affirmation'.

It is the combination of these key aspects of Freire's work: Dialogue, Praxis and Conscientisation, which include: educative and critical reflection; learning; action; communal experiences; the importance of action and social change; and the non-neutral aspect of education, which makes Freire such an important figure in the development and understanding of adult education.

The adult education of Paulo Freire is of social justice, social transformation with a strong sense of the interconnectedness between education and politics, it is not a neutral process. Commenting on Freire, Mayo (1999) says 'it is impossible to deny, except intentionally or by innocence, the political aspect of education' (1999:58). Jarvis (2002) says that at the heart of Freire's

educational ideas lies a humanistic conception of people as learners who do not remain passive about their situation but become active participants in the world.

1.2.4 Malcolm Knowles

Malcolm Knowles is another central figure to the development of adult education, particularly in the United States. As with Lindeman and Freire, who influenced his work, the placing of how an adult learns is for Knowles, central to the learning process. The prior experience of the learner, informal learning, the concept of self-directed learning, and the role of the educator in how the learning takes place are key elements of adult education.

Knowles will always be remembered for his work in the popularisation and the development of 'andragogy'. It is for this reason that Jarvis 2002 refers to Knowles as the 'father of andragogy', for Knowles it is the presenting of a clear distinction between the ways in which adults and children learn. For him the whole premise of andragogy is the assumption that adults engage with experience and learn differently from children. The concept of andragogy is developed later in this chapter.

Knowles (1970) in *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* sets out four major differences between andragogy and pedagogy, namely: the difference in self-concept; the experience of adult

learners, their readiness to learn and the adult orientation to learn i.e. problem centred not subject centred. In *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (1980), while still presenting the four differences, he has shifted position slightly regarding the relationship between pedagogy and andragogy. Note the change in title; it is no longer pedagogy *versus* andragogy, but rather *from* pedagogy *to* andragogy. In reflecting on this in his autobiographical book *The Making of an Adult Educator* (1989) Knowles comments that andragogy accepts its relationship with pedagogy. Knowles in 1984 added to the original list of four differences to include the adult's motivation to learn. In presenting andragogy in practice (Knowles, Holton & Swanson 1998) the list has grown to six points, with a new first entry regarding the learner's need to know.

These changes are evidence of growth and development in the theory of adult education and the nature of adult learning. Knowles (1980) speaks originally of contrasting the differences between pedagogy and andragogy but then comes to understand that they can be used alongside each other, as two alternative modes.

Originally I defined andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children...So I am at the point now of seeing that andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative modes for testing out the assumptions as to their 'fit' with particular situations (1980:43).

In (1989) Knowles acknowledges his changing and developing position over the years and comments that if he were writing in another ten years his work would be revised again due to substantial changes in his thinking.

I am therefore certain that if this book is revised in ten years, it will report substantial changes in my thinking (1989:85).

1.2.5 Jack Mezirow

The key element of adult education associated with Mezirow (1977, 1981, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000,) is the concept of education as ‘transformation’. His work describes learning as a process of making meaning from experiences, which transform our current mind-sets to new, more inclusive, more reflective, more meaningful perspectives. Mezirow’s transformational learning of individual adults involves not just the personal, it includes the academic and it also has a social dimension. Mezirow’s basic assumption is that each individual person carries constructs or ‘perspectives’ of reality which are dependent upon reinforcements from the external world. It is these very constructs or ‘perspectives’ that are transformed through the process of adult learning. He regards transformational learning as:

A development process of movement through the adult years towards meaning perspectives that are progressively more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative of experience (1977:159).

That it involves:

Reflective assessment of premises, a process predicated upon still another logic, one of movement through cognitive structures by identifying and judging presumptions (1991:5).

Critical reflection and analysis are other central aspects to transformative learning. Mezirow sets out the different levels of reflection that can occur in adult education. He speaks of reflection and self awareness; becoming aware of judgement values; acknowledging limited sets of perspective and judgement; acquiring new knowledge; building confidence; exploring options and new ways of thinking; experimenting with new knowledge and bringing this knowledge and awareness into the wider society.

Transformation takes place if certain conditions are met and outcomes achieved, - chapter three explores these stages of transformation in detail - it always involves developing new meaning from interpretation of experiences. Change in perception and understanding are the cornerstones of transformation. Mezirow speaks of transformative learning assisting the learner to accomplish such personal, epistemological and sociological changes:

Learning always involves making a new experience explicit....learning is dialectical process of interpretation which we interact with objects and events, guided by an old set of expectations....in transformative learning, however, we reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to the old experience (1991:11).

Fostering transformative learning involves helping learners bring the sources, nature, and consequences of taken-for-granted assumption into critical awareness so that appropriate actions can be taken (2000:195).

An exploration of transformative learning follows in this chapter with a detailed description, evaluation and explanation of transformation theory will be undertaken in chapter three.

1.3 Emerging Themes

Adult education can take place in many different settings and opportunities. Learning opportunities come in many guises and it is important to have an appreciation of the various types of adult learning available. For example: formal/non-formal/informal education; community education; continuing education; vocational education; recurrent education; popular education; experiential education; critical education; and feminist education. For a brief description of each please see appendix three. However, through the initial reading and research into the nature of adult education, the developmental context and the core themes of the seminal thinkers, it becomes clear that there are emerging themes. Most notable amongst these are: transformational learning; self directed learning; lifelong learning; and andragogy. While this list could not be considered a full and final list of all themes within adult education provision, they have a central role regarding the nature of this research. For this reason it is important to provide an understanding of these aspects of adult education.

1.3.1 Transformational Learning

Transformational learning is focused on how adults interpret their life experience, how they make meaning and how this new awareness gives them a new perception of themselves and society, thus leading to change. Transformational learning is learning as a meaning making activity, which Mezirow describes as:

Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (1996:162).

Already referred to above in relation to the work of Dewey, Lindeman, Freire, Knowles and Mezirow, learning is rooted in the experience of the learner. Each of these theorists makes the case for the individual to begin with life experience to make meaning. With Mezirow (1990) observing:

No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience (1990:11).

However, experience on its own is not enough, critical reflection must also be present to enable the learner to make meaning from the experience. This process of creating meaning will in turn lead to change, both in the individual and in the wider society. In order for this to happen there must be a process of critical reflection, self-examination of the held assumptions and beliefs. Thus in Mezirow's (1981) opinion, transformative learning ensures that a review of held beliefs is conducted, leading to change occurring in:

specific assumptions about oneself and others until the very structure of assumptions becomes transformed (1981:8).

Mayo (1999) notes the social/political nature of transformative learning as ‘one which recognises the political nature of all educational interventions...’ (1999:24). Mezirow (1991) states that the purpose of transformation theory is to:

explain the way adult learning is structured and to determine by what process the frames of reference through which we view and interpret our experience (meaning perspectives) are changed or transformed’ (1991:xiii).

Chapter three explores in more detail the theory of transformation and transformative learning.

1.3.2 Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is perhaps the most recognisable face of adult education. Championed by Knowles and Brookfield, it is considered to be one of the cornerstones of adult education. Knowles describes it as the learner choosing to take initiative for their own learning experience, to:

Assume the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating those learning experiences (1975:18).

Knowles (2005) speaks of the goal of adult education helping the learner move from dependant to self-dependant learner. Brookfield (2010) speaks of self-directed learners having the ability not only to perform the planning, carrying out and evaluating their experience, but he associates self-directed learning

with the ability of critical reflection. For him, self-directed learners become successful independent learners, developing their own expertise. He suggests that there are various elements to self-directed learning which include:

Specifying goals, identifying resources, implementing, strategies, and evaluating progress (2010:47).

Brookfield also refers to the concept of self-directed learning and its links to personal and social transformations, which he refers to as ‘internal change of consciousness’. He describes this aspect of self-directed learning as:

When learners come to regard knowledge as relative and contextual, to view the value frameworks and moral codes informing their behaviours as cultural constructs, and to use this altered perspective to contemplate ways in which they can transform their personal and social worlds (2010:47).

Another core element of self-directed learning within adult education is the freedom of the learner to choose that which they wish to study and the outcomes they desire to achieve. Knowles (2005) refers to this as the democratic nature of adult education:

Democratic adult education employs the method of self-directing activity, with free choice of subject matter and free choice in determining outcomes (2005:43).

This concept of self-directed learning is easily understood as a distinct area of adult education. Peters and Jarvis (1991) describe self-directed learning as:

One of only a few core concepts that have laid the foundations for the identity of adult education as a distinct field of practice... (1991:194).

Merriam and Brockett (2007) speak of self-directed learning as one of the most important developments in adult education in the past three decades, saying it is the most popular way in which adults choose to learn, that it allow adults to take control of their own learning, and intrinsically connected with a persons self concept (2007: 134,140). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) describe the goals of self-directed learning to have three core elements: to enhance the ability of adult self-directed learning; to have transformational learning a central aspect of self-directed learning; and to promote personal and social change. Brookfield (2010) describes the most developed form of self-directed learning as:

One in which critical reflection on contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meaning systems, and the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present (2010:59).

1.3.3 Lifelong Learning

According to Elliot (1999) the term lifelong education was in common use and recorded by Dewey in his writings as far back as 1916. In the 1960's OECD committed itself to lifelong education and in 1996 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) sponsored the European year of Lifelong Learning. Kidd (1979) suggests that a typical definition of lifelong learning incorporates:

planning, coordination and implementation activities designed to facilitate learning... (1979:113).

Some of the popular definitions are:

Lifelong learning is the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments (Longworth and Davies 1996:22).

UNESCO (1997):

[lifelong learning] should extend throughout life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and give the opportunity to all people for full development of the personality (1997:2).

while the Learning Act 1976 (USA) states:

Lifelong learning includes, but is not limited to, adult basic education, continuing education, independent study, agricultural education, business education and labour education, occupational educational and job training programs, parent education, post-secondary education, pre-retirement educational programs for groups or for individuals with special needs, and also to assist business, public agencies, and other organisation in the use of innovation and research results, and to serve family needs and personal development (Kidd 1979:116).

What becomes obvious from these various definitions, separated by decades and oceans, is that lifelong learning implies emphasis on the importance of: the learner experience; the nature of continuation; the acquisition of new skills/knowledge/values. That lifelong learning is broader than adult learning or education, it is a process, a transitional experience, something that happens rather than something a person studies. The handbook of *Teaching and*

Learning in Further and Higher Education, speaks about the importance of experience in lifelong learning and the need for a ‘whole life perspective on learning’ 2007:17).

Lindeman’s publication of 1926 is critical of the notion that learning is a process that ends with the completion of formal schooling. For him learning is continuous and can have no end, as noted above in the previous section on Lindeman, the whole of life is learning. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (2007) speaks of his desire to see education being less restricted and contained by state providers. He asserts that education is a social process, built on individual experience, personal interests and social relationships. For him education is an ongoing process throughout a person’s life. Brookfield (2010) when describing the self-directedness of adult education promotes lifelong learning, through his description of adults learning continuously throughout life, through their experiences and changing life situations. For him the possibilities that exist for the adult learner are endless, which he describes as the intellectual voyager.

...it is possible for adults to embark on an intellectual voyage
without knowing their final destination (2010:49)

Self-directed learning and lifelong learning are key aspects of adult education and adult learning. They are also core elements of the concept of andragogy. While they can be examined and discussed as separate entities, they must also be present within the context of developing an understanding of andragogy.

1.3.4 Andragogy

Andragogy is identified as the art and science of helping adults learn. Although popularised by Knowles, he himself acknowledges that he was first introduced to the world of andragogy through the Yugoslavian adult educator, Dusan Savicevic. Although the term andragogy was in use in 1921 by the German social scientist, Eugen Rosenstock, and in 1957 by a German teacher, Franz Poggeler (Knowles 1989:79).

Within the past three decades, it is true to say that the term andragogy is now synonymous with the writings of Malcolm Knowles and is understood within the field of adult education world-wide. So much so that Brookfield (2010) refers to the use of andragogical methodologies as the ‘badge of identity’ for adult educators. The key assumptions of the andragogical model, mentioned above, as set out by Knowles (1975, 1980, 1989) are:

1. The need to know: adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it
2. The learners self-concept: adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives. Once they have arrived at this self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction.
3. The role of the learner’s experience: Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths.
4. Readiness to learn: Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know or to be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
5. Orientation to learning: In contrast to children’s and youth’s subject-centred orientation to learning, adults are life centred (or task centred or problem centred) in their orientation to learning.

6. Motivation to learn: While adults are responsive to some extrinsic motivators (better jobs, promotions, salary increases and the like), the more potent motivators are intrinsic motivators (the desire for increased self-esteem, quality of life, job satisfaction).

(1989:83-85)

An andragogical approach to learning which has these assumptions will have to provide learning opportunities to adults in a different way than is traditionally supplied for children and younger learners. Knowles (1980) set out some of the implications of adopting these assumptions into practice as: teachers need to have an understanding of the type of student and the motivations of adult learners; the need to explore experience and build this into the learning programme; along with increasing the self-directed ability of the learner (1980:45-55). Knowles (1995) offers eight components of an andragogical programme design for adult learners:

1. Preparing the learners for the program
 2. Setting the climate
 3. Involving learners in mutual planning
 4. Involving learners in diagnosing their learning needs
 5. Involving learners in forming their learning objectives
 6. Involving learners in designing learning plans
 7. Helping learners carry out their learning plans
 8. Involving learners in evaluating their learning outcomes
- (1995:5)

Whilst andragogy was initially developed to highlight the difference between adult learners and the learning style and approach to teaching children, Knowles (2005) notes that with the development, growth and acceptance of the

andragogical approach, andragogy has to now also recognise the uniqueness and difference amongst its adult learners. Noting how there is an increasing focus on:

How individual differences affect adult learning. From this perspective, there is no reason to expect all adults to behave the same, but rather our understanding of individual differences should help to shape and tailor the andragogical approach to fit the uniqueness of the learners (2005:154).

As with transformative learning, andragogy is also concerned with critical reflection on experience. That learning comes from the adult being able to analyse and reflect on their life experiences to draw meaning and significance. Andragogy is also closely linked with self-directed learning, as it proposes that the learner presents that which they need to know and set their own goals and accomplishments. Andragogy is most certainly, and without doubt, a lifelong learning process.

It is important to understand the distinctions between these different elements of adult education as they inform the approaches and methodologies employed in this research. It is also important to realise that they are related and often inter-related, overlapping and complimentary.

1.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a foundational understanding of adult education, specifically within the context of the research question. It has

set out an appropriate ‘back drop’ regarding adult education from which the following chapters build. With an historical and philosophical understanding along with knowledge of the seminal thinkers and emerging themes, this chapter has introduced the reader to the world of adult education.

Section one of this chapter showed why it is important to have an understanding of the meaning and nature of what adult education is, the historical and philosophical foundations. Section two examined the contribution of some key educationalists, in particular, Dewey, Lindeman, Freire, Knowles and Mezirow. The final section focused on the emerging themes within adult education, including, transformative learning, self-directed learning, lifelong learning and andragogy.

These elements do not stand alone nor in isolation, but in relationship to each other. Taken together, the sections of this chapter have achieved the aim of setting a contextual framework for, and an understanding of, adult education. With this foundation in place, the research will now focus on an understanding of adult development, knowledge and learning within the adult education sphere, in the next chapter, chapter two, followed by a detailed exegesis of the theory of transformation and transformative learning in chapter three.

Chapter Two: Adult Learning

2. Introduction

Chapter one discussed the historical and philosophical context of adult education along with the seminal thinkers and some of the emerging themes. Building on that foundation this chapter will now explore in more detail such concepts as adult development, the nature of intelligence, the understanding of learning and knowledge, learning styles as aspects of learning and the contextual issues that arise in the arena of adult education.

Development can be understood as developmental progressions (Piaget), but also as cyclical, ongoing and multifaceted. As a professional adult educator, who, for a number of years has been teaching in various educational settings, in ability levels ranging from FETAC level 1 through level 8 of the National Framework of Qualifications (see appendix 4), it is my experience, that not all adults are at the same developmental place, at the same time or age. This experience tallies with theoretical studies from Piaget (1936, 1937), Kohlberg (1969 1971, 1972); Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1966), which offer the position that chronological age is not a corollary of development, that development takes place throughout the life cycle. An adult learner could be at different 'stages' in various developmental tasks simultaneously.

The notion of intelligence is discussed with specific reference to the traditional psychometric approach and the alternative, more expanded idea of multiple intelligences. Learning and knowledge are intrinsic aspects of intelligence and will be explored through the major theorists, with specific reference to Dewey, Kolb and Mezirow, noting the linkages to the ALBA programme and their influences. This is particularly noticeable in the discussion regarding learning styles, with Kolb's Learning Style Inventory being the central focus-as it is used within the ALBA programme -amongst other models as they relate to Kolbe.

There is widespread agreement that the learning needs of the adult should be at the centre of adult learning and that the adults' readiness to learn is central to the learning process of each individual. For Piaget (1929, 1952), it is a person's development that enables the learning process to happen. Kegan (1999) speaks of the ego development as the 'evolution' of meaning. The theory of 'andragogy' – mentioned in chapter one and discussed in more detail later in this chapter - proposed by Malcolm Knowles, clearly establishes a link between adult development and learning.

The final aspect of this chapter is a drawing out of some of the contextual issues which are part of adult education, and are mentioned throughout the chapter. This explicit treatment of issues such as personal background, societal influences, gender, and ethnicity, is important as these are real issues which

affect and effect adult learning. It is important that they are recognised and respected in the same way as we speak of development, intelligence and learning.

2.1 Adult Development

Adult development is complex, multi-faceted and cyclical. It includes all aspects of adult life, career, family, parenthood, retirement, social events, Knox (1979) writing on the topic of research insights into adult learning, suggests that:

Such major role changes can also be associated with personality development which continues throughout life... both gradual trends and role changes contribute to adult life-cycle shifts in values and interest (1979:60).

What is presented here is a short condensation of the various and many development theories. It is not a direct replication or summary of the theories; instead it is a presentation of the main themes arising from the many, and show the continuity and development of thought. It is not a treatise on adult development but a signpost to the important place it has in the discussion of adult education and learning.

2.1.1 Developmental Theories

Considerable research by theorists such as Piaget (1936, 1937, 1948, 1962, 1969, 1970, 1972), Erickson (1963, 1982), Havighurst (1972), Perry (1970, 1981) Levinson (1986, 1996) Kohlberg (1969 1971, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1990)

Fowler (1981), Vygotsky (1962), Bruner (1966), and Kegan (1982) suggests that there is some predictability as to the pattern of development within a structured setting and that human development; cognitive, emotional and moral, tends to be front loaded to the earlier years. For example, Piaget (1972), gave us a hierarchical four stage cognitive development based on performance functions for children from ages birth to teens. Erikson (1982) provided us with an eight stage model extended beyond childhood over the life span.

Another hierarchical developmental cognitive model is that of Perry (1970, 1981) who proposed nine stages of development (called positions) exploring the different ways of interpreting learning experiences. King and Kitchener (1981, 1994) have a stage model of development, which shows that development is sequential. Havighurst (1972) also espouses the notion of a sequential model of development with definitive points of achievement called 'teachable moments'.

Other theories of development include those of Lev Vygotsky, (1962) the Russian psychologist, who outlines a cognitive developmental system for children's learning through language and social learning. Laurence Kohlberg's (1973, 1981) moral judgement theory is developed from the Piagetian approach to development and has given us a three level, six stage development of moral characteristics. James Fowler (1981) uses a six stage model of development to represent faith development. Jerome Bruner, (1966, 1977,

2003) focusing on problem-solving abilities in the cognitive development of children, speaks of three defined phases from birth to age seven. Kolb (1984) discusses a three stage development theory of experiential learning: stage one; 'acquisition', of basic learning skills and developmental constructs, from birth to adolescence; stage two; 'specialisation', higher education/career and early adulthood. Here people are shaped by culture, experiences and social factors; stage three; 'integration', personal conflicts between the personal and social demands are resolved (1984:144-145).

2.1.2 Childhood to Adult Development

What each of the developmental theories, be they cognitive, faith or moral, have in common is the idea that there are certain developmental points that people/children reach as part of a healthy development. These milestones are universal, recognisable and detectable under clinical observation. They provide a framework on which to benchmark progression, growth and development. Bruner (1997, 2003) distinctly summarises this saying:

Research on the intellectual development of the child highlights the fact that at each stage of development the child has a characteristic way of viewing the world and explaining it to himself... (2003:33).

The theories stemming from Piaget and Bruner are undoubtedly useful and important. Nevertheless they are firstly primarily rooted in studies of children and secondly, linear models of development. In this study the focus is on the development of adults and the readiness and ability of adults to learn. Merriam

and Caffarella (1999:132-166) outline a number of models of adult development offered to us from people such as; Baltes (1982, 1987) who opens us to the idea of adult development being multifaceted. It includes a person's context, history and culture and traverses a multidisciplinary approach including psychology, anthropology, biology and sociology. Perun and Bieldy (1980) spoke of adult development as 'temporal progressions', consisting of internal changes and changes as a result of an external influence, which Peters (1989) refers to as the biological, psychological and sociological aspects of adult development.

2.1.3 Development as Multi-Linear, Multi-Faceted and Cyclical

An initial reaction to those 'stage' theories above may be one of dismissal, given that initially they are related to the cognitive development of children. However, these earlier theories became the growing blocks for those who followed – Perry, King and Kitchner, and Gardner. Indeed we only have to think of the concept of Maslow's 'Self Actualising' to understand the notion of development.

The progression and growth of developmental theory is still advancing. Kolb (1984) speaks of development as 'multi-linear' rather than the Piagian influenced 'uni-linear'. This multi-linear approach has, according to Kolb, four major aspects, it: recognises individual differences in the development process; conceptualises development as the product of a person's knowledge and social

knowledge; encompasses an holistic understanding to the development and learning process; and, has practical implications regarding the accommodation of development and learning (1984:136-139).

Acknowledging the development and progression in the thought processes and concepts of development and learning is important as it moves the discussion from a linear model to a holistic multi-faceted cyclical approach. Levinson and Levinson (1996) speak of the many social and familial roles we each play as having ongoing influence on our character. Riegel (1973, 1975, 1976) followed by Kramer (1983, 1989) enables the discussion regarding development to move beyond Piaget sequential stage model to the idea of a people operating simultaneously on all levels.

Taking all of the above into account allows us to say, with confidence, that unlike the developmental stages of children, adult development is influenced and affected by sociocultural factors, including race, gender, career, background, history, personality, emotional and biological history.

Adult development is not linear or necessarily chronological. Adult development is multi-faceted, influenced both by internal and external factors. Depending on the individual it may develop or arrest at different points during the life cycle. A competency in one area does not automatically mean a corresponding competence in another area of a person's life. Kolb refers to

adults ‘osculating from one stage to another’ (1984:141) that peoples cognitive functions will vary depending on cultural and developmental experiences.

21.4 Developmental Implications for Learning

We can say that adult development is central to adult learning, and that this development is non-linear, is multi-faceted as is our understanding of intelligence. This in turn has implications for how we, as educators, approach adult learning. A linear, singular approach may not be the most appropriate way forward. It is important, therefore, to have an understanding of learning and of the learning processes best suited to adults.

In adulthood, knowing how you know involves awareness of the context – sources, nature and consequences – of your interpretations and beliefs and those of others (Mezirow (2000:7).

If then, as the evidence suggests, adult development is multi-faceted and multi-layered, that individuals may be at differing levels regarding different issues even, what implications does this have regarding adult learning? Piaget, Knowles, Dewey, Kohlberg, Erikson, Kolb along with the other theorists mentioned above acknowledge the link between development, learning and our intelligence. Could intelligence be as multi-faceted as development? The ALBA programme in All Hallows College adapts this ‘cyclical’, ‘multi-linear’ approach to adult learning. ALBA recognises the importance of individuals experience and different developmental processes.

2.2 Intelligence

Hyland (2000) tells us that in the Irish language there is no one word for a direct translation of the English word ‘intelligence’. In the Irish language, there are other factors considered as to the type of intelligence being referred to. For example, “éiriniúil” is used when intelligence is used in terms of school intelligence; “intleachtúil” for intellectual intelligence; “tuisceanach” when referring to an understanding; “cliste” when referring to cleverness. When speaking of people who are intelligent different words are used: “duine cliste” – clever person; “duine glic” refers to a clever person, concerning their own interests; “duine crionna” refers to a person who is considered wise from experience.

The ancient Egyptians considered intelligence to be located in the various organs of the body: the heart for thought; the kidneys for judgement. Plato spoke of the mind being in the brain, while Aristotle thought ‘life’ was in the heart (Gardner 1983, 2004). Gardner maintains that until the twentieth century, intelligence was understood in different ways in different cultures, and in the western societies it was more associated with astuteness and wisdom. Gardner gives examples of how traditionally the Greeks valued personal strength and judgement, the Romans - courage, Islam - holy soldiers, Chinese - poetry and music. Today, the Pueblo Indians value the caring for others. He is also of the opinion that modern Western society moved to confine intelligence to areas of logic and verbal reasoning.

2.2.1 Recording Intelligence

The use of the examples above illustrate immediately that there are different interpretations or meanings to the single word 'intelligence'. However, the word intelligence has, in Western/industrialised societies, often just been thought of in a narrow sense. Gardner (1983, 2004) tells us that intelligence was considered to be a 'single entity' that was inherited, a 'blank slate' that could be taught. Intelligence was seen as a single measurement of a persons singular I.Q.

It is quite astonishing how something that was initially developed in Paris by Alfred Binet in (1905) to screen which children would achieve in school would soon dominate the world of intelligence. Alfred Binet and his colleague Theodore Simon devised the initial tests in mathematical, verbal, spatial and memory abilities. Later the German psychologist William Stern used mathematical formula to devise the 'intelligence quotient' (I.Q.). Today there are thousands of psychometric and intelligence tests for all ages and cohorts. However, Gardner (1993) is of the opinion that when intelligence tests were first developed there was not much attention paid to the theory of intelligence. (Gardner 1983, 1993, 1999, 2004; Hyland 2000; Gage & Berliner 1991).

What is presented here is not the final word on intelligence theory but a representation of the opinions, discussion and development within this area. There has been intrigue regarding the nature of intelligence for centuries. Some

believing intelligence is something a person is born with or without. For others it is something we accomplish as we journey through life. For others yet, intelligence is about thought processes and problem solving.

2.2.2 Intelligence Types

Different theorists may diverge slightly or emphasise different aspects of intelligence, for example: Cattell (1962) and Horn (1982) focused on two areas: crystallised intelligence and fluid intelligence; Guilford (1985) focused on three areas: contents, operations and product; Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence theory initially provided us with seven intelligences, then later added an eighth. Sternberg's (1985) triarchic theory focuses on 'problem solving' and 'successful intelligence'. Ceci (1990) published his bio-ecological treatise on intellectual development; Anderson's (1992) provides us with a theory of intelligence of cognitive development; and Perkins (1995) proposes three dimensions to intelligence: neural, experiential, and reflective.

Important for this discussion is to appreciate an understanding of intelligence as something dynamic, multifaceted, living, growing, developing, multi-layered, inherent, learned, internal, external, personal, environmental, linear and cyclical. It is complex. It is not one single trait which a person may or may not have. It differs from person to person. It differs within an individual person. We have different intelligent type abilities and different levels operating within us simultaneously.

Intelligence is a living organism. It is influenced by our culture, our environment, our life history. Goleman (1998) spoke of 'emotional intelligence'- the knowing and managing of one's own emotions, and the ability to recognise emotions in others, empathy, social skills.

Gardner and Sternberg (1996) opened up the discussion regarding intelligence and, according to Gardner (1990), have:

Moved the boundaries of intelligence beyond just the minds of individuals and have challenged researchers and practitioners to consider how the individual and the context interact to shape intellectual functioning in adulthood. They have also moved intelligence out of the hallowed hallways of schools and universities, which have placed more value on academic skill and abilities, into how people function in all aspects of life (1990:188).

Gardner (1993) offers a number of possible definitions of intelligence, each emphasising the many aspected nature of intelligence. For example, he tells us that intelligence is the interaction between the individual and society. It is a 'matrix of forces' between (a) the knowledge needed to survive in a particular culture, (b) the values of that culture and (c) the educational system the individuals experience (1993:231-236). He proposes that:

Intelligences are inevitably expressed as a result of interacting genetic and environmental factors (1993:121).

He further offers,

One might go so far as to define a human intelligence as a neural mechanism or computational system which is genetically programmed to be activated or 'triggered' by

certain kinds of internally or externally presented information (1983, 2004:64).

Another definition put forward by Gardner is understanding intelligence

As the ability to solve problems, or to fashion products, that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings.

Hyland (2000) makes the distinction between intelligence and ‘ability’, saying that it is important not to equate ability with intelligence as this can lead to negative outcomes for learning. For example if a student has low ability in certain (tested) intelligences, will the teacher have lower expectations for that student? Will the education system blame the students ‘poor ability’ for poor results rather than the system (2000:28-29).

This brings attention to the area of intelligence testing. Can intelligence be measured? The proliferation of I.Q. and psychometric testing suggests it can. Yet many, like Gardner, believe that tests only measure that which can be tested, that tests are culturally biased and that the I.Q. test is specific to only three areas, mathematical, verbal and spatial. From the research of the material regarding intelligence, I, too, am of the opinion that intelligence is a broad canvas and not accurately reflected in ‘paper and pencil’ tests.

2.2.3 Psychometric Testing

Since the introduction by Binet of intelligence tests in Paris in the early 1900’s the Western world has become besotted with I.Q. tests. Soon after the Binet’s and Stern’s initial steps, I.Q. tests were embraced by the American army

during the World War 11 and throughout the USA and Europe during the 1920s, 1930s. It has now become standard practice to test children for their I.Q., and to test adults for career suitability.

The legacy of this means that today, intelligence is commonly understood in terms of this psychometric tradition. This assumes that intelligence is measurable and limited to the 'scholastic' notion of intelligence. Schaie (1996) is of the opinion that while this concept of intelligence may be appropriate for the discussion regarding childhood intelligence and development, it does not provide any great insight for an understanding of intelligence within the adult sphere (1996:27).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) believe that an assessment tool must be developed to measure 'both academic and practical notions of intelligence, including emotional intelligence....combined with designing assessments that are 'age fair'' (1999:173). In addition, assessment procedures also need to take culture and biographical detail and the contextual perspective into account.

2.2.4 Context of Intelligence

Contextual issues are an important consideration in the discussion of intelligence, because intelligence can be, and is, defined differently by different cultures and social classes. Blenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule

(1986), Gilligan (1982, 1993) speak of how traditionally the voice of women has been absent from theories of cognitive development and learning, which were primarily based on white males. They speak of how women have been 'silenced' culturally and ritually. This history can lead to a complete 'way of knowing' being under-represented, hidden or even lost or viewed as illegitimate. Luttrell's study (1989) shows working class black and white women judged people as intelligent by their ability to cope with everyday problems, they saw common sense as an important intellectual skill. They considered men's common sense knowledge or craft and manual skills to be a higher form of intelligence.

Theorists over previous decades have put forward various respectable theories as to the nature, meaning and interpretation of what intelligence is: Spearman (1927); Kidd (1959); Cattell (1963, 1987); Gange (1965); Bruner (1966); Skinner (1968); Terman (1975); Horn (1976, 1982, 1985); Guilford (1967, 1985); Jensen (1980); Eysenck (1981) Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999, 2004); Sternberg (1985, 1986, 1988); Herrnstein and Murray (1994); Goleman (1995, 1998); Schaie (1996); The list continues. At this juncture it is sufficient to say that 'intelligence' as a topic of discussion and study has been, and continues to be, an integral aspect of adult education.

2.2.5 Howard Gardner: Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1983, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006) sets out an understanding of intelligence, a broader view than was previously held, with his hypothesis that there are numerous types of intelligences. Traditionally, linguistic and logical ability were tested to determine a person's intelligence. What Gardner has achieved is a widening of this narrow interpretation of intelligence to a much more holistic understanding of intelligence. Through his research he proposes that there are at least eight (originally he proposed seven) types of intelligence and that we all use one, two or more of these when we learn.¹

- *Linguistic Intelligence*: the intelligence of words. Sensitivity to the spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, skills in hearing, listening, speaking, humour, creative writing, poetry. People in this area can argue, persuade, entertain or instruct effectively through the spoken word.
- *Logical-Mathematical*: the intelligence of numbers and logic, reasoning, pattern detection, symbolic abstraction, formulas, number sequence, calculation, problem solving, create hypotheses. People in this area think in terms of cause-and-effect.
- *Musical Intelligence*: People, who have the capacity to perceive, appreciate and produce rhythms and melodies, singing, and vibrations. Musical skills and performance including composition abilities.

¹ For a full description of intelligences see Gardner 1983, 2004.

- *Spatial Intelligence*: people in this area think in pictures and images. They have the ability to recognise and manipulate the patterns of wide space or confined areas. They have the ability to perceive, transform and re-create different aspects of the visual/spatial world. Important aspects in this area are art, pictures, sculpture, drawing, doodling, mind maps, pattern, colour, imagination.
- *Bodily-Kinaesthetic*: the ability to use one's entire or parts of the body to solve problems of fashion products. It is the intelligence of the physical self. 'It includes the talent in controlling one's body movements and also in handling objects skilfully'. Examples include: athletes, crafts people, mechanics, and surgeons. People who enjoy physical pursuits activities such as role play, drama, sport, dancing, jogging.
- *Interpersonal*: The ability to work with other people. It requires a capacity to 'perceive and be responsive to the moods, temperaments, intentions, and desires of others. Characteristics include: sociable, group projects, teamwork, collaborating, giving and receiving feedback. It is the ability to understanding people's motives, to be able to 'get inside the skin of another person'.
- *Intrapersonal intelligence*: the intelligence of the inner self. A person who is able to access and understand their own feelings, emotions and use this self understanding to enrich and guide their life. Often independent people with high self discipline and goal orientated. Career examples include theologians, the self employed, counsellors.

- *Naturalistic Intelligence*: A person who demonstrates expertise in the recognition and classification of nature or the environment, biological interest, charting, observing change, journal- and log-keeping, phenomenon aware. (Ref Gardner 1983, 2004; Armstrong 1999. Gage & Berliner 1991).

Gardner (1983) originally defined intelligence as ‘the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings’, two decades later he offers what he calls a more refined definition, saying that he conceptualises an intelligence as ‘a bio-psychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture’ (2004:33-34). He is proposing that we each have all the intelligences to a greater or lesser degree, some developed more than others depending on circumstances, that no two individuals are the same, not even identical twins (2006:23).

2.3 Learning

Dewey’s (1938) *Experience and Education* adds to the debate as to the nature of adult learning opened by Lindeman’s (1932) *The Meaning of Adult Education*. For Dewey, it is a matter of fact that people learn from their experiences. The meaning and the process of learning have been the attention of numerous theorists in recent decades, including: Bateson’s learning theory (1972); Cell’s learning theory (1984); Habermas’s instrumental and communicative learning (1971, 1984,1987); Gange’s (1977) eight phase model

of learning; Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning; Kolb's (1984) experiential learning, Langer's (1997) mindful learning, along with the theorists previously mentioned.

Learning in the context of this research is concerned more with the 'processes' of what actually happens as the learning takes place, rather than the content and the outcomes. Schuller and Megarry (1979) refer to effective adult learning as 'an active search for meaning' 1979:61).

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999) adult education is a 'large and amorphous field of practice, with no net boundaries... (1999:45). Merriam and Brockett (2007) suggest that trying to define adult education is 'akin to the proverbial elephant being described by five blind men: it depends on where you are standing and how you experience the phenomenon' (2007:4). However they do offer a more helpful way forward by acknowledging that adult education is what happens when 'you are working with adults in some organised, educational activity...' (2007:4).

Schuller and Megarry (1979) referring to the United Kingdom, use the term adult education to be understood as an 'extension of general education into adult life....' (1979:257). Again referring to the UK, Jarvis (2002) says that the term 'adult education' carries specific connotations which imply that it is

‘specifically liberal education’ which gives it a stereotype of being a ‘middle-class, leisure time pursuit’ (2002:22).

Jarvis (1983) suggests education can be defined as ‘any planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participants learning and understanding’ (1983:5). Later in his 2002 writings, Jarvis puts forward the meaning of adult education to refer to ‘any educational process undertaken by adults, whether liberal, general or vocational, and located in the spheres of adult, further or higher education or outside the institutional framework entirely’ (2002:22).

Brookfield (1995) when presenting the differing approaches taken within the field of adult education suggests that the important core aspect within each approach is that it enables the development of the skills to learn from experience and plan for the future.

The core idea uniting these diverse formulations is that adults develop a kind of situational reasoning that they use to interpret their experiences and guide their actions (1995:221).

Learning, in its broadest sense, can take place in a variety of ways in a variety of places. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) speak of the importance of understanding the many learning opportunities encountered by adults; how it is important to acknowledge prior knowledge and experience of learners ‘wherever gained’.

This concept of learning taking place in a variety of arenas is central to understanding the concept of 'learning' in an adult educational context. The life experience of adults, the situational context in which learning takes place, is a key factor in the understanding and development of adult learning. The learning of adults is shaped by the society in which he or she lives. Jarvis (1987) makes this point when he says that learning does not take place 'in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives... it is intimately related to that world and affected by it' (1987:11).

This concept of learning challenges the educator to understand how adults learn and have an appreciation for the prior learning which adults bring with them into the formal setting. This prior learning may consist of skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal, informal or self-directed learning, as much as from formal learning opportunities.

2.3.1 Learning Theories

Bateson (1972) spoke of four learning categories, two of which did and two of which did not involve any significant change in the processes of learning. The change that does occur is change and transformation in the way a person understands and makes meaning of experiences, through reflection, action and interpretation and conscious process. Cell (1984) also presented four levels of learning which he names: response learning, situational learning, transitional learning and transcendent learning. Again each level of learning, like those of

Bateson, brings more reflection, understanding and transformative action to the person.

Mezirow's (1972) transformational theory also uses four categories of learning, habitual meaning schemes, learning new schemes, learning through transformation of meaning schemes and learning through perspective transformation. In later publications Mezirow (1991, 2000) reasserts his four principles stating that

learning occurs in one of four ways: by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind (2002: 19).

Gange (1977) developed an eight phase model of learning based on motivation; apprehension; acquisition; retention; recall; generalisation; performance and feedback. He also produced eight types of learning, the first seven are hierarchical and the eighth can occur at any stage. They are signal learning; stimulus-response learning; motor and verbal chaining; multiple-discrimination; concept learning; rule learning and problem solving.

Habermas (1971, 1984) describes three distinct properties of learning; instrumental learning, communicative learning and emancipatory learning. Within these learnings he addresses the need for critical reflection, problem-solving abilities and learning to understand other people's perspectives. This is

done with the intention of gaining insight, to generate knowledge that is attained through critical self-reflection.

Hart (1990) later expands on this framework. Bruner (1966, 1996) also provides four aspects of learning: inter-subjectivity, action, construing and making propositions, which Mezirow (2000) considers incomplete and adds a fifth element of critical awareness (2000:4). Bruner (1966, 1997) talks of learning involving three almost simultaneous processes: acquisition, transformation and evaluation (1977:48), that “knowing is a process, not a product” (1966:27).

For Jarvis (1987) all learning comes from social experiences leading to nine possibilities or ‘routes’. Three of these routes do not result in new learning, this is called non-learning, they are presumption, non-consideration, and rejection; three are non-reflective learning, they are pre-conscious, skills learning and memorisation; and the final three are reflective learning, they are contemplation, reflective skills learning and experimental learning.

2.3.2 Levels of Learning

While there are subtle differences, nuances and developments within the various theories there is one overriding message. Learning can take place at different levels of consciousness; it can be intentional or unintentional learning. It can be learning that is habitual, reactive or active, but not

comprising of reflection, deep thought, change or transformations within the person's perceptions and understanding of the world. Other types of learning involve critical reflection, the trying out of hypothesis, the reframing of, or extracting new meaning from, experiences and finally a profound integrated change in how the person understands and experiences life.

This awareness of differing levels of learning is important for this study of ALBA students because many adults returning to education may not have had the opportunity to develop learning that is critical, reflective and transformative. Many adult learners are still operating from the childhood experience of rote learning or the 'banking' model described by Freire. Learning as understood in the context of this research is dynamic, challenging, and will affect how people perceive, experience and respond to themselves, others and society. Mezirow (2000) the strongest proponent of transformative learning states:

Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action.... Learning may be intentional, the result of deliberate inquiry; incidental, a by-product of another activity involving intentional learning; or mindlessly assimilative. Aspects of both intentional learning and incidental learning take place outside learner awareness (2000:5).

2.3.3 The Experience of Learning

One of the main characteristics coming through for all the theorists is the importance of the learners' experience. Past experience can colour present

experiences. Present experiences need to be reflected upon to establish the learning, which will in turn affect how the learners approach and interpret future experiences. For Dewey (1938) it is essential that learning take place from experience:

The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after... As an individual passes from one situation to another his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue (1938:35, 44).

Kolb (1984) builds on the work of Dewey and places experience at the centre of learning. He is of the opinion that four central tenants involved in learning from experience. These are outlined as (1) concrete experience (2) reflective observation (3) abstract conceptualisation and (4) active experimentation. It is important to stress that these are not stand alone entities, but are interlinked and cyclical. He is adamant that people do learn from their experiences and that for many particularly mature students, 'experiential learning has become the method of choice for learning and personal development' (1984:3).

Jarvis (1987) agrees that all learning begins with experience and for him they need to be of a transformative nature. Again life experience is explicitly named by Boud and Walker (1990, 1992) and Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997),

while Bateson (1994) speaks of the spiral nature of learning from experience (ref Mirriam and Caffarella (1999: 223-229). Marienau and Fiddler (2002) write that student's reflection on their experience is the 'key ingredient' for transformative learning. Experience then is considered as central to the theory of learning, for Jarvis (1987) 'all learning begins with experience' and again Jarvis (2002) believes learning begins with, and can not take place separate from, actual experience:

Learning then always begins with experience, there can be no learning that does not begin with experience although the level of consciousness of the learner plays a significant part in both the experience and the learning (2002:65).

2.3.4 Learning Process

Experiential learning takes into account the actual 'process' of learning. Kolb (1984) believes that the process of learning and experiential learning are as one, that learning takes place in all human settings, through all life stages, through the continuous modification of experiences. That learning is a process through which concepts are developed and continuously modified by experience of thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving.

The emphasis on the process of learning as opposed to the behavioural outcomes distinguishes experiential learning from the idealist approaches of traditional education and from the behavioural theories of learning.... The theory of experiential learning rests on a different philosophical and epistemological base from behaviourist theories of learning and idealist educational approaches (1984:26).

The central idea here is that learning requires an experience to be reflected upon and a form of transformation to take place as a result of that experience. There is also a general agreement running through the various learning theories/aspects, that learning involves change, transformation. Mezirow (1991, 2000) is the leading standard bearer for transformative learning.

...a mindful transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight (2002:23).

Mezirow (1991) is keen to acknowledge the context in which learning takes place, pointing out that there are five primary interacting contexts: (1) the frame of reference or meaning perspective in which the learning is embedded (2) the conditions of communication (3) the line of action in which learning occurs (4) the self-image of the learner (5) the situation encountered – the external circumstances within which an interpretation is made and remembered (1991:13).

In the realm of adult education, the process of learning is as important as the learning outcome. Adults need to know how learning happens, through experience, reflection, experimentation, action. This learning process is an internal process, individual and personal. This form of learning process is different from the more traditional linear approach that adults may have experienced in their childhood educative experiences. Bentham (2002) argues that we need to know about the process of learning in order to build this

knowledge into our learning processes (2002:114). Mezirow (1990) speaks of the learning process as central to 'making meaning', to understand and engage with our environment, to reinterpret old experiences with a new set of principles.

Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (1990:12).

2.3.5 Learning and Knowledge

Learning is a process which leads to new experiences, new interpretations, new understanding and new transformations. Ultimately learning creates new knowledge. It increases our skill sets, our cognitive abilities, it transforms our way of knowing. It not only changes what we know, but how we know, it enlightens our way of knowing.

Without exception, despite differing emphasis on the learning process, there is unanimous agreement that the outcome of learning is knowledge. To fully understand learning we need to have an understanding of knowledge and the processes of knowing.

Kolb (1984) plots the theory of knowing within two major areas. The first form of knowledge is 'knowledge as comprehension', knowledge that is constructed in the Piagetian system, that knowing takes place and is fixed, it is a record of

achievement and linear. The second form is 'knowledge as apprehension', the experiencing of the here-and-now, the process of understanding experiences as they happen, for example, personal knowledge. He is of the opinion that a holistic system of knowledge must draw heavily on both 'apprehension' and 'comprehension', rather than one approach versus the other. He says that knowledge is not solely a static theory but a living reality, that knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences.

Knowledge does not exist solely in books, mathematical formulas, or philosophical systems; it requires active learners to interact with, interpret and elaborate these symbols. The complete structure of social knowledge must therefore include living systems of inquiry, learning subcultures sharing similar norms and values about how to create valid social knowledge (1984:121).

Belenky, Bond and Weinstock (1997) speak of various ways of knowing including connected knowing; received knowing; subjective knowledge; procedural knowledge; constructed knowledge; separate knowers; communicative knowers.. Each form of knowing show a preference for one aspect above another, for example received knowers have quicker understanding of explanations given, while communicative knowers like to achieve consensus.

2.3.6 Models of Learning

Theorists, such as Piaget, Dewey, Lewin, Fowler, Kolb, Jarvis, Mezirow, et al, all provide models of learning, as discussed above, be they developmental or

experiential based. What is important to extract from the individual models is that there is a similar thread running throughout. Learning is gradual, incremental and at times cyclical in nature. There is recognition that learning is uniquely individual and the process of that learning is core. Some theorists (Dewey, Kolb, Lewin, Jarvis) have developed 'learning cycles' or 'spirals' which have differences, but ultimately comprise the following elements: concrete experience; observations and reflections; formation of abstract concepts and generalisations; action, testing implications of concepts in new situations (adapted from Kolb and Fry 1975). For Jarvis (2000) the learning cycle is the process of 'transforming experience into knowledge, skills attitudes, values and feelings etc'. (2000:58).

Other theories of adult learning include 'andragogy' as described in chapter one, championed by Malcolm Knowles (1973) and transformation theory championed by Jack Mezirow, to be discussed in chapter three. Mezirow (2002) asserts that learning is a process of transformation. He states that learning,

is the process of transforming that present experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions etc.; it is a matter therefore, of modifying the individual biography, which in its turn will affect the manner by which future situations are experienced (2002:67).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) offer a synopsis of other learning models including the CAL model offered by Cross (1981) which includes the

principles of andragogy along with personal and situational characteristics. McClusky's Theory of Margin acknowledges the centrality of the adults' life situation, noting it is a period of change and development, growth and integration. Knox's (1980) Proficiency Theory also places the current role of the person in the centre of the learning dynamic (1999:278-283).

Gangé et al (1992) suggested a nine phase learning instruction. Gaining attention; informing the learner of the objectives; stimulating recall of prerequisite learning's; presenting the stimulus material; providing learning guidance; eliciting the performance; providing feedback about performance correctness; assessing the performance; enhancing retention and transfer. In 1997 Gangé proposed another nine phase learning process expectancy; attentive; selective perception; coding; storing; memory storage retrieval; transfer; responding; reinforcement.

One of the key theorists used within the ALBA programme is David Kolb, precisely because of the centrality given to the role of experience, the cyclical nature of learning and the understanding of the different developmental issues of adult learners. Kolb (1984) links learning, process and knowledge together saying that:

Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (1984:38).

and again

To understand learning, we must understand the nature and forms of human knowledge and the processes whereby this knowledge is created... (1984:36).

Kolb (1984) believes that there is a four stage process cycle of learning, from concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Learning requires both the process of experience and reflective transformative process. Experience without understanding is not enough. There must be a process of comprehension, a transition, a transformation of meaning, leading to a new, active form of learning. Added to this there must also be an awareness of the cultural, biographical and historical aspects that each individual brings into the learning process. As Mezirow and associates say (2002) it is important that learning should 'emphasise contextual understanding' within the learning process.

Emerging from this examination of the learning process is the centrality of experience, biographical, cultural, historical, and the individual nature of the learning process for adult learners. Learning involves reflection and action. It involves personal investment and is influenced by the external environment of the learner.

In order to develop a fuller understanding of the process involved for individual learners, attention will now be focused on learning methodologies and styles.

2.4 Learning Methodology

Bennett (1990) defines learning styles as:

[The] consistent pattern of behaviour and performance by which an individual approaches educational experiences. It is the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment (1990:140).

Other definitions are provided by Toye (1989) who says that learning style ‘attempts to explain learning variation between individuals in the way they approach learning tasks’ (1989:226-227), James and Blank (1993) define learning style as:

The complex manner in which, and conditions under which, learners most efficiently and most effectively perceive, process, store and recall what they are attempting to learn (1993:47-48).

What is being expressed here is the notion that individual learners find and develop their own personal approaches to learning, which best suits them. This may highlight their personal weaknesses and strengths, and give pointers on how to approach learning which the student may find helpful. These styles may be influenced by past experiences, environmental factors as well as personality types.

A number of theorists have developed their own learning style theories or inventories, the purpose of which is to help the learner discover ways that may

best suit them as they enter into the process of adult education. This engagement by the student in a form of self-assessment is an important factor in the student's knowledge of themselves. Marienau's (1999) study of student's engaging in self assessment presents fifteen themes that through this process including: students learn from experience; it stimulates reflection and introspection; fosters shifts in perspectives; whets appetite for feedback; help individual to function more effectively; fosters self-agency and authority and enhances a sense of identity (1999:139-142).

There are a number of factors which influence how an adult learns, these include, personality types, educational specialisation, professional career, current job role and adaptive competencies. How an individual learns shapes the course of their personality. Of the many learning style theories that exist, this research will focus primarily on Kolb's 'Learning Style Inventory', and the Jungian based Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as these are used on the ALBA course.

2.4.1 Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI)

The Kolb Learning Style Inventory is based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (1984) and is designed to help individuals identify the way they learn from experience. The ELT model described by Kolb has three distinct stages: (1) acquisition, birth to adolescences basic cognitive abilities developed; (2) specialisation, from school to early adulthood and work, the

development of social, educational, and organisational abilities; and (3) integration in mid-career and later life.

The Learning Style Inventory (LSI) was developed (1971,1985,1999) primarily to serve two purposes: (1) to serve as an educational tool to increase individuals' understanding of the process of learning from experience and their unique individual approach to learning, and (2) to provide a research tool for investigating experiential learning theory (ELT) and the characteristics of individual learning styles. The LSI is constructed as a self-assessment exercise and tool for construct validation of ELT. It is designed to help the individual to understand how they learn best in educational settings and everyday life. The advantage for a person to know more about how they learn will help them to maximise their learning, manage social issues such as conflict, personal and professional relationships, work in teams through understanding of self and others and problem solve.

To-date there have been five versions of the LSI; Version 1 (1971, 1976), version 2 (1985), version 2a (1993) version 3 (1999) and version 3.1 (2005). The format is a short questionnaire, asking the learner to rank four sentence endings that correspond to four learning models –

- *Concrete Experience* (experiencing) focuses on being involved in experiences and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way. It

emphasises feelings as opposed to thinking. People with concrete experience orientation enjoy and are good at relating to others. They are often good intuitive decision makers and function well in unstructured situations.

- *Reflective Observation* (reflecting) focuses on understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by carefully observing and impartially describing them. People with a reflective orientation enjoy intuiting the meaning of situations and ideas and are good at seeing their implications. They are good at looking at things from different perspectives and at appreciating different points of view. They like to rely on their own thoughts and feelings to form opinions. People with this orientation value patience, impartiality and considered, thoughtful judgement.

- *Abstract Conceptualisation* (thinking) focuses on using logic, ideas, and concepts. It emphasises thinking as opposed to feeling, theories as opposed to intuitively understanding, scientific as opposed to artistic approach to problems. A person with abstract conceptualisation is good at systematic planning, manipulation of abstract symbols and quantitative analysis. They value precision and the discipline of analysing ideas.

- *Active Experimentation* (doing) focuses on actively influencing people and changing situations. It emphasises practical applications as opposed to reflective understanding. The emphasis is on doing as opposed to observing. People with active experimentation enjoy, and are good at, getting things

accomplished. They are willing to take risks in order to achieve their objectives (Kolb 1984: 68-70).

The LSI is designed as an holistic and dynamic theory of learning. The four models although interdependent, are set up as being related dialectically, i.e. the choice of one involves not choosing the opposite. Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) is opposite Concrete Experience (CE), as are Active Experimentation (AE) and Reflective Observation (RO). Through answering the questions and calculating the scores, the result is shown as a learning style represented by one of the four quadrants created by the AC-CE, AE-RO poles. The four quadrants are: (1) The Divergent Learning Style, (2) The Assimilating Learning Style, (3) The Convergent Learning Style, and (4) The Accommodating Learning Style.

- *The Divergent Learning Style*: Combines Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation. People with this learning style are best at viewing concrete situations from many different points of view. Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action.
- *The Assimilating Style*: Combines Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualisation. People with this learning style are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form.

- *The Converging Style*: Combines Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation. People in this learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories.
- *The Accommodating Style*: Combines Active Experimentation and Concrete Experiences phase. People with this learning style have the ability to learn primarily from ‘hands-on’ experience.²

The diagram below shows the basic strengths of each learning style (Kolb 2007:10)

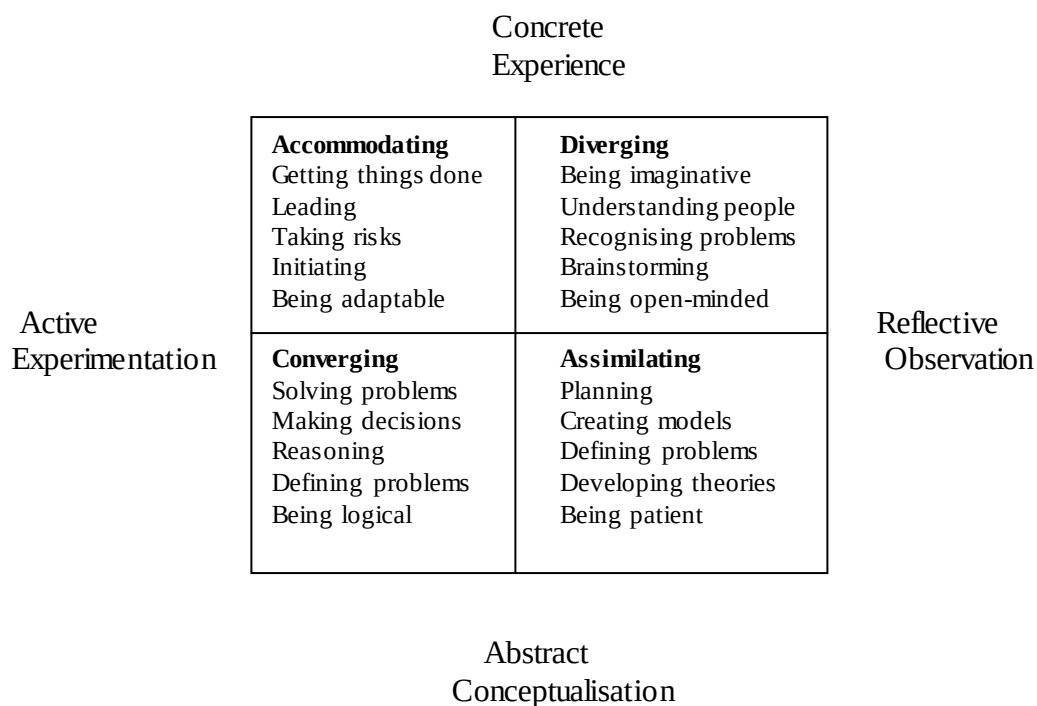


Table 1: Kolb Learning Styles

² (Kolb 1984:68-78; The Kolb Learning Style Inventory – Version 3.1 2005 Technical Specifications; Kolb (2007) Experience Based Learning Systems – Kolb Learning Style Inventory Workbook, Version 3.1)

2.4.2 Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

The MBTI draws on the research of Carl Jung. It identifies four main fields of personality types/learning styles which the individual will score along a continuum within each area. The four fields are: extroversion/introversion; sensing/intuition; thinking/feeling; and judging/perspective. It is widely used as a self-reporting assessment of people's orientations regarding the Jungian personality types. The person receives a score in each diametrically opposed area. This will give them a preferential personality type in each of the four areas. For example, a person could score I,S,T,J, or E,P,S,F etc. with this information they will then be able to read a personality type profile related to how they scored.

Jung's Psychological Types.

Mode of relation to the world	E EXTROVERT TYPE Focus oriented toward external world of other people and thinking	I INTROVERT TYPE Focus oriented toward inner world of ideas and feelings
Mode of decision making	J JUDGING TYPE Emphasis on order through reaching decision and resolving issues, like to set and strictly follow agendas	P PERCEIVING TYPE Emphasis on gathering information and obtaining as much data as possible, willing to change with circumstances
Mode of perceiving	S SENSING TYPE Emphasis on sense perception, on facts, procedures, details and concrete events	N INTUITION TYPE Emphasis on possibilities, imagination, meaning, and seeing things as a whole
Mode of judging	T THINKING TYPE Emphasis on analysis, using logic, rules and rationality, to make decisions.	F FEELING TYPE Emphasis on human values, establishing personal friendships, decisions made mainly on beliefs and likes, personal considerations.

Table 2. Jung's Psychological Types (Kolb 1984:80; Bentham 2002:101)

Kolb (1984) is able to make connections between his LSI and the MBTI saying there is a correspondence between the MBTI introversion and his experiential learning mode of reflective observation; between extraversion and active experimentation; between sensing type with concrete experience and the apprehension process; and intuition with his abstract conceptualisation and the comprehension process; judgement with the abstract conceptualisation; perception relates to concrete experience; the thinking type with his convergent area; the feeling personality with his divergent learning style (1984:80-84).

While the description provided of different types of learning styles is informative and hopefully useful, it must be considered with a note of caution. Learning styles are not fixed, set or immovable; they are traits that exist in a particular person at a specific time and point in that person's life. They are flexible and may change over time as a result of new experiences, new learning opportunities, new life or career situations. If a person is working in an accounts office, they will score highly in one area dealing with order. If they have stopped working and spend much of their time engaged in the arts, they would register a different learning style. Another point to bear in mind is that learning experiences that are congruent with learning styles have a more positive outcome.

2.5 Learning in Context

Adult education is, as Kolb (1984) would assert, a ‘tension-and-conflict-filled process’ moving the learner from concrete experience to abstract conceptualisation, from actor to observer from specific involvement to general analytic detachment (1984:30-31). It is the ‘praxis’ of Freire, the conflict between concrete and abstract concepts of Lewin, the ‘moving force’ of Dewey. For Bentham

academic achievement depends on an interaction between a number of factors, including gender, social class, type of schooling, ethnic background, and how the individual sees educational achievement in relation to their gender identity and peer groups (2002:95).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) summarise the conflictual issues within adult education by stating that within the past twenty years there has been acknowledgement of the importance of issues such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. However, not everybody wants to acknowledge such issues or that different ethnic groups bring different experiences and needs to the learning environment (1999:125-127).

The challenge facing educators is to provide a learning environment that takes into account some of the issues already mentioned along with others, such as, culture, ethnicity, race, gender, age, economic, cognitive development, intelligence type and learning style, prior experience and personal histories.

Adult education needs to approach learning from a developmental holistic place. This is confirmed by Bentham (2002) when he asserts:

[That] many factors, such as gender, social class, ethnic origin and type of schooling, and an interaction of these factors, contribute to differing levels of educational attainment (2002:87).

Adult education has the ability to enable the learner to move from their current position into new experiences, new ways of thinking, new ways of interpretation, new frames of reference and enhanced problem solving skills. In order to do this, educators need to acknowledge, accommodate and challenge issues which might jeopardise this learning process. Learning takes place in a context, a context of social interaction with other people and society, from early childhood through to adulthood. Mezirow and Associates (2002) are certain that for learning to happen it needs to be based on 'values such as freedom, equality, tolerance, social justice, civic responsibility and education' (2002:16).

2.5.1 Personal History

Adult learners come to learning with a personal history, previous (mostly childhood) experiences of education, family role, career role, a social role, culture, health issues, personal emotional issues and a whole mixture of life issues which demand attention. Mezirow calls this the 'learning past' it is an important part of the individuals present and future (2002:58). Add to this the extra responsibility of entering into the discipline of learning, where we

encourage them to reflect on the way they understand themselves, their histories, their culture and their place in the world. Some adult learners experience stress and anxiety when taking on the new role of 'student'. As educators we need to be conscious of this jigsaw reality because students who are stressed will not be able to fully engage with the new learning opportunities.

A person's past/current career role will have an influence on their learning experience and often their learning style as they will have been exposed to a specific learning style/methodology, Kolb (1984) refers to this influence as 'shaping the person's adaptive orientation'. Life events, life cycles and transitions such as births, marriage, illness, death, anticipated or not, all have an impact on a person's development and current position in life. There are milestones, ambitions, desires, goals attained or to be reached that affect, effect and inspire a person. Life is a process, it is never static, and the current position or role a learner is experiencing will not always be so.

Age related issues also need attention particularly when the learner may need specific accommodation and understanding of issues such as sight, hearing, memory recall. Human reactions may slow with age, intelligence does not, and adults of any age have the ability to learn. Indeed as already said an understanding of human developmental changes over the life span and is crucial to an understanding of adult education.

The publication by Carol Gilligan (1982) of her book '*In a Different Voice*' followed by '*Women's Way of Knowing*' by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Taruel (1996) brought to the fore the issue of gender and development and learning. They suggest that the story of development was traditionally informed by the male voice only and that the voice of women had been silenced. Indeed, Gilligan found that Kohlberg's (1984) moral development scheme did not adequately represent women's characteristics. Traditionally in society, men took a public role, were seen to be more logical and mathematical while women assumed the private functions of homemaker, carer, and place a higher importance on interpersonal relationships. This partly led to the 'silence' of women, which Goldberger (1996) develops further speaking of the ritual and cultural endorsement of silence, that only the experiences of men were recorded. Evident even in this research is the fact that all the seminal thinkers referred to in chapter one are men. This alone supports the concept of the female voice being silenced.

While acknowledging this important historical and sociological reality, it is however, unfortunately, not within the scope of this research to examine the scope of either the complex issue of the representation of women or the impact it has had on the development and delivery of adult education provision. Female theorists and practitioners are referenced throughout this work, for example, Patricia Cranton, Sharan Merriam, Phyllis Cunningham, Rosemary Caffarella, Catherine Marienau, Kathleen Taylor, amongst others. However,

this can be acknowledged as a limitation within the research into transformative adult education.³

Brooks and Edwards (1997) discussed the issue of sexual identity and how their life experience impact on their learning. Also to be considered and understood are the issues of mental health, physical disabilities and learning disabilities. Understanding and accommodations need to be in place in order for the educational experience of learners to be as complete and accessible as possible. Whilst these issues are not the focus of this research, they need to be noted and understood as part of the myriad that is adulthood. Indeed, during the course of the research interviews, a number of these issues arose as part of the individual's story. In being asked to speak about their experience of being in adult education, interviewees freely spoke of personal issues including physical and learning disabilities and of mental and emotional health issues.

2.5.2 Learning Preferences

It is important to help adult learners to recognise and understand that intelligence is not confined to the traditional I.Q test. Part of this process would undoubtedly include assisting the learner to discover their own type of intelligence and their own learning style. For example; Gardner (1983, 2004) as described above, offers the notion of multiple intelligences that we all have and which can offer us a fuller appreciation of human cognitive development.

³ Further consideration to the contribution of female theorists within the field of adult education is needed and could be part of a future research project.

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. All previously described above.

Consciousness of the learning styles of adult learners, it is important that adult educators take full cognisance of this reality, and provide an educational experience that accommodates the various learning styles and abilities of their students. We need to challenge the status-quo of educational systems, which provide a system of education that often suits the provider rather than a system that is centred on the needs of the learner. This can be achieved through the use of different methodologies, media and course designs. Through recognising individual learning styles we will be able to enhance the learning experience and potential of the learner.

Students learn better if they engage with a system that best suits their own abilities. It is important for students to become aware of their own learning profiles. It is important too for the provider, the educational institution, to be aware of the learner's individuality and learning style so as to try and avoid a mismatch of learning style and methodologies.

2.5.3 Prior Learning

Adults bring a lot of experience into the learning environment. Recognition of prior learning at times has been confined to approved accredited courses. We need to broaden our interpretation of prior learning/prior knowledge to include

life, career and other experiences from which knowledge and learning has been gained.

Gardner (1991, 1999, 2006) speaks of the numerous ways through which a learner can gain access to the learning experience, he calls these 'entry points', and they are: 'narrational', 'numerical/quantitative', 'logical, existential/foundational', 'aesthetic, experiential/hands on', 'interpersonal'. Entry points enable learners to be directly at the centre of a disciplinary topic that arouses their interest and encourages further exploration (1999:169-174). By providing multiple entry points the educator is allowing the learner access to the learning experience in a helpful way as they place the student at the centre of the learning experience.

The ALBA programme has a detailed structure in place for such learning to be acknowledged. The student needs to be able to show that learning took place; they need to describe the process, the experience and the learning outcomes, referenced to appropriate academic theories. Students who complete this task, called an Independent Learning Pursuit (ILP) can receive European Credit Transfer (ECT) credits.

2.5.4 Learning Environment and Culture

Culture, according to Gage and Berliner (1991) plays an integral part of any person. Culture in the family home, school, heritage and the wider society

plays a large role in determining individual differences. They further suggest that culture has an impact on a person's cognitive development, personality and intelligence (1991:166-219). Bentham (2002) considers that a person's social and ethnical background, their religion and family structure has a bearing on learning style and educational attainment (2002:87-108). Writing on a similar point, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) discuss how Asian students are culturally influenced by the importance of family, society, and find their identity in external sources, as opposed to Western students who are more individualistic. Jarvis (2002) tells us that culture is not a static thing, it is dynamic and changing, new knowledge, new values, beliefs and skills develop and are adopted into a culture. This he asserts can be reflected in a person's knowledge – the need to ever develop, challenge and adapt (2002:54-55). For Mezirow (2002) 'the who, what, where, why and how of learning may be only understood as situated in a specific cultural context' (2002:7).

It is therefore important to acknowledge the culture/environment/world in which a person has grown, developed and lived. Each adult has been influenced by a myriad of cultural aspects, including education, family and social status, gender, previous experiences, career choices, current roles, etc., all of which have influenced the individuals human development and all of which are brought into the learning situation.

As a result it is vital that the learning environment provided is appropriate to adult learning methodologies, learning style, prior experiences and prior learning of the adult student. There is a duty to stimulate learning and problem solving through appropriate methodologies. For example, does the learning environment need to provide the opportunity for students to learn under the different intelligences of Howard Gardner, or the different orientations of Kolb concrete, reflective, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. It is clear that the learning environment needs to take into account the learning styles of each individual learner and create a learning climate to match these styles.

2.5.5 Role of Educator

The role of the educator is a challenging one. The educator has a responsibility to help learners understand their prior experiences, beliefs and theories. The educator has to create opportunities for new experiences; new opportunities using different methodologies to enable the learner to engage in a process of learning that will enhance and change their existing beliefs and theories. There is a duty to help learners to become more aware of the context of their personal histories and to enable them to be fully open to new experiences, new concepts, and new interpretations. As Mezirow (2002) puts it, 'develop the capacity to reflect critically on the lenses we use to filter, engage, and interpret the world' (2002:71).

Education provision needs to take into account the individual differences each person brings to the learning situation. Being an adult learner does not necessarily mean that those adults have the skill sets often presumed by the provider. According to Mezirow, ‘adult students are not all automatically self-directing merely by virtue of being adults, or easily trained to become so’ (2002:67). It is, therefore, a challenge for the institutional provider to furnish structures and programmes that allow for the individuality of learners and learning styles.

Within any group of learners, there will be people at various positions on the life cycle, living various life roles. This provides a challenge and an opportunity for the education provider to not only be conscious of such issues, but to be accommodating in how best they provide the service. Meeting the life event needs of the students is as important as accommodating their learning styles and learning needs.

The issue of gender also creates a challenge and an opportunity for the provider, particularly when many adult learners are women. It is important for the voice and experience of women not only be heard, but also be listened to and incorporated in the planning of educational programmes.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the nature of human development (especially in the adult years): its complexities, stages and recurrent nature. It established that there cannot be a presumption that all adults are at the same developmental place as each other, just by virtue of them all being adults. Educators need to be aware of these complexities, be sensitive and proactive in responding to the educational needs and experiences of the adult learner.

This chapter has explored the nature of intelligence, learning, and learning styles were developed and placed within the adult education context. It has discussed the different forms, and theories of learning. It has included a discovery of the progression of thought and understanding as to the nature of learning and knowledge, and of how an adult learns. Particular reference was given to Kolb's 'Learning Style Inventory' and its relevance within the ALBA programme.

Finally, this chapter extracted some of the contextual issues that arise within the sphere of adult education; Issues concerning ethnicity, educational background, experience, gender, social and family status. The learning process is not something that can be of static formulation. It is not necessarily a similar process for each individual person, it needs to take account of each individual, their uniqueness, their skills, traits, experiences, learning styles, motivations, histories, roles and needs.

In chapter one a comprehensive understanding of adult education was presented, noting the development, key theorists and emerging themes. Chief amongst these was transformation theory and Jack Mezirow. This foundational understanding of adult education is now in chapter two combined with an understanding of adult development and learning, including the situational and contextual issues of adult learners. The natural progression for this research is to now focus specifically on the theory of transformation and how it exists within our understanding of adult education and learning.

Chapter Three: Transformative Education

3. Introduction

The previous two chapters discussed the broad parameters of an understanding of the nature of adult education. In chapter one the philosophical context and the historical development was explored. It also introduced the theorists associated with adult education and noted some of the emerging themes of adult education, first among these were transformative education, which is the focus of this chapter. In chapter two the concepts of adult development, the nature of intelligence, the concept of learning and of knowledge, learning styles and the learning context of adult education were discussed. As a result, it is now important to focus more explicitly on the nature of transformation; the theory and the learning associated with it. For it is the very notion of transformation, within the context of adult education, and adult learning that underpins the premises of this research.

The primary focus of this chapter will be the work of Jack Mezirow (1975, 1978, 1981, 1991, 2000, 2009). Mezirow has, since his initial study in 1975, been the leading theorist of transformation and transformative learning. This chapter will provide an understanding of transformational theory and the impact and processes of transformational learning and the centrality of critical reflection.

The first three sections of this chapter are concerned with presenting an outline and a working understanding of the theory of transformation and the work of Mezirow, supported by references to Daloz, Cranton and Brookfield. Section one is concerned with the ten phases of transformation, section two with the elements of transformation, namely; meaning perspective/frame of reference; habits of mind and points of view/meaning schemes, and section concerns itself with critical thinking. With this understanding of the core elements of the theory of transformation, the final section of the chapter concerns itself with the concept of transformative learning.

3.1 Understanding Transformation

Transformation theory sets out to explain and understand the processes that take place when adults engage in education and learning. It is interested in how adults understand their learning and what (if any) the impact this learning has on the individuals. It seeks to elucidate the developmental and thought processes of the adult learner. It speaks of ‘trigger events’, ‘frames of reference’, ‘habits of mind’, ‘meaning schemes’ as aspects of transformation.

Transformational theory places great emphasis on ‘critical reflection’ and ‘processes’. Mezirow and other theorists draw on the work of developmental psychology – Piaget; Jung; Chomsky and Kohlberg - in helping the reader to understand the concept of transformational change from childhood interpretations of experiences to an adult, more critical, interpretation.

Mezirow is building on an accepted goal of adult education which is to help adults discover the meaning of their experiences.

Transformation theory and transformational learning are, according to Mezirow, a means by which a person can change their 'frame of reference', their 'habits of mind'; their way of interpreting and experiencing of the world. Mezirow (1991) offers the following description of his understanding of transformation theory which:

...explains the way adult learning is structured and to determine by what process the frames of reference through which we view and interpret our experience (meaning perspective) are changed or transformed...it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being and their performance (1991:xiii).

3.2 Ten Phases of Transformation

Transformation as understood by Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2009) can begin with a 'distorting dilemma's/'triggering event'. These are often in the form of a personal crisis, or sequence of events which through a process of learning activities will culminate in a change in the person's self concept leading to a new perspective which then leads to action. Mezirow refers to these various paths towards transformation as the major 'catalytic event' or as a process of 'incremental transformation'. Similarly, Cranton (2006) speaks of the transformative process as being 'provoked by a single dramatic event, a series

of almost unnoticed cumulative events, a deliberate conscious effort to make change in one's life... (2006:57). Whichever way transformation occurs, it is clear from all the theorists that a process of 'reflection' is essential in order for new learning and new understanding of the experience, to be accomplished. It must be noted that while there are recognised elements or aspects to transformation, for even the theorists speak of 'phases' or 'stages', it is not seen as a linear process,. As Taylor (2000) suggests, transformation is more 'individualistic, fluid, and recursive than originally thought' (2000:291). A more detailed analysis of the elements of critical reflection will be discussed later in this chapter.

Cranton (1997) working with Mezirow's theory of transformation speaks of learners developing 'autonomous thinking' and the need individuals have to understand the meaning of experience. Mezirow (1991) when speaking of 'clarification of meaning' and of 'perspective transformation' offers us ten phases which the adult learner may experience:

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame.
3. A critical assessment of assumptions.
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
6. Planning a course of action.
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8. Provisional trying of new roles.

9. Building 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. (1991:168; 2000:22)

Mezirow believes strongly that transformation is achievable when the person progresses through these phases.

Perspective transformation involves a sequence of learning activities that begins with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with a changed self-concept that enables a reintegration into one's life context on the basis of conditions dictated by a new perspective (1991:193).

It is important to note that Mezirow does not believe that these sequences of learning are necessarily a linear step by step development, but are better understood as 'sequential moments'.

The sequence of transformative learning activities is not made up of invariable developmental steps; rather, the activities should be understood as sequential moments of 'meaning becoming clarified' (1991:193).

In the analysis of the data in chapter six, reference will be made to the existence of transformation and the clear identification of these stages. It is important, therefore, at this point to have a clear understanding as to the exact meaning of each phase.

3.2.1 A Disorienting Dilemma

Comparable to trigger events a disorienting dilemma is something that upsets a person's equilibrium to the point that they feel the need to take action. A

disorienting dilemma does not necessarily have to be in the immediate present, it may, in fact, be a past event or something which happened in the persons childhood, which has continued to have an effect on their life. They are, according to Mezirow (2009), a response to an externally imposed dilemma, such as children leaving home, personal illness, bereavement, success at work or retirement. Mezirow writes,

There can be little doubt that transformative learning often occurs as the result of an adult's gaining insight into unresolved traumatic experience occurring in childhood. It also seems apparent that transformative learning may be the result of our gaining insight into other unresolved areas of conflict as well... (2009:27).

Within this research both forms of disorienting dilemma are visibly present in the research data. One group of interviewees experienced a recent emotionally traumatic event, that of becoming unemployed. Another group, held a desire to go to college, something which was not possible or available to them in their childhood for a myriad of reasons.

3.2.2 Self-Examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame

Adopting new positions whilst letting go of long held views and assumptions is not only challenging but can be an emotionally charged experience. People who experience such disorienting dilemmas will have a myriad of feelings, some easier to process than others. Mezirow (1991) acknowledges that such feelings can be painful because they question previous held frames of reference and meaning schemes, that they are often an 'intensely threatening

emotional experience' (2000:6). As part of the transformative process Mezirow believes that people need to learn to 'negotiate and act' on such experiences and feelings rather than to 'uncritically assimilate' those from others (2000:8).

Transformation Theory's focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others... (2000:8).

3.2.3 A Critical Assessment of Assumptions

Transformative Learning can not take place without personal critical reflection on one's assumptions; assumptions which have been unquestionably held since childhood, assumptions which may be culturally and generationally influenced. Mezirow (1990) asserts that critical assessment is the 'process of testing the justification or validity of taken-for-granted premises' (1990:354).

Critical reflection is a key element to transformation and is central to Mezirow's work. It is for him important to challenge such beliefs through critical assessment of these assumptions, to question the taken-for-granted positions and to challenge their validity:

Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built (1990:1)... Challenging of the validity of presuppositions in prior learning (1990:12).

3.2.4 Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared

Transformative Learning has both individual and social dimensions and implications; it involves not only development of personal awareness but must include discourse with others. The type of discourse Mezirow is interested in is not one based on winning arguments but 'involves finding agreement, welcoming difference, 'trying on' other points of view' (2000:12). It is a social process which involves 'testing our new perspective on friends, peers, and mentors' (Mezirow 1991:185).

It is through such social interaction that people learn to recognise that they are not alone in their journey of transformation. That their experience is a universal reality in transformational learning, there is what Mezirow calls 'consensual validation'. He writes

To seek consensus, we turn to those we feel are best informed, least biased, and most rational to critically assess the evidence and arguments and arrive consensually at the best judgment (1990:10).

This social aspect of transformational learning is important as learners can find comfort in discovering other people are having similar experiences, which gives them a bond of identification and provide potential 'role models' (1991:205).

Implicit in any learning community is a mutual sense of solidarity among participants that entails acceptance of and identification with the values of the community (1991:207).

3.2.5 Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

Part of the transformative process is for people to try out their new understanding of themselves and their new interpretations of experiences. Action and praxis are an integral part of transformational theory which is achieved through a process of exploration (Mezirow 1991:204). Mezirow (1990) speaks of the educator having a responsibility to

assist them [learners] to learn how to take the action found necessary by the new perspective... this may involve new ways of understanding and using knowledge or new ways of understanding oneself and acting in interpersonal relations (1990:358).

Transformation is witnessed when the individual is able to make choices which reflect their new understanding. It is noted by Mezirow (1991, 2000) that this new understanding of self, the new interpretation of values and beliefs may not always be readily accepted by friends, relations or life partners, as they have not been part of the transformational journey (1991:194), indeed it can even seriously threaten such relationships (2000:xii).

3.2.6 Planning a course of action

Putting learning into action is one of the core themes within transformative learning. Following critical reflection on new learning the emphasis is to incorporate this learning into one's personal and social life.

All transformative learning involves taking action to implement insights derived from critical reflection (Mezirow 1991:225).

The learner must have the will to act upon his or her new convictions... (1990:355).

This demands a level of understanding and emotional strength

It is not enough to understand intellectually the need to change the way one acts; one requires emotional strength and an act of will in order to move forward (Mezirow 1991:171).

Such intellectual or emotional strength may not be immediately present, but just as learning is a process, so too is planning a course of action. Mezirow notes that

A transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act or not. This decision may result in immediate action or delayed action, caused by situational constraints, or lack of information on how to act, or a reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action (2009:22).

3.2.7 Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

Students in a transformative learning environment will not only broaden their knowledge base but they will engage in making and developing new plans for

their future. For some this will lead to a manifestation of their learning through action. The processes involved which leads to the implementing any action is also a process of learning for the student. It is a sign that transformational learning has taken place, as students review, revise amend and make changes in their lives. This is a key element within transformation theory and it is for this reason that transformative learning programmes include elements of personal development, communication skills along with critical thinking and ethics. Mezirow points out that,

Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action (1990:1).

Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (1991:12).

3.2.8 Provisional trying of new roles

Education programmes following a transformative learning model will often include a component of practical work experience, an internship, or a voluntary work placement for example. Within ALBA the 'Capstone' sequence requires students to fulfil forty-eight hours of such a placement. Such an emphasis is in keeping with the concept of 'Praxis', the integration of learning into social action. Mezirow observes

Action in transformation theory is not only behaviour, the effect of a cause, but rather 'Praxis', the creative implementation of a purpose (1991:12).

It is through such experiences that students learn to test their hypothesis, to try out new roles within personal relationships or within the wider community. It is through this process of trying out new roles that students can experience praxis, plan and implement new roles.

3.2.9 Building Competence and Self Confidence in New Roles and Relationships

Today almost all transformative learning programmes will include an element of personal development and communication skills, which are to help improve the individuals self confidence. Through critical reflection, participatory study and collaborative learning, students also learn to experiment with new roles, new understandings and new relationships. Mezirow speaks of the learner developing competencies as they move through the transformative learning process, allowing them to overcome difficulties in areas in which they found difficult. He proposes that

The learner is motivated to move forward through the stages of transformation by a sense of personal competence, acquired from prior experiences, that allows him or her to overcome feelings of dependence and lack of power and sustains developmental efforts (1991:162).

3.2.10 A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

Having engaged in a transformative learning process, reflected on experience, undertaken new learning opportunities, developed the skill of critical analysis,

begun the process of setting new goals and putting into place new actions, students find they are drawn into an often challenging experience of trying to integrate their new learning, and their new visions into their everyday life.

Transformative learning not only encourages personal change, action, social action, and praxis, but it incorporates personal transformation, personal congruence on behalf of the learner. It is this that Mezirow is concerned with in this stage, he says:

We may also look to make sure that our actions have been consistent with our values, to see how well we are doing in relation to our goals, whether our attitude has been objective and our interpretations of the results convincing (1990:7).

3.3 Elements of Transformation Theory

Central to transformative theory and the process of transformative learning activities, Mezirow asserts a number of key aspects to transformative learning are: meaning perspectives/ frames of reference; habits of mind; points of view/meaning schemes and the centrality of critical reflection.

Cranton (2006) tries to explain these terms by telling us that the ‘frame of reference’ is how we filter the world and can be expressed as a ‘habit of mind’, which is expressed as a ‘point of view’. The ‘point of view’ is made up of clusters of ‘meaning schemes’.

To assist in the understanding of transformation the following section will proceed to discuss these elements in some more detail with specific reference to Mezirow.

3.3.1 Meaning Perspective/Frame of Reference

A frame of reference, also referred to as a 'meaning perspective', is, for Mezirow, (1991) the process through which 'all meaning is construed and all learning takes place' (1991:4). It can be understood to be the way in which an individual filters the information and meaning they absorb. Like any filter there are layers of filtration or structures which the information must pass through. A person's frame of reference is compiled by aspects such as a person's culture, family, socialisations, assumptions, expectations, sociological and psychological development. Mezirow (1990) defined a meaning perspective as referring to the structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past experience during the process of interpretation... That they are made up of higher order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations... (1990:2).

Mezirow (1991, 2000) suggests that frames of reference are sets of assumptions and expectations held by the person in social, psychological, epistemological, moral-ethical, philosophical, aesthetic domains of a person's life. These assumptions and expectations can be firmly held and are often

difficult to broaden. He suggests that a frame of reference serves as a 'boundary condition for interpreting the meaning of an experience' (1991:32) and there is a need to transform a 'problematic' frame of reference (2000:20). A problematic frame of reference maybe a belief held from childhood that is no longer useful or helpful as an adult living and interpreting the world. It is by these meaning perspectives that adults make value judgements and develop their belief systems. This is explained by Mezirow when he says that:

Our values and sense of self are anchored in our frames of reference. They provide us with a sense of stability, coherence, community, and identity. Consequently they are often emotionally charged and strongly defended. Other points of view are judged against the standards set by our points of view. Viewpoints that call our frames of reference into question may be dismissed as distorting, deceptive, ill intentioned, or crazy (2000:18).

He says that as adults have

Acquired a coherent body of experience – assumptions, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses, - frames of reference that define their world (1977:5).

and again that

Meaning perspectives are acquired through cultural assimilation...or intentionally learned. Other stereotypes we have unintentionally learned (1990:3).

Further he informs us that

Meaning perspectives are, for the most part, uncritically acquired in childhood through the process of socialisation, often in the context of an emotionally charged relationship with parents, teachers, or other mentors. The more intense the emotional context of learning and the more it is reinforced, the more deeply embedded and intractable to change are the habits of expectation that constitute our meaning perspectives (1990:3-4).

Commenting on Mezirow's 'frame of reference', Kegan (2000) talks of a frame of reference as being how we make sense of the world. It is a way of knowing, it is an expression of family loyalty. It can have implicit or explicit ethical dimensions and has a 'moral colouring' (2000:52). Cranton (2000) also speaks of it as a 'system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience'. She tells us that:

Our frames of reference are complex webs of assumptions, expectations, values, and beliefs that act as a filter or screen through which we view ourselves and the world. Our cultural background, the knowledge we have acquired, our moral and spiritual beliefs, and our own psychological makeup all influence how we interpret and make meaning out of our experience. A frame of reference can become problematic when we encounter new and different viewpoints or information... (2000:181).

For Mezirow (1990) the transformation of meaning perspectives is about becoming critically aware of 'how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world... (1990:14). Gould (1990) speaks of the need for adults to 'revise' meaning perspectives of the past and to change 'behaviour patterns and attitudes'. When speaking of frames of reference Mezirow (2000) says:

A frame of reference is the structure of assumptions and expectations (aesthetic, sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, psychological) through which we filter and make sense of our world. It is indicative of a 'habit of mind' that is expressed as a point of view (Mezirow 1998 in Mezirow & Associates 2000:292).

and again

We make meaning of our experience through acquired frames of reference – sets of orienting assumptions and expectations with cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions – that shape, delimit and sometimes distort our understanding (2000:29).

Cranton (1997) also attends to the notion of transformation of frame of reference when she asserts:

We transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based. We become critically reflective of the assumptions we or others make when we learn to solve problems instrumentally or when we are involved in communicative learning (1997: 7).

However, this transformation brought about by critical reflection is not always achieved or even attempted. Mezirow himself acknowledges that transformation is difficult, that it can be very challenging for a person to question or indeed change their frame of reference:

Who we are and what we value are closely associated. So questions raised regarding one's values are apt to be viewed as a personal attack. Learning tends to be come narrowly defined as efforts to add compatible ideas to elaborate our fixed frames of reference. However, this disposition may be changed through transformative learning (2000:18).

For this reason Mezirow (1978, 1985, 1991, 2000) considers that the most significant transformations in learning are transformations of 'frames of reference/meaning perspectives'. This is in keeping with what is arguably the central aspect of adult education - to broaden and develop the person's thought

processes, their learning abilities, their critical analysis and decision making.

Again Mezirow asserts:

Meaning becomes clarified when one's beliefs and frames of reference are more likely to produce judgments and opinions that prove true or justified than those based on other frames and beliefs. Meaning becomes clarified when learners become more autonomous as thinkers and learners- that is, negotiate their own purpose, values, judgements, and feelings rather than act on those of others. Meaning becomes clarified by making a decision to act when this is feasible, to learn what one needs to know, to have the emotional stamina to take action effectively, and to learn from the results of taking action when one does so (2000:350).

3.3.2 Three forms of meaning perspectives

According to Mezirow (1991:42) there are three major types of meaning perspectives: (1) epistemic meaning perspectives, (2) sociolinguistic meaning perspectives (3) psychological perspectives. The importance of these meaning perspectives become very clear when analysing the interview data, particularly when looking to see if the lived experiences of the interviewees relates to the theory of transformation. If transformational learning is taking place then transformational change will be found at these levels of epistemic/academic; sociological/social and psychological/personal. These three areas are explicitly dealt with in the presentation of the findings of the research. At this juncture it would be helpful to have a clearer understanding of each of these three perspectives and the implications for the existence of transformation.

3.3.2 (a) Epistemic

Epistemic Meaning Perspective: is concerned with the academic transformations of the individual. Their cognitive development, the new learning they develop, awareness of intelligence and learning styles, along with changes in their ability to reflect, analyse, and critique information. Mezirow (1991) sets out the following areas which can be measured to determine epistemic transformation:

- Developmental stage perspectives
- Cognitive/learning/intelligence styles
- Sensory learning preferences
- Frequency of events to identify patterns
- Scope of awareness
- External/internal evaluation criteria
- Global/detail focus
- Reification
- Reflectivity

3.3.2 (b) Social

Sociolinguistic meaning perspective concerns itself with the learner developing new and broader horizons of knowledge and learning. Particularly with regard to the world they live in, including an understanding of the political and philosophical discourses along with a development of social knowledge and culture. Mezirow includes the following elements within this meaning perspective:

- Social norms/roles
- Cultural/language codes
- Language/truth games
- Common sense as cultural system
- Secondary socialisation
- Ethnocentrism

- Prototypes/scripts
- Philosophies/theories

3.3.2 (c) Psychological

Psychological perspectives are concerned with the person, their experiences and development from childhood. Long held belief systems which may not be best suited to the adult they are now. Transformations in this perspective are concerned with:

- Self-concept
- Locus of control
- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Lost functions-childhood prohibitions enforced by anxiety in adulthood
- Inhibitions
- Psychological defence mechanisms
- Neurotic needs
- Approach/avoidance
- Character logical preferences

(1991:42,118-144)

3.3.3 Habits of Mind

Habits of mind are the ways in which individuals think, feel and carry inherent assumptions about the world. They are, as Mezirow (2000) refers to, the filters through which we see the world:

Our psychological preferences are a habit of mind. They filter how we see the world, make meaning out of our experiences, and determine how we reconstruct our interpretations...(2000:190).

Mezirow speaks about habits of mind, particularly those in the psychological and moral-ethical field that are unquestioned, may in time cause difficulty for

the adult who has developed beyond childhood notions or traumas. Unquestioned habits of mind can become dysfunctional in adulthood. Mezirow believes that habits of mind are more fixed and less easy to change than a point of view. He asserts the need for transformation of habits of mind through transformative learning. Habits of mind can be transformed by what Mezirow refers to as 'incremental transformations' and through individuals participating in critical reflection. These processes will lead to transformed points of view.

According to Mezirow there are six types of habits of mind, which while identified individually do not act independently but are intertwined as they are influenced by personal experience. For Mezirow (2000) a habit of mind is a way of understanding the world channelled through these six filters, which are:

- Sociolinguistic: habits of mind that are based on cultural rules, ideologies, social norms, customs, language games, secondary socialisations. For example the beliefs a person holds about the role of women or foreign cultures.
- Moral-ethical: habits of mind that are based on conscience and moral norms. Our understanding of goodness, right and wrong, justice.
- Epistemic habits of mind that are based on learning styles – how we learn and the way we learn, sensory preferences, focus on wholes or parts or on the concrete or abstract. It is concerned with what we later do with new knowledge.
- Philosophical habits of mind are based on religious doctrine, philosophy, and our transcendental world view. These can create strongly held views leading to powerful – at times entrenched- frames of reference.

- Psychological habits of mind are based on a person's self-concept, personality traits or types, repressed parental prohibitions that continue to dictate ways of feeling and acting in adulthood, emotional response patterns, images, fantasies, dreams. These habits of mind are often based in early childhood experiences and may be difficult to change or access.
- Aesthetic habits of mind are based on the values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgments about beauty and the insight and authenticity of aesthetic expressions, of the community and culture the person develops in. However as Cranton (2006) notes it is possible to be part of a culture and not hold the same standards.

(Adapted from Mezirow 1990, Mezirow 2000, Cranton 2006)

3.3.4 Points of view/ Meaning Schemes

According to Mezirow these meaning schemes /points of view are less structured than habits of mind and while they may be more likely to be open to change, however, they are still a significant challenge as they are concerned with individual subjective assumptions. They are:

Sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects and attribute causality (1998:5).

Mezirow asserts that it is within meaning schemes that transformative learning can take place. He speaks of 'learning through meaning schemes' i.e. learning new developments or aspects of a held meaning scheme; 'learning new meaning schemes' i.e. creating new meaning schemes; and 'learning through transformation of meaning schemes' i.e. using critical reflection to challenge and change our assumptions (2000:93-94). For Mezirow (1991) it is important

to learn through the transformation of meaning schemes so that a persons learning involves reflection upon assumptions.

Meaning schemes enable us to construe meaning for our experiences, thus allowing us to learn from the experience. Meaning schemes enable us to learn to understand ourselves and others. In Mezirow's point of view, it is easier for a learning scheme to be critically reflected upon and to transform than the above mentioned frames of reference. Here we are dealing with the parts which combine with many to make up the frame of reference.

A meaning scheme is the particular knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an interpretation (1991:44).

Meaning schemes are as Mezirow (1991) says are:

Specific habits of expectation' which 'influence how we define, understand, and act upon our experiences (1991:61).

or again:

...a habitual set of expectation that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and that serves as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience (1991:42).

3.3.5 Perspective Transformation

According to Mezirow (1991) meaning schemes, habits of mind, points of view, can all be transformed through reflection, which may 'result in the elaboration, creation, or transformation of meaning schemes...' (1991:5).

Again 'transformations in frames of reference take place through critical

reflection and transformations of a habit of mind... (1997:7). The notion of reflection is central to any transformation:

Although the transformation of meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions) through reflection is an everyday occurrence, it does not necessarily involve self-reflection. We often merely correct our interpretations. On the other hand, the transformation of a meaning perspective, which occurs less frequently, is more likely to involve our sense of self and always involves critical reflection upon the distorted premises sustaining our structure of exception. Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (1991:167).

The transformation of meaning schemes and of meaning perspectives are, according to Mezirow, two dimensions of transformative learning, the process of assessing old assumptions and creating new interpretations of experience, this he says is the 'dynamics of everyday reflective learning' (1991:192).

Learning to change the structure of a meaning scheme is transformative, leading to changes in our habits of mind and ultimately in our frames of reference. This change initiates the process of personal transformation. A personal transformation will result in a changed perspective in how we understand, experience and participate in society. It will lead not only to personal change but also to social action. For Mezirow (1990) transformation of meaning schemes can be as a result of reflection upon anomalies...and more predictably, occurs in response to an eternally imposed disorienting dilemma...

a “trigger event”. Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1990) refers to this process as perspective transformation and is similar to the ‘praxis’ of Freire (2008) discussed in chapter one:

There is no transformation without action (2008:87).

3.4 Critical Reflection within Transformation Theory

The theory of transformation can not be understood without exploring the central role of critical reflection. As we have just read, transformation takes place when people are able to re-frame their perspectives, when they are able to learn from and assess their experiences in a new way, create new meaning schemes. This can not be achieved if the person does not engage in a process of meaningful and purposeful reflection known as critical reflection. This section will now explore the concept of critical reflection within the theory of transformation.

3.4.1 Place and definition of Critical Reflection

Mezirow (1990) argues that central to adult learning is the process of reflection on prior learning and central to transformative learning is the process of critical reflection. Brookfield (1991, 1995, 2005, 2010) the leading theorist on critical reflection, along with Mezirow (1991, 2000), Mezirow, Taylor and Associates (2009), Cranton (1997, 2006) and Cell (1984), amongst others agree that critical reflection and critical self-reflection are central to the transformational

learning process. They agree that critical reflection is the process of questioning held values and beliefs, that it is the key concept in transformative learning.

For Mezirow it is reflection on our 'presuppositions', on the 'how' and 'why' of our perceptions, of our assumptions. It is through critical reflection that we 'see through' our default habitual way of interpreting our world and our experiences. It is the process of critically assessing how we 'perceive, think judge and act' (1990:6, 1991:23,102-106). It is more than simply an act of reflection, it is reflection with critique, reflection which leads to change, reflection which leads to action.

Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience... (1991:104).

Reflection is more than simple awareness of our experiencing or being aware of our awareness; process reflection involves both reflection and critique of how we are perceiving, thinking judging, feeling, and acting, and premise reflection involves awareness and critique of the reasons why we have done so...(1991:106).

Reflective action is making decisions or taking other action predicated upon the insights resulting from reflection...transformative learning here may refer to content and process reflection, which can lead to transformation in meaning schemes... (1991:108).

Brookfield (1995) also presents critical reflection about trying to understand our assumptions, of 'seeing how we think and work through different lenses'

(1995:pxii). Critical reflection is not something to be taken on lightly as according to Brookfield (1995):

Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles we face in our lives (1995:2).

Brookfield (2009) defines critical reflection as:

... the deliberate attempt to uncover, and then investigate, the paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal assumptions that inform how we practice (Brookfield 1995 in Brookfield 2009:125-126) .

3.4.2 Critical Reflection as Social

Mezirow, Brookfield et al also agree that critical reflection is in essence a social process. For the process to be effective a person needs to encounter and enter into dialogue with contradictory points of view, exposure to different social norms and the importance of discourse with others involving differing beliefs and values. There is agreement in the need for the process of critical reflection to involve other people to help us to move from our current position and who can 'reflect back' our point of view (Brookfield 1991), to help us 'unearth our hidden assumptions and question their validity' (Cranton 2006:65). Brookfield, Mezirow and Taylor view dialogue is key to this process:

Through this dialogue, students are helped to name, honour, and understand their own experiences (Brookfield 1995:208).

For Mezirow it is

Through dialogue that we attempt to understand – to learn - what is valid in the assertions made by others and attempt to achieve consensual validation for our own assertions (1990:354)

and for Taylor (2009):

Dialogue is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed.... It is within the arena of dialogue that experience and critical reflection play out. Dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned and habits of mind are ultimately transformed (2009:9).

3.4.3 Critical Reflection as Questioning

For Mezirow (1990) and Mezirow, Taylor and Associates (2009) critical reflection is the process of questioning the origin of deeply held assumptions and beliefs ‘based on prior experience’ (2009:7). It is the process that enables us to ‘correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving’ that critical reflection involves ‘a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built’ (1990:1). Mezirow believes it is central to adult learning, for it is the process of testing our ‘taken-for-granted’ positions which, in turn, as we noted earlier leads to a change not just in thought but also in action. For Mezirow it is essential that we transform our ‘habits of mind’, our ‘frames of reference’ and our ‘meaning schemes and perspectives’, through critical reflection on our held assumptions.

Mezirow (1990) is in agreement with Cell (1984) when he asserts that the key to transformational learning is contrast; to develop the skills of evaluation and

the ability to discover alternatives, to find new ways of seeing, new questions to ask, new ways to use things...(1990:369).

3.4.4 Critical Reflection is Central to Transformation

Critical reflection is essential if transformative learning is to happen, if we are to truly transform our 'meaning schemes', our 'frames of reference' and our 'habits of mind'. Mezirow is clearly arguing for this when he asserts:

We transform our frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of our assumptions to make them more dependable when the beliefs and understandings they generate become problematic (Mezirow 2009:29-30).

Brookfield is also speaking of the need to transform our default assumptions, which he refers to as 'those taken-for-granted', and the need to make these assumptions explicit, the need to question our assumptions which he sees as a central task of critical reflection. Brookfield (1990) presents three elements to the process of critical reflection:

(1) identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions; (2) scrutinizing the accuracy and validity of these in terms of how they connect to, or are discrepant with, our experience or reality... and (3) reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative. Central to the process of critical reflection, then, is the recognition and analysis of assumptions. Assumptions can be defined as comprising those taken-for-granted ideas, commonsense beliefs, and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions (1990:177).

It is through this process that a person can move away from the embedded proscriptions or ‘premise distortions’ (Mezirow 1991) and discover what Brookfield (1995) calls the ‘authentic voice’, that through critical reflection the individual will come to what Mezirow calls ‘perspective transformation’ for central to this process is the ability for adults to reflect on and change their previously held values, beliefs, behaviours and self concepts, along with previously held perspectives of society. It is what both Mezirow and Brookfield calls a ‘fundamental reordering of assumptions’ and what Brookfield (2000) calls a ‘shift in the tectonic plates of one’s assumptive clusters’.

I believe an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts. If something is transformed, it is different from what it was before at a very basic level (2000:139).

In order to achieve such transformations Mezirow asserts the need for critical reflection and critical thinking and has placed critical reflection as a central part of transformative theory; critical reflection on one’s self and one’s assumptions. Otherwise, he warns that people may tend to simply ‘accept’ and ‘integrate’ only those experiences that fit within our existing frames of reference, thus rejecting ideas, experiences and learning opportunities that do not fit. Furthermore, for Mezirow transformation is never complete unless the new insights have lead to a new action.

3.4.5 Critical reflection on experience

Understanding experience is key to transformative learning. Brookfield (2005, 2010) refers to the ‘naming and renaming’ of experience, Mezirow (1981, 1991) of the ‘emancipatory process’ within transformation, of the critique that is critical reflection. Brookfield (2005, 2010) says that it is this critical thinking that will lead the adult learner to ‘freedom’. Taylor (2000) speaks of ‘a greater life experience provides a deeper well from which to draw on and react to as individuals engage in dialogue and reflection...’ (2000:6). While Boyd, Keogh and Walker (1994, 2005) note the need for reflection upon experience in order for people to ‘think about it, mull it over and evaluate it...’, that reflection is a ‘response of the learner to experience’ (1994, 2005:18-19).

It was noted in chapters one and two that in adult education the learners’ individual experience is a central starting point. Chapter two presented the work of Kolb (1976) and his model of the four stage learning cycle which starts with the concrete experience. Dewey (1933) speaks of the need for reflective activity in learning and noted the need for reflection on experience.

He describes reflective activity as:

Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it leads...it includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality (1933:9).

3.4.6 Critical Reflection: the heart of transformation

Critical reflection is at the heart of transformation theory and transformative learning. Critical reflection and mindfulness are central to discovering that previously held assumptions and beliefs may no longer be helpful. Mezirow (1991) speaks of transforming such perspectives through a reorganisation of meaning, which for him is the most significant kind of emancipatory learning, noting that not all learning is transformative, thus the need for critical reflection followed by action and change.

Transformative learning involves reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or transforming our meaning perspectives (sets of related meaning schemes) (1991:223).

Through this process of critical reflection the learner is empowered to journey from their previously held positions to adapting new meaning perspectives which are more critical, informed and helpful. This is the essence of transformative learning.

Mezirow believes that reflection is central to transformation, for it is through this theoretical/critical reflection that a person becomes aware of their taken-for-granted 'frames of reference' and 'meaning schemes'. Mezirow (1991) speaks of perspective transformation as happening when new interpretations successfully challenge previous meaning perspectives (1991:95). These new interpretations will only come about through the process of critical reflection,

which as noted above, is central to transformative learning. The final word on critical reflection and thinking within transformation theory goes to Freire (1978, 2008) who asserts that:

[if]... people develop their power to perceive critically **the way they exist** in the world **with which** and **in which** they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation...
[original parenthesis] (2008:83).

3.5 Transformative Learning

Not all learning is transformational. Learning can take place without the individual experiencing any form of transformation. For learning to be transformational it needs to have certain characteristics, distinguishable features and outcomes. This section examines the nature of transformational learning within the context of the theory of transformation.

3.5.1 Learning as part of Transformation Theory

The theory of transformational learning is encapsulated by Mezirow's when he asserts:

There is a need for a learning theory that can explain how adult learners make sense of their experiences (1999:15).

According to Mezirow, transformative learning takes place when learners critically question, challenge, assess and enter into a process of changing their personal assumptions and the dominant ideologies they hold about the world,

and how they interact and relate with it. This process of reflection leads the individual to a more mature, inclusive and truthful experience of, and assumptions about, the world in which they live. Through transformative learning, the learners' perspective of themselves, and of their world, changes. They will have new and transformed meaning schemes, and meaning perspectives. This perspective transformation is described by Mezirow as:

the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to contain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (1991:167).

3.5.2 Definitions of Transformative Learning

Cranton (2006) offers a definition of transformative learning as:

the process by which people examine problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. It can be provoked by a single event - a disorienting dilemma - or it can take place gradually and cumulatively over time (2006:35).

While she also states that she follows Mezirow's (2000) definition of transformative learning as:

a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives, are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated... incorporate imagination, intuition, soul and affect into their understanding of the process (2000:2)

Mezirow himself (2000) defines transformative learning as:

The process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights (2000:pxvi).

and again, as follows:

Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences. It is not possible to understand the nature of adult learning or education without taking into account the cardinal role played by these habits in making meaning (2000:1).

Taylor (2009) speaks of transformative learning as a change agent, where students are encouraged and challenged to assess their value systems through individual experience, critical reflection and dialogue, which will lead to change in personal beliefs. He also refers to this process of transformation as providing a 'lens for making meaning and guiding a transformative practice' (2009:4).

3.5.3 Transformative Learning as process

Mezirow (1997) sets out a four stage process of transformative learning:

- (a) To elaborate on existing points of view by seeking further clarification;
- (b) To establish new points of view;
- (c) To have an experience which leads to critical reflection and a change in our point of view
- (d) By becoming critically reflective of our own frames of reference (1997:7).

Mezirow (1991) asserts that this four stage process will always occur within the context of the learners own personal experience.

The four processes of learning – by extending meaning schemes, creating new ones, transforming old ones, and transforming perspectives – always occur in the context of the learner's line of action, reflection his or her intention, purpose, and feelings... (1991:212).

Mezirow (2009) speaks of transformative learning as a 'reconstructive theory' in that it tries to explain the dynamics of the learning process. It is concerned with the awareness of the knowledge of how we know. He believes it is important for adults to know how and why they reason as they do, how they make decisions, how they judge, and to be aware of the unquestioned assumptions each person carries. Mezirow says that we need to be 'able to critically assess and validate the tacit assumptions supporting our own beliefs and expectations, as well as those of others' (2009:23).

Cranton (2006) offers a synopsis of eight themes identified by Taylor (2000) regarding research carried out on the characteristics of transformative learning; these are:

1. Transformative learning is uniquely adult;
2. Transformative learning appears to be a linear, but not necessarily step-wise process;
3. The nature of a frame of reference and how it transforms is unclear;
4. A disorienting dilemma usually initiates transformative learning;
5. Critical reflection is significant to transformative learning;

6. Discourse is equally dependent on relational ways of knowing;
7. Context plays an important role in shaping transformative learning, but the influence of culture has not been well investigated; and
8. Some characteristics of a learning environment that fosters transformative learning have been identified, but more work needs to be done in this area (2006:52-53).

Similar to Mezirow's (1978, 1981) term 'perspective transformation', Kegan (2000) speaks of how transformation of a person's mind-sets, meaning perspectives and their 'taken-for-granted' frames of reference leads to a more open, discriminating and inclusive person, as it 'demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as aware as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives...' (2000:8). He is keen to emphasise the need for change in the 'form' of our knowing, suggesting that changes in a person's self-esteem or self perception could take place without any transformation 'because they could all occur within the existing form or frame of reference' (2000:50).

Kegan (2000) also sees the importance of critical reflection and action and, as with Mezirow, Cranton, Brookfield and other proponents of transformational learning, Kegan too asserts that this kind of transformation has both individual and social dimensions and implications, again similar to Freire's term 'conscientisation'.

Brookfield (2005) points out that transformation includes personal transformation, along with how the person sees themselves in the world, and how they see and experience the world. Kasl and Elian (2000) also speak of transformative learning as the 'expansion of consciousness in any human system, thus the collective as well as individual' (2000:232).

Cranton (2006) commenting on Mezirow (2000) tells us that transformative learning is a 'deep shift in perspective' and that it leads to 'a way of seeing the world that is more open' (2006:5); that transformation leads to perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience (2006:19). She asserts that transformative learning is a

process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspective... that if a person responds to an alternative habit of mind by reconsidering and revising prior belief systems, the learning becomes transformative.. (2006:23).

For transformative learning to be acknowledged as having taken place certain criteria must be met, for example, the phases of transformation, leading to new meaning schemes and ultimately leading to action. The analysis of the interview data will search for evidence of transformative learning as a way of understanding if the ALBA students have experienced academic, social and personal transformations.

3.6 Critique of Transformation Theory

The theory of transformation and transformative learning are presented in this thesis as the theoretical framework on which this research is underpinned. The theory has been presented in a positive fashion, highlighting its appropriateness and application to this research. There are, however, alternate voices who question some of the tenets of transformative learning and the theory of transformation. Recently Newman (2012) in an article in the *Adult Education Quarterly* called transformative learning into question and created much debate and response. Whilst it is not the focus of this research, for the purpose of balance I am presenting here a representative view of the main critiques of transformation theory, these are, that the theory:

- Is too cognitive, relying on rationality (Taylor 2000), that it needs to include the importance of feelings and emotions (Kucukaydin & Cranton 2012).
- Is too individualistic and should have a greater social dimension (Collard and Law (1989).
- Does not give adequate place to contextual issues such as social context, class, ethnicity, culture (Taylor 2000), and, that it is a very white-middle-class- male (Clark and Wilson 1991).
- Is too subjective, that transformational learning can only be recognised retrospectively and verified only by the learner (Newman 2012).

- Focuses on a linear/stage process whereas in reality the process is more recursive (Taylor 2000). For example there is not one ‘trigger event’ but usually an accumulative affect from experiences.
- Is not explicit enough in clarifying that not all adult learning, or that the presence of critical reflection, equate to transformative learning (Brookfield 2000)

Keegan (2000) offers the following observations as to aspects of transformational learning which in his opinion need further consideration to make them more ‘explicit’ (47).

1. Transformational kinds of learning need to be more clearly distinguished from informational kinds of learning, and each needs to be recognised as valuable in any learning activity, discipline, or field.
2. The form that is undergoing transformation needs to be better understood; if there is no form there is no transformation.
3. At the heart of a form is a way of knowing (what Mezirow calls a “frame of reference”); thus genuinely transformational learning is always to some extent an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavioural repertoire or an increase in the quantity or fund of knowledge
4. Even as the concept of transformational learning needs to be narrowed by focusing more explicitly on the epistemological, it needs to be broadened to include the whole life span; transformational learning is not the province of adulthood or adult education alone.
5. Adult educators with an interest in transformational learning may need a better understanding of their students’ current epistemologies so as not to create learning designs that unwittingly presuppose the very capacities in the students their designs might seek to promote.
6. Adult educators may better discern the nature of learners’ particular needs for transformational learning by better understanding not only their students’ present epistemologies

by the epistemological complexity of the present learning challenges they face in their lives.

(2000 pp47-48)

In response to critique over the years, Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000), has replied and developed his theory, acknowledging, that the theory of transformation is a theory in progress. He addresses issues of cultural, historical and biographical context, acknowledges the place of feelings and is clear that his ten stages of transformation are not a rigid linear process. He appreciates that learning is a continuous process, needing revision and re-interpretation.

Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action...Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and pinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (2000:5-8).

Accepting that transformation theory and transformative learning has its critics; it is, even amongst them, the leading theoretical approach within the field of adult higher education. It is fair to say that the theory of transformation and transformative learning is developing and ongoing. It is with this understanding that this theory is used as the theoretical approach within this research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate the nature of transformation and transformative learning along with the central role of critical reflection. Within the area of transformation it set out to provide a working knowledge of the theory of transformation. This was achieved by using Mezirow's understanding and presentation of the components of transformation, most notably: the ten points of transformation; Meaning Perspective/Frame of Reference; Habits of Mind; Points of View/Meaning Schemes. The next section of this chapter focused on 'Critical Reflection'. It did so because critical reflection is considered to be central to transformation. Finally the key area of transformational learning and the processes involved were analysed and presented.

Each section of this chapter will have a future significance later in the research. This is particularly so when it comes to the analysis of the data. Recalling that the purpose of this research is to look for evidence of transformation and transformative learning under the various headings explored in this chapter, it will be an essential tool in the data analysis and findings.

In preparation of reaching the discussion concerning findings, the research will first set out the context in which the research takes place. Chapter four sets out for us the situational context of the research and chapter five will present the methodological approach undertaken.

Chapter Four. Setting the Scene: The Situational Context

4. Introduction

This chapter will look at the broad aspect of adult education in Ireland through presenting the salient aspects of reports and policies relating to adult education. By setting out these broad parameters and noting the recommendations and recurrent themes emerging from mostly government commissioned reports, the chapter will set the environment in which the BA for Personal and Professional Development, known in All Hallows by the soubriquet ALBA (Adult Learning Bachelor of Arts) ALBA is the terminology that the staff and students use (with some affection) to distinguish themselves and their programme. It is for this reason (and for brevity) that we use the designation ALBA throughout this work.

This chapter will show how innovative and current this new initiative is and how it actualises much of the best practice mentioned in the government sponsored publications. The chapter will include a short description of All Hallows College noting its affiliation with Dublin City University (DCU) and its previous and existing collaborative links with DePaul University, Chicago.

The main focus of this chapter is undoubtedly the story of ALBA. It will trace the timeline from the original decision to provide a flexible BA programme for

adults, through the planning stages, up to the implementation and start up phase. As part of the research for this chapter two study visits were made to DePaul University. All documentation relating to ALBA was presented to the researcher by the then Director of ALBA. These included copies of emails, minutes of meetings and contemporaneous notes from meetings.

4.1 Background

Adult education within the Irish context is still a relatively new concept, with the first governmental paper being published in 1998 (although there were educational acts that included vocational and training aspects for adults). Traditionally adult education was provided through the form of short-term night classes, often focused on basic practical skills or hobby type subjects. These classes were provided through the network of local vocational schools as fee paying night classes. The growth in adult education came about in Ireland through community based, particularly women's groups. This section deals with the historical development and growth of adult education within the Irish context.

4.1.1 Adult Education in Ireland

Adult Education in Ireland is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Education and training is carried out in second level schools, vocational colleges, universities and a range of education centres

throughout the Country. Adult education and lifelong learning comes under the remit of the 'Further Education Section' within the Department.

The chronological history of adult education in Ireland is well documented in the *Green Paper on Adult Education in an era of lifelong learning* (1998). It sets out the historical evolution of adult education into three phases: (1)1922-1969; (2)1969-1988; (3)1989-1998.

The first phase (1922-1969) starts with the establishment of the Department of Education, noting a more centralised approach to policy making. 1930 brought the 'Vocational Amendment Act' the purpose of which was to establish a suitable system of 'continuation education' and to supply technical education. This 1930 act was revised as recently as 2001 and is still the seminal act for the provision of second-level education and vocational education in the Country, administered through the County and City Vocational Education Committees. In 1931 County Committees of Agriculture (the forerunner of Teagasc) were established to provide education and training to farmers and rural women. In the 1940's University College Cork established outreach centres and conducted adult education courses. The focus of the 1960's was primarily on school going children and second level schools.

The second phase (1969-1988) again the primary focus of education policy and development was in areas other than adult education, however, there is

acknowledgement of the concept and growth in adult education and of 'lifelong learning'. There are some important developments during this period, most notably the publication of two reports on adult education, the Murphy and the Kenny reports, the appointment of Adult Education Organisers in each of the countries Vocational Education Committees (1979) and the creation of an Adult Education Section within the Department of Education (1980).

The Committee on Adult Education (1969-1973) produced an interim report in 1970 and the final report – known as the Murphy report - in 1973. This report speaks about a student centred approach to adult education and argues for improved administration of adult education provision, noting that government funding for adult education was very low.

The second report was the Kenny Commission on Adult Education, 'Lifelong Learning' (1984). This report places lifelong learning as the central aspect to adult education. It highlights the need to develop administrative structures which will cater to the needs of adults engaging in educational programmes. It also looks at the general attitudes and awareness of adult education, participation and barriers.

One of the major impacts of this report was the creation of a budget from the Department of Education for the purpose of adult education, called the Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) budget. This budget along with

the appointment of Adult Education Organisers, both of which are still in place today, was a real turning point for the provision and development of adult education in Ireland. Adult education could now be provided in local areas, outreach programmes, evening classes, the length and breadth of the Country. This period also saw the establishment of two national organisations, AONTAS (1969) (the national organisation for adult education) and NALA (1980) (the National Adult Literacy Association). Both of these organisations still play an important role in promoting the cause of adult education today.

OSCAIL the Distance Education Centre, located in Dublin City University (DCU) began to provide courses in 1982. This provided a range of courses and opportunities to adults wishing to further their education, in their own time.

The third phase (1989 - 1998) saw more rapid development, growth in and provision of adult education programmes. The administration and structures had been established earlier. During this period a number of important programmes were developed and initiatives taken. In 1989 the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS) was established to provide education to adults over the age of twenty-one. These programmes are still running today, and provide an opportunity for usually unemployed adults to return to education on a part or full-time basis to study for state exams or other appropriate educational courses. In 1990 the Department of Social Welfare put a policy in place that enabled long-term unemployed people on approved

courses, such as VTOS, to retain their social welfare benefits along with receiving a training or attendance allowance. The ALCES budget mentioned above continued along with a further budget called the Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme (SPIDAS). With these initiatives, budgets, structures and administration, there was a sizeable development in community based groups engaging in adult education, particularly women's groups and the development of the Women's Education Initiative. There was a move away from vocational training towards community education.

The Regional Technical Colleges Act and the Dublin Institute of Technology Act (1992) clearly identified a role for these colleges in vocational and technical education. The Universities Act (1997) explicitly requires those institutions to facilitate lifelong learning 'through the provision of adult and continuing education'. 1997 also saw the development of the Back to Education Programmes, to encourage adults to return to education. During this period from 1994 onwards, thirty eight Area Based Partnerships were established, each having an education coordinator, to provide education, support and training, particularly to disadvantaged individuals and communities. Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses were established to provide one or two year full-time courses for students not entering universities or institutes of higher education, but who wanted to continue their studies.

The 1998 *Education Act* provides for the equality of education for all members of society, undertaking to provide a ‘quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities’ of people from the diversity of traditions and backgrounds resident in the state. The act also recognises that education can take place outside of formal schools. The *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act* (1999) provides for the setting up of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) of Ireland. The role of the NQA is, to establish and maintain a framework of qualifications, to act as the overall guarantor of the quality of awards, and to facilitate and promote access, transfer and progression. The Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) are established under this act to provide certification within the framework of qualifications.

1999 also saw the publication of the: *Final Report and Recommendations* from the Commission on the Points System, which addressed the issue of participation of mature students in the third level education sector, setting intake goals and access for such students; *Report of the Review Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Training Places*, which recommends that more places be given to mature students, and the provision of part-time options.

In 2000 saw the publication of the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, which placed lifelong learning as a central theme in bringing about a socially inclusive knowledge – based society, and the 2000-2006 *National*

Development Plan which championed the provision of funding for the development of an Adult Guidance Service and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).

For many involved in adult and community education, the water mark for adult education in Ireland is without doubt the publication in 2000 of the *White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life*, which promotes lifelong learning as ‘the governing principle of educational policy’. The White Paper reaffirms the Government’s commitment to a national policy for lifelong learning and specifically to the establishment of a well-funded adult education system.

Within the document lifelong learning as a systematic approach, can be understood as having three guiding principles:

- Focusing on an holistic curriculum catering to the learners educational and personal needs within their cultural and community context combined with life experiences.
- Seeing the learner, as the centre of the learning process, being supported by teachers and other learners. Learning is seen as construction rather than instruction.
- Placing a focus on support for learners at key transition points, from school to work or further education.

The White Paper devotes complete chapters to ‘Second Chance and Further Education’, ‘Community Education’, ‘Workplace Education’ and ‘Higher Education’. It calls for the expansion and diversity of provision of learning opportunities for adult education. It gives detailed and specific information on the role and scope of the BTEI programmes. It calls for the creation of new

educational posts of 'Community Education Facilitators' and the development of the Adult Guidance Service. It provides detail regarding the accreditation of prior learning (APL) and work-based learning (WBL). It says that learning and assessment systems that best enable APL and WBL have the following characteristics: they are modular; they have an outcomes based approach; they allow for credit accumulation over a period of time. In the field of Higher Education, it calls for greater flexibility in timing and provision of part-time options, development of outreach and access programmes.

Two years later in 2002 the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning was published. This report noted the need for lifelong learning across the whole spectrum of jobs and workplaces. It endorses the definition of lifelong learning given by the European Commission as: 'all learning activity undertaken through-out life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective' (2002:6). As with most of those mentioned above, this report speaks of the need for modularisation of courses, course flexibility and a coherent credits system which allows for the transfer of learning. It calls for non-traditional learners – older, unemployed, poorly educated, lower occupational groups - to become part of the culture of educational institutes, calling on these institutes to 'develop a range of pedagogic methods to deal with the different expectations, attitudes and learning styles suitable to different groups of non-traditional learners' (2002:36). One of the sub groups established by the

Taskforce made a number of suggestions when exploring the issues of part-time provision, recommended:

- need for more flexible learning opportunities, in modular formats which can be accumulated over time towards a full award.
- valuing all learning, across education and training, irrespective of the learning site.
- allowing an inclusive process which enables participants to learn at their own pace and combine learning with family and work responsibilities.
- the need to promote more flexible provision by providers of education and training in terms of access routes, timing and delivery.
- the need to encourage adults to re-enter the system.
- the need to ensure equity of treatment for full-time and part-time students insofar as is feasible.
- the need to ensure that the approach adopted does not deter those with the lowest skills and educational levels from accessing learning appropriate to their needs.
- the need to provide for an orderly and planned change in third level provision towards a wider student cohort, through more flexible delivery options, in the context of rapid demographic change.

(2002: 39)

4.1.2 All Hallows College

All Hallows College is situated three kilometres north of Dublin city centre, was founded in 1842 by Fr. John Hand, originally a seminary for the overseas missions, the College began a process of transition in the 1980's of opening itself up to non-clerical students. This was the beginning of a process that has seen All Hallows College become an established third-level college and an affiliated college of Dublin City University. Since the 1980s, All Hallows College has responded to the changing situation in education, society and the

church with a series of new theological and pastoral courses and by opening its doors to a wide variety of students. The College was among the first seminaries to offer Bachelors and Masters Programmes to prepare lay people for leadership roles in community and church. Today, All Hallows College is an international centre for theological and pastoral development and formation for community service. The All Hallows Strategic Plan of 2005 states: ‘The Strategy for All Hallows is to develop its capacity for education in pastoral leadership, community service and adult education, especially religious *education*’. All Hallows Programmes have a large proportion of adult students. At the time of preparing the accreditation document for the ALBA programme the figures were:

- the undergraduate BA course in Theology, Philosophy, English Literature, Psychology and Spirituality has had about 50% mature students on average throughout its history.
 - the Access Evening BA has taught almost 400 mature students over the decade of its existence.
 - the Pastoral Theology “Top Up” BA Programme has taught almost 100 mature students over 8 years.
 - the Sabbatical (non-degree) Programme has had almost 800 participants through 10 years, all of them mature adults
 - the Continuing Education and the “Pathways” (non-degree) Programmes have reached over 1,500 people in a number of locations since 1985.
- (Accreditation Document 2008)

All Hallows College is a linked college of Dublin City University, relating with the Faculty of Humanities; the Linkage Agreement being formally signed on the 4th February 2008. This linkage fulfils objectives in the strategic plans of both institutions, with Dublin City University’s Strategic Plan 2006-2008

Leadership through Foresight stating as Strategic Objective number seven that ‘DCU will deepen its commitment to Ireland’s social, cultural and economic development’.

Access to higher education for disadvantaged students is indicated as one of the concerns under this objective and, it suggests a target of 25% of the DCU student population coming from non-traditional groups previously under-represented in higher education by the year 2008. The Plan states that the general strategy will be integrated across the university with the support of three major component strategies: Learning Innovation Strategy, Research Strategy and Wider Community Engagement Strategy.

Thus, the Adult Learning BA is aligned with the DCU Strategic Plan, as it promotes the involvement of a major group, the adult learner, hitherto under-represented in higher education, with learning innovation in a wider community engagement. Currently DCU has upwards of twenty percent of non-traditional students on campus (non-traditional student includes mature students, access programme students, students with disabilities). The university was originally formed to cater for business, science, computer, communications and language graduates to work within local communities. They have been and continue to be creative and innovative in programme provision both on and off campus. A number of smaller colleges, like All Hallows have become a partner college of DCU in more recent years, thus

providing the college with greater expertise within very specific academic spheres and with deep community links. For example All Hallows offers undergraduate programmes in theology and philosophy which are not available in the DCU campus. Such a relationship is mutually beneficial. A more detailed investigation as to the benefits of such partnerships is, while interesting, not within the remit of this research thesis.

4.1.3 Current Statistics

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 report by the Department of Education & Skills (DES 2011) show that in 2009 there were 5,568 fulltime mature students in higher education. This figure had risen to 5,944 fulltime mature students or 13% of the student population in 2010 and 1,484 part-time mature students, representing 92% of the part-time student population. In 2010 18% or 7,428 of the student population in higher education were mature students (Higher Education Authority 2012). The DES (2011) strategy report estimates that by 2015 this figure will have risen to 8,919 and will have almost doubled to 16,229 by 2025. It is evident that adult participating in educational programmes in Ireland is a growth area. Currently provision is varied, comprising of full-time, part-time, modular, accredited and non-accredited courses. Flexibility in provision will be one of the key factors in managing this growth development. This flexibility is acknowledged in the report:

People can learn in a variety of different ways, and the higher education system needs to be flexible in supporting and

accrediting them all. While campus-based learning will continue to play a major role in higher education, the institutions will have to accommodate and serve the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, many of whom will need to engage flexibly with higher education (2011:54).

4.2 Development of ALBA; the BA for Personal and Professional Development

In this section focus will turn to how a conversation, over a meal in Dublin, about adult education led to a journey of discovery in Chicago, a partnership between two institutions and the creation of a new undergraduate degree programme which has become known as ALBA.

4.2.1 Genesis

In 2005, All Hallows College produced their 2005-2010 Strategic Plan. There are a number of salient objectives with reference to the development of adult education. The plan speaks of ‘exploring further possibilities for night courses’ in its provision of undergraduate programmes and, of the strategy to place adult and community education ‘more central to the work of All Hallows’. It sets a goal of an interdisciplinary team to ‘agree a common strategy for adult education...’ stating that one of the strategies for All Hallows is to ‘develop its capacity for education in pastoral leadership, community service and adult education, especially religious education’. The focus on adult education was the subject of discussion between a number of All Hallows’ staff any in particular? regarding the role All Hallows College could play in the

development of adult education within the college. During this discussion it was suggested that contact be made with the School for New Learning, DePaul University, Chicago – a fellow Vincentian institution- and its then Dean, Susanne Dumbleton.

All Hallows College had successfully collaborated with DePaul University in the past, notably with the Masters of Arts in Management Community and Voluntary Services (MAM). Dr. Joe McCann, Director of the MAM in All Hallows, was also one of the leading people interested in developing an adult education degree for the college. It was he who led the initial contacts with DePaul and Dr. Dumbleton, arranging for exchange of information, mutual educational visits and development of the proposal to progress with the development of what is now the ALBA programme.

4.2.2 School for New Learning

DePaul University established the School for New Learning (SNL) in 1972 to address the learning needs of adult students. It's enrolment has grown to 3,000 students and operates from five campus locations; there are over forty full-time faculty staff and over two-hundred part-time instructors. To-date the SNL has over 6,000 alumni. The United States Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) ranked the SNL as one of the six best practices institutions for serving adult learners in higher education, calling it a 'cutting edge pioneer'.

The approach of the SNL in the education of adults is to provide modular courses which require the attainment of specific learning outcomes along with individual research projects, work placements and group work for competency attainment. When these outcomes are achieved, credits are accumulated, which will eventually lead to a BA Degree. One of the unique attributes of this approach is the non-prescriptive, individualistic nature of the BA. The SNL also recognises learning that adults have achieved in previous areas, including college, work, community and self directed learning. Each student will decide on which mode of learning they take to achieve the learning outcomes needed.

The School for New Learning describes itself as offering:

A distinctive and powerful educational programme exclusively for adults. The four underlying ideas that form the basis of the School originated in the 16th century, but like all breakthroughs, remain fresh and exciting today... Individuality... Partnership... Balance... Competence...

(DePaul School for New Learning Undergraduate Programme Guide)

To obtain a degree from the School for New Learning students have to achieve 50 degree requirements, which are statements of skills, knowledge and abilities covering three major competencies:

1. A skill development area including lifelong learning, writing, critical thinking, presentation and research skills;
2. A liberal education area including arts and ideas, the human community and the scientific world;
3. An individual focus area.

Students can achieve these competencies in three ways: by transfer of credits from other colleges, by completing SNL courses, independent learning and by demonstrating learning from career and life experiences to meet requirements (DePaul School for New Learning Undergraduate Programme Guide).

According to Dr. Dumbleton the fundamental academic assumptions underpinning the SNL are:

- Learning from experience
- Acknowledging and developing competence
- Assessment
- Individualisation/Personalised approach
- Lifelong learning

(Extract from a Presentation by Dr. Dumbleton ‘What we do about education for adults at DePaul University: A conversation with All Hallows College. September 2006)

4.2.3 Links between All Hallows College and the School for New Learning, DePaul University, Chicago and the development of ALBA

In spring 2006, Dr. Joseph McCann was in DePaul University as a visiting lecturer. During his time there he made contact with, and had a number of meetings with the Dean of the School for New Learning, Dr. Susanne Dumbleton. The School for New Learning has been successfully providing modular part-time credit based adult education, encompassing individualised learning guided by competence framework, including independent learning, life experiences and courses leading to undergraduate degrees. It was during these initial conversations that Dr. McCann felt the established and successful

model of the SNL could, with local adaptations, be a model of adult education that could work in All Hallows College. Upon returning to Ireland, Dr. McCann reported to the College President and sought permission to invite Dr. Susanne Dumbleton to visit All Hallows College, to discuss how the School for New Learning approached adult education, to share what the SNL had learned through their facilitation of this programme over the previous thirty years. An invitation to visit and explore the possibilities for running a similar course in All Hallows College was extended to Dr. Dumbleton which was accepted.

In September 2006 Dr. Dumbleton visited All Hallows College. She provided briefing documents, had individual meetings with AHC academic and administrative staff and delivered a lecture themed ‘What we do about Adult Education in DePaul University’. Her presentation outlined the fundamental academic assumptions of the SNL: learning from experience; acknowledging and developing competencies; assessment; individualisation; personalised approach; and, lifelong learning. She noted the advantages of the SNL approach to adult learning were strong learning outcomes, strong market value, adaptability and affordability.

At the end of her visit, an ad-hoc feedback group met to draw up a memo which was presented to All Hallows College administration the memo, dated 27th September 2006, proposed that the All Hallows Faculty could develop a

competence-based programme around four strands: Core; Arts and Ideas; Holistic Human Development; and, a Focus Area. It considered that elements of the SNL degree could be transferable, particularly: professional advisor, part-time faculty, multiple campuses and multiple delivery approaches. This memo acknowledged the ability of AHC staff to develop a competency based programme and made the following recommendations: to create an implementation group which would formulate a proposal, to liaise with DCU, and to have the implementation group present a proposal to the Board of Directors and Board of Studies of BA (AHC), both in conceptual and business terms.

In this report Professor Dumbleton acknowledges the willingness of All Hallows staff to be open to new ideas acknowledging their ability to develop a comparable course for All Hallows College;

The All Hallows faculty are able to develop a competence-based programme. All Hallows possesses the following advantages:

- A familiarity with the taxonomy of learning outcomes.
- A framework of learning.
- Personalisation. The ethos of All Hallows is based on a charism of care, so it fits well with the adult education approach.
- Individualisation. There is broad agreement that individual minds work uniquely.
- Experience. All programmes at All Hallows have always been for professional preparation, and there is great openness to learning from experience and mining experience for knowledge.
- Reflection. This is part of all learning at All Hallows.

- Lifelong Learning. Many of the faculty use Kolb in their teaching.
- Assessment. There is considerable interest in doing assessment well.

(Report Memo on the visit of Dr. Susanne Dumbleton, Dean of DePaul University's School for New Learning, to All Hallows College. September 2006).

Dr Dumbleton further states that elements in the SNL degree would be transferable, particularly: Professional Advisor; part-time faculty; transferability of courses from non-credited to credit bearing within All Hallows and multiple delivery approaches. She ended her report with an invitation to AHC staff to visit the School for New Learning, to assist in reviewing their proposal, an offer to return at a future date to assist in the moving forward of the initiative, and to be available via the internet and telephone as required.

The following month, October 2006, Fr. Mark Noonan, the then President of All Hallows College, and the college's Academic Council, appointed an Implementation Committee with the purpose of developing a strategic plan. Dr. McCann was appointed Chair. In November 2006 the committee produced a feasibility report which was presented to the AHC Board of Directors. It was decided by the board to proceed to validation by Dublin City University, of the proposal for a new BA in Adult Learning.

The Feasibility Report set out the context for third level adult education along with a history of adult education in All Hallows College. The proposal detailed the outline and specifications of the degree: it would be a part-time course of three or four years duration comprised of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits, achieved through competencies that are attained through the completion of course modules. There are four strands of study which offered the student a choice in the specific focus of their degree (see appendix 5), leading to a level 7 degree on the National Quality Framework.

Work on the validation report continued through November 2006 to spring 2007. During this period, contact was maintained with Dr. Dumbleton in DePaul University. In February 2007 members of the AHC Implementation Committee met with the Humanities Department of DCU, the topic of this meeting was the AHC proposal for the Adult Learning BA. In April 2007 a Validation Proposal for an Adult Learning Bachelor of Arts was forwarded to DCU for approval.

The Validation Proposal (2007) set out the background to the proposal, including collaboration with DePaul; the strategic fit of the proposed course with Government policy, All Hallows College and Dublin City University; philosophy, aims and objectives; structure of the course and the implementation process, including finance, staffing and timing.

The Academic Strategy Committee of DCU sought some clarifications regarding the proposal, which were responded to, in full, by All Hallows College. DCU's Academic Strategy Committee approved the proposal on 2nd May 2007, and the Universities Academic Council approved the validation on 13th June 2007.

In May 2007 two members of the AHC Implementation Committee visited the School for New Learning in DePaul University, Chicago. Their purpose was to speak with faculty staff regarding the administration, teaching, financing, student welfare issues as well as to sit in on classes, meet students and generally see how the system of a part-time, multi-stranded, competency based BA operated effectively. During this visit, the AHC representatives had some 29 face-to-face conversations with DePaul staff. They gathered valuable information, documents, procedures and books. Following this visit, a report was presented to the AHC implementation committee. Again the suitability of such a BA course was noted, and a decision to formulate an accreditation proposal for presentation to DCU was reached.

On the 13th November 2007 All Hallows College presented their accreditation proposal to Dublin City University, for an Adult Learning Bachelor of Arts. The document provided: an overview of the programme; philosophy, aims and objectives; programme content; assessment and learning philosophy; quality assurance and programme evaluation; transferable skills; implementation

plans. Other documents provided included detailed module descriptors and curriculum vitae of the proposed staff.

The Academic Council of DCU met on 12th December 2007. The application was approved, with recommendations. These recommendations were addressed by the AHC committee and the revised proposal document was submitted on 20th September 2008.

During 2008 the implementation committee continued to be productive drawing up an implementation plan, and by March 2008 both a business plan and an education proposal had been developed. These plans were used primarily as discussion documents with potential partnership groups, and as supporting information in funding proposals. Funding was secured from a number of religious orders and from a private individual. No funding was secured from Government bodies.

In 2009 the President of All Hallows College, appointed Dr. McCann as Director of the Adult Learning BA (ALBA) with Moya Curran and Colm Kilgallon as Assistant Directors. The committee continued with its work and began sourcing personnel, drawing up time-lines, updated the implementation plan, worked on financial budgets and aimed for a September 2009 start date, by which time the implementation committee planned to have established a programme board and an advisory board. With these boards established the implementation committee would be disbanded, their work complete. By

March 2009, the core staff team was almost complete, a publicity brochure was produced and circulated to relevant bodies and organisations, and the official launch of the Adult Learning BA was scheduled. On the 28th of April 2009 the implementation committee handed over to the programme board.

The programme board immediately got to work and began approval of module descriptors, possible teaching staff, arrangements for student enrolment and organisation of learning assessment seminars, prior to the beginning of term, and the first intake of students to the ALBA programme.

In May 2009, Dr. Dumbleton returned to All Hallows College, by invitation. She conducted two days of training, dialogue and consultation with the programme board. Over the course of the next two days a number of important issues were decided upon concerning the enrolment of students, their progression through the programme, the recruitment of lecturers and the role of the core staff members.

4.2.4 Research Archive

In researching this chapter this researcher was given total and complete access to the complete files, documents and personal correspondence and reflections (uncatalogued) of Dr. Joseph McCann on whom grateful thanks must be bestowed. This information allowed, for the first time, the creation of the timeline narrative regarding the creation and establishment of ALBA. The

documents provided were a rich and broad primary source of information and are contemporaneous with developments from conception to inception.

4.2.5 Launch

The Adult Learning BA was officially launched by then Minister Seán Haughey TD, Minister for Lifelong Learning, on the evening of Tuesday 26th May 2009. Throughout the summer of 2009 applications for entry onto the ALBA course were received. The first of the learning assessment seminars were held in July, potential students were offered places on the course and on Monday 21st September 2009, a total of twenty eight students began their studies as the first intake of ALBA students.

4.2.6 SR Technics

In January 2010 a group of former workers of the SR Technics Company entered the ALBA programme followed by another SR Technics group in March 2010. This intake of former SR Technics workers is an important development within the ALBA story for a number of reasons: (1) it happened so soon after the first intake (September 2009); (2) it vastly increased the number of men on the programme, and, (3) it had an impact on this research study.

SR Technics Ireland Ltd was bought over and closed down by the Mubadala Corporation in 2009, thus bringing an end to aircraft maintenance, repair and

overhaul in Dublin. As a result eight-hundred-and-fifty workers lost their jobs, and an entire industry was lost to this Country. The history of SR Technics is intriguing and a little complex. In 1990 Aer Lingus, a fully state owned company set up a subsidiary company called TEAM Aer Lingus Ltd. In 1997 a company called Tatem Ltd. was registered in the company registrations office but changed its name to TEAM (Dublin) Ltd. in 1998 – having been acquired by Aer Lingus for the purpose of the planned ‘hiving down’ of the business, including employees of TEAM Aer Lingus Ltd. In 1997 Aer Lingus set about selling off this company and in 1998 TEAM (Dublin) Ltd was bought by FLS Industries, a Dutch engineering company proficient in the cement and mineral industries, this new company was called TEAM FLS Aerospace Ltd. In 1999 the company changed its name to FLS Aerospace (IRL) Ltd. In 2004 SR Technics acquired FLS Industries and according to the company’s registration office, in January 2005 FLS Aerospace (Irl) Ltd became SR Technics Ireland Ltd.

(ref. Company’s Registration Office, Dublin. Attachment no.B.1. SR Technics Ireland Limited. Company Registration 268659).

The company SR Technics was originally set up as a technical department of Swissair and later established as a separate company within the Swissair Group of companies. When Swissair collapsed, SR Technics was transferred to new ownership, comprising of 3i Group and Star Capital. SR Technics bought out FLS Industries in 2004 and so acquired SR Technics. In 2006 SR Technics itself came under new ownership – a consortium of the three United Arab

Emirates based investors- Mubadala Development Company, Dubai Aerospace Enterprise and Istithmar World. In 2009 Mubadala Development Company acquires sole control of SR Technics and the Dublin plant was closed down.

(ref.<http://www.srtechnics.com/cms/index.asp?TopicID=213> accessed 25/02/ 2013).

With the closure of SR Technics eight-hundred-and-fifty people were made unemployed and the Irish Government applied to the European Union to access the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), to fund the education and re-training of these workers. Each of the former SR Technics workers who are on the ALBA course had their college fees paid for by this fund. Funding became an issue for these students at the time of the interviews and is thus recorded in the findings of the research.

The Irish Government formally applied for EGF funding in October 2009. The application was approved and €7.45m was allocated. Of this a total of €2.93 was used. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) report of August 2012 ‘The Review of the Completed EGF Programmes in support of redundant workers in Dell, Waterford Crystal and SR Technics’ states that in relation to SR Technics some seven-hundred-and-fifty-six former employees were assisted, with , two-thousand-one-hundred-and-eighty-one interventions, including guidance and counselling, training and third level education. Seventy-four former SR Technics workers were in fulltime education or training at the time of this report.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter set out to discuss the background to the general nature of adult education in Ireland and the Adult Learning Bachelor of Arts in particular. It traced the development of structure, administration and initiatives of Government policy, along with other relevant reports concerning adult education. The inception and development of the ALBA programme was time-lined, from initial thought to investigation, through feasibility to proposal, approval and implementation. The connections between All Hallows College and DePaul University, Chicago, and the assistance received were explored. A section concerning the students who were former SR Technics was included as they, as a group, had an impact on the development of ALBA and on the research itself. The information contained in this chapter sets the backdrop in which this research takes place. It is from this stand-point that the next chapter will explore the research methodology.

Chapter Five: Methodology

5. Introduction

Each of the previous chapters has prepared the way for the research study to be conducted with a solid theoretical grounding. From exploring the nature of adult education in chapter one, understanding the nature of adult learning in chapter two, presenting an exegesis of transformation theory in chapter three and setting the research environment in chapter four. This chapter, now, sets out in four major sections: an outline of the methodology; critique of the methodology; research design, and, research considerations. Each section is now presented and explains the research undertaken moving from the theoretical theory of research to the practical field work of conducting research, including the handling of the data created, validity and ethical considerations.

The purpose of this research study was (a) to collect data with regard to the research about whether participation in adult higher education can be transformative for the learner, with particular reference to Mezirow's theory of transformation in personal, social and academic spheres; (b) to present new information about the impact of transformative learning programmes to the wider world of adult higher education; and, (c) to make recommendations an to have an impact on future practice. In fulfilling these objectives, the method of research is vitally important, as it is the desire of this researcher to honour and

respect the individual stories of those who chose to participate in this study. It is for this reason the decision was taken to adopt a narrative form of research which would allow people to tell their story.

5.1 Methodology

A qualitative research approach using the methodology of narrative, which depends heavily on in-depth interviews was the preferred option when considering how to conduct this research. This approach was deemed appropriate given the aims and objectives of the research, particularly the personal and human dimension of trying to facilitate adult learners tell their personal experiences. This section will now describe the nature of qualitative research, narrative research and narrative interviews, giving the reader a clear understanding of the methodological underpinning of this research.

5.1.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is descriptive, explorative and full of open-ended questions. It is concerned with explanations, individual experiences and the meanings people make from these personal experiences. Bryman (2004) describes qualitative research as a form of research seeing “through the eyes of the people being studied” (:279). As a result qualitative research tries not to be over structured so it is ‘genuinely revealing the perspectives of the people’. Thus for Bryman (2004), qualitative research ‘tends to be a strategy that tries not to delimit areas of enquiry too much and to ask fairly general rather than

specific research questions...' (:282). It is, according Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), a research process capturing 'how people make sense out of their lives...' (:422).

Creswell (2005) offers three characteristics of qualitative research:

- A recognition that as researchers we need to listen to the views of participants in our studies.
- A recognition that we need to ask general, open questions and collect data in places where people live and work.
- A recognition that research has a role in advocating for change and bettering the lives of individuals.

(:43)

Goodson and Sikes (2008) acknowledge that there is no one definition of Qualitative Research, suggesting that it may mean different things at different times and contexts.

Fundamentally, research is about furthering understanding, increasing the universal sum of knowledge, and making better sense of whatever is it that is being studied. Thus, researchers are seeking to interpret and then re-present an aspect of the world, whether that be of the physical, objective world or of subjective, lived experience (2008:48).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that qualitative research is multi-faceted both in subject and practice:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials...that describe routine and problematic moments and

meanings in individual's lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand (1994:2).

Rogers (2002) further contends that good qualitative research is the champion of open ended questions which allow for transparency when the data are analysed. It allows the interviewee to focus on his/her experience at a given point in time and the meaning they create from that experience. Qualitative Research is ideal for exploring deeper understanding. It elaborates on or challenges theory.

Qualitative Research often offers multiple interpretations, raises new questions and even raises questions that cannot be answered definitively or with a single strong interpretation. Daiute and Fine (2002) agree that Qualitative Research can lead to a 'collision of evidence' rather than give a simple definitive confirmation of the hypothesis (2002:69).

5.1.2 Narrative Research

Narrative research is personal, person-centred and in-depth. It is interviewing based on deep listening in a relationship built on trust and safety. It is an accepted alternative to the more traditional 'empirical/statistical' or 'quantitative' approach to research, particularly within the field of adult education. In more recent decades, a narrative form of research became more

popular with the publication of Mitchell's edited volume *On Narrative* (1981).

Mitchell introduces narrative research as:

The study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural science. The idea of narrative seems...a mode of knowledge emerging from action, a knowledge which is embedded not just in the stories we tell our children or to while away our leisure but in the order by which we live our lives (Mitchell 1981:ix-x).

Narrative research has its emphasis on 'meaning making' and of personal interpretations of the lived experience by the telling of their stories. Fraenkel (2009) speaks of the story teller recalling special events or 'epiphanies' (2009:427). Josselson and Lieblich (2002) refer to narrative research as "voyage of discovery – a discovery of meaning" (2002:260). Daiute and Fine (2002) speak of narrative as a 'development discourse' a 'search for meaning' (2002:63) while Weiland (2002) speaks of narrative as 'the goal of understanding how "meaning" is made' (2002:202). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) offer the following definition of narrative:

Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it (1997:xvi).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that narrative research is a way of understanding experience, that experience is the key. They suggest that

narrative ‘is the best way of representing and understanding experience’ (2000:18) and in their view the narrative approach is the most suitable research method for researching educational experiences:

Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively...simply stated ...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (2000:19-20).

The purpose for the use of narrative as a research method in this study was to try and make sense of the students’ experience of returning to education, with particular reference to transformative learning experience. In the telling of these stories, in their detailing of their experiences the meaning would emerge. Narrative research is about making meaning from the ‘narration’ of the story. Creswell (2005) sets out a number of elements that are key characteristics of narrative research, all of which can be recognised as being part of this research, these are:

- The identification of an initial phenomenon to explore;
- The telling and collecting of individuals stories;
- the re-storying by the researcher (transcription, structure etc);
- the coding for themes; the presentation of the story;
- Validation and accuracy of the report (2005: 477-487).

Elliot (2008) summarises the importance of narrative because it focuses on the ‘content rather than the form of the narratives’ and that the emphasis is on the ‘value of the qualitative data as lying in the rich detail and the attention to process, (2008:121).

In adopting a narrative approach, there must be openness to the process as there is no quantitative hypothesis to prove, there is no guarantee that anything of significance will emerge from the research. The narrative approach is a way of understanding experience, and it was precisely the experience of the interviewees that this research sought to ascertain. This centrality of experience is in keeping with the examination in earlier chapters of the role of experience, particularly in Dewey, but also in Jarvis, and Knowles. The development of adult education, adult human development and the importance of the lived experience have also been documented.

In this research, people were asked to tell the story of their educational experiences. After an introduction of who I was and why I was doing this research, of my own educational background and interest in adult education, interviewees were invited to tell their own story when asked the opening question: *'tell me about yourself, who you are sitting in that chair'*. A majority of the interviewees initially spoke for up to twenty minutes without interruption, questions or prompting from (me) the researcher. People wanted to talk and be listened to. This is similar to the approach of Perry (1970) who whilst researching students college experiences asked *'Why don't you start with whatever stands out for you about the year'* (1970:19).

5.1.3 Narrative Interviews

The narrative interview is different in nature from the quantitative interview and from other forms of qualitative interviews, although many will use the term ‘unstructured’ or ‘semi-structured’ interview. In this form of interview there is not so much a testing of hypotheses but rather an exploration and meaning making of experience. Arksey and Knight (1999) refer to qualitative interviewing as a ‘way of uncovering and exploring the meanings that underpin people’s lives’ (1999:32).

In narrative interviews the interviewee is invited to ‘tell their story’, without interruption or questions. Elliot (2008) speaks of the interview enabling the interviewee to tell their ‘own account of their lives’ and that it is important not to ‘impose a rigid structure on the interview’ (:31). The interviewer may, however, explore issues raised by the interviewee. This requires great listening and interviewing skills on the interviewer’s behalf. Of vital importance is the rapport built up between the interviewer and the interviewee, in order for the interviewee to feel safe enough to detail their personal story.

Narrative interviews, according to Bryman (2004), Elliot (2008), Holloway and Jefferson (2007), Kvale (1996), amongst others, consist of the following components: an interest in the interviewees’ point of view; a flexible interview schedule; possibly only one interview question to start; not a set format or order of questions; a flexible approach to the direction of the interview; and

may consist of more than one interview. There is wide agreement that the key element of a narrative interview is ‘flexibility’: flexibility in allowing the interviewee freedom to talk, even if they are going off in a tangential subject or area; flexibility in the length of interview; flexibility in the order of questions. At the core of narrative interviewing is the ability to enable the interviewee to lead the conversation content.

The interviews conducted for this research consisted of having a broad ‘interview guide’ containing ten topic areas of interest – aligned to Mezirow’s ten phases of transformation, with one opening statement and an invitation for the interviewee to ‘tell their story’ of educational experiences. During the course of the interview, “vignette” type questions were used to seek clarification or further expansion of a topic or issue raised by the interviewee. For example, when an interviewee mentioned that they were feeling more confident in themselves, they were asked if they could give examples of how their confidence has changed.

While this research grew from the researcher’s personal experience and interest in the theory of transformation and the transformative nature of adult education, there was not one question during the course of thirty-two interviews which actually used the word ‘transformation’. Yet the core purpose of the research interview was to discover if transformational learning, personal, academic or social transformations had occurred. The rationale for this is that

the researcher did not want to influence the interviewee in any way as to the content or direction of their response. It was the job of the researcher to create this narrative space and to later search for transformative narratives from within the data collected. This use of narrative interviews did allow for the interviewees to tell their stories in a narrative format, rather than a question and answer format.

5.1.4 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is concerned with the production of analysis within qualitative research data, that is, how the persons' 'story' is presented. Narrative analysis is a particular way of looking at and understanding these stories. Gilbert (2008) explains that narrative analysis is concerned with both the content and the form of the interviewee's account, saying:

A narrative approach is concerned not only with the story-telling components or characteristics of an account, but also with the social interactions between interviewer and interviewee that encourage and influence the way that an account is presented. To adopt a narrative approach is to choose to understand and analyse interview or other data from that perspective rather than, for example, focusing solely on the content of what interviewees are saying or the conversational forms and rules that underlie the interaction... (:428).

Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams (2002) talk of two main characteristics of narrative analysis as: (a) how people make sense of their experience and communicate that meaning; and, (b) that personal narratives have a social dimension. It is through this type of analysis that we learn how individuals

construct meaning from their experiences (:79-80). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that narrative inquiry is more than the reading and rereading of research texts or of coding themes. Narrative inquiry requires the researcher to become so immersed in the experience that they begin to 'narrative code' (:131). This includes a deeper understanding of the texts, the field notes, the complete research experience, hunches, feelings, the verbal and non verbal experiences. It is what they refer to as a 'layered' complex action which includes different writing styles and production of 'interim' texts (2000:131-135).

In order for a researcher to practice narrative analysis, it is important that a narrative approach is taken throughout the research project, particularly during the interview/data collection. For Roberts (2008) the central feature of a narrative approach is the 'careful listening and reading of the words and stories of the teller' (2008:132). Josselson and Lieblich (1995) offer the following description:

Narrative approaches to understanding bring the researcher more closely into the investigative process than do quantitative and statistical methods. Through narrative, we come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves. We work then with what is said and what is not said, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We then must decode, recognise, recontextualise or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before us (1995: ix).

5.2 Critique of Methodology

Qualitative research consists of multiple methodologies; it is a flexible useful paradigm for researching people's experiences. It allows people a voice to 'tell their experience' and enables meaning to be created from such experiences. It is also important to acknowledge that qualitative research may be criticised for some of these very reasons. Bryman (2004) has said that some people criticise qualitative research for being too impressionistic and too subjective; that the research relies too heavily on the researcher's own views, perhaps coloured by the close personal relationship developed, between interviewer and interviewee, within the research process.

There is an argument that qualitative research is difficult to replicate, because of the very nature of the interview relationship and that generalisation from small sample case studies or interviews is a questionable practice. However, there is an argument supporting generalisation when it is relating to a theory rather than to a population (2004: 284ff). This is so when the research is focused on the experience of interviewees in relation to an established theory, a theory which is consistent regardless of the chosen student cohort.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2007) address the question of the criticism of qualitative research depending on memory, which may be very subjective and the recollection factually inaccurate. They offer the argument that it is the narrative of the experience that is important, it is the narrative that leads to

understanding. It is the meaning making of the individual which is most important, rather than total accuracy of recall.

Elliot (2005, 2008) is concerned with the disadvantage of the transcription process. It is time consuming, is one step removed from the narrator and is subject to the researcher's interpretation. However, she also contends that the qualitative process has the ability to provide more in-depth, detailed reflexive information and understandings of experiences, motivations and values of those studied. She asserts that the qualitative process not only gives a voice but also provides a '*construction and maintenance of*' their identities (2008:178).

5.2.1 Advantages

One major advantage of using a narrative research approach is that it is flexible and not overly structured. By adopting this approach it enables the researcher, through attention and listening skills, to glean detailed information from the interviewee without having to ask a series of formulated questions and avoided a question and answer type interview. According to Silverman (2006) this flexibility allows for the researcher to respond to unexpected or unanticipated opportunities that arise during the course of the interview. This flexible approach also allows the interviewee to introduce the topic areas that are relevant and meaningful to them, which Roberts (2008) refers to as individuals constructing their own narratives according to their interpretation of experience within their own socio-cultural contexts (2008:119).

5.2.2 Disadvantages

There can be some disadvantages to using a qualitative research method. Qualitative research methodologies are often judged in terms of how it differs from quantitative, most notable being accused of being less scientific; Bryman (2004) notes that qualitative research is often criticised as being too subjective, too impressionistic, and can be accused of being overly influenced by the researcher and can be difficult to replicate, due to its often very unique qualities. Furthermore it can be difficult to fully explain how the researcher arrived at their conclusions unless a very detailed description of the analysis and finding are recounted.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) report that criticism of the narrative approach is that it can be seen as not theoretical enough, that it can be open to being accused of being too subjective; that recounting individual experiences may not, in fact be chronological or imperially accurate, but are rather an interpretation, an impression. They also point out that this criticism can also be levied at the interpreter, who may interpret the data according to their own interpretation and experience.

5.2.3 Justification

Using narrative style interview was preferred by this researcher as it allowed the interviewees to 'tell their story', to allow their 'voice' be heard. It enabled them to tell their realities and experiences, in their own words. It placed the

adult learner as the centre of the research process. This method of research has become increasingly popular over the past three decades. It is generally agreed that it is an appropriate method to use when conducting research in the field of adult education. Merrill (2007) argues that using this type of narrative/biographical method of research has led to:

A greater understanding and insight of why adults return to learn, their institutional experiences of learning and the impact of learning upon identities...how learning affects their private lives in the family and community and the inter-relationships between public and private lives. Biographies enable the voices of participants to be heard, placing them central to the research process as they reflect upon, interpret and give meaning to their life experiences... (:74).

For Dominicé (2002), it is appropriate in adult education for this approach to be used; it allows the learners to reflect on their educational experiences:

It is a narrative research method that helps people identify their learning processes in adulthood (2002:xv).

Bryman (2004) talks of qualitative research being concerned with 'words' rather than quantification, of its specific relationship between the theory and the research and of the importance of 'allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of one's data' of 'seeing through the eyes of the people studied...' (2004:266-279). The use of narrative methodology in this research enabled interviewees to speak uninhibitedly and prioritise issues that were important to them.

5.3 Research Focus

Every research has a specific focus, parameters within which to work and limitations imposed for many and various reasons. This section will now explore and detail the focus of this research project, namely the ALBA students. It will outline that which the research does and can not include.

5.3.1 ALBA Students Cohort Profile

For the purpose of this research, it was decided to conduct interviews with current students of the ALBA programme who had completed a minimum of one full calendar year on the programme. As the ALBA programme does not follow the traditional academic year, the insertion of ‘one full calendar year’ was important as it allowed for the cross section of students from different entry dates, referred to in ALBA as cohorts.

The research staff within the college suggested a target number of thirty interviews. The number of students who met the above criterion amounted to eighty-five, spread across three enrolment cohorts: September 2009; January 2010; and, March 2010. A method of purposive sampling (Bryman 2004) or purposeful sampling (Creswell 2005) was used in this research study.

All eighty-five students were written to (appendix 6) inviting them to express an interest in being interviewed. With this initial letter a short description of the nature of the research was enclosed outlining the research topic of adults

returning to learning and the transformative nature of such participation (appendix 7).

Thirty-four responded. Interview appointments were arranged for all those who responded and indicated a willingness to participate. These respondents were written to with an attached consent form to be returned to the researcher (appendix 8). When the consent forms were returned, the respondents were contacted by telephone to arrange a suitable interview appointment.

Of the thirty four respondents, thirty-two actually attended for their interview appointments. One person cancelled due to a family bereavement and another person failed to keep three appointments. Of the thirty-two interviews conducted, sixteen were male and sixteen female.

Within the sixteen males, twelve were from the S.R. Technics group, a specific group of male students who were funded to return to education through the European Globalisation Fund (see Chapter 4).

Table three below shows the number and percentage of students who participated in the research.

Total Number of Students who met the criteria	85	100%
Number of respondents	34	40%
Number of respondents interviewed as a % of total number of students	32	38%
Number of students interviewed as % of respondents	32	94%

The above sampling process and the decision to use this sampling method is in keeping with established research practices within qualitative research and is in accordance with Creswell's (1998) assertion that all the selected individuals meet the criterion and Mason's (1996) definition on sampling as:

Selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position...and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing (1996: 93-4).

Table four provides a cohort and gender breakdown of those interviewed.

Cohort	Male	Female	Cohort Total
1	2	9	11
2	10 (8 SRT)	5	15
3	4 (4 SRT)	2	6
Totals	16 (12SRT)	16	32

Table No. 3. Cohort and Gender Breakdown

Gender: Of the thirty-two participants, sixteen were male and sixteen were female. Of the sixteen male, twelve were from the SR Technics group. This is noted because their entry onto the course as a large homogenous group was noted by interviewees. On a point of clarity not all SRT students were male, just the ones who presented themselves for interview.

Age: The majority of the interviewees were in the forties to late fifties age bracket. The youngest interviewee was twenty-eight, to oldest sixty-five.

Education Level: Of the thirty-two people interviewed, seventeen had completed upper second-level education, Leaving Certificate or equivalent. Thirteen had completed lower second level school, Intermediate Certificate or equivalent. Two had left formal education after primary school. All but one of the SR Technique interviewees had completed an apprenticeship. Three interviewees, one male and two female, had completed a one-year post Leaving Certificate course at Certificate or Diploma level. Five of the women had completed Commercial College secretarial courses.

Experience of School: While not explicitly asked whether they had a positive or negative schooling experience, seven of those interviewed offered this information to assert that they had had negative experiences of the education system as a child and that this had curtailed their education advancement or interest at a young age. One interviewee expresses an extremely positive experience of both primary and secondary school.

Family History of Education: Of the interviewees who spoke about their family of origin in relation to education, no one recounted any experience of a family member attending third level. The predominant discourse was on the fact that no member of their immediate family of origin or extended family had attended or attained a third level education.

Employment Status: The majority (fourteen) of the male interviewees were unemployed, eleven of those being the men from the SR Technics group. Of the men who were working, only two were working full-time. The profile of the female interviewees was somewhat different with the majority of the women (twelve) working, either full-time (eight) or part-time (four), with only two identifying as unemployed and two identifying as retired on health grounds. This stark difference in employment status can be accounted for by the fact that the twelve SRT interviewees were all participants of the 'Back to Education' grant from the DES and funding from the EGF. The majority of men were in the category of 'trade' classification, with one interviewee identifying as 'unskilled' and one as 'self-employed'. The women were predominately working in the clerical field.

Full-time/Part-time: The majority of men (twelve) were full-time students, while the all of women were part-time students. Again this large proportion of male students being full-time students is a direct correlation to the twelve SRT men for whom the course was extended to allow for full-time study. The original start-up phase of the ALBA course was designed for part-time students only.

Previous experience of Adult Education: All of the female interviewees had previously engaged in other adult based part-time education programmes. These ranged from VEC/community based night classes, often hobby/interest

type courses, FAS courses, other courses in All Hallows College, with four participating in certificate courses in other third level colleges. The opposite is the case for the male interviewees. They had only attended courses which were work related, when sent on specific courses by their employers or provided for during working hours by their employer. Only two male interviewees had participated in education programmes outside of their work environment.

Personal Interest in Learning: In presenting themselves in their introductory remarks during the interview, thirteen of the women expressed the opinion that they held a long held desire for degree and had always an interest in learning. Seven of the men expressed the same interest.

How they heard of ALBA: There were various ways in which people heard of the ALBA Course ranging from local and national newspaper articles, the internet, word-of-mouth, or through an education fair. All of the SRT participants were recruited either by the education fair that was organised for the former SRT workers or through word-of-mouth from former work colleagues. Of the other participants, four read about ALBA in newspaper articles, three through the College's promotional leaflet in their local library/community, three from the College internet web page, three as a result of attending other courses in All Hallows, one person heard of the course through a community based presentation made by ALBA staff and one other by attending an education fair in their local community centre.

5.3.2 Parameters and Limitations

The parameters of this research included the following:

- Students had completed a minimum of one calendar year on the course.
- Only those students who responded to the interview invitation were interviewed.
- Students who had left the ALBA programme were not included.
- Only students were invited to participate; College staff, tutors or administrative staff were not included.

While thirty-two interviews with an even proportionality of male and female students is a considerable size for a narrative research, it still has its limitations. It is still only a percentage of the total number of students who met the criteria and a smaller percentage of the total student population. The students who presented for interview did so by their own free choice and showed a willingness to participate— perhaps this shows a positive regard for the ALBA course. Could it be that less committed students or students who have less positive regard for the ALBA course did not engage? Or were some student so caught up in their own business of being a student that the intrusion of an outside agent was unwelcome? It is not possible to second guess why people did not volunteer to participate, but it is appropriate to acknowledge this as a limitation of the research.

Another limitation of this research is that it is only focused on those who have completed a minimum of one year of study. It was not possible to conduct interviews with students who have completed the BA course as the course was

only eighteen months running when the research was conducted and no student had completed the course. The research consisted of one interview with each of the students. Given time scale and resources it was not possible to conduct any subsequent follow-up interviews.

5.3.3 Research Focus

The impetus when setting out on the research journey was to discover whether adults who participate in education programmes experience personal transformations. This was supported by my experience as an adult educator and by the theory of transformation. This research is to ascertain if through their participation in the ALBA programme, students became aware of or experienced any changes in themselves. This research focus is the common thread running through all the chapters of this thesis.

It was important therefore, in the process of gathering data, that the actual interview question was an open-ended invitation to the interviewee to ‘tell their story’. Subsequent follow on ‘probes’, ‘follow-through’, or ‘sub-questions’ were related to the information presented by the interviewee and guided by the theory of transformation, specifically by Jack Mezirow’s ten points of transformation. This provided a ‘frame’ on which to hang the research question and to draw on for the analysis.

Green (2008) suggests that a research question should be; interesting, relevant, feasible, ethical, concise and answerable. In this particular case the chosen research question is; *Interesting* – do the ALBA students represent their experiences as personal ‘transformation’ as a result of engaging in course. *Relevant* – The ALBA programme is new, these are the first group of students to participate in the programme that has been specifically designed for adult learners. *Feasible* – It was possible to enable the interviewee to ‘tell their story’. *Ethical* – Students were invited to tell as much or as little as they felt comfortable with. They were allowed set the content of the conversations. *Concise* – The research question in this study was to ask the person to ‘tell their story’, not a concise question. *Answerable* – each interviewee held the answer.

This research question was originally framed in broad general terms and refined to a core, concise, focused question, with appropriate subsidiary questions. This was achieved through discussion, other research samples and a pilot study, taking into account the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of the research to be undertaken.

5.4 Conducting the Research

This section will detail exactly the process undertaken and involved in conducting the research interviews. It will describe how the interviews were

prepared for and conducted, the handling of the data and the information provided to the participants beforehand along with assurances of confidentiality.

5.4.1 Interview Guide

The interview guide which was drawn up was based on Mezirow's ten aspects of transformation theory, with a research interest area equating to each of Mezirow's points. There were many drafts of this guide including the one used in the pilot interviews and adapted for the research interviews. Due to the format of the interview process, the interview guide was not referred to during the main body of the interview, but only at the very end of the interview as an aid memoir to see if all the research areas had been covered. The full interview guide including possible questions is available in appendix 9.

5.4.2 Participant Information

In contacting potential participants, a letter of invitation (appendix 6) was circulated which included the title of the research, a short brief about the research along with assurances of approval from that the college programme board. All potential interviewees were given, along with the invitation letter, a written statement outlining the nature of the research, the purpose and the process to be undertaken (appendix 7). Assurances of confidentiality and of their freedom to opt out at any stage were also included. This information was again presented to the potential interviewees orally in a follow up telephone

conversation and again prior to the actual interview. Consent forms were received from each interviewee prior to participation (appendix 8).

5.4.3 Pilot

Prior to the research interviews, a number of pilot interviews were conducted, which allowed the opportunity to test-run the narrative interview approach. The participants for the pilot study were chosen from another adult education course run in All Hallows College, called the “Pathways Programme”. This is a two year part-time course for adults exploring their faith journeys. A presentation was made to the whole group explaining the research and the request to conduct a pilot study. Participants who were in their second year were asked to volunteer. Four people volunteered and presented themselves for interview. These pilot interviews certainly helped in confirming that the narrative interview approach was correct and it facilitated the creation of the final structure for the interview guide.

5.4.4 The Interview Process

All thirty-two interviews for this research were conducted on site, on the college campus, in a private room. Interviews were digitally recorded. Interviews varied in length, the average being one hour and fifteen minutes duration. The shortest interview was forty-five minutes, with the longest lasting over two hours.

At the outset of the interview once the recording was on, I introduced myself with a detailed summary of my own educational background, professional involvement in adult education, the reason for conducting the research and knowledge of the ALBA programme. Having explained the background to the research, the interviewee was then invited to tell their story, of how they and why they had come to be sitting in the seat opposite. This opening invitation is the suggested practice of researchers conducting qualitative interviews, of inviting interviewees to tell their stories.

All the interviewees responded positively to this invitation, many speaking uninterrupted for over twenty minutes, whilst making their opening introductory remarks. They spoke of their families, their childhood, schooling, their educational experiences, their own children, and their sense of self. It was important to allow the space and freedom for the interviewees to express themselves and set out their priorities.

It also meant that I was respecting what was important to them, their priorities and not a personal agenda. Thomson (2006) suggests that the first requirement of the researcher is to;

accept the informant, and give priority to what she or he wishes to tell, rather than what the researcher wants to hear, saving any unanswered questions for later... (2006:39).

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It was from their opening statements that I was able to use follow up questions and further probing was introduced relating to themes they themselves had introduced. The follow up probe questions were again very open-ended questions; ‘could you tell me more about...’ or ‘when you mentioned ‘X’ I am wondering what that was like for you...’ ‘Can you describe for me...’ At all times these questions and prompts were related to the research question and Mezirow’s theory on transformation. At the end of each interview, the interview guide was consulted to see if we had covered the relevant areas. In almost all cases the interviewee had invariably covered all the research areas, if they had not, a question relating to the absent area was asked (see interview guide in appendix 9).

Independently of each other, and completely unsolicited, a number of the interviewees contacted this researcher some time after the interviews to say they had found the experience of the actual interview process a very rewarding experience which motivated them into further reflection and action.

5.4.5 Data Collection, Management and Storage

The interviews were digitally recorded and then saved to a password protected computer. The digital recordings were then deleted from the hard drive of the recording device. The recordings are only accessible through specific software loaded onto the computer, without this software it is not possible to listen to

the recordings. This software came with a licence number which is not saved on the same computer as the recordings.

5.4.6 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was assured to all interviewees. This included not identifying any person through their participation, and trying at all times to secure their anonymity through the presentation of findings. It is intended that no person will be identifiable as a result of the researcher's authorship. For this reason each interview was given a series of reference numbers which were not recorded together and which created an encryption type system to safeguard the anonymity of the interviewee.

For example: Each student was given an interview number between 1-32. When the interviews were recorded the recording was numbered randomly between 07-42, finally the transcripts were then numbered in order of the transcription 1 -32 but not in interview order. Thus for example, interview number 7 could be recorded data number 22 and transcript number 12. These numbering systems were maintained separately. The recordings and the transcripts were held on a password protected computer.

5.4.7 Transcription

Some authors have suggested that the transcription process begin as soon as possible after the interview is conducted and as a parallel process to the

subsequent interviews (see Elliott (2008) Bryman (2004), Creswell (2003), (2008), Gilbert (2008), Silverman (1997, 2006), Merrill & West (2009), Perks & Thomson (2006) Goodson & Sikes (2001, 2008)). This can inform future interview questions and identify emerging themes. While fully accepting that this is good practice it was not possible in this research to begin the transcription process during the interview stage, the recordings of the interviews were, however, listened to immediately after each interview and contemporaneous field notes were written.

The transcription process took place when all the interviews were concluded. It was a long and arduous task. Each interview was transcribed fully. With the transcription text, a second listening to the recording then took place whilst double checking the written text. This second transcription was to ensure that there were as few errors as possible and to regain the sense of the interview through tone, voice etc. The researcher's introduction to the interview and subsequent questions were included in the transcriptions. Some of the non-verbal elements were also included, particularly if there was a prolonged pause. Repetitions were included and there was no attempt to correct grammar or mispronunciations. In the event of some words being inaudible the exact time reference was noted in red typeface. Having re-read and re-listened to the interview, a short summary or 'pro-forma' transcription was created which tried to capture the key themes and the essence of the interview. Along with

the 'pro-forma' a descriptive 'pen portrait' of each interviewee was written in order to keep the person present throughout the entire process.

5.4.8 Data analysis procedures

The interviewees had been encouraged to 'tell their story'; it was now my responsibility to represent what they told. Analysis is the eliciting of these stories and referencing it back to the theory of transformation. This enhances the validity of the research to see if their told experience supports the theory, and to see if there are new insights which can inform theory and practice. Narrative analysis is about focusing on both content and form. The analysis of narrative interviews places an onus on the researcher to be reflective during the practice and to present the 'wholeness' of the individuals' experience, what Creswell (2005) refers to as 'wakefulness' and Elliott (2008) emphasises the value of qualitative data as being rich in detail.

In essence the data analysis began during the transcription process, with ideas and themes emerging and re-emerging, connections being made by the researcher. However, the analysis began in earnest when the completed transcriptions were printed onto pages with columns to the left and the right of the text. Within these columns, observation notes could be made on one side and possible codes or themes on the other. I read and re-read each transcription multiple times. The interview recordings were again listened to for a third and fourth time. As a result, new themes emerged. Initially there were

multiple categories of codes which were collated into a large number of broader categories, which then became 'themes.' The themes were then reduced to themes related to the theory of transformation, questions that were asked and other themes that emerged from the interviews. Themes were colour coded within the text of the transcriptions.

The next stage of the transcription process created a second set of documents which placed similar themes from multiple interviews together, at all times noting and referencing the origin of each contribution back to its original interview. These multi-layered readings, coding and theme creating was an ongoing process which demanded great organisational skills and perseverance. However, this process enabled a focused and detailed analysis and interpretation.

The third set of documents created from the transcription process was to create a database of quotations. Quotations relating to specific themes, from the various interviews were collated together. These quotations were used when describing the findings and conclusions of the research.

The analysis was labour intensive and time consuming. However, it became so engrossing that the whole process became lived experience, resulting in deep insightful analysis and findings. This analysis took place in a systematic way

referencing the data to the theory and the interview questions along with the new and emerging themes discovered.

The analysis was at all times an attempt to understand what the interviewee was saying. Its goal was making explicit the lived experiences of the interviewees and the meanings they attributed to these experiences. The analysis process developed an understanding how to present the interviewees interpretation of their experiences of participation in adult education and is presented in chapter six.

5.5 Research Considerations

Any research undertaken needs to be conducted in an ethical and appropriate manner. For research to be presented as truthful and factual the researcher needs to take due cognisance of certain principles. These considerations are presented here and deal with the ethical, trustworthiness, reliability and verification issues of this research.

5.5.1 Verification

There has been debate amongst scholars and practitioners of qualitative research as to how this form of research interviews can be assessed in terms of reliability, trustworthiness, validity and verification issues, as has been the traditional approach in quantitative research methods (see Denzin (1970);

Roberts (2002), (2008); Burges 1982; Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg (1991); Hammersley (1990); Plummer (1983); Glaser & Strauss (1970); Perks (2006); Kvale (1996); Holloway & Jefferson (2000); Feildhouse (1996) Lincoln and Guba (1985); Guba and Lincoln (1994)).

While it may not be possible or even desirable to try and impose the rigours of quantitative research onto qualitative research, there is undoubtedly an onus on qualitative researchers to provide the reader with a security that the work carried out was ethical, valid, reliable and trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) speaks of ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ in qualitative research, which consist of creditability, transferability, dependability, conformability, fairness, and authenticity.

5.5.2 Validity

To ensure *Validity* in this research, the research questions/research areas were developed around the transformations theory of Mezirow. This was to ensure that what is being measured is, in fact, what is needed. To quote Kerlinger (1973) ‘are we measuring what we think we are measuring...?’ (1973:456). This is vital if the research findings are to show that there is a match, or not, between the data collected and the theory. This provides plausibility and credibility to the findings of the research, which is a concern for Bryman (2004) and Hammersley (1992). This assertion of validity is important

particularly if making generalisations from specifics and in order to show that the findings are accurate.

5.5.3 Reliability

Within this research it was important to ensure that the method used was consistent in order to fulfil the criteria of reliability. This is the degree to which the study was consistent in its methodology and can be replicated at a future date by another researcher. This was achieved by having a clear interview guide, related to theory and adopting a narrative approach in each interview. From the methodology used it is clear that this study could be replicated by another researcher at a future date.

5.5.4 Trustworthiness

There is also trustworthiness about this study as a result of the nature of the narrative style interviews, the subsequent transcriptions and analysis. The interview style allowed for the interviewees to become really present and central to the research. It is their story. It is the account of their experience, presented by the researcher. For Elliot (2008) this empowering of participants in describing their experiences is a central aspect to what she refers to as 'internal verification'. (2008:23).

Issues of methodology, sampling, justification, reliability, validity support the trustworthiness of qualitative research such as this. They give support and credence to the generalisation/inferences which are drawn from the analysis.

5.5.5 Ethics

There are core elements that all researchers agree are central to ethical research practice. These include confidentiality; avoiding harm; anonymity; informed consent; freedom to opt out at any time; no deception; confidentiality of data; voluntary participation; consideration of potential impact of the research; no coercion or manipulation; a legitimate research topic and professional conduct and behaviour from the researcher at all times (see Josselson, R., Lieblich, A., McAdams, D.P. (2002), Homan (1991), House (1993), Bryman (2004), Creswell (2005), Gilbert (2008), Creswell (2003), Hollway & Jefferson (2000) (2007), Merrill, Goodson & Sikes (2001) (2008)), Merrill & West (2009), Elliott (2005) (2008), Shaw (1999), Perks & Thomson (2006), Roberts (2002 (2008)).

The British Sociological Association (BSA) in its Statement of Ethical Practice clearly states that:

...as far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on behalf of the researcher to explain in appropriate detail and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about'... that 'The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information

concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate to record certain kinds of sensitive information'...and the importance to 'anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful' and 'to consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one (BSA 1996).

In conducting this research, the above elements were taken into consideration and addressed both in my ethical statement (see appendix 10) to the Research Ethics Board and in the information provided to the participants, both written and orally before each interview (see appendix 7).

5.5.6 Researcher Integrity

An important decision concerning researcher integrity was made long before any interviews were conducted – namely that I would not teach on the ALBA course when it began in 2009. This decision, while personally difficult at the time, was made because it was known that at a future date ALBA students would be interviewed for the purpose of this research. This decision was made in order to avoid any conflicting professional, ethical or issues of integrity. The researcher's involvement with ALBA since 2007 and former position on the ALBA programme board was acknowledged and made clear to the interviewees.

5.5.7 Researcher as Reflective Practitioner

Within the process of reflexive practice this relationship between researcher and researched is of great importance, as is the reflexive practice concerning the analysis of the data. Elliot (2008) suggests that reflexive practice is also at the heart of the analysis of trying to provide insights from the information received. For her it is not simply a matter of coding the transcripts, but on reflecting on the analysis to gain deeper insights into the meaning being transmitted by the interviewee, along with the internal or emotional responses experienced by the researcher. Elliot refers to Hollway and Jefferson (2000) who offer four main questions to be asked when involved in analysis of qualitative data: (1) What do we notice? (2) Why do we notice what we notice? (3) How can we interpret what we notice? (4) How can we know that our interpretation is the right one? (2008:159). Yow (2006) suggests that when conducting research and analysing data, the following set of questions should be asked of oneself in order to reach an understanding of what is happening:

1. What am I feeling about this narrator?
2. What similarities and what differences impinge on this interpersonal situation?
3. How does my own ideology affect this process? What group outside of the process am I identifying with?
4. Why am I doing the project in the first place?
5. In selecting topic and questions, what alternatives might I have taken? Why didn't I choose these?
6. What other possible interpretations are there? Why did I reject them?
7. What are the effects on me as I go about this research? How are my reactions impinging on the research? (67).

My role as a researcher, as an adult educator and as a part-time student, has encouraged me to become more reflexive in my practice and in my educational journey. This in turn has enabled me to be present to my interviewees and to really listen to their stories. In transcribing the interviews and in the analysis of same I have endeavoured to be a reflexive practitioner. As Oakley (1979) noted that ‘academic research projects bear an intimate relationship to the researcher’s own life...’ In being reflexive I have acknowledged my own journey in education, my own values and motivations. Being clear about what is personal has, in turn, freed me to be able to listen clearly to the voice of the interviewees and their values and motivations and experiences of being adult learners. The Valediction section at the end of this thesis takes up the issue of personal reflection and the impact of conducting this research.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to set out in detail the methodology of the research along with the research paradigm. This includes the justification for conducting the research, the research question, the choice of methodology and the subsequent treatment of the data. As set out in the introductory chapter and all subsequent chapters, this research is to test the hypothesis as to whether participation in adult education is transformative.

It has been the clear intention, stated throughout preceding chapters, that this research is structured to enable the interviewees to ‘tell their own story’. The format in which this could best take place was through narrative research, particularly narrative interviews. The approach of this research was one of openness and honesty at all stages. Criteria for the research were set out, a sampling procedure clearly identified and an interview guide that was relevant to the research and grounded in theory was developed.

Interviewees participated of their own free will, voluntarily and without compulsion. Interviewees were provided with details of the research and assured that they could opt out at any time. The research was conducted in a way that was ethical and met with validation and reliability criteria. The data generated from the interviews was respectfully handled, assuring confidentiality in storage, interpretation, analysis and in presentation.

The research has been objective and truthful. It has enabled thirty-two adults to ‘tell their own story’ of their experience of adult education and how participation has affected them as individuals.

Having now set out the methodology employed in this research the focus of the next chapter, chapter six will turn to the analysis and findings of the research interviews, to be followed by the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this analysis in chapter seven.

Chapter Six: Findings & Analysis of Data

6. Introduction

For the purpose of clarity the findings have been grouped into five major themes, each with detailed sub categories which present in detail the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees. These categories were compiled from the analysis of the data as a reflection of the number of times such issues were raised.

The five categories are: (1) their motivation for returning to education; (2) their decision to chose ALBA; (3) the impact of returning to study, the barriers encountered and the supports experienced; (4) their experience of being in the ALBA programme; and, (5) their personal, academic and social transformations.

The findings are presented in narrative form with supporting quotations from the interviews, thus allowing the voice of the interviewee to be heard and being consistent with the research methodology of narrative research. These findings are subsequently related back to the theory of transformation and transformational learning as presented in previous chapters. This was deemed important for the purpose of validation and reliability. It was important to see if the theory of transformation was upheld in the experiences of this cohort of

learners. As the findings are presented, they will be referenced back to Mezirow's theory of transformation and Transformative Learning Theory.

6.1 Motivations for Returning to Study

There were four over-riding motivations to pursue higher education which emerged through the data analysis: unemployment; the desire to have a degree; career advancement; and, the idea of doing something for oneself. In his ten phases of transformation Mezirow's first phase is that a disorienting dilemma takes place (1991; 2000). The result of the data from the interviews elucidates a number of such disorienting dilemmas and trigger events.

6.1 (a) Unemployment – Losing One's identity

One obvious and repeated trigger event, primarily from the male (SR Technics) interviewees, as their main motivation to return to education, was unemployment. This disorienting dilemma of becoming unemployed was described at times emotionally. How the difficulties of coming to terms with being unemployed impacted on the interviewees. They found the term 'unemployed' did not sit with them, that it did not convey the essence of their lived experience. They spoke of losing their identity. One interviewee describes the dark place unemployment brought him to:

I didn't realise it until later, how down I was and how bad and how impossible I was, but I had no work and there was no prospect of getting anything... (11).

However, it was this 'event' which prompted them the opportunity to return to education, and there was a sense of becoming re-skilled in order to find alternative employment. On returning to education, one man said:

...in view of the way we lost our job I found it a great help in handling the loss of the job. It's in your head no matter how strong you are, but it gave me the tools to handle it ...I'm two years unemployed now, well, I'm actually not unemployed now... I'm a student (7).

Another strong motivating factor for this particular group of men was the fact that being in fulltime education also afforded them certain social welfare rights.

I did realise that I had only three months to go on my dole, and the Back to Education grant which was exactly the same as the dole would keep me going, so that really is the reason I said I am going to have a go at this (15).

6.1 (b) Career Advancement

Those who were unemployed saw this as a route to enhance their employment possibilities hoping that having a degree would open up the employment market for them. Those in employment believed that achieving a degree would be an advantage when it came to internal promotion or career advancement. Some interviewees spoke of their experiences of not being able to find employment or of being passed over for promotion because they did not have a degree qualification. Others spoke of advancing their career within their

current employment, for example one woman who has begun climbing the career ladder said:

The reason I took the business strand as my professional focus was that I was planning to use it to go up through the administrative side of [name of employer] (9).

Interviewees spoke of being realistic about their career prospects in the current economic climate, how they would like to advance in their careers but needed formal recognition, of needing 'that piece of paper', as one woman put it:

I didn't have anything on a piece of paper that said I have done this...when I saw the degree [ALBA] so I said that's what I'm going to do now, I'm going to move on from here and I'm moving on (16).

6.1 (c) Degree Focus

The desire to obtain a degree was spread evenly across male and female interviewees and for many was a long held desire throughout their lives. They spoke of how in their family of origin going to college was not a possibility. They considered themselves to now be addressing a childhood legacy.

I always wanted to go to college (23).

I would've gone to school as far as leaving cert which would have been unusual in our family...to go that far. Going beyond that just wasn't the done thing to be honest, although it probably would have played with my head a bit, but I literally went to work at eighteen but always had a hankering to come back... (24).

I did my Intermediate and Leaving Cert and then I followed on from that then to do a commercial course within that

college. I would have liked to at that stage, I wanted to do something like Montessori teaching, but for family reasons financially I had to go to work...(28).

I wanted a third-level qualification and I suppose I wanted recognition for the experience that I had gained (29).

That this degree was recognised and accredited by Dublin City University was important.

So I looked at the brochure, said DCU, that's fine...because you are wasting your time studying for a degree that's not accredited properly (27).

The fact that this was endorsed by DCU; it's a degree (21).

The minute I saw they were accredited by DCU, which All Hallows College is a college of, so once I knew they were accredited and they met all the marks and standards and all of that area I was really happy to come here (22).

6.1(d) Personal Fulfilment

A sizeable number of the female interviewees (twelve), saw their participation as a chance to 'do something' for themselves. They spoke of giving themselves this opportunity as a 'gift' to themselves, that it was not allied to their job or to develop a new career, it was for their own personal fulfilment.

I had always sort of had it in the back of my mind, I'll go back to education...I'm doing a degree that's about me, as opposed to being about a job (16).

It's not anything to do with job prospects at my stage in life. It's just something for, I suppose, my head because it was obviously a huge lack that I always felt (20).

Its given meaning to what I've done ...(22).

6.1.2 Relating back to theory

It is clear that these experiences are compatible with the notion of a trigger event leading a person to action. Lewin (1951) offers the suggestion that changes in the internal needs of the individual are motivating factors leading the desire for change. Knowles (1990, 2005) offers a synopsis of the earlier work of Lindeman (1926) noting that adults are motivated to learn: (a) as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy and (b) adults' orientation to learning is life-centred (2005:40). Knowles himself offers the motivation to learn as one of his key principles for andragogy. He describes motivation as being either intrinsic value or personal payoff (2005:3, 4). Dominicé (2000) acknowledges that there are many kinds of motivational reasons for adults to return to learning; often adult learners themselves are not clear as to their actual motivation. From interviews he conducted, Dominicé lists some of the motivations identified by adult learners included: the need to prove to people; the desire to return to study after an interruption due to family commitments; to become recognised in the world of work; the need to be busy and to try something different (:105). West offers similar motivations in presenting four major themes of motivation: lifecycle, hierarchy of needs, social needs, and personal needs (1996: 6-10).

6.2 Why participants chose the ALBA Programme

Through the interviews it became clear that there were a variety of reasons why individuals chose to enrol in the ALBA programme. Here they are presented under a number of headings.

6.2 (a) Degree Programme Structure

There was unanimous agreement amongst all those interviewed that the vast and comprehensive range of subjects on offer was one of the most attractive features of the ALBA programme. Interviewees were equally positive regarding the flexibility of choice regarding which modules to study, using terms such as ‘self-directed’ to emphasise this point. Others spoke of ‘building your own degree’ and the fact that when graduating, it is possible that no two people would have the exact same course content. One interviewee referred to it as her dream degree:

It is like having a dream degree, that you can pick what you really wanted to do, and that’s exactly what I’ve done (20).

Another echoes this idea of being able to pick and chose that which you want to study:

Here I’m able to pick. I have chosen specifically for me and that is the real value of it (22).

A further aspect to the structure of the degree as highlighted by the interviewees was the comfort of knowing that they were not restricted to meet

predicted unmovable targets. For example, interviewees spoke of the fact that they could take as many or as few modules per term as they chose, noting that achieving a degree could take anything from between two years to four or even five, others not knowing how far they will go, as they might avail of the various exit points:

So the school is very flexible in that sense, it's not hard and fast. It's not you must do 3 modules in the first semester and if you don't you're out on your ear, you know, they can accommodate (10).

I was never convinced that I would complete the course; in fact my grid only goes as far as the diploma (30).

A further feature of this structural flexibility was the availability and possibility of multiple exit points. This allowed people to study towards a Degree, but if they so chose they could exit the programme at Certificate or Diploma level (FETAC Level 6). The option of exiting at Degree level (FETAC Level 7) or at Honours Degree (FETAC Level 8) level was also much valued.

It was explained pretty early in the workshops that even if I came out after say 60 credits that I would have a certificate, 120 meant a diploma, 180 meant level 7. And so it was all plotted out. So I felt I've very little to lose, that I should at least get a certificate (24).

Allied to multiple exit points, was the multiple entry points. ALBA has three student intakes during the academic year, September, January, April. Interviewees were supportive of this approach as it allowed them to enter the

programme at a time that suited their personal needs/commitments or enabled them to begin study mid academic year instead of waiting for the following autumn. They also liked being mixed with students from other entry cohorts as described by one woman:

Whether you joined last term or four terms ago, everybody meets the same for the modules so there's no such thing as 'new kid on the block' (2).

6.2 (b) Programme Content

Taking due regard for what is stated in the above paragraph regarding the range, scope and choice of subject matter, interviewees were equally motivated and enthusiastic about the content of the programme, individual modules or strands. The compulsory modules of the adult education strand were valued particularly as it opened people to a new awareness regarding the learning process and the multiple ways in which people learn. This was of particular benefit to one female interviewee who struggled with low self-esteem:

I left school feeling with very low self-esteem, thinking I was stupid. And I now realise that the different intelligences which we learnt at foundations (28).

And challenging for another male interviewee:

I thought that one was either intelligent or stupid. Not that I ever did think that anyone was ever stupid, but I didn't realise there was so much in between. That was amazing learning (3).

In addition to this positive regard for the learning process, interviewees spoke repeatedly about the impact of the 'Critical Thinking' module and the

‘Collaborative Learning’ module. The initial ‘Foundations’ course which all students are obliged to complete was highlighted as a positive aspect to the overall course content, allowing adults a graduated entry back into the education process.

Foundations was like stepping stones, [it] gives you an introduction (21).

Finally, the concept of the ‘Professional Focus’ strand was for many of the interviewees a major plus when deciding to apply for entry into the course. This was understood as allowing them to study for a general degree with a specific focus which was of interest to them as individuals. One male interviewee describes the structure well when he says:

It is a kind of different format then your normal art degree... there is four strands: adult education, there is Art and ideas, there is a possibility that they are going to do human development, goes to professional focus area and what different emphasis there is and what you could choose (6).

6.2 (c) Course Philosophy

The fact that ALBA was specifically for adults and espoused an adult learning methodology was recognised and appreciated by the interviewees as one of the factors that helped them in their decision to enrol in the course, as described by three of the interviewees:

So when I heard about this and that it was for adults who haven’t had enough learning in their own lives, I thought it was very interesting because I had moved around a lot... so it

was a change coming back here and starting from nothing and then getting settled somewhere and that I've achieved in going back to college (3).

It's the perfect degree I think for adults coming back into education (6).

For adults who may not have had a great time in education and are willing to go on further and get a third level degree, that's basically what it is for (21).

Equally strong in the decision making factor, was the belief that the ALBA programme valued peoples' prior learning from life experience, certified or not. That people with previous certification could gain credits towards their degree was a major positive. So too was the fact that people understood they could bring their personal experiences to the course and undertake to do an 'Independent Learning Pursuit' (ILP) to achieve credits.

I have done two transfer of credit for a diploma in counselling skills that I have from St. Patrick's College in Maynooth and even though I did that fifteen years ago and have done other things since....So I got two transfers of credit for that (17).

What I was bringing in with me, that was another area that was hugely beneficialI had six full outcomes at level 6 I suppose at diploma level, so that filled in a number of areas. I had a number of ILPs, that wasn't very daunting for me (22).

Finally another recurring theme during the interviews was the fact that the ALBA course and its approach to learning was different from other Colleges, in its flexibility, content and structure.

It was completely different to when I was studying in the [College Name], where everything was just thrown at you. And even if you didn't want to do subjects, you still have to

do them, so this was a major plus with the ALBA being able to pick and choose what you wanted to study (8).

...the flexibility of it and the fact that you can mix and match and you can use your past experience to apply, it's not wasted. It's a very positive for me, probably the most positive thing (19).

The flexibility ... when I read about this one, that you can do it at your own pace, you decide how many modules you are going to do at a time and it's all in the evening. I thought that's ideal and it wasn't dear either, another factor (31).

6.2 (d) All Hallows College

The physical location, the physical size of the College and the relaxed peaceful surroundings of the College grounds did impact on the interviewees.

Straight away when I came down here, I loved the place, I loved the feeling in here, I still do, I just love coming down here, people are really nice and just beautiful campus and lovely atmosphere and everything (17).

I like the college here, I think it's very friendly, it's not anonymous, there is a value for me as a person, like everybody is valued... and I like that ethos (16).

The most important and certainly the most frequently recurring message from the interviewees was the personal contact and personal attention they received from the college staff when they either made enquires about the course or attended one of the information evenings. This was often accompanied by an example that they were met personally and individually by one of the management team, who gave them time and attention in explaining the course

to them and listening to their needs. This personal and individual contact was highlighted again and again throughout the interviews.

I was only speaking to [named staff member] and saying I wasn't sure if I was suitable or not if I was the right kind of candidate, so he sat me down and spoke to me for probably fifteen minutes in the coffee dock (24).

I came and sat down with [Programme Director], he sat down with me for about an hour. This wasn't at an open day, I think I just got a hold of him somewhere, he sat down with me for about an hour, went through the whole ALBA thing (17).

6.2(e) Expectations

Initial motivations were paralleled by their expectations to achieve a degree and to find a level of personal fulfilment. Students had expectations that they would be treated like adults, that the learning environment would be adult focused and that the course would be interactive, supportive and non-judgemental.

My expectation at that time was to get back into learning and this time successfully come out with a piece of paper. A formal piece of paper that I felt I needed. And I still feel I need that the same way..... Yes, they are being met absolutely; I feel like eventually if I decide to exit with a graduate diploma, or a diploma, that might be something I might have to do if my health didn't allow more than that. But it's not the plan... take longer and get a degree, there's no rush (25).

My hope was support, that was number one.... so that was the thing I was hopeful for. Yeah I think that was the major change I was hoping, and that has lived up to my expectations. **[So your expectations have been met in that regard]** couldn't say more, completely like 100% in fact more than that. Absolutely much more (6.)

I expect to be treated as an individual. To be treated as an adult. To be encouraged to do the best of my ability and not to be bored or just left sitting there. Not to be left stagnated in the back of the class, to be encouraged to participate. And I do believe that that's what's happening (27).

For each of the interviewees, the ALBA programme is meeting their expectations. This can be evidenced by the number of interviewees who would be willing to recommend ALBA to other people. During the interviews, it was notable that without exception every interviewee said their expectations were either being met or had been met.

6.2.2 Relating back to theory

The reasons people chose the ALBA course were primarily focused on the programme itself: its content, structure and approach to learning. These considerations are strongly acknowledged in the literature concerning adult education. In designing a specific adult education course Knowles (1995) includes the following elements: independent learning, acknowledgement of learner experience, enabling learners to form their own learning plans. He also speaks of setting the physical and psychological climate to ensure the learner feels safe, secure and supported. For Knowles it is important that the learner becomes self-directed and experiences different teaching methodologies, that they are involved in the planning process and understand the programme administration. Cranton (2006) speaks of creating supports and helping with personal adjustments, and of having a hospitable atmosphere. O'Brien Thesing and Herbert (2001) findings show that the place where the programme operates

is vitally important for adult learners. They suggest that small groups where there is a sense of belonging and safety are elements sought by adult learners.

It is clear from the research cited in the literature and in my own interviews that the ALBA programme provides the core elements of good practice when providing adult education. In promoting itself through education fairs, literature, and person to person meetings, the content, structure and flexibility of the course are the major deciding factors for learners to enroll.

6.3 The Impact of Returning to Learning

Many of those interviewed had enjoyed a long working life or were still in the workforce, had family commitments and other adult responsibilities. To return to study and to engage in third level education at this stage in a person's life is a major achievement which has both visible and unforeseen consequences. During the interviews, interviewees spoke of the impact of returning to education, on themselves and their families; of time constraints, of not being available, of missing out on family and social occasions. They highlighted barriers encountered and supports enjoyed along the way. The reporting of such issues is in keeping with Mezirow's (1991, 2000) second phase of transformation, the self examination with feeling of fear, anger, guilt or shame.

6.3.1 Personal Impact

6.3.1 (a) Apprehensions

Two thirds of those interviewed stated that they were not anxious at all about returning to education; rather, they were excited and were full of anticipation during the lead in time. They spoke of the excitement and joy coming up the college avenue and arriving for the first time to something they had only dreamed of and wished for in the past. It is worth noting that most of those who said they were not anxious mentioned the role that the learning assessment seminars (LAS) had in bridging their transition into third level education. It was clearly stated that attending the learning assessment seminars allayed their fears and anxieties. They had physically walked the college facilities, met other potential students and begun writing reflective exercises. They considered this to be a positive experience. It is described here by this gentleman:

I was a bit apprehensive... the fact of going to a college, it was a bit daunting alright, but obviously the seminars helped, the two weeks. You weren't just turning up on the Monday night and just straight into a lecture. So that kind of obviously helped (21).

However, there was a significant number, almost one third of the interviewees (ten) who clearly identified themselves as apprehensive and fearful of returning to study. One person described herself as 'terrified' (interviewee no. 32). Interestingly, of this group of apprehensive people, all but one were male. The anxieties expressed by these people were fear of failure, feeling

inadequate, and feeling intimidated by the world of academia. Coupled with unemployment there was a lot riding on this education venture. With one man describing it as being like the childhood experience of starting school for the very first time:

Like the first day of going to school. It was very frightening coming in, getting into a classroom with people that you may not know... (12).

6.3.1(b) On Being a Student

The majority of those interviewed said they did identify themselves as a student, noting that it was a positive experience. A number of the SRT men said that being a student gave them an identity as they had struggled with being classified as unemployed. It is described well by these two former SRT workers:

Getting a place on ALBA ...It was the best thing that ever happened to me. The day I got my ID card in ALBA that changed me from being unemployed and maybe unemployable to a student and I felt it was an improvement in status and I felt a lot better (11).

I would prefer to remain a student rather than revert back to being unemployed...being a student gives a status of having a title, that you're doing something (10).

Another group of interviewees did not identify themselves as students, either because they had no concept of it or that it was not impacting on their everyday life. Studying was something they were doing, but they identified

more closely with their career or family status rather than as a student, as explained by this female interviewee:

So I don't think as myself as a student in the way that they are students. I sometimes envy them, because they don't have to go home and do the ironing and get the dinner ready and go to work the next day and then go to lectures at night and get the assignments done and so forth. So in a way it would be easier to be a full time student. But of all the things that I have to give in life to make room for something new, this isn't going the thing that gives, I'm going to keep this up (31).

Some interviewees gave stories of experiences, some embarrassing, when presenting their student card for discount, noting they received comments about their age, refusal or 'raised eyebrows'.

6.3.1(c) Family Life

Twenty-eight of the thirty-two students interviewed were living in a family unit consisting of spouse/partner with or without children. Of this group there was agreement that returning to study had and was having, a profound affect on their family life. The most often used phrase during the interviews was that it was having a 'big impact'. Interviewees listed time pressures and family responsibilities as being the major stressors. These commitments included not only their immediate family but also commitments to extended family – especially to elderly parents. As individuals they felt they now had higher levels of stress as a result of returning to study. These stresses involved trying to juggle work/family life balance with attending College and study time.

Well it has really effected... in say my family life in...so it has impacted on that and then it causes a little bit of tension then between myself and my partner,...definitely yes, it has definitely impacted (6).

However it became apparent that the longer the person was in the routine of attending class and studying the less stressful the impact was. Family life adjusted. A considerable number of interviewees felt that by their returning to study they were setting a good example for their children.

6.3.1(d) Spouse / Partner

There was an equal split between male and female interviewees regarding their return to study having an impact on their relationship with their spouse/partner. However, more women reported that their returning to study as creating a negative tension in their relationships than did their male counterparts. These women spoke of their spouse/partner not supporting the idea of them returning to education, not understanding why they wanted to go to college and having expectations that family life should not suffer any consequences as a result of the person being in education.

I think the only barrier for me was... my partner is very worried that I'm going to leave him as soon as I get my degree....He sees me changing, but I like the new me, I'm much happier with the new me (27).

Well there were a few obstacles. My husband didn't like the idea at all, so I missed the September cohort because he had to get used to the idea. There was a lot of opposition there..... But I wouldn't have done it if it was going to cause a big sour at home; it just took time to bring him around (31).

Whilst men did speak of an impact on their relationships, it was not due to a lack of support but rather an experience of discovering a whole new and exciting world which they were finding it difficult to share with the partners. Of those who spoke of positive impacts, they spoke of having better quality time with their spouse/partner, of being happier in themselves and this reflecting in their relationships and of feeling supported in their efforts, as one man said clearly:

My wife is very supportive (15).

6.3.1(e) Personal/Social

By far the biggest impact of returning to study outside of the family home was the negative impact it was having on the person's social life. For almost all those interviewed – bar one - the commitment to study was profoundly curtailing their social contacts and interactions. People spoke of no longer having a social life or of it being radically curtailed. With some regret, interviewees recounted numerous stories of having to miss attending extended family events such as baptisms/ communions/ confirmations/ weddings and funerals. A number spoke of having a feeling of regret for not visiting ill relatives or friends. At a more personal level, interviewees spoke of feeling a constant pressure to balance work/home/study life. Those with school age children spoke of trying to remain in touch with their children's lives while still finding time to study themselves. Interviewees spoke of having to make

personal sacrifices regarding cost implications in order to meet the expense of going to College. Finally, a number of interviewee's spoke of feeling they were constantly putting pressure on themselves to achieve the appropriate balance, while others spoke of a recurring tiredness as a result of the increased work load.

Some people, friends of mine, and members of my extended family have actually passed away and I hadn't seen them before they died, because I have been so busy. I had planned to see them. I planned to visit somebody and then they died. I had heard they weren't well and then they passed away and I couldn't even attend their funeral because I was so busy (14).

I used to religiously go to the gym once a week minimum, once a week never miss... I paid my gym membership last year and I think I have only gone four times. It's just as I say when I started doing stuff you just don't want to leave it because in case you are falling short, it's constantly on my mind you are falling short you should be doing what you are supposed to be doing (13).

My social life is probably contracted, because you are just not free to do what everybody else is doing (16).

My social life is a lot less hectic than it use to me. I suppose at the moment I know coming towards the end of this semester I do feel a bit stressed out. It's like as if I have to kind of fill every day. If I pick up a book that has nothing to do with college, I almost think I shouldn't be reading this, I should be reading Plato or Aristotle. And whilst I never watched much television, I now kind of feel that I can't, because I can't legitimately sit in front of the television for an hour when I have studying to do. So yes it has definitely impacted me, I'm looking forward to having the summer off (17).

6.3.1(f) Commitment

All of the interviewees felt they had underestimated the commitment involved in being a third level student. Many had not initially accounted for the time commitment involved outside of attending classes. Interviewees spoke about trying to stay up-to-date with study/assignments, the amount of time spent reading in preparation for class, and the quantity of research needed to be undertaken and its time consuming nature. Interviewees also found it difficult to find a study routine or even a suitable place for study. They found putting time aside for study difficult and challenging. Lack of technical skills in IT and in academic writing was also noted as having a bearing on the amount of time spent studying. Interviewees constantly spoke about being behind in assignments and the pressure that this created.

I didn't realise particularly it would take so much time (2).

This is hard work; it takes commitment (9).

If you don't stay on top of your work, if you let it build up you're in trouble. If you've a semester finished and another semester started and you've work from the previous one not started you're in big trouble (10).

Don't take on too many modules. I would say that was my biggest problem. I was trying to get through to the end by taking on too many modules (11).

Stay with the work, don't think you can shelve it, because you will be swamped at the end, trying to do assignments... but you do need to do the work. But don't underestimate that...it is a big time commitment. And I would say to anybody don't underestimate that, think long and hard. And particularly if there is very young children involved (16).

Don't take on too much... there's an awful danger of coming to the lectures four nights a week, it's great, but what all about the hours behind work you have to do, (25).

6.3.2 Barriers

6.3.2 (a) Economic

While there was a representative number of each cohort who mentioned economic pressures as a barrier encountered in their return to education and continuation of participation, there was an overwhelming number from the SRT group. Financial worries were largest amongst this group and this needs to be seen within the context of their funding arrangement as explained in chapter four. These participants in ALBA had their fees paid through the EGF fund. At the time of the interviews, the SRT men were in negotiations to have the fund continue to pay for the subsequent years. It was uncertain at this time if they would receive funding. If funding was not forthcoming, most, if not all of the SRT men felt they would have to withdraw from the course.

Well one of the problems we are having is the funding of it (32).

I cannot, absolutely cannot afford to pay for the next 2 years, it's just impossible, I can't do it (13).

Of the others who spoke of financial difficulties, not in this category, financial pressures were noted as the costs associated with being a student, course materials, travel and subsistence. They were, however, determined to continue

with their studies. Three of the interviewees were on ALBA scholarships and another was on a private scholarship.

6.3.2 (b) Personal

Apart from the financial issues noted above, the single largest identified barrier to participation in education was considered by all interviewees to be internal. This ranged from procrastination to lack of organisation, to self belief. They saw themselves as their greatest barrier.

I am a perfectionist, and a by product of that is I procrastinate a lot (15).

Probably myself would be the main barrier. I procrastinate to be honest. I put stuff off until it's due or an essay is due, I'd always say, I have a week to do that, and then something else would come up (21).

Outside of this, other personal barriers encountered were poor writing abilities, personal illness and learning difficulties.

6.3.2(c) Lack of Personal Information Technology Abilities

Interviewees were very honest about their own personal lack of abilities in IT and the impact this has on their participation. They identified their lack of IT skills and lack of personal IT equipment as a barrier. For them there were cost implications in purchasing equipment along with time commitments in taking on tuition to become proficient in IT skills.

You really need to know how to type before you go into adult education (14).

Make sure you have a good computer because all the work or most of the work is on computers (12).

Last year I did twenty-five hours ...and I knew I hadn't passed the exam, ...I knew I hadn't passed and I continued on but I had to start the IT again here last week. I had to sit it again because I just find that it's a disaster... (13).

6.3.2(d) Lack of Support

In their return to education a notable number of female interviewees reported experiencing a lack of support. These ranged from lack of support from their spouse/partner, their employer and/or their extended families. No male interviewee spoke of experiencing such a lack of support. As noted previously, women spoke of difficult situations with their spouse/partner. Lack of support from employers was also reported by the women interviewees. They were not given time off, financial assistance or encouragement. In fact a number of women relayed stories of actual discrimination and an attitude of indifference towards their return to study.

I asked work if they would sponsor me. No what do you want that for. Tried a few times to continue on but it was the same response, you are a woman, you're whatever age, are you not thinking about dropping out of the workforce (16).

There were some very personal testimonies for the women about lack of support from their extended families, with some experiencing jeering taunts

and sarcasm.⁴ One interviewee, fearing such lack of support, had kept her return to study a complete secret from her extended family.

It's my secret life really, because I don't talk about it at work and I don't talk about it with my extended family either, in fact everyone is sworn to secrecy. You see I didn't expect much encouragement. I had such a to-do with my husband to begin with and I thought well everyone is going to think it's pointless. Because where I come from you only go to classes if you are going to earn more money out of it. So I couldn't actually convince anybody that this was going to make me wealthier, so I thought there is no point in even talking about it. So I never told my family and I told my boss, but I didn't tell anyone at work. Because it meant a lot to me and I just didn't want people maybe talking the wind out of my sails or just talking about it, because they had already talked about the weather and the conversation had gone dry, I didn't want it to be that kind of a subject. So it's my secret life... I'm not looking for people's permission, but I don't need their discouragement either (31).

This secrecy is echoed by another female interviewee:

I haven't told anyone about this because people drag you down, people say things, what are you doing that for (20).

6.3.2 (e) Academic Language

Both male and female interviewees struggled with understanding the academic language they were now hearing for the first time. Initially feeling unable to

⁴ It is interesting to note that post interview, a number of these same women either emailed or told me in person, that their participation in the interview had helped them reflect on their situation and had encouraged them to make changes. The interviewee who had not told her employer or her family that she was studying decided to break her silence and let people know she was attending college. Another told me how the interview had helped her in 'moving on' from her stated position of keeping quiet about her studies to feeling proud of her achievement, that it was not something to hide. While another said that participation in the interview enabled her to hear herself and take action.

ask for explanations yet finding it difficult to comprehend. For example one female interviewee tells of how she wanted to study for a degree, was not on the course but did not know what this BA was that the staff were referring to:

I had to ask my mother what was a BA, because I didn't understand what it was (27).

When an explanation was given some interviewee was still left confused:

It was described to us as, 'it's similar to a liberal arts degree', now I didn't know what that was (28).

... a degree in humanities, I don't even know what that is (20).

Other examples offered during the interviews were phrases like criteria, outcomes, bibliography, ennergramme and ECT's.

He said, 'looking at the criteria I had a good change as any'. Now I didn't really know what 'criteria' was at the time (24).

We didn't know what outcomes were. You see you can use the terminology but if you don't know what bibliography is.. now that may sound ridiculous but I didn't know what it was. So when they were talking about the bibliography at the end and you don't know what it is you are lost (32).

6.3.3 Supports

6.3.3(a) Spouse/Partner

The overwhelming support received by interviewees was from their spouse/partner. Whilst both male and female interviewees named their spouse/partner as providing support which made it either possible or

manageable for them to return to study, there was a two to one ratio of men over women who nominated their spouse/partner as their greatest support. Male interviewees spoke more of the emotional support and encouragement, of interest shown in their studies, their assignments and in their new areas of knowledge.

The wife goes around and collects the books in the library for me. Now if there's anything for project management I want that and there's a list of 10 films, and I was looking for one and she said "oh leave that with me and I'll see if I can get that for you". Now she's not into laptops and she's not into computers or websites, knows nothing about that, but she'll walk now and she'll go round to Xtra-vision or she'll go round to somewhere in town,...but it's nice. It all helps (12).

I was saying to [wife name], you know, I was giving her a compliment, you know it's good to give her these, and I said was just thinking about you if you weren't here, and this is genuine, helping me I wouldn't have lasted a week on that thing. And she is really good, now she would come in and edit stuff for me or whatever (13).

Women described the more practical support of their male spouse/partners taking on extra responsibilities in the home, extra child minding, cooking, taking children out of the house so the interviewee could study or even helping to source study material in libraries.

My husband does everything else in the house, because I'm either studying or I'm in here at lectures. And without that kind of support you are not going to do it...my husband was great, he supported me to do it (16).

My husband is very, very supportive and I don't know how anybody could do it without a supportive husband (29).

Both male and female interviewees also spoke of a sense of pride in their achievement of returning to College, and by virtue of them being happy in themselves this was having a positive impact in their relationship.

I know my wife and children are very proud of what I am doing...for my wife and children to come down here and see me walking out with a degree, I know they will feel and I will feel terrific about that...Something I never in my life thought of doing, to walk out of here with a degree. I will be so proud. It will mean an awful lot to me (15).

6.3.3(b) Family and Friends

While more men named their spouse/partner as their main support, it was exclusively women who nominated their wider family, friends and work colleagues as their main supports. Women, particularly those with teenage children, spoke about the support received from their children, especially in relation to household chores.

The children are very supportive of me learning (27).

They spoke about the encouragement they receive from close friends and family relations. Particularly from parents who were pleased for their achievement. When speaking of her parents one female interview acknowledged how they were proud of her and supported her efforts by their attendance at a college show she participated in.

So they're very glad for me and proud of me... the fact they showed up to it showed they were interested (24).

One lone parent spoke of how important it was for her to have the full support of her three children in order to make it possible for her to attend classes.

So I had to take four people into account. the three kids and myself. So I sat down one evening and they knew I was going for the learning assessments seminars and whatever so I sat down with them and I said 'I really would love to do this but I need to know that you all want me to do this and for me to be able to do this we all have to pull together and are you willing to do this are you happy for me to do this, can you see any problem or will we talk about it'. So each of them in turn said, 'oh yeah do it'. Now for a year and a half I have to say the children were brilliant, I would come home and the dish washer would be filled and there'd be something put aside for me to eat (9).

Describing friendship one interviewee spoke of discovering the support of 'good friends'.

As regards friends, I have discovered I have very good friends and I have discovered I had very fickle friends. In that what I would call my good friends know how much this has given me as a person, so they're quite prepared not to see me every single week and would kind of start a conversation with are you ok? Are you doing an essay or anything? So that's good. They're supportive (9).

6.3.3(c) Mentors

Interviewees spoke of the personal support they received from their mentors, the encouragement and the honesty. They spoke about receiving feedback which at times was not always easy to accept, but ultimately helped them

progress and learn. They were complimentary about their mentors approach and understanding of the difficulties and struggles involved in returning to education.

My mentor is [name] and I know if I email [her] she would be back within hour or she would certainly ring me back, and they contact me, that's the way it is in here (15).

I have to say I found the mentors here, everybody has a mentor and I found that very helpful and they were very supportive. (28).

My mentor is [name], I really feel the support and they really had my best interests at heart and I think that's just about fabulous. The attention there and they are hearing exactly where I am coming from and they are really engaging (6).

6.3.4 Relating back to Theory

West (1996) in a series of biographical analysis with adults, who returned to education, presents a number of impacts experienced by the students. Including guilt feeling due to lack of time spent with family members, fears and anxieties regarding their ability to fit in or succeed, as well as family conflict, lack of understanding but also support. King, O'Driscoll and Holding (2002) found that the barriers adults encountered in education included location; cost; lack of childcare; perceived bureaucracy and lack of confidence. The barriers described by the ALBA students are comparable although childcare was not raised as an issue.

When introducing the topic of supporting students, Mezirow (2000) acknowledges how mentors play an important role in all walks of life, sport;

business; political; teaching; social; work, etc. He notes that students also need support. Support in their academic and personal development, in their learning and socialisation. Mentoring is one source of providing this support along with the appropriate initiatives from the education provider. Cranton (2006) and Mezirow (1991) assert that the educator has a role in supporting the learner in both their personal and academic transitions, that in fact such an action is an integral and indispensable component of transformative learning (1991:209). O'Brien, Thesing and Herbert (2001) report that family support is very important to adult learners as is the supports given by the programme providers are essential in assisting the adult learner.

6.4 The Experience of being on ALBA

The experience of returning to education as an adult learner had many seen and unseen consequences for the interviewees. In this section they tell of the things which they found helpful and the difficulties they encountered along the way.

6.4.1 Positives

6.4.1(a) Supportive Environment

The overriding consensus was that the ALBA programme was an open, supportive, encouraging non-judgemental environment. People spoke of their engagement with the course being a positive experience. They had experienced peer support and peer learning. There was a sense that the individual mattered.

That this course was not just about attaining a degree or a new career. It is about the person. A repeated phrase used throughout a number of interviews was that ALBA ‘takes you where you are at’. Others commented on the holistic approach to learning and that this approach encourages people and ultimately brings out the best in them. People felt they had been fully supported in their efforts and encouraged at every step of the way.

The support you get is a big one, because if you are ever in trouble, if ever you feel you can’t hack it at something regarding the course, there is always someone there to help you. And I would go as far as to say if you had any other problems, you could come down here and have a chat with [ALBA staff member name], with [ALBA staff member name], they would have a chat with you... That’s one of the strong points...Everybody is supportive, somebody will support you (15).

There was a feeling that the College only wanted the individual to do well, that they had the students’ best interest at heart, as noted by these two interviewees:

They really had my best interest at heart (6).

Very very good support, everybody wants you to do well and I have been really astounded by the support. Whether it’s the girls in the office or any of the tutors, that if you are struggling with something, there’s a real underling tone of we want you to do well and we’ll do whatever we can to get you there (29).

Interviewees spoke about experiencing this sense of support from the time of the initial contact with the College and the ALBA staff when enquiring about the course. Of particular note is the fact that many of the interviewees spoke warmly of the personalised attention they received when attending either an

ALBA information evening or a one-to-one appointment. This sense of personal interest and of being supported and encouraged continued into the actual course. Tutors and mentors were mentioned and will be addressed in the next section, but particular mention was the support given by the administration staff. They were perceived to be very supportive and helpful to the students.

The staff and the people around are here to help and they do. I mean it's not like you are just thrown in here and you turn up at lectures and no one says anything (21).

The second largest aspect of support was the actual physical environment, the location and the ambiance of the College. Interviewees spoke about the sense of peace and tranquillity within the College grounds, along with the overall sense of welcome amongst all College employees. The availability of the computer room and the library resources were noted amongst interviewees as another important support. One example given was that the College had provided rooms for study groups. One interviewee spoke of the support he and a group of fellow students received on a bank holiday:

We were here, now, the last bank holiday weekend, Easter Monday and we were wandering around looking for a room here. [Staff name] let us in and gave us the computer room to work in (12).

6.4.1(b) Tutors/Mentors

Amongst the College staff who were mentioned as being supportive towards the interviewees, tutors and mentors were specifically mentioned by all. Of note were the classroom methodologies and facilitation skills of the tutors. People interviewed felt they were encouraged to participate in their learning and their own experience and vantage point valued. The availability of tutors was also repeatedly commented upon by the interviewees who felt they had unprecedented access to their tutors. Tutors were approachable and available outside of the classroom, particularly in the coffee area where they willingly engaged in discussions with the students, described well by this student:

In here we're very blessed with how good, how accessible our lecturers are... they're so accessible all the time, in the coffee dock. Like they never sit apart, they always sit with whosoever at the table and they leave themselves open for, bless them, and can be exhausting they never get a break. So they never hide out in the, you know, in another cafeteria they're always there and they're always accessible. And they're fabulous, they really, really are (2).

The mentoring system was highly praised as it gave the interviewees a formalised supportive structure. Interviewees found their mentors to be agents of encouragement, who provided them with honest and realistic feedback in a supportive manner, as described by this interviewee:

The mentors are extremely nice. And I only have come across helpfulness, I really have (20).

6.4.1(c) Foundations

The foundations course within ALBA was highlighted by almost all of the interviewees as an important and crucial aspect of the programme. The foundations course enabled people to make the transition into third level college. It dispelled fears and anxieties. It provided explanations to how the ALBA programme worked, describing modules, outcomes, professional focus and other terms within the ALBA framework.

Foundations is a great introduction for people from the fear element point of view, coming in and getting an introduction to the college structure, what to expect and everything else like that. There's one thing I'd say that foundations is that there are modules that come after the foundations that could possibly be included in the foundations stage of it making it much easier for people, and one example of that is the scholarly writing, because right from the outset it's best to get a handle on the formal length of work and stuff like that, and to have that introduced within the foundations. Also in relation to the foundations, if there could be more time spent on instructing people how to construct their portfolio and their grid (1).

For many it helped to increase personal confidence in their belief that they were able to take on this course of study. Elements of the foundations course that made a particular impact were the discussion regarding 'learning styles', the undertaking of the personality traits test, the 'enneagram', combined with the presentation of Howard Gardner's 'multiple intelligences'.

At the foundation stage where things were being explained to you, and then all of a sudden, even within the foundation level where we did advice in relation to prior learning where you get credits for ...and that allayed an awful lot of the fears (2).

Foundations was great and it was very good at getting you thinking and getting the cogs moving and looking at from you and what you can do and how you can do it (9).

6.4.1(d) Course Content

Concerning the course content interviewees again stressed the value they put on the scope, range and variety of modules available. Their ability to choose modules, on a day or time of year that suited them was of paramount importance. There was much praise for the amount of modules available and the amazing variety of subjects on offer which would allow them to achieve their learning outcomes.

There's thirty six modules there, but there is a mountain of professional focuses (26)

You can pick modules, you have a selection of modules you can pick from, and you can dip your feet in the various areas. And if in the first few months, there is something that particularly interests you in there; you can follow that thread as a professional focus (15).

Equal praise was attributed to the classroom content. Interviewees were, to a person, impressed by the style of teaching and the facilitation skills of the tutors. Interviewees particularly welcomed the classroom discussions and interactions which took place between both fellow students and the tutor and students.

There is great interaction and it is great we have great debates (4).

I think what's very progressive in the part of education is the group discussion (12).

Classroom presentations were also high on the list of positive aspects of the course content both as a learning aid and also as a personal confidence enhancer.

We had to do presentations and stand up for three-to-four minutes now doing that in front of people you normally worked with, is very, very frightening, very frightening, and I did it and I was delighted with myself that I got through it (15).

Interviewees also spoke of how the various courses enabled them to develop analytical skills in their thinking processes and in their ability to critique. For many this was an opening up of a new way of thinking, of holding different perspectives simultaneously.

I find that when I'm listening to the radio or watching something on TV I would recognise something I wouldn't have recognised before, or there's a bit of history or things like that I can identify with better than before. I think the mind seems to be more open... So I was listening to it in a structured way and trying to think back to what we did in the course. So I thought that was very interesting just to get the mind a bit more... (3).

6.4.1(e) Course Structure

Interviewees spoke of the importance of the structures ALBA had in place which enabled students to progress through the educational process. The initial information evenings followed by the learning assessment seminars (LAS)

seminars were recognised as being particularly helpful in easing the transition into third level education. The learning assessment seminars and foundations were specifically mentioned as an easy step-by-step transition into third level education. This progression is concisely described by this participant.

The learning assessment, that's just to give us a feeling of it. Found that very helpful to look back on the past and your past experience. Before, it would lead us into the first of the foundations...little small stepping stones on the way, was the way it balanced from the start (8).

Interviewees spoke repeatedly about the range of subjects and the choice of modules. The particularly appealing aspect of these was their ability and freedom to choose exactly the areas they wanted to study. Interviewees were highly complimentary regarding the vast range of subjects available and the creativity and openness in developing new modules as the course progressed. For some it was a dream come true:

For me it was like having a dream degree. That you could pick what you really wanted to do and that's exactly what I've done....I can pick the things off the shelf that I want, I can modify things to the way I need (22).

Also important for the students was the recognition of prior learning and the possibility of attaining credits for the individual learning programme (ILP). There was clarity around the four academic strands and the professional focus areas.

I got a credit transfer; I'm hoping that I will maybe do a few ILPs (9).

I still want to write up the ILPs. From the point of view that they acknowledge something that I've done in the past. And that's a big thing, I think the ILPs they put a value on things that you have done in the past (11).

Interviewees felt that there was openness within the ALBA structure to allow participants to question and give feedback, particularly negative feedback, to which they felt there was a response, and often a positive resolution.

If we have a problem and they bring a solution and they bring it fast (6).

6.4.1(f) Fellow Students

Interviewees spoke warmly of their fellow students, asserting that this was a positive aspect of the ALBA programme. Of particular mention was the support and camaraderie felt amongst students, that there was a sense of community, a collective ALBA identity within the wider college. Interviewees had developed, at their own accord, friendships and created 'peer learning groups' or 'study buddies', which they found to be a source of support whilst studying.

Meeting other people in the very same boat you are in, is terrific, very enlightening, and the whole process I have enjoyed (15).

The friendships you make and the range of subjects, they're very broad, and they are very supportive now working in the college around ALBA as well, it's very good (8).

The number of men on the course was repeatedly mentioned as a positive aspect of ALBA by both male and female interviewees, as it was felt that this brought a balance to group discussion and an understanding of different thinking processes. The influx of the SRT men was noted as a positive development for ALBA as a whole, described here by one female interviewee:

What I like about the course best is one of the big things for me is that we have the S R Technics lads in. You know they came in a term after we started so it was huge. And mmm the dilute of what they brought was excellent because as they all brought their insecurities and their uncertainties and I thought they haven't a clue how brilliant they are. They're all still reeling from rejection, redundancies and everything else but they are going to be brilliant from the math, the logical and this is going to be good because it's not all women. And I think when you're learning stuff, when you're addressing issues like power or ethics, getting a male perspective is very important to get a balance. And these men weren't behind the door coming forward with... and it's been really revealing to me. Every time there are men in the class I just think we've got a balanced class, even if it's only 3 or 4 it's good. That was one of the big bonuses (2).

6.4.1(g) Adult Environment

The fact that ALBA is specifically an adult programme was mentioned as being important, as this helped to create the specific environment in which interviewees felt comfortable. For some this had been a deciding factor in their reason for choosing to study on the ALBA programme.

So when I heard about this [ALBA] and that it was for adults who haven't had enough learning in their own lives. I thought it was very interesting because I... starting from nothing and then getting settled somewhere and that I've achieved in going back to college (3).

It's the perfect degree I think for adults coming back into education (6).

Because when adults go back to education it's because they want to be there. And I felt I could meet my tutors as an equal. As opposed to this you know this thing you've grown up with (2).

It was important to be treated like an adult, to have the responsibility for their own progression through the course, along with the freedom of choice in relation to modules. One interviewee said they liked the straight talking approach they received from the college:

Telling it like it is and being treated like an adult with no patronising stuff (22).

Interviewees felt that their life experience was truly valued by the college and this gave them a sense of personal validation. The adult environment enabled or encouraged students to ask questions and enter into dialogue with tutors and fellow students.

It has given me a theory behind the life experience (17).

It's a self made degree, you can use your past life experiences and get credits for it (23).

Its given meaning to what I've done...It has affirmed things I have done...putting theory around the lived experience (28).

Overall, interviewees spoke of liking the fact that they were treated like adults. They appreciated that their previous life and work experience was valued and

taken into account. They accepted their responsibility in organising and planning their degree content. They wanted and responded to the self directive nature of the course.

6.4.1(h) Personal Developmental

Amongst the positive aspects of ALBA as mentioned by those interviewed was the focus on personal development. Interviewees felt they had benefitted at a personal level by virtue of being on the course. They spoke of this personal change coming about as a combination of course contents/facilitation style along with the supportive environment which enabled them to reflect and learn from their own personal experiences, present and past. They felt they had certainly gained in confidence, were more reflective and considered themselves to be better citizens, with a more developed social conscience.

The process here has helped me to identify where I am in my life (7).

ALBA has given me a very educated outlet. It has provided me with an opportunity to grow on an academic level as well as on a personal level (2).

I have learnt that I am much more capable than I thought I ever was, that I have something to offer people now, I always had, but I never really realised it before (28).

There is no doubt amongst interviewees that the ALBA programme is about personal development. Interviewees saw their participation on the course as an opportunity to change, to develop as a person, to discover new horizons, to find a new direction in life, along with the opportunity to learn.

6.4.1(i) Modules that Impacted

Whilst almost all individual modules were name checked at some point throughout all the interviews, there was a consistent reoccurrence of a number of modules held up as example of modules that impacted on them.

First amongst these is the foundations course, already highlighted above for specific mention. The next most commonly referred to module for its impact on the person was the communications course and in particular the presentation element of that course. Interviewee after interviewee spoke of the impact of having to stand up in public and deliver a speech/presentation in front of other people. While they were initially nervous they found the exercise a complete confidence booster. This learning was reinforced throughout many modules, as they had to make classroom presentations.

Doing the presentations in front of the class: I wouldn't have been good at doing that sort of thing... I can do that now and I've no problem doing that in front of a class and I would have been more embarrassed, I would get a big red face and been embarrassed previously. I would've been flat footed, I wouldn't talk to people and now that has improved an awful lot from those presentations. It really has improved (11).

Critical thinking, collaborative learning and scholarly writing were the next group of modules which were highlighted as having impacted on interviewees. These modules have given the interviewees tools they find invaluable as they progress through their studies. The ability to think, reason and critique. The new skills gained in learning techniques and styles and the essential skill of

academic writing, referencing and researching were all mentioned as instrumental in helping the interviewee in their progression.

You're being taught to think (7).

I think the critical thinking should come after the scholarly writing so that again learning how you know how to write now you have to learn how to use your thoughts to get things down on paper...(4).

Another frequently mentioned module was the ethics course. Interviewees spoke glowingly about the skill of the tutor to open up a complete new world of language, thought and knowledge. Interviewees genuinely seemed to have a sense of personal achievement in now having a language that made sense of their life experiences. This module seems to be the one where the learning transcends the classroom and into the personal lives of the students.

The ethics class has proven to be an eye opener because this is one thing we thought was going to be terribly dry and boring but it turned out to be very interesting (4).

Then there were ethics, they were excellent. He's a fantastic lecturer the way he handles the whole thing, massive exposure there and it's very enlightening in view of the way we lost our job. I found it a great help in handling the loss of the job (7).

Ethics...it's a core[subject], I went in and I was more than surprised I really enjoyed [tutor name], He's an excellent bloke. Now he is really, really good now and I loved it and we are doing the ethical acting first and now we are doing ethics in the modern day world...(13).

Not all modules were enjoyed as much; there was one module, quantitative reasoning, that was noted by a number of people as being not only difficult, but

questionable as to the reason for having to take it. Two of the interviewees described their frustration with having to take this compulsory course:

Quantitative reasoning I couldn't make head nor tail of... because it doesn't make sense to me. And I can't understand why for a degree you have to have maths (23).

I don't know why quantitative reasoning has to be core, that doesn't make any sense no, absolutely nothing to me (30).

For a full list of modules available in the ALBA course see Appendix 11.

6.4.2 Difficulties encountered

6.4.4(a) Administrative Communication

The lack of clarity in communication between ALBA administration, ALBA tutors and students was a common theme within the interviews. Interviewees felt there was unnecessary confusion because of this lack of clarity. Much of which seemed to be small matters such as classroom allocation, change of venue, cancellation of classes or changes to the schedule. Interviewees spoke of not being informed of changes which created a sense of 'not being in the loop'. These were experienced as minor frustrations but impacted on already busy people.

I think just administration and you know they are just simple things that would make everybody's life...I spend more times looking for classrooms, classes, you know, bring a sticky note and put it on the door, 'we have moved to room #'. I missed half an hour of a class the other day, because I couldn't find the room. They are silly but they are really relevant. So it's all really administration. (19).

I think communication needs to be improved... people have very different ideas about what is going on, Because I hear things from people that I kind of think well you know, I probably should have heard that from somebody who is organising in ALBA. (17).

Allied to this lack in communication, interviewees were very clear that there needed to be an improvement regarding the initial and ongoing explanation of the Grid, of Outcomes and of the students' Portfolio.

There could be more time spent on instructing people how to construct their portfolio and their grid, what way they actually want to hear. So that just to give a bit of instruction and people could actually then make better use of their selection of classes and stuff like that (1).

6.4.2(b) Availability of Modules

The availability of modules and timetabling of courses became an issue for most interviewees the longer they were on the course. Whilst core modules were repeated more frequently, other modules were less frequent and more difficult to access. Interviewees felt that while there was an array of subjects on offer, they had a tendency to be clustered, with specific strands on specific days or week long summer courses not being alternatively available as a twelve week programme during the traditional academic year. Some part-time students felt quite strongly about the timing of modules not facilitating their needs, such as courses being run during the day or the summer programmes.

It's a part time course, the amount of stuff that comes up during the day time or afternoon. Say like in September, they

are putting on the ethics and business course; it's going to be over two weeks for, six days. I had to negotiate it with my employer to get out of my office and be able to work around that, it's not great... The other thing that happened this year, which again was difficult to cope with, we had a situation of with two of the business studies courses, one didn't start 'til late and then they switched them. So I ended up being in five nights a week and on a Saturday. That kind of switching around isn't that good, because it's disincentive. Because really January, February March, nobody saw me, even my husband didn't see me (16).

However, this can be balanced by the full-time students who would like to see more daytime courses.

Well certainly the choice of classes are very poor. Maybe some more classes in day time as opposed to night time. I know we have to cater for the part time students but maybe if there were some more classes given that we're doing the thing full time. So I would like to see a bit more of a choice in times and in content (10).

6.4.2(c) Information Technology

One of the strongest criticisms presented throughout the interviews was the issue of booking a place on forthcoming modules. Interviewees spoke of confusion and frustration with this process. The process of booking onto a module has changed three times during the first eighteen months of ALBA, from a paper based request/booking form to an emailing system to the internet based Moodle. Each system proved to have non satisfactory elements for the students. The frustration experienced by interviewees was further compounded by the fact that as their individual 'grids' filled up, the urgency to get onto a module became greater. Interviewees repeatedly spoke of their

frustration at trying to access Moodle. They found the log in process particularly difficult and erratic.

Now I waited till ten o'clock, because if you went on before 10, you might go in, but you wouldn't be registered. But I went to the button, I would have everything ready and I had my watch at 10 o'clock the night before and I hit the button and the list of names come on, fellows that all would be waiting and all of the guys would have them, but we are all waiting because we all wanted to know and I have to ring guys now and say, look if you are going to get in or on this course, you better go on [moodle](32).

On line at 11 o'clock in the morning and it was full, the course was full at eleven. One of the other guys had gotten it, he had been there waiting for 10 o'clock and hit the button, but he actually got enrolled in five courses because he was in first, whereas anybody else, people are not even getting one course, so that is a little area that is you know is going to have to be tidied up (4).

Of those who were able to access Moodle on a regular basis they complained that the tutors needed to make better use of Moodle by posting articles, lecture notes, presentations, and assignments on line.

The one negative thing, the one I would say for sure is the tutors don't use Moodle right, big time. They should use it, it's a fantastic tool and they should be all trained in it and if they're fudging around with it they should be told to get a grip (9).

There was a lot of criticism of the IT Course provided, suggesting that it was not practical enough. There was also strong criticism regarding the tuition with many of the interviewees highlighting the IT Course as a negative experience.

I found that she wants to just get through it rather than teach it... what I did notice within that IT class again was, as the weeks went on the numbers dropped, dropped, dropped (5).

A more general comment about tutors was that they all needed to be updated in their IT abilities. Finally, interviewees were critical of the IT operating system throughout the College as it was an old version of Windows.

The IT department they are operating on a 03 system... I suppose would want to be maybe looked at (5).

6.4.2(d) Facilities

A general theme throughout the interviews was that the college facilities such as the library, canteen and student support services, were more geared towards the day/fulltime students. Interviewees cited the opening hours of the library tended to correlate to the traditional college semester/academic year and not the ALBA timetable.

The library, the hours in the library are not geared to ALBA, they are geared to the other students in the college (18).

The ALBA students also felt they were not represented by the students union within the college and felt that they did not have a voice.

The students union here is a social union; it's not really like a normal students union. So if you come into conflict with management you are on your own here. Because they're not incorporated into the union of students of Ireland. They are actually very nice people who are difficult to find. There are

notices, but they are part-time, they're all studying themselves full-time, so they can't do anything as they don't really have the time (14).

Many of the interviewees expressed a desire for more informal socialisation amongst students.

I would like to see and I was going to make the suggestion is... if we formed a social club. But to do something outside of just work because we meet each other very much in the coffee dock and it's good I've so much to do, I haven't got that assignment done and have you yours done and...so if we did a bit more on the lighter side of entertainment... but to do something just for the craic would be nice and it's come into my mind a few times (24).

6.4.2(e) Foundations

There was a sense that the foundations programme was too intensive. There was information overload. Interviewees found it at times confusing. They raised the use of academic language and the need for clearer explanations of such language. Clearer explanations were also required regarding the 'grid' and the 'outcomes' system used in ALBA. Interviewees felt that there was a presumption that people understood academic terms such as 'module', 'outcome' or even terms such as 'Bachelor of Arts'. Interviewees felt that academic language should have been explained better, particularly at this initial stage of the programme.

I was on a foundations course for eight weeks and I still didn't know the meaning of things, they were still just names of subjects to me even when I was signing up for them (13).

Comments were made that it was ‘too busy’, that too many elements were included, and that initially, it was a little chaotic and confusing. Described here by an interviewee from the first cohort:

What disappointed it for a lot of people was the adult learning foundations. A lot was ground in and it was the order in which you’ve done was less than helpful, it actually nearly showed up what you didn’t know. And it scared the hell out of you in the early days. And all of a sudden you’d get Howard Gardner’s seven intelligences and whatever else and I just want to learn how to write an essay. And things like the critical writing and stuff like that, so if you’d have known how to write and approach the essays and some balance. Then we got John Newman who is quite heavy in our adult learning foundations, which was delivered to you in the first two weeks of the module, your first module of your learning and he isn’t easy, it’s hard stuff reading a lot of John Newman’s never mind try to digest it and give it back, so I found that very difficult work, and it could be scary to those of us who were anyway doubtful or doubting of our academic abilities. But the Howard Gardner’s stuff eventually they staggered it differently and that seems to be ok now so foundations was hard but I know it is necessary (24).

6.4.3 Relating back to Theory

Knowles (1980) in describing how an adult education course should be constructed suggested the following: a tentative number of modules that need to be completed; a number of core subjects; a balanced variety of subjects; selection of students to enter the course, relating to the philosophy of the course and its content; availability of scheduling times, evenings, etc.; and a clear adult methodology and andragogical approach (1980:138-150). Daloz (2000) speaks of the importance of a ‘climate of safety’ in which people are

able to learn to express themselves and explore their ideas in a non-judgemental environment. The supportive environment of the ALBA course, the mentoring system and the adult methodological approach are experienced by the students, making their overall experience positive.

West's (1996) study of adult students in college found that some of the difficulties encountered by the students were issues regarding work load, disagreements with college administration, difficulty accessing resources, along with the cost of being in college. These experiences have similarities with the findings of this research. However West also presents a catalogue of areas where his interviewees felt the college experience brought a disadvantage.

Campuses could seem unfriendly places, lecturers less available; the curriculum, especially for part-time students, was 'atomized' and contact with other students was sporadic. Exam procedures and decisions about which subjects to choose for a coherent degree, as well as the implications for a subsequent career, were confusing and guidance was limited (2006:195).

This level of dissatisfaction was not found amongst the ALBA students.

6.5 Transformation

At the heart of this research is the desire to discover if the interviewee has experienced transformation as a result of being as student on the ALBA course. In keeping with the theory of transformation and transformational learning this section looks for accounts of transformation in three areas; personal (psychological), social (sociological) and academic (epistemological).

6.5.1 Personal Transformations

6.5.1 (a) Discovery

Interviewees spoke of joy in the discovery of their own learning styles and intelligence types. As part of the foundations programme interviewees participated in personality type assessments such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the Kolb Learning Style Inventory Tests. They also had the opportunity to participate in the 'Enneagram' which explains personality type traits. Through these experiences, interviewees became aware of their own personality traits and how this influenced their understanding and interpretation of the world around them. It explained to them how they relate with people of similar and different personality traits. Each person who spoke of these exercises spoke highly of them and acknowledged how helpful they were at a personal growth level.

I have learnt about my own personality, how I learn (6).

You actually reveal something within yourself that you didn't even realise was there (1).

I'm learning who I am (2).

Allied to this personal learning was their introduction to the work of Howard Gardner and the concept of Multiple Intelligences.

What I have found is that anything I have thought before has been validated...I suppose allowed to think for myself (16).

It has given me a structure to how I have felt all along (17).

For many there was an experience of an 'ah ha' moment when they found the language for their personal experience. Interviewees spoke of finally having a vocabulary in which to frame their life experience. This level of personal learning was attributed by many as a critical positive aspect of their self concept, and the beginning of their confidence growth.

I have learnt I am a very capable person ...I have learnt that my opinions are valuable...I like myself now (9).

Its has been a revelation in loads of ways (20).

6.5.1 (b). Open Mind

There was no discernable distinction between the sexes when it came to asserting that they were now more open minded than prior to their engagement in ALBA. This open mindedness was described as being open to other opinions, open to seeing things in a new and different way, open to difference. They experienced a new openness to having their own views challenged and questioned. This they found to be liberating. They were genuinely pleased that

they had become aware, that their ability to learn had increased; their minds were more open and more retentive.

It has improved my baseline for thinking (7).

It's just life changing. It is changing your way of thinking (6).

There was acknowledgement that this openness of mind was part of their journey of personal change, and that some of their previously held views had changed completely.

6.5.1 (c) Tolerance

There was universal agreement amongst interviewees concerning their levels of tolerance. Each person expressed that they were now a much more tolerant person. They spoke of being much more understanding, more forgiving and more compassionate towards others. They noticed how they had become much more relaxed in themselves, more reasoned in their thought processes and emotional responses. Commonly, interviewees referred to themselves as more 'mature'. There was a greater awareness of other people's points of view and opinion, and of other people, without judgement. All of the interviewees spoke of this new found tolerance as a beneficial aspect to their involvement in ALBA and a corner stone of their personal development.

I am more open to other people's views...it makes me more open to myself and to everything else out there (6).

Well my tolerance level would have improved. I wouldn't be...well I don't want to say I was intolerant but I'm far more

understanding now, well not far more but more understanding and I'm possibly more patient, with people's views and stuff I'd be a bit more tolerant (07).

6.5.1 (d) Awareness of Self

All of those interviewed stated that they had become more self aware. This self awareness was mostly supported by positive examples:

I've learnt that I'm possibly changing my personality I guess (21).

It really has opened up everything for me, in the sense that really I'm enjoying myself in my life again (20).

I'm discovering who I am rather than what I am (2).

One person spoke of becoming aware of poor personal communication skills, another of discovering a learning disability. Almost all of the men and certainly all of the SR Technics men described themselves as procrastinators and this was learning in itself.

I've learnt I'm an awful procrastinator! I put off doing things until the last possible minute unfortunately an awful lot of the time. I've learnt an awful lot about the sort of person I am, the sort of character I am with regard to work etc. I'm a stickler for doing things right to the extent that I procrastinate to send in something that I think is not perfectly right. I might go over an essay 50 times when twice would've been enough, that sort of thing, which is a nuisance (11).

What I call a sickness, procrastination sets in – I'll do it tomorrow, I'll do it tomorrow. Its not laziness, procrastination, it's just fear, lack of self confidence (1).

Examples of self awareness ranged from a sense of befriending the self to accepting personal flaws. From an acknowledgement in a shift from positions previously held, to new thinking processes, tolerance and openness. People spoke of being more aware of both their personal strengths and weaknesses.

It's made me a bit more accepting of people as well, who I don't perceive to be as academically oriented, I realise that they have skills in other areas that I don't have. And in work I would say, I think more before I speak and try and engage the situation really rather than kind of reacting straight away. So I have had yes...I mean whatever I learn in here, I tend to apply it more to my personal life than to in here, when I go home when I'm doing reflections, I think about how it applies to my personal life, because that's the one that I want to...and my work and not just thinking how I get on with the students in the college, because they are going to change all the time. So I would tend to take what I have learned and think about it in terms of my home and work (17).

For some dormant interests were rekindled, while others discovered latent knowledge just waiting to be released. Interviewees experienced awareness of how they learnt and of their desire to learn, their enthusiasm for learning and their interest in new areas of knowledge.

It has made me recognise who I am, how I think, what I think, how I view society, how I view me.... It has opened my mind, totally opened my mind (9).

6.5.1 (e) Change in Confidence levels

Overwhelmingly, interviewees spoke of their confidence levels being increased as a direct result of their participation on the ALBA programme. Without any prompting from the interviewer, interviewees spontaneously

spoke about their confidence levels at numerous points during their interviews. People felt they were now more confident to offer an opinion, not just in College, but in wider social situations. Many spoke of entering the course with low levels of personal confidence which they now felt had been reversed.

I'm a hundred times more confident than I was when I came here (8).

This has given me so much self esteem, to see you have this ability and you are capable of this (9).

Since I have been doing this course, I now realise 'you are not stupid', I mean I'm well able to do this degree, getting good feedback from lecturers so I have something to offer, so it's definitely given me more confidence (28).

When speaking of increased confidence, interviewees spoke about their own understanding of themselves. Phrases like 'increased self esteem', being 'more sure of myself' and feeling of being 'more grounded' were common throughout the interviews. People spoke of themselves having a sense of developing as a person as a result the increase in confidence. They spoke with pride when saying they felt they now had more confidence and belief in themselves, in what they do and what they know.

I really have more confidence.... Confidence has grown (6).

I have confidence now, I always had the knowledge of how to do my job, but I never had the confidence before (22).

I feel quite confident in myself now...massive confidence boost...It has given me a massive confidence to go forward...I'm a hundred times more confident than I was when I came here (8).

The women spoke validating their own sense of themselves. They spoke of now being able to affirm for themselves that they are capable people, that they have a value and a contribution to make. Many spoke of finding their own 'voice' and 'finding the real me'. This acknowledgement of their sense of worth was accompanied by an often-used phrase 'I am better than I thought' when discussing their academic ability.

This has given me so much self esteem; to see you have this ability and you are capable of this...It has given me a sense of me again (9).

It's given me confidence (24).

Personal worth for the men was by in large considered in a more objective manner. They focused on how they now had a better quality of life, of feeling happier in themselves and of having a sense of achievement.

One of the recurring themes within the confidence discussions was that of how interviewees felt they suffered from a lack of confidence because of not having a third level degree. Many spoke of how, prior to the course, they did not feel confident in either social or formal situations if they were speaking to a person who they knew had a third level qualification. This had now dissipated by virtue of their participation in the ALBA course even without achieving the degree.

If I met a professional I would be automatically convinced that that person was in some sense on a different level to

myself or to people I grew up with.... I wouldn't assume that now (20).

There were two interviewees who expressed an alternative view. It is noteworthy that this is the only area within the data collected that there was an opposite opinion expressed. Two interviewees stated that they felt their confidence had lessened during the time they were on the ALBA programme. In both cases the interviewees felt that they were not achieving the results they expected from their assignments. One person felt he was probably overconfident when entering the course, while the other person had studied in the same area in a different jurisdiction and found it difficult to make the transition and found her results in ALBA being dramatically lower than they had previously experienced.

6.5.1(f) Social Confidence

In conjunction with what has been written above, regarding interviewees increased confidence in their communication ability and in speaking with people who have a higher education level, it is interesting to discover that these increased confidence levels have had another positive affect on individuals lives. An equal amount of men and women spoke of now being more confident in a variety of social situations. They spoke of being more outgoing and found themselves to be more talkative, more engaging in conversations, both in social settings and at work. A number of people said that in the past they were not willing to offer an opinion during a conversation and now felt comfortable

to make such contributions. In the past they would not have had the confidence to engage at this level for fear of being judged as not being intelligent, as this interviewee describes:

I must say at that stage I wouldn't have that much confidence in meeting people but I always felt sometimes inadequate that I mightn't know as much as they know, do you know what I mean. (15).

One interviewee said that even if he were never to graduate with a BA, he would be glad he did this course because of the confidence it has given him in social situations, he told how previously he would avoid engaging in conversations but now he felt different:

If even on one occasion I am launched into the middle of a crowd of people that I have never met before in my life and I'm not standing there s***ing myself with nothing to say and I get into conversation with somebody about something that I have picked up here, even if this never worked out for me, it was worth my while going for whatever length of time, it just gives you an extra bit of confidence (13).

There was a small group of those interviewed who said that they had now joined a new organisation or interest group or social group as a direct result of their increased confidence levels.

6.5.1(g) Workplace Confidence

Of those interviewees who were working there was a common experience recounted, during the interviews, that their new and improved confidence levels was having a positive affect in their employment. Interviewees felt they

had more confidence in themselves in their workplace. They were more willing to speak up, ask questions or seek clarifications. In the past they agreed that they would not have been so inclined. Others spoke about starting new initiatives at work, proposing new ideas and taking the initiative to improve work practices.

In work I guess I do have more confidence the fact that I'm actually going to college (17).

I trust what come out of my mouth... I'm confident in what I'm saying...confident in my opinion... I'm allowing myself to speak, trusting myself (9).

A number of examples were given, particularly by female interviewees, of how they spoke up when they felt uncomfortable by either what was being said to them or by the tone or content of conversations in the staff room. Again they each said that they would not have had the confidence to do this in the past.

If I hear somebody saying something now, I have the confidence to kind of give my thought. I mean like yesterday my boss was talking about something and it referred to Africans as, 'nignog', I couldn't believe it and I said, 'that's a little bit of derogative term there'...and he said, 'oh yea, course sorry'. And previously I would have thought well he's my boss, I better not say anything. But now that I actually appreciate how the words that you use for something affects how other people perceive people, I couldn't let it go. And I just find myself doing things that I would of sort of marking peoples cards (31).

Having increased levels of confidence has also led a considerable number of interviewees to consider applying for promotions or changing careers. This they directly attribute to their participation in ALBA, to their new confidence,

new knowledge and the fact that they are studying towards and will hopefully attain a degree.

6.5.1(h) Communication Skills

In describing how they knew their personal confidence levels had increased, interviewees spoke of how they were now better able to communicate. They spoke of how they now felt they had the language and ability to phrase their thoughts, views and opinions. They recounted experiences of how they reacted differently in situations now, in a calmer, reflective more assured manner. They thought they were better listeners and more analytical in their approach. Overall the major change that people experienced was that they felt they could engage with people better, in a deeper more meaningful way.

I now realise I have a valid point of view and I'm able to express it (11).

I'm just finishing communications now and certainly my confidence... I would be much more confident about speaking now and saying what I think, then I would have been there's no doubt about that (30).

The fear they previously held of being in social situations, of speaking with people they did not know, of meeting with people in positions of authority or people they perceived to be educated, was no longer present. Unanimously there was agreement that this change in confidence in their communication ability was attributed to the communications course within ALBA and the fact that in most modules, students had to make an oral presentation to the class.

The initial public speaking aspect of the communications course loomed high in all the interviewees' consciousness. They found they became more confident as they progressed through the course, with each presentation becoming less and less daunting.

...especially with the communications ... my confidence grew with that the first time and then it grew the second time more because we were speaking from the bottom of the church and you had to project. Because I used to think I had no voice and then I didn't want to shut up. So I suppose I discovered my voice in a way (23).

6.5.2 Academic Transformation

6.5.2(a) New Understanding of Education

Having been in the adult education system for over twelve months, interviewees were able to acknowledge a change in their understanding of what adult education is about. Having previously considered it to be concerning basic education, literacy and hobby type activities, they now offered a different understanding. Adult education is now viewed as an age appropriate learning environment, which valued experience and had a flexible adult approach to learning. This 'adult approach' was understood as providing people with choice and personal responsibility. Interviewees spoke of the modular, assignment-based approach to learning which was accredited and could lead to a degree. There was an understanding that adult education provision of learning was specifically tailored for adults who wanted to learn.

Adult Education can prise open that door and reveal that wealth of knowledge that is in them (1).

Adult education is learning in a way that you could never learn in school It's about doing something you are interested in (23).

Adult education is about engaging, of people learning, being challenged to think critically as well, not just sort of taking hearsay as gospel and developing your own thought about how you feel (29).

It is clear that as a result of their participation in the ALBA course their views had changed completely. They now had a new understanding of adult education, a new consciousness and appreciation of what adult education can provide for a person. They spoke of adult education providing confidence to people, opening up new horizons of knowledge and awareness, and an appreciation of wider society. Findings such as these are in keeping with phase three of Mezirow's ten phases of transformation suggests that a 'critical assessment of assumptions'.

6.5.2(b) Academic

New academic learning identified amongst interviewees was of a consistent nature, with most people referencing their ability to research, critique and analyse information and present their findings in an academic essay. They considered these as the major new learning they had achieved during their studies on ALBA. To be able to write in an academic format was a new experience and seen as a major achievement. For people who had left formal

education at either primary or lower second level education this was indeed an initial obstacle which they had overcome and recognised as a personal achievement.

Yes I can sit down now and I can produce an assignment, I can produce it in the format that they require here, I can do bibliographies, I can cite it. Because of the critical thinking if I am given a subject on that I can go off and you know, analyse something down and, you know, present it in an easier programme (13).

I know how to do citations, and bibliography (14).

One other skill which was mentioned on a regular basis, particularly by the men, was their new proficiency in IT skills, typing, creating word documents and using the internet. For many interviewees this was the first time they had ever attempted these tasks and there was pride in their achievement.

I've learned a lot more from my IT point of view as well because the fact that I've involved myself with some of the IT problems here and also people's computers or whatever, I learned more in that area (11).

Finally, when speaking of new learning a number of individual modules were mentioned. Apart from Communications and Foundations – already discussed - Ethics and Critical Thinking were two modules that were repeatedly identified as providing interviewees with new learning. These modules were mentioned most notably as they provided interviewees with new ways of looking at, and understanding, the world.

6.5.2(c) Analytical skills

Interviewees were in agreement that they had become much more analytical. They described being more analytical in their studies but also in their personal dealings, work life, home life and relationships. Interviewees spoke of thinking in a more critical way, of being able to critique people, places and things, discussions and work situations. They described how their thought processes had become much clearer, how they now were better able to structure their thoughts as a result of being more reflective. They were able to reflect on their learning within the various modules and described how this internalising, this integration of learning permeated throughout their day to day lives. They found they were more ethical in their approaches and dealings with individuals and society.

It has allowed me to analyse things that I read and everything in a different way. It allows me to take views on board and analyse them rather than knock them straight on the head saying it's ridiculous. I think about things now. Before if someone said something to me I might have thought it was stupid. I never think It's stupid now. I will analyse it for what it's worth and I might pack it away into a different area the way I feel about it so I get a different perspective, my own perspective on it (22).

The combination of reflection and critical analysis was held as being part of their happier disposition. Interviewees spoke of developing a deeper understanding of their relationships, of approaching family issues from new and different angles. They found they had a better balance in their lives as a

result of the reflective stance they had discovered and which had become part of their way of being.

6.5.2(d) Critical Thinking

Interviewees were overwhelmingly positive about the way the structure of the course enabled them to learn critical and analytical skills. They were able to identify that their ability to think in a critical way had developed as had their ability to critically analyse information. In describing how they had developed new ways of thinking, they spoke regularly of a new ability to critique information. They noticed changes in their thinking patterns, and their thought processes. They no longer accepted either written or spoken information as fact. They asked questions, looked for other possibilities, other interpretations, other solutions.

Well I can tell you immediately that I can critique rather than be critical, I can do that now. Which I think is very important to know the difference and to know when it is appropriate to use the difference (25).

This newly developed skill was not confined to the academic world but was now pervasive throughout their whole life, from reading the newspaper to social interactions. Interviewees spoke of how they had become more reflective and more critically aware of their own personal lives and of their relationships.

In terms of the critical to eh, what I am consuming from the media..... listen to what is being broadcast you may not necessarily agree with anybody. Whereas maybe in the past you would agree with one side, you think you have to pick one side, where as now you don't have to pick any side, both of them may be bulls**t. So your ALBA or Adult Ed is very, very good for analytical skills, it is enormously impressive (14).

Many of the interviewees gave examples of how they were approaching situations from a changed position, how they were re-evaluating familial and workplace relationships, for example:

...and the critical thinking. I would apply that in life as well (23).

6.5.2(e) Education

Interviewees spoke about how they no longer had a fear of the academic world: that through their participation the mystery had evaporated and that their own ability to learn was giving them a growing confidence. Examples given to support this new confidence were common throughout the interviews. Interviewees spoke of trusting their ability to understand, trusting their innate sense of knowledge and personal experience. The spoke of no longer being afraid to ask questions, of how they had been told and now believed 'there was no such thing as a stupid question'.

They have educated me to the fact that my views are fine (22).

It encouraged me to ask more questions and to think. I have the right to ask questions (27).

They spoke of feeling more assertive in offering opinion and in their ability to research and form that opinion. Equally important was the fact that they felt they had a new vocabulary from which to discourse. They felt they were now operating inside the education system and that they belonged. Finally, they felt equal.

I suppose it would have given me a confidence I mean a lot of stuff I would have known but I wouldn't have had the confidence to believe I knew it you know (30).

There's a mountain of knowledge in there that has not come out yet...to show the world this person that's been hidden since she was four (23).

6.5.3 Social Transformation

6.5.3 (a) New Horizons

Throughout all the interviews the phrase “new horizons” was constantly repeated in various contexts, but specifically within the context of the benefits of adult education.

Interviewees spoke of their own personal horizons being broadened.

It has broadened my horizons (5).

Interviewees felt they were now connected to the world in a way they had not previously experienced. They attributed this to their involvement with, and

exposure to, the education process. It has had the affect of opening up their minds to a much larger world.

It [ALBA] has opened up a whole store of opportunity (4).

They noted that they had become more socially aware of humanitarian issues, more ethically aware of societies structures, politics and governance. Many spoke of amazement that their lives had been insular prior to their engagement in the education process.

It'd make me recognise who I am, how I think, what I think, how I view society, how I view me. And then how I view society that'd make me question things about society whether I think they're right or wrong. Things that I wouldn't ever have been in before. It has opened my mind, totally opened my mind (9).

The opening up of these new horizons also impacted on their own personal lives. They spoke of now having new visions for their own futures, new goals and a new way of understanding the world they inhabit. This is a world of education, a world of knowledge, a world of learning, a world of insight, a world of new possibilities and a world of new interests. It is evident that through their participation in ALBA they have been exposed to new philosophies, new learning, new knowledge and this has opened for them new horizons, new possibilities.

6.5.3 (b) Social Awareness

Interviewees spoke repeatedly of how their learning inside the classroom transcended into their psyche. There was a sense of integrating the academic into the personal. Interviewees spoke of not just learning new knowledge, but becoming aware. They developed an awareness of a larger world to that which they had inhabited previously.

We were talking about social identity and organisations, it has affected me in how I view work and the structure in work and the boss is down and where I fit in the keg, in the wheel and how it is all structured and why it is structured in such a way (9).

This awareness included awareness of social issues that affected not just the person or their local community but wider society. They developed a social conscience. They discovered new horizons of knowledge that as described by one interviewee, ‘pushed their boundaries’ of comfort. There was a genuine sense of discovering that there is more than just one way of seeing and interpreting the world. There was a realisation that societies are complicated and multi-faceted.

My outlook on what I might do in the future has changed.
Back then I was trying to hold on to what I had (11).

In tandem with this new awareness each individual spoke of it being a liberating experience. They discovered a freedom in multi-vantage points,

liberation in becoming open to different perspectives. Their new awareness was truly a new learning experience and, it was positive.

6.5.3 (c) New Roles

A quarter of those interviewed said they had actively taken on something new as a direct result of participation in the ALBA programme. Those who had not taken on new activities cited time constraints as the barrier to developing new interests.

I would do if I had time. But at the moment I'm working full time as well. That's the only thing about it, I'd love to have more time really and I'd love to have a lot more time to be able to do that (19).

However, it was widely accepted by all interviewees that in order to meet the criteria for the 'capstone sequence' as a requirement for an honours BA, they would have to spend a considerable amount of time in the field of their specific professional focus area. This would entail undertaking a forty-eight hour internship shadowing an expert in their chosen professional focus area, followed by another forty-eight hour externship of voluntary work.

I need to do that, for the capstone sequence. I need to do the practicum which involves something in the family-focus related field (31).

Start doing voluntary work, a day a week, whatever, a half day, it doesn't matter, I need to go out there and work, do something, offer to the community and I love to work with

older people. I want to work in a spirituality way, my whole focus is on spirituality (25).

Of those who had already developed new interests there was a commonality in their activities. Most had volunteered their time to community-based organisations within their local areas, including parish committees, board of management of a local school, a community project, a residents committee and a voluntary organisation.

Well I have taken on...I'm part of the board of management of the local school, but that's a new undertaking (18).

I've set up an Irish conversation group. I did it about a year ago and that was a direct result of ALBA because there were several advantages to it 1) if I got people to come to it I'd improve my bit of Irish by interacting with them and that of itself was an end that I sort of wanted. Along with that I could perhaps write it up as an ILP and ALBA certainly helped there (10).

Others spoke of the rediscovery of a past interest and yet another of actively engaging in situations with a new approach. Of those who had taken on these new roles, there was agreement that having the confidence and social awareness to do so was as a direct result of their learning and participation in the ALBA course.

6.5.3(d) Personal, Family and Social

A small but significant number told how they had joined a new club or taken up a new activity directly, because they now had the confidence to meet new people and socialise and were no longer afraid to present themselves for such activities. Interviewees spoke of how their increased communications skills were beneficial in their family relationships and amongst friends. They felt they were better able to listen and understand situations, be more reflective and more reasoned. These experiences of being confident enough to join a new club, of being more tolerant in relationships were experienced as a liberating, positive experience.

there is [group name] and I have been involved with that since Christmas and I suppose that was another thing that ALBA has helped me to do is gain confidence ...it is a bit daunting at times as well but now that the confidence is growing I have to trust my own self in this. I really have good sense to this and I am starting to trust it and through a sense that I am engaging a bit more... so ALBA has helped that as well (6).

6.5.3(e) Employment

The majority of interviewees expressed the desire to either return to the workforce or considered changing career following completion of their studies. Of those already in employment they felt that having a degree would better position them for promotion within their current workplace or it would encourage them to apply to other employers.

The reason I took the business strand as my professional focus was that I was planning to use it to go up through the administrative side of the [employer]. That was the plan... I'll be going for two interviews, I possibly could go for the third ...The two jobs that I would be going for, one is office manager and the other is regional co-ordinator and the third possible job I'd be going for would be national co-ordinator.... But I'd just like to go for it just for the experience... so I have tried everything, anything that's come up I've soaked it and I've tried and also vice versa anything that comes and affects me, I'd say where can I use this, where can I bring this in (9).

I'm doing my BA in professional development and it's in business studies. So I have pretty much trying to get a degree in that. Obviously through work as well, so it's really to extend myself in work... that's my motivation is to go for a supervisor, management position. So my way of doing it is to go through education. So that's my plan. And I probably will go for (21).

Of those who were in employment and wished to change careers, they believed that the skills they were acquiring from the ALBA course would equip them to make such a change. Of those not currently employed they believed that (a) having a degree would be an advantage when applying for employment and (b) the elements of the ALBA course like critical thinking and collaborative learning would be of particular interest to potential employers. Other skills previously mentioned such as research and academic writing were seen as particularly practical skills to bring into any future employment.

What I do know is that if I do go back out looking for a job, I'm certainly a wiser person as a result of just having a year and a half involvement in it. There's no doubt whatsoever and even from the point of view that it's even instilled more confidence in to me as to what areas I can actually start targeting myself (1).

The idea of a career change was equal amongst those in existing employment and those seeking employment. It was striking how often interviewees spoke about wanting to move into the community and voluntary sector; with some people have very specific jobs in mind. Another strongly repeated theme was the desire to find a role within the adult education sphere either as a tutor or as a community support worker.

ALBA has sent me off in a total different direction than if I wasn't here (21).

I might end up getting myself involved on community based activity ... I'd have no problem then getting involved with something in the community (7).

But I'd like to have a job that I help people, whether it's around education, whether it's in community development, whether it's in the Youth Club, working with child and families (27).

6.5.3(f) Future studies

The immediate future for all of those interviewed was to (a) continue on with their ALBA course and achieve the Bachelor of Arts Degree (b) a sizeable number (twelve) wishing to progress to further post-graduate studies.

If I got the opportunity I'd love to go on and do a Masters (11).

Definitely I'll do a Masters and probably here in All Hallows (16).

Then I'm going to go on and do the honours degree and I'm already thinking I'd like to do the Masters in ecology and religion (17).

I would hope to do a Masters (22).

I intended to stay the length and get the Masters (24).

God I'd love to do the Masters, when you get this far, you start pushing on a little bit more to do other, like if you can get this far, you might push it to that level (26).

I would like to do a Masters, I can see it as continuing down this road of education (28).

6.5.4 Relating back to theory

One of the aims of this research was to see if the experiences of the adult participants related to the theory of transformation and transformative learning. This section will now map the findings presented above to the theory outlined in chapter three.

6.5.4(a) Ten Phases of Transformation

In chapter three I discussed the ten phases of transformation as presented by Mezirow (1975, 1978, 1981, 1991, 2000, 2009). This current chapter has so far discussed the analysis of the data gathered from the research interviews. It will now turn its attention to comparing the theory of transformation with the research data. In this section, evidence of Mezirow's ten phases of transformation is drawn from the data analysis. Mezirow believes strongly that transformation is achievable when the person progresses through these phases.

Perspective transformation involves a sequence of learning activities that begins with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with a changed self-concept that enables a reintegration into one's life context on the basis of conditions dictated by a new perspective (1991:193).

Phase one of the ten phases speaks of a 'disorientating dilemma' or 'trigger event' which can be either present in the immediate or a legacy issue. Within my findings both forms of disorienting dilemma are visibly present. One group of interviewees experienced a recent emotionally traumatic event of becoming unemployed and another group, who as adults, held a wish to fulfil a desire to go to college, something which was not possible or available to them in their childhood for a myriad of reasons.

Individuals who encounter dilemmas that force them to challenge established ways of seeing and thinking and are able to move developmentally toward more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative meaning perspectives may do so as self-directed learners (1990:365).

The second phase of transformation is concerned with the self-examination, with feeling of fear, anger, guilt or shame. These feelings can be incurred as a result of individuals moving away from previously held views and beliefs. The findings presented above drawn from the research interviews repeatedly speaks of people coming to new realisations, new understandings, which at times have caused difficulties and stresses within their relationships. One male interviewee spoke of the guilt he felt because through his participation in education, he felt he was leaving his wife behind.

Sometimes I am sitting down with my wife and its like, it's really like you are leaving somebody behind (15).

Phase three ‘a critical assessment of assumptions’ asserts that previously held assumptions must be analysed and critically assessed for their usefulness. Interviewees spoke of how they had developed the skill to critically analyse not just academic information, but sociologically and relationally. Many of the male interviewees, particularly the SR Technics men, found this particularly challenging. Being engineers by profession, they had come to believe there was a right and wrong answer for every situation, that there was only one way of solving a problem or of viewing an issue. Through their participation in ALBA they were challenged, and they engaged in this challenge:

I found it hard that in education, there isn't a right and there isn't a wrong (12).

The fourth phase; ‘Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared’ is the recognition that transformative learning effects change at both personal and social levels of engagement and understanding. Mezirow (1991, 2000) is very clear in his assertion that social interaction and ‘consensual validation’ are part of the transformative journey. It is clear from the testimony of the ALBA students that they not only experienced such social interaction as part of their course structure, but they came to value this methodology as an integral learning experience which taught them much about themselves, others and society. Participation in group work challenged and supported the interviewees in understanding new and different perspectives:

If you'd got me six months ago, I probably would have said I hated getting together with the classes in groups to talk about something but that is working out...an entirely different perspective on things and things that you would not have known about people from a work environment, now changes and you were learning different things about different people. So in a way there is whole different dynamics (4).

Mezirow's transformation theory is strongly advocating the support fellow students can receive from each other in their learning and from role models.

Again this experience is to be found amongst the ALBA students:

I think what's very progressive in the part of education is the group discussion and the group getting people...there's three people who meet here every week to discuss our essays and homework and we hide ourselves in that little room at the back of the library, couldn't be better..... and the three of us have three different ideas on what has to be done (12).

But when you all get together, you know, and you are doing something like this, they are asking me things in the group and I am asking them things, all putting stuff together, we were all very much the same. So that's kind of yeah, you feel a little bit more kind of together, connected (15).

The lecturers sometimes seem to be learning from the students as well you know, it's that way interactive and it just makes sense to me (30).

The fifth phase of transformation concerns itself with the exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions. While many of the interviewees said they had not undertaken any new roles because of time constraints, some had, but almost all intended to as part of their 'capstone' sequence. A sizeable number had suggested, as reported above, they intended to explore new career options.

I'm prepared to go outside of my little remit now in a more holistic fashion... I have the confidence to do that now and I do think I've always had the knowledge but I never did it before (22).

I would have to do something next year as part of the pastoral and to do something voluntary (16).

The sixth, seventh and eight phases of Mezirow's ten phases of transformation involve students 'planning a course of action' as a direct result of their new learning, followed by the 'acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan', and including the 'provisional trying of new roles'. Throughout the interviews, there was a resounding affirmation that their new knowledge and learning was transcending beyond the classroom walls. Interviewees spoke of how both their new learning and the deeper personal changes were having an affect in their daily lives and described the changes they saw and experienced in themselves regarding the transfer of knowledge and learning from the classroom into life.

Phase Nine concerns itself with building competence and self-confidence in the new roles and relationships undertaken as part of the transformation process. Self-confidence was one of the major findings of this research, self confidence within new roles and positions;

What ALBA has helped me to do is to gain confidence (6).

The feedback that I got here just instils in me the confidence that yes, I'm doing the right thing and it's good (1).

You feel you can contribute and say it in words (24).

And self confidence in social relationships

In the past I probably would have thought that a person with letters after their name would be better educated than me, in a way ALBA has given me a boost, a bit of extra confidence and I would say I have the same education as them (20).

Phase Ten requires 'a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective' as described in chapter four, transformative learning requires the incorporation of new learning, new skills, and new insights. It demands that the action discussed in phases five through eight, are not once-off event but become part of the person's life. That personal and social transformation becomes integrated.

Interviewees displayed not only personal, academic and social transformations, but they understood, experienced and were congruent with the concept of praxis and integration.

The one thing that it has made me aware of is, as I've done modules that you get in... there's things in your society, in your locality, nationally, internationally, that you've heard of but you're not aware of them in an in-depth way. And in certain ways doing different types of modules here have given me a broader perspective on those things. One example being a module there in relation to a community development, and the final assignment was to go off and identify a community group where you could actually explain what it was all about (1).

Another student spoke of his growing awareness of

‘social policy and public policy and social justice’ (6).

6.5.4 (b) Frames of Reference

Transformational Theory speaks of how a person’s ‘frames of reference’ are influenced and conditioned by a person’s culture, upbringing and experiences. According to Mezirow and transformational theory, for transformation to occur, a person’s frames of reference would need to be transformed. This transformation can only come about through critical reflection and action, particularly regarding ones own assumptions.

Critical reflection challenges and enables people to question their default assumptions and their habitual, taken -for-granted ways of interpreting the world. It allows people to evaluate information with new questions, new openness and a new way of seeing the world. Ultimately, according to Mezirow, for critical reflection to have truly occurred, it must lead to a change, both personal and social. Change which leads to action. It is only through critical reflection that the above discussed Frames of Reference, Habits of Mind, and Meaning Schemes can be changed. Mezirow speaks of the importance of critical reflection within this transformative process:

We transform our frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of our assumptions to make them more dependable when the beliefs and understandings they generate become problematic (2009:29-30).

When self-reflection is critical, it involves a searching view of the unquestioningly accepted presuppositions...Reflection is

the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience...Reflection involves the critique of assumptions about the content or process of problem solving...(1991:87, 104,105).

Throughout the interviews, interviewees spoke of how they had become more analytical, more reflective and more critically aware of social and political issues. One phrase that was regularly used by interviewees was that their 'horizons had been broadened'. It became clear during the data analysis that interviewees had benefited from their participation in modules on ethics, critical thinking in particular in relation to this later shift in their frames of reference. While no interview used Mezirow's term, frame of reference, they described exactly the meaning and understanding of his theory.

Interviewees spoke of their new awareness of social issues; local, national and international. Some wondered how they had lived so long without this awareness and were surprised by their own lack of knowledge or inquisitiveness and were somewhat taken aback at their insular existence prior to their engagement in the ALBA course.

It is without doubt that for those who were interviewed there had been an experience of a broadening of horizons, a shift in their frames of reference and an embracement of a new meaningful perspective in their lives.

6.5.4(c) Meaning Schemes

Meaning schemes are described in transformative literature and by Mezirow as clusters of habits of mind but being less structured and more open to change. Transformational learning can take place here using critical reflection and this transformation leads to the transformation of habits of mind. These initial transformations are often at first, personal transformations, which in turn lead to a change in how people view the world. Of critical importance here is the need for reflection of self and of society. This awareness of self and of others is in keeping with the stage four phase of Mezirow's ten phases of transformation, a 'recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared'. Interviewees were able to understand that their process of change and transformation was not solitary, but an experience they were sharing with others on the course.

Perspective transformation is a social process: others precipitate the disorienting dilemma, provide us with alternative perspectives, provide support for change, participate in validating change perspectives through rational discourse, and require new relationships to be worked out within the context of a new perspective (1991:194).

As before, the interviewees did not use the term meaning schemes or personal transformations, but they told their stories. They told how they were experiencing themselves. They told how they were able to notice the difference in their attitudes, in their thought processes and in their actions. It is clear that for this group of people, personal transformations were happening, their meaning schemes were changing.

6.5.4 (d) Habits of Mind

Transformative Theory speaks of ‘habits of mind’, which are the inherent assumptions that a person has about the world. They are the filters through which people see and understand the world. Mostly these habits of mind are accepted and go unquestioned. The challenge for transformational learning is to help people to learn to question, to critically analyse and, more difficult to accept there are other ways of interpreting the world. For adults who have unquestioned assumptions about the world since childhood, this process can be challenging and at times uncomfortable. In the fifth of the ten phases of transformation, learners are challenged to undertake ‘exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions’.

Within this research there is evidence of changes to existing habits of mind as reported by those interviewed. Two of the strongest examples that came through the research was (a) the feeling of insecurity when in the company of people with a recognised educational qualification, and (b) the challenge to accept there may be no right or wrong answers and there may well be many different interpretations of a single item, be it an event, literature or societal issue.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out to give voice to the experiences of those interviewed. In presenting the research findings in the format chosen, namely a narrative style, it achieves this aim and honours the truth of each person interviewed. Each section clearly presented the themes which emerged from the interviews.

As previously described in chapter five, research methodology, interviewees spoke freely and uninterrupted on the issues that they felt were important to them. The function of this chapter was to present this data in a meaningful format. Each section, presents findings under a number of themes; from motivation, choice, the impact of returning to learning, the experience of being on the ALBA programme, to personal, academic and social transformations giving detailed analysis of the information gathered.

Having conducted and analysed the thirty-two interviews it is possible to see each of Mezirow's stages necessary for transformational learning present. Interviewees spoke of their desire for education and learning, but for many they had not had the opportunity. They spoke of their feelings of inadequacy and of the sense of there being something lacking in their lives. They wished for something more for themselves and during the interviews were able to reflect on why their education to date had not included a third level education. Some wondered if they would be able to make the transition to third level.

Having participated in the ALBA course for duration of between one year and eighteen months, students no longer had these fears or insecurities. Interviewees were able to discuss their ability to formulate and present their own ideas, new thoughts, new insights and personal learning. Their points of view on many personal and social topics were changed. This change was a gradual process, as they discovered new language to put on their own experiences along with new knowledge. They now had the tools to critically reflect on past experiences and to learn from these experiences past and present. It is without doubt that they now have new frames of reference from which to understand their personal experiences. They have new habits of mind from which to understand the world and they have new meaning schemes from which to engage in a critically reflective way with society. Evidence has also been presented of interviewees having experienced the ‘ten phases of transformation’. It is clear from the information gathered that transformative learning is truly evident.

The analysis of the data and presentation of the findings presented in this chapter included a mapping back to the theory as presented in earlier chapters. The findings of the research interviews could stand alone as vitally important research information. However, it is much more effective to present these findings within the context of existing theory. The conclusions to be drawn from this will be developed in the following chapter, chapter seven.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

7. Introduction

With the growth in the number of adult learners expected to double by 2025, it is vital that appropriate programmes, methodologies and practices are developed. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter address this issue through drawing on the research findings based on the lived experience of adult learners. The research presented thus far has articulated clearly that adult higher education can be transformative, that those who participated in the ALBA programme experienced personal, academic and social transformations. The structure, programme provision and content of ALBA facilitated these transformative experiences.

In the introductory chapter I stated clearly and unapologetically, my belief in and support for the educational approach of the ALBA programme. I drew on my experience as an adult educator and recalled the many times I witnessed such personal transformations in learners. This research was born from such passion and belief in adult education. It is with confidence now that I can say that this research has clearly shown how the individual's self-concept and confidence levels grow measurably. It has established that returning to education impacted on the individual, their wider family and their relationships. This research set out to prove a hypothesis and it has preformed that task. It is, therefore, appropriate, important and necessary to draw some

conclusions and recommendations from this research. The findings of this research have a valid and important message particularly for those entrusted with programme provision, policy makers and practitioners.

Briefly, at this point in the presentation of the research it is appropriate to review and summarise the research project from inception to findings. This provides providence for the conclusions and recommendations and allows the reader to attain a complete full understanding of the research undertaken and its implications. Thus this chapter will draw the whole research project together.

The introductory chapter set out the aims, objectives and motivation for conducting this research. The justifications, aims and objectives for conducting the research, the methodology to be employed, along with the limitations and parameters of the research were all clearly presented, as was a description of the chapters to follow. Chapter one presented a general understanding of adult education, its historical and philosophical developments and its seminal thinkers and emerging themes. Chapter two developed the key themes of adult education, namely, development, learning and knowledge. Considerable attention was paid to the concept of learning and learning styles and an understanding of intelligence. Chapter three focused on the theory of transformation and transformational learning with particular emphasis on the work of Jack Mezirow. It detailed the processes involved in transformational

learning and the changes that take place in the adults' life as a result. Chapter four outlined the development and place of adult education in Ireland, from government policy to community development. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of All Hallows College in conjunction with its fellow Vincentian Institution in America, DePaul University, Chicago, and the approval of Dublin City University in adapting, developing and bringing the Adult Learning BA (ALBA) to Ireland. Chapter five laid out in detail the research methods and the process which took place in conducting the research, the interviews, the data collection and the analysis. The analysis and findings of the interview data was presented in detail in chapter six, with major and minor themes explored and discussed.

This chapter is laid out in a number of sections; (1) conclusions drawn from the research; (2) recommendations arising from the research; (3) implications as a result of the conclusions and recommendations; (4) recommendations for future research and (5) concluding comments followed by the final section valediction.

7.1 Conclusions drawn from the Research

As a result of my research and reading, I conclude that the current situation is that adults returning to education share key experiences in relation to personal and academic transformations. This research has a number of conclusions that are presented here.

7.1.1 It is Important to Facilitate the Transition into Third Level Education

Chapter two discussed the nature of adult development and developmental theories. Evident in these various theories is the presentation of transition from one developmental stage to another. Transition into adult education is another type of developmental transition. For some this transition is easier than for others. It can be accompanied by feelings of fear and anxiety or a sense of being supported by family (King and O'Driscoll 2002). Bourdieu (1977) speaks of transitional periods as having the properties of *threshold* 'a sort of sacred boundary between two spaces' (1977:130), while Berger (2004) speaks of the learner being on the edge of knowing as a 'dance on the edge of their knowing' (2004:34).

Appleyby (2008), Savin-Baden (2006), O'Brien, Thesing and Herbert (2001) have addressed the issue of transition into education and there are some recommendations as to how the provider can assist the learner in this process. These include taking account of the learners' current circumstances and responsibilities, barriers they may have to learning, and previous educational experiences. With this in mind the provider should develop a multi disciplinary approach to supporting the learner by recognising and building on existing skills, competencies and interests as well as developing a transition plan, which includes continuous assessment and reviews of the students progress, both social and academic. Another aspect of transition is the letting go of old

past experiences, habits and ways of engaging with education, Savin-Baden (2006) talks of building 'learning bridges' to assist in the transition, while for Daloz (1986) transition involves both a breaking down and a rebuilding. It is evident from the existence of published theoretical works acknowledging the place of transitions that such experiences are common amongst adults returning to education the findings of this research concurs.

The ALBA programme is cognisant of the need for support and assistance towards students during their transitional period. As a result it has developed learning assessment seminars (LAS) and the foundations course which helps to initiate students into third level education. Prior to joining the ALBA course of study all potential candidates are invited and required to participate in two full day LAS seminars. On these, usually two consecutive Saturdays, potential students are provided with college information regarding the structure and content of the course and the commitment needed in returning to study. Prior learning experience and transfer of credits are explained. They are brought through an exercise in assessing personal, professional and educational experiences and future goals. They have to complete a written assignment between the first and second LAS. This is used to help both the student and the college discern if this person is ready to undertake a third level course. On entry into ALBA, students are required to complete the foundations course, which includes modules on academic writing, learning styles and orientation to third level.

From the information garnered from the interviews, it is without doubt that adults returning to formal education experience the transition into academia in a number of ways; from personal doubt regarding their own ability to feeling overwhelmed by the volume of new information.

Returning to formal education was a major step forward for the people interviewed in this research. Almost half (fifteen) had finished their formal education at lower second level or without any formal qualification. Having made the decision to return to education a number of the interviewees spoke of their anxieties as to whether they would be academically able for third level.

A lot of trepidation...to a certain degree it was fear built on a situation where I was an unknown quantity....there is fear and anxiety...and here you are thinking to yourself, do I belong here? (1).

However, having made the step to enrol in their course of study, interviewees experienced a transition process. This transition was described in various ways. For some it was coming to terms with the new language they encountered. For others it was a process which they extended over a number of months and some spoke of an initial confusion and of being overwhelmed by the amount of information they were receiving.

7.1.2 Self-Esteem is a Significant Contributing Factor Affecting Entry to Third Level for Adult Learners.

West (1996) speaks of adult learners needing reassurance, of inner emptiness and of the individual's low self esteem on entering into higher education. In his book, *Beyond Fragments: Adults, motivation and higher education a biographical analysis*, West sets out to prove the premise that higher education is a place where people can overcome feelings of low self esteem or lack of confidence, thus supporting the fact that many adults returning to education do so with a low self image.

In an Irish study on adult participation in education (King and O'Driscoll 2002) there is evidence that lack of self confidence of adult learners is attributed as a barrier to their participation in education. The Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, UCD published a study in 2001 which strongly supported that the adults participating in education programmes showed a growth in personal development and self-confidence. In the United Kingdom, Dench, Hillage, Coare, (2006) also speak of the increase in personal confidence of adult learners due to their participation in an education programme. This growth in self confidence supports the findings that many adults returning to education do so with a low self image and a lack of personal confidence.

Repeatedly interviewees spoke of how, prior to their participation in ALBA, they had experienced feelings of inadequacy when meeting people who had a higher level of education than them.

I always felt sometimes inadequate that I mightn't know as much as they know... (15).

You feel that the person that has more of an education, you are kind of catching up with them...We would have thought we were wrong because of our education background, because they were the ones with the education (32).

I think the whole thing that really struck me about not having gone on and not having a third level education is a certain lack of confidence. (20).

But you do over value it [education] because when you haven't had it you feel the lack of it when you're around people and you think 'oh she has a degree, so she must know more than me', it's a natural assumption (24).

I never realised until I came to take classes in ALBA how powerless I felt, how worthless I felt around educated people...if felt that people would look at me and say... could see that I was a failure (27).

They had a belief that people with a formal education qualification had more education and were more knowledgeable, that they were in some way superior.

All of the interviewees who expressed such views were able to report that by virtue of having enrolled and participated in this third level course of study, they no longer felt intimidated by those they previously feared. They also expressed the opinion that they now had a better understanding of what

intelligence and education is, and that it was not solely the preserve of those with a formal qualification.

Now I feel that I'm at least equal to them (24).

Interviewees reported themselves, prior to participation in ALBA, of having feelings of inadequacy when dealing with professional and educated people. The findings of this research are able to substantiate a reversal in this low self image. This change in self esteem was assisted through a number of aspects of the ALBA course. For instance in the foundations course the students are helped to discover their personal and learning traits, abilities and preferences. During the foundations course they study the different types of intelligences and undertake the Myres Briggs Type Indicator and the Kolb Learning Style Inventory. In offering these varied and different initiatives as part of the foundations programme, ALBA are assisting their students to see their prior experience as having a value and to understand and develop their own self understanding and increase positively their self image.

7.1.3: Structured Specific Supports Assist Student Progression

Within the literature concerning successful adult education there is a commonality regarding the kinds of support systems needed to assist adult learners. O'Brien, Thesing and Herbert (2001) speak of the need for the tutors to be trained beyond their academic subject to become a supporting ally. Daloz

(1986) when speaking of mentoring uses many different verbs to describe the role of a mentor: support, challenge, provide vision, provide structure, encourage, explore expectations, advocate, tolerance, set standards, offer a map, provide a mirror, guide, listen and set tasks.

Mezirow (2000, 1991, 2009) speaks of mentoring within transformative learning as part of the 'webs of relationships in which we are invariably held', the importance of the 'significant others' who assist those starting out in any discipline, not just education. (2000:115-116). For Mezirow the role of the mentor is to assist the learner in critical reflection by being a 'facilitator and provocateur' (1991:11).

Mentoring involves large, visible features, such as the organisation, policies, and procedures of an academic institution. And it also invests small interaction between students and faculty, such as adjusting course content too, that a student can take advantage of her strengths. But whether big or small, these involvements mean changes in the conventional ways most universities have operated (2009:86).

We could also look to the learner centeredness of the andragogical model of Knowles (1989, 1990, 2005) as working from a supportive place, developing from the learners experience and focusing on their need to know, helping them achieve autonomy. Cranton (2006) adds that the educator has a responsibility to support the individual through the changes that arise out of engagement in transformative learning.

For adults returning to education it was important that their efforts were supported by others. Interviewees spoke of various supports they experienced during the course of their studies, supports from within the college and support from family and friends.

Interviewees repeatedly acknowledged the supportive environment of All Hallows College and the various staff members, academic and non-academic. In particular they highlighted their access to, and the availability of, the teaching staff and how they found this to be a source of continuous support.

The mentoring system provided by the College was also an important support system highly commended by those interviewed. The fact that they could discuss their progress and receive an honest appraisal of their efforts was appreciated and valued.

The mentors are extremely nice. And I only have come across helpfulness, I really have. (20).

Other College staff were mentioned as being supportive towards the students included the ALBA administration staff and library staff. These supporting roles along with the support received from spouses, children, and family, made the task of endurance and perseverance much more palatable for the interviewees.

I wouldn't have survived in any of the mainstream third level places; you just wouldn't get the same care and attention. They are wonderful here, they really really are and very sympathetic towards the likes of me...(13).

There's a real underlying theme of we want you to do well and we'll do whatever we can to get you there (29).

7.1.4 Flexibility and Choice are valued by Adult Learners

Flexible provision is continuously mentioned in the literature regarding adult education. Flexibility regarding the type of provision, the timing of provision and the choices available to the learner is one of the fundamental elements of adult and transformative education programmes. It is valued by all reputable theorists – Knowles (1970, 1972) speaks of flexibility in course selection, scheduling, balance between courses, and timing as just some of the issues to consider when designing educational programmes. In Ireland the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) report (2001) found that flexibility regarding timing, fees, location and course structure were positive influences on women's participation in education programmes. Flexibility is again mentioned in the King, and O'Driscoll, with Holden, (2002) report regarding gender and learning as it is in Ownes (2000) report '*Men on the Move*'. Internationally, these findings regarding flexibility are also found in the O'Brien, Thesing and Herbert (2001) report regarding education in New Zealand and in Appleby (2008) report '*Bridges into learning for adults who find provision hard to reach*' in England and Wales.

As a result of conducting this research it can be stated that adult learners returning to education like having the autonomy to choose the modules which will form their course of study. Flexibility was a key sentiment amongst the interviewees, flexibility in course provision, course content and participatory commitment. As described by one interviewee:

ALBA has taken the degree out of the box (22).

Students had an option of returning to study on a full-time or part-time basis. The availability of module choice was vitally important for the learners. They particularly liked having the freedom to choose which courses they would study rather than having a tightly prescribed schedule.

This process of choice and decision making was facilitated through the completion of a 'grid', which although experienced as a daunting challenge, enabled students to create their own study progression plan.

This is like having a dream degree. That you could pick what you really wanted to do and that's exactly what I've done (20).

A further aspect of choice and flexibility was the range of module provision, with courses being available during traditional college hours, evenings, weekends, week long courses, and summer schools.

Flexibility in relation to taking courses and when you can take them. The fact that they're out of, you can't say office hours

but outside normal academic hours and the fact that some courses can be accelerated and done in an intensive program in one week and you could have a week off and Saturdays and Sundays. Things like that, I like all of that (22).

This array of availability assisted students in advancing their progression at a pace that suited their personal goals and needs.

7.1.5 An Adult Methodology is Essential

An andragogical approach in course provision for adult education is perhaps most notable in the work of Knowles (1970, 1972, 1975, 1980, 1989) as discussed in chapter one. At the heart of andragogy is the learner. Andragogy is a learner centred model of adult education, taking into account the past experiences of the learner, their current position, their motivations and goals. A different approach to education of adults is needed from the education of children, as adults according to Knowles require ‘different principles and techniques’ (1980:37), defining andragogy as

The art and science of helping adults learn... is simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their “fit” with particular situations (1980:43).

This research has shown that a methodological approach that appreciates the learning styles and needs of adult students is essential when providing adult specific education. Adults appreciate and value acknowledgement of their

prior learning and life experience. They value dialogue and discussion, and being exposed to contrasting opinions. They like to work on both individual and group projects. They particularly value listening to the work of other students being presented to the class and considered their own presentations to be a positive learning experience.

A recurring message throughout the interviews was the appreciation people had at being treated like adults. This expressed itself mostly through the teaching methodologies employed by the ALBA staff. Repeatedly, interviewees spoke of how classes, interestingly they referred to their 'classes' and not to lectures, were conducted.

Interviewees spoke of how they liked the discussion aspect of their classes and how they felt their life experience was valued and appreciated. They also repeatedly spoke of how they learnt from each other through this process. Another aspect of the adult methodology approach was the presence of group work often culminating in making a presentation to the class. Interviewees found these experiences beneficial to their learning needs and styles.

I think it's very good as well, all the classes, 95% of the classes you have to stand up there and do your little presentation, even if it's only reading from something, you still have to get up. And I think it's making everybody in the class, not just me, everybody in the class more confident about speaking to people, about people and being able to talk. (12).

These different teaching methodologies were evident from the data generated through the interview process. It was clear that interviewees particularly liked the mixture of lecture, discussion and project work. Having to present their individual and or group work to the class was seen by most to be advantageous, as was the assignment based assessment procedures.

7.1.6 Developing communication skills is important

Cranton (2006) tells us that communicative knowledge is central to the whole idea of transformative learning, that through interactive methods, collaborative learning, discussion, dialogue and group work, students are helped to understand their learning (2006:116). Lindeman (1926 [1989]) considered to be one of the founding theorists of adult education, asserts that communication is a central aspect of all education, that it is through communication that education can happen, both personal and social (1989:94). Mezirow when speaking of communication and communicative learning highlights the importance of achieving coherence and the understanding of the meaning.

Of even greater significance to most adult learning is understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decision, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labour, autonomy, commitment, and democracy (1990:8).

Cranton (2006) speaks of ‘communicative knowledge’ which she says is concerned with how people see themselves and the social world, how we are

shaped and what our potential for transformation is. One of the findings of this research is that students were able to express their ideas through the communication skills they learnt on the course. Developing communication skills was central to their learning and development.

ALBA is providing a communications course which the interviewees speak highly of. There is an element of communications in all modules taken on the course, whereby students have to make a presentation to their class group.

Interviewees repeatedly spoke of the development of their personal communication skills as a positive result of being on the ALBA course. They particularly mentioned the communications module and the giving of presentations in other modules. They spoke of their initial fear of having to speak in front of others, and how having accomplished this they felt much more confident.

Another module that made a big impression on me was the communications module, which enabled you to stand up in front of a group of people and deliver a lecture or something and I never thought I would be able to do that, that was one that I thought would be my own undoing. And I couldn't believe I was just euphoric one day, because I stood up in the church there in front of the whole group ...and that was something I thought I'd never be able to do. Now the church wasn't exactly packed but there was a lot of people there, so yes, I felt, I turned a corner that day in terms of confidence, because what I think I can do, might be there, but now I know, I've moved up a step. And now when I have to give presentations in the class or that, I'm not hiding behind the chair, I'm happy enough to stand up and talk (31).

The act of having to read, speak and present in a public forum was both a major challenge and a provider of personal growth.

7.1.7 Participation in Adult Learning increases individual confidence

Through a succession of interviews over a three year period with adults in higher education West (1996) is able to show the increase in personal confidence, self-image along with social and academic confidence of his interviewees. He notes that self-esteem increases as the inner emptiness described by interviewees diminished over the duration of their study. In describing one interviewee he tells us that in their management of new experiences was the 'emergence of a more confident self which had previously been repressed' (1996:77).

This undertaking of new experiences is also a key aspect of Mezirow's ten phases of transformation (Mezirow 1990, 1991, 2000, 2009), step eight is the provisional trying of new roles and step nine being the building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships. These aspects of transformation theory and transformative learning show the ability of students to try out new roles and take on new responsibilities. These changes in the personal abilities of students are evidence of change in confidence levels as action is intrinsic to existence of transformative learning.

Without doubt the greatest benefit accruing from participation in the ALBA programme was an increase in personal confidence. It is worth noting that it was the element of participation as opposed to instruction that greatly impacted on the confidence growth in students. The encouragement of students to make presentations to their class as part of their course of study, combined with the compulsory communications module has benefited the ALBA students.

Willingly, repeatedly, and without prompting, interviewees nominated their increased confidence as the major benefit of returning to education.

I have totally changed...being on this course has changed me, completely (8).

I feel when I'm finished ALBA, I'll just be a more rounded person (17).

My whole life, my whole identity of what I feel I am has changed drastically since I came to All Hallows, but I like the change in me (27).

This growth in confidence was acknowledged in various ways, from greater participation in social events, to having the vocabulary to express personal thoughts.

It has instilled more confidence in me (1).

I think this course has helped me to gain my confidence in myself as well. Being able to do things or let me realise there are things that I feel comfortable with and that I didn't know I could do...(3).

The structure of the study programmes enabled and enhanced their development in confidence levels.

The results of assignments ... was worth more than I would have given it credit for myself. And I suppose the fact that I can learn and I can contribute in the discussion that goes on at all the lectures. And I have to get up and present like everybody else every now and then and I can do it (30).

7.1.8 Adult Learning Methodologies Develop Critical Thinking Skills which Broaden Social and Political World View

In chapter three the core principles of transformation theory were outlined, particularly Mezirow's (1991,2000) treatment of 'frames of reference', 'habits of mind' and 'meaning schemes'. For transformation to have taken place it is essential that change occurs in how the person understands and interprets their experiences of the world. Evidence of such change is a broadening of personal, social and political horizons. In the words of Cranton (2006) it is a 'way of seeing the world more open' (2006::5).

Through the provision of modules on social justice, ethics, critical thinking, power, united nations, politics, as part of the adult learning strand, ALBA was able to help students broaden their world view and understanding of issues not previously considered. This was achieved through both participation in the modules and the assignments which challenged students to broaden their knowledge and undertake research into a previously unknown area to them.

Both the research conducted and the existing theory espouses the widening of a learners social and political world view. Adult learners are exposed to new learning, critical thinking, and new knowledge along with new and varied opinions, arguments and positions. While this, at first, can be disconcerting for the learner, it is without doubt one of the areas they recognise as evolving as a direct result of their engagement in a course of study, that is, the going beyond the subject matter.

It has improved my baseline for thinking (7).

Interviewees in this research spoke glowingly of their new understanding of political and social issues, of their awareness and consciousness of the world in which they inhabit. By providing modules of study along with teaching methodologies which encouraged and supported learners to broaden their horizons, the ALBA programme created the conditions for transformative learning to take place.

7.1.9 Participation has Broad Impacts; it affects the Individual, Family, Work Place and Social Life

Freire (1970, 1997, 2008), Dewey (1997, 2007, 2010), Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000,), Cranton (2006), Lindeman (1926 [1989]), Knowles (1970, 1975, 1980, 1990) all write of the changing impact education has on the person. Transformative learning requires that change occur internally and externally

for the student. In the reporting of such change in personal 'Frames of Reference' and 'Habits of Mind' there is an impact from this changed perspective on the persons private, social and economic life. These theoretical writings are further supported by research and reports into adults who have undertaken education programmes amongst them are: King, O'Driscoll (2002); Appleby, (2008); O'Brien, Thesing, Herbert, (2001); Savin-Baden, (2006); Dench, Hillage, Coare, (2006); the WERRC (2001); and Owens, T. (2000).

Added to the course content and the methodology of the ALBA course to assist in the occurrence of transformational learning, the structure of the course also has a role to play. The ALBA programme includes a 'capstone sequence' which is in the final year of the honours BA programme allowing ALBA students the opportunity to actively become involved in work placements as part of their learning. This has a twofold impact (a) it enables the student to gain valuable work experience and try out potential new career areas and (b) gives the host organisation a volunteer for up to 40 hours along with a link into a third level college.

The research clearly showed a number of positive consequences of returning to learning, not solely the increase in self confidence. Impacts were identified as both personal and what I call wider impacts, including family, work and society.

7.1.9 (a) Personal

Interviewees spoke of understanding themselves better and of finding their own voice. At a personal level they found this comforting and reassuring, their self image improved and their confidence grew to new heights.

I need a formal recognition of my ability (2).

I actually can prove I have the ability, I have this formal bit (2).

I was forty-five when I signed on for it but I think I'm a richer fifty year old than I would've been by the time I finish it. Even if I get nothing academically (24).

7.1.9 (b) Family

There was also a wider impact. Interviewees were certain that their return to study was a positive influence on other family members, spouses/partners, children and siblings. They felt it gave an example to their children and grandchildren and that it helped in their relationships and gave example to others.

I would hope to be an inspiration to others (4).

I hope that I am now an inspiration to my grandchildren (4).

Other people are learning from me (12).

It's not just me, it's moved out into my family, into my friends (12).

It nearly gives you permission for my daughters to go to third level (24).

However there was another family impact, the impact of not being as available to family members and spouses as in the past.

If there's something on and my wife wants to book something in the evening time and I can't go to it (11).

well it has really effected in say my family life in...so it has impacted on that and then it causes a little bit of tension then between myself and my partner,...definitely yes, it has definitely impacted (6).

7.1.9 (c) Work Place

In the work place too, interviewees provided examples of how their new knowledge and confidence allowed them to initiate new initiatives or provide confidence to participate in more proactive ways.

The learning here absolutely transcends the classroom (14).

The whole essence is that applying what you learn and bringing it outside (15).

7.1.9 (d) Social

Adult learners also benefit the wider society. Many of the interviewees told of how their new social and political awareness helped them to be more civic minded and more conscientious as citizens. A considerable number spoke of either changing or developing a new career path, often in the voluntary community sector.

In relation to professional focus it's not my intention to change my job, but I do intend in future years that I will drop

a couple of days and do some caring work, preferably in the children's hospital, but I wanted to be able to do it right. I didn't want to go in there as a volunteer and do more harm than good so my motto kind of was do it right (22).

The future plans are to continue this and to get a degree and see where it goes and look at jobs to the point of view of moving into an area in a job that I wouldn't have gone to before (32).

Another social impact was the decline in the social life of the student, the restriction on time to meet friends or to socialise.

I have to give time on the weekends to study and that impacts on our social life (2).

I get lots of flak for not being available to do lots of various things. I had three nieces getting communion over three weeks, one after the other in May on Saturdays and I was doing Ireland and the UN module on Saturdays and I got a few sort of...from my brothers and sister but anyway they were satisfied in the end that it was ok (11).

7.1.10 Adult Education is Transformational

This research set out to test the hypothesis that adult learning is transformational. It asked adult learners to tell their own stories. The data analysed from their interviews has clearly, beyond any reasonable doubt, proven that people experience personal, academic and social transformations, as described previously. This conclusion is a culmination of all that has gone before and is at the heart of this research.

The conditions by which education and learning can be understood as transformational are laid out in chapter three, most notably, the work of Jack Mezirow (1981, 1990, 1991, 1999, 2000, 2009) and the ten phases of transformation. It is clear from the presentation of the findings of this research in chapter six and along with the conclusions presented here in chapter seven that the education programme engaged in by the ALBA students is transformational, as it meets the established criteria.

Transformational learning does not take place by chance or in a vacuum. Conditions and supporting infrastructure like course content, module variety, student supports and approaches to learning, need to be carefully and thoughtfully provided. From the self reporting of the interviewees the ALBA programme has succeeded in creating the environment for transformative learning to be cultivated.

the overall thing is that it's been very very positive for me and I really think it is the right course for so many people, it just takes away all that mystery about college life and I think you can really get people to believe that they can do this, because it's like steps... step by step and the pace that you want and that kind of thing, and it's really, really important and I just hope it continues to grow (29).

7.1.10 (a) Personal

Academic qualifications are readily quantifiable, academic transformations become apparent through a process of transformation. This process initially deeply personal becomes more encompassing, more tangible. All those

interviewed experienced some transformation as a result of their participation in the ALBA course. For some it was personal transformations in terms of self-image and confidence, for others it moved beyond the personal to interpersonal relationships, while for some it became a propellant for change in wider, often working, life. It is clear from these findings that ALBA is enabling transformation to occur.

From the analysis of the data of this research, the existence of personal transformations can be collaborated. Transformation in personal concept, self-image, confidence levels and personal well-being are well documented. From being intimidated by professional and educated people, from feeling insecure in social settings to being confident in giving classroom presentations to public speaking, to asserting one's opinion, interviewees have spoken of the varied and many ways in which they have experienced personal transformations.

It's not always caps and gowns but it's about becoming something...the process has been so important to me rather than the result (24).

You change your focus, my focus it to get as much out of it as I possibly can (2).

7.1.10 (b) Academic

Academically, transformational learning has taken place. This includes the personal transformations spoken of, along with the growth and development of a wider awareness of social, political and academic issues. Interviewees spoke

of the new knowledge they had discovered, the existence of theories and opinions they had here-to-fore not understood or experienced and their openness to same.

I am far more wise about life (15).

I have surprised myself actually in how much I have learned (13).

It's fascinating how much you can learn (1).

I have never been disappointed. It is around me and educating me, I'm not being educated to do any particular job. It's valuing me as a person, that's the difference (16).

7.1.10 (c) Social

Social transformations were reported to have taken place at two levels, (a) interviewees felt more confident in social situations, and, (b) they had developed a greater social conscience, a new social awareness. Repeatedly interviewees spoke about how they recognised changes within themselves when in social situations. Events or meetings that would have caused nervousness or evoked a sense of inferiority no longer caused worry or stress. Interviewees felt that through their participation on the ALBA programme they had increased their social confidence and transformed their understanding of society.

The one thing that has made me aware of is as I've done modules that you get in,,, there's things in your society, in your locality, nationally, internationally, that you've heard of but your not aware of them in an in depth way and in certain ways doing different types of modules here have given me a broader perspective on those things. One example being done a module there in relation to a community development, and the final assignment was to go off and identify a community

group where you could actually explain what it was all about
(1)

Yes, well as I say, before I have often been at the meetings and I'm sitting around the table and I'm thinking what am I doing here and what am I going to say, when it comes to my turn. I have gone the other way now. Now I have things to say. And I'm beginning to wonder, because I have been invited to be on a local area committee (32)

7.2 Recommendations Drawn From the Research

As a result of my research and reading, I recommend that consideration be given to the following areas when providing educational opportunities to adults returning to education programmes, in order to provide or enhance a transformative learning experience.

7.2.1 Transition and Orientation to Academia Requires its own Dedicated Process and Programme

As many adult learners returning to education are unfamiliar with the world of academia, assisting them in the transition of entering an education programme must be an essential element of any such programme. Adult learners need this transition to be managed in a clear and supportive manner.

Instructions and guidelines need to be written and explained in a reader friendly manner. There should be no presumptions on behalf of the provider as

to the prior knowledge of the adult learner regarding the academic environment. Academic language, expectations and college procedures need to be explained clearly.

One very practical support in making the transition easier is to provide an orientation programme which includes orientation to the physical world of the college or institution. This can include tours of the college facilities, including the library and other student support services. Helping students familiarise themselves with ICT access, photocopying and canteen facilities are all part of this orientation programme.

Organisations providing adult education need to be very aware of transitional issues for their students and put in place suitable programmes of support to ease the anxieties of transition. These include;

- Providing appropriate orientation,
- The use of understandable language,
- Clarification of academic terms
- Simple explanations of same.
- Providers need to provide a user friendly glossary of terms.
- Reinforce these messages during the initial college term

7.2.1.1 How ALBA Could Improve

Despite the learning assessment seminars and the foundations course, students still found the transition difficult. They were confused by elements of the administration procedures and there was confusion and some distress regarding the filling and completing of their individualised ‘grid’ of modules they were choosing to study.

Maybe, if when the modules comes out it tends to give you a rough idea of what category they fall into...but sometimes when the module comes out, it doesn't explain which one they fit into (17)

ALBA needs to make administration procedures clear and precise, particularly those procedures regarding the enrolment onto modules. There needs to be further explanation, simplification and assistance of the ‘grid’ system. This type of support and assistance would ideally become part of the function of the mentoring system, particularly during these early days of the student's engagement with ALBA.

Regarding the use of academic language and the initial lack of understanding amongst some students, the ALBA staff team need to explain in detail all academic terms and encourage mentors and tutors to reinforce this approach. Students are helped when mentors and others are clear, specific and ensure that language is accessible to all. Presumption that students entering a third level institute for the first time understand technical or academic terms is not helpful in this situation.

7.2.2 A Foundations Course which assists Adult Learners develop learning skills needs to be an integral and necessary part of every Adult Education Programme.

All providers of Adult Education Programmes need to provide a foundations type course. This course would include:

- Acknowledgement of prior learning
- Understanding of life experiences
- Learning styles
- Learning preferences
- Adult learning methodologies
- Introduction to academic writing
- College orientation

The provision of a foundations course as part of the initial transition into third level education is essential for programmes aimed at adult learners. The findings of this study show that students benefited greatly from their initiation through the foundations programme provided.

Core elements of any such foundations programme must include the elements of orientation into the new environment of third level education. It must help students with understanding the expectations of the institution, the language of academia, along with managing their own expectations. It must include assistance in study planning, guides and tips, how to research and how to write for the academic environment.

Another core element of any foundations programme is inclusion of the philosophy of learning and adult development, learning styles and an

exploration of the different types of intelligence. Students at this initial stage of returning to study will also benefit greatly from being assisted in discovering their own learning style and intelligence type along with developing organisation skills and self management for the work ahead.

7.2.2.1 How ALBA Could Improve

While the foundations course is a compulsory element of the ALBA programme, it is not compulsory for students to take it at the start of their course of studies. As a result students may be engaged in other modules without the preliminary basic tools of academic writing, referencing, or knowledge of learning styles or personal preferences. It should be compulsory for new students to take the foundations course at the initial stages of their study. A dedicated personal development element in the foundations course would help allay the low self esteem many of the adult students carry with them into the educational setting.

7.2.3 Adult learners need a proactive support system in place

Supporting adult learners is essential if they are to feel secure and achieve their potential. Supports that work include a mentoring system and access to career guidance and counselling. Providers must ensure that these services are available to their students.

Adult learners who return to education after a long absence and with low self esteem regarding the academic world need to be supported not just in their transition but throughout their course of study. There are different levels of support needed at various times throughout a course of study as the individuals life experiences change. At times support is needed in the role of encouragement while at other times it may need to take a more therapeutic form. The types of supports I consider to be appropriate for adult learners are:

7.2.3 (a) Mentoring System

The success of the mentoring system undertaken in the ALBA programme highlights one such way of support. Through a mentoring system students are supported by an experienced member of staff, often through encouragement and honest feedback. Adult learners need someone they can trust and confide in especially when they are unsure regarding their ability to produce academic work or sustain the momentum of a long study programme. Such mentors could meet with the students at designated times throughout the academic year.

7.2.3 (b) Career Guidance Service

Along with a mentoring system, there needs to be present other support systems such as a career guidance service. Adult learners have many demands and commitments outside of their college work and at times need a safe confidential space in which to explore personal struggles and issues that arise during the course of their study. The availability of a career guidance

counsellor for all students enrolled on an adult education course is essential. Having a service such as this available would undoubtedly ease some of the pressure experienced by adult learners and help them remain focused on their goal of gaining a qualification. It would also assist them in planning for their future post qualification.

7.2.3 (c) Counselling Services

There are times when the adult learner will need to have recourse to a safe confidential support system to help them work through personal issues that are affecting them. Easy access to a counselling service needs to be provided by colleges and institutions enrolling adult students. Providing a counselling service can help to retain student participation and provide them with the personal tools and strength to cope with personal or family issues that are impinging their personal wellbeing.

7.2.3.1 How ALBA Could Improve

The existing mentoring programme needs more structure for example: a compulsory number of meetings per academic year or per term; a structured review of the students' progress during these meetings. Mentoring needs to encompass not just academic performance but include the students overall experience of being on the course. This would allow for another form of feedback to the ALBA administration.

Not all students were aware that they had access to a guidance counsellor and a number of the interviewees expressed the need for this type of support to be part of the ALBA programme.

7.2.4 The provision of flexible, multiple choices of modules, that are outcome based containing various assessment methods is key to developing adult-friendly education programmes.

Providers need to take the following recommendations into account:

- Provide flexible provision by making modules available at variety of times, day, evening, weekend, summer
- Provide a wide and varied range of subject choice to students
- Be creative in the development of new modules
- Provide modules that relate to the interests of the student population
- Provide multiple assessment approaches including continuous assessment, assignment based assessment and exams.
- Allow the student a choice in their preferred assessment method.
- Develop use of ICT technology to provide off campus participation and on-line modules.

7.2.4 (a) Flexibility

The provision of flexible learning opportunities are important attributes when providing learning programmes for adult learners. Provision which will include

full-time and part-time options, that are modular based, which are available at multiple times throughout the course, are optimum.

Providers need to make the provision of courses encompass all possible ramifications of days and times. Daytime, evening, weekday, and weekends along with intensive programmes over shorter time periods, for example, week long full-time course. However these shorter intensive courses can also alternatively be available as part-time options.

Within this flexibility there also needs to be a balance with certainty, as many adult students may be in employment. Thus it is important that there is clarity regarding the provision in order to assist a person enrol for a programme knowing they will be able to attend on set days.

7.2.4 (b) Variety of Subject Choice

The availability of a wide range of choice is a key feature of the needs of adult learners. To sustain interest, momentum and active participation, subject choice is an important aspect of provision. Education providers need to be creative in how they can create the facilitation of the achievement of learning outcomes for their students. Within this research study, subject variety, flexibility and choice were key elements for the adult learners.

From the experience of the ALBA course, it became clear that subject choice developed throughout the course duration with new courses being added and imagined, often arising from consultation with and suggestions from the students.

7.2.4 (c) Modular Based

For the adult cohort who returns to education, there is an attraction to studying defined course modules. A typical module would perhaps be twenty four class contact hours spread over twelve classes of two hour duration over a twelve week period. Given the flexible nature required by adult learners, their ability to commit to a module is enhanced by such provision. This approach also enables adult learners to define the level of their commitment, for example taking one or more modules per college term.

Another advantage of modular based provision is that it allows students greater autonomy in the choices they make. It is therefore imperative that the provider produces an adequate choice and range of modules available. Whilst some modules will undoubtedly need to be core or compulsory, other modules can be optional alternatives to achieving course requirements and European Credit Transfer (ECT) credits.

7.2.4 (d) Outcome Based

A system of learning outcomes is best suited to facilitate the flexible, module based approach provision of adult education. Under this system, students enrol in a module of study with the expressed intention of achieving one, or more, learning outcomes. The learning outcomes that could possibly be gained through successful completion of the course of study are stated in advance by the course provider. Ideally decisions regarding learning outcomes should be the result of collaboration between provider, teacher and student.

Through an outcome based approach, it is possible that students studying the same module may achieve learning outcomes, through different methodologies depending on their study emphasis. It is also theoretically possible that students participating in the same module may achieve different learning outcomes.

This learning outcomes approach is the way forward not just for adult education but for education provision in general. It has already become the standard norm for the FETAC (recent changes to FETAC level 2 and 3 course module descriptors and learning outcomes).

7.2.4 (e) Assessment

Many of the adults who return to formal education are attracted by the fact that there are no exams. Modules comprising of classroom assessment and or

assignments are the popular choice. It is important therefore that whilst maintaining the highest standards of education, the provider acknowledges the preferred choice of assessment.

Assessment through assignments, often multiple per module, allows the student to study in their own time and gain a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the area of study. Group assessments could also be considered as can an assessed method of classroom presentations. A combination of more than one of the above methods could provide opportunities for students to perform to their personal abilities under the different nature of learning styles.

While assessment through assignment may be the preferred choice of adult students, there may be on occasions a time when an exam may be offered as an alternative or indeed the appropriate means of assessment. Examples of this might include an ICT exam, or an oral presentation exam in communications.

7.2.4.1 How ALBA Could Improve

- It is suggested that the core modules be made available in a multitude of ways, for example as a term course and as a summer programme. Core modules need to be repeated more frequently.
- Clarification is needed regarding the outcomes available in a module for example whether one module could fulfil two different learning outcomes for two different strands.

- Assessment criteria and marking systems need to be explicit at the commencement of each module with consistency of information provided by tutors.
- Make better use of and develop ICT provision by providing classes on-line, stream classes live to provide off campus real-time participation in classes and provide pod casts of classes.

There was some concern from the interviewees regarding the availability of the compulsory core modules. It was felt that these modules were not repeated frequently enough. To rectify this, ALBA could facilitate further the planning of students taking the core modules as part of improving the understanding and implementation of the individualised ‘grids’ each student has. This could be accommodated through a more structured use of the mentoring system.

7.2.5 An Andragogical Approach is Essential

Providers must ensure that their courses for adult learners are andragogical proofed and that all teaching staff have an understanding of appropriate methodologies within the adult education sector. All staff need to be trained to an appropriate standard of understanding and practice.

7.2.5 (a) Tutors

It is vital that all persons responsible for the provision and presentation of adult education programmes be fully converse with the philosophy of adult education, its core principals, methodologies and practice. Tutors need to be fully versed in an understanding of andragogy. An andragogical approach to the facilitating of learning amongst adults is paramount, thus ensuring that the teaching methods employed are appropriate to the learning cohort.

The understanding of andragogy and the application of this approach must be consistent amongst all those entrusted with the role of teacher/facilitator on adult specific courses. Adults learn best when they are engaged as adults, when their life experience is acknowledged and valued, when they are entrusted with an ownership of the learning process, and when learning is facilitated.

7.2.5 (b) Course Structure

It is recommended that those responsible for adult education provide appropriate teaching methodologies, suitable for adult learning. There are various methodological approaches which tutors/teachers can employ to enhance, encourage and develop the learning experience of the adult students. Chief amongst these, for adult learners, is creating an environment of respect for the individual's life experience through engaging in meaningful dialogue.

Adult learners are active learners. They like, and need to be, fully engaged in their subject. To enhance their learning and opportunities, it is important that those responsible for provision of adult learning must incorporate some, if not all, of the following methodologies. Facilitated classroom discussion and debate; individual and group research projects; classroom presentations by students; reflective practice; assessed assignments, along with the more traditional provision of information from the tutor.

Through these various methodologies, it is envisaged that students will be able to expand and explore their own learning style preference and gain a broader understanding of the educational process.

7.2.5.1 How ALBA Could Improve

ALBA must ensure they have in place a programme of continuous professional development for all teaching staff. This will provide training and safeguards to enable all members of staff be fully immersed in knowledge and practice of adult learning methodologies, in particular the theory and practice of andragogy. In parallel to this they need to have a system in place that ensures there is consistency of methodological and andragogical approach across all modules provided.

7.2.6 The Theory of Transformational Learning is Central to the Andragogical Approach of adult Education.

All future provision of adult education courses must be underpinned by the theory of transformation and have a structure in place which promotes and accommodates transformative learning. This will ensure that adult learners will experience education within a transformative learning environment, which will contribute to their personal transformation. To develop this, course providers need to have a system in place for:

- Continuous professional development of staff to familiarise them with transformation theory.
- Proof all modules for the presence of transformation theory to ensure consistency throughout the course provided.
- Ensure the elements of transformational learning are explicit in the course and module structure.

Adult education provision needs to establish the theory of transformation at its core. In this way adult students will be enabled to participate in an active educational environment. Students will be supported and challenged in their learning to become critical thinkers, researchers and analysts. Such provision would encourage praxis of theory and action as putting learning into action is central to transformative learning.

This approach will also acknowledge and support the differing reasons for entry into education, life experiences and other commitments. A transformative learning approach is the perfect environment in which to provide adult education.

A key element of transformative learning is that the student becomes more socially aware, not just locally, within their own communities, but on a wider, national and international scale. In order to develop this consciousness, it is incumbent on the provider to ensure the opportunity for such learning is facilitated. This can be accommodated through experiential placements, and the provision of course modules focusing on such social and global issues.

Courses on social and civil policies, politics, rights and developments can be included in course curricular. These can include modules on history, politics, power and governance, social studies, international studies, developmental studies.

Critical analysis must become part of every adult education programme. As critical analysis is a central element in transformational theory, it is essential that this skill be incorporated into any future adult education programme. It beholds the provider to incorporate into its programmes a course of study which will equip students with the skill of analysis. This can be facilitated by

provision of a stand alone module or an integrated element within numerous modules.

7.2.6.1 How ALBA Could Improve

Instead of transformation happening as a by-product of participation in the ALBA course, it is vital that ALBA promote transformational learning and transformation theory. A core module regarding transformation will enable students to have an understanding and experience of transformative learning as they journey through their studies. Presenting transformational learning during the foundations course would develop a linking theme running throughout their course and into their capstone sequence.

As evidenced through this research, the learning achieved on ALBA impacts not only on the individual but on their wider family, their work, and society. This presents an opportunity for ALBA to build a learning outcome based on the impacts and evidence of transformative learning. I recommend that ALBA create a module based on this information thus aiding the development of and consciously implementing a transformative theory approach.

7.2.7 Personal Development Courses must be an integral aspect of adult education programmes

Adult education providers need to make a conscious effort to develop and increase their student's personal development and confidence levels. It is not

sufficient to rely on this happening as a by-product of study. Personal development must be part of all adult education courses as a specifically designed course with identifiable outcomes.

One of the major findings of this research was the growth in personal confidence as a direct result of engagement in the ALBA programme. In order to ensure that such personal development be achieved in adult education programmes it is important to make deliberate choices to incorporate elements of personal development practice and theory into the course provision, through either stand alone modules or cross curricular.

One example of providing direct opportunities for personal development and confidence building is to take the ALBA experience of providing a compulsory module in communications along with building classroom presentations into many of the modules on offer.

Accepting that many adults returning to learning suffer with low self esteem, this recommendation is vitally important for the health and well being of the student.

7.2.7.1 How ALBA Could Improve

The increase in personal confidence experienced by the ALBA students could be enhanced by specifically targeting personal development and development of confidence as a named outcome. Similar to the above suggestion, having a

personal effectiveness module, ALBA could provide a personal development module as part of the human development strand, which would focus on confidence building.

7.3 Implications

The number of adult and mature students entering into full-time and part-time education is growing year on year. In 2010/2011, 15% of full-time undergraduates were mature students, this was an increase of 2.7% from the previous year on top of a 6.1% increase on the preceding year (HEA 2012). In part-time provision the number of adult and mature students is as high as 92%. It is estimated that by 2015 the percentage of mature students engaged in full-time education will be 18% and by 2030 - 25% (DES 2011). It is clear that provision of study programmes designed for adult learners will be a growth area in Ireland within the next decade. It is important that such provision is founded on the principles of an adult methodological approach, andragogy, rather than pedagogy.

For such provision to be fit for purpose, it must take into account the experience of adult learners, such as those who have participated in this research and the conclusions and recommendations drawn from their experiences.

Adult education is not merely the provision of a course, which adults attend. It is a philosophy; it is a holistic provision of a learning experience. Adopting such a position will have implications for the providers of such programmes.

Programmes must be designed in such a way that they support and encourage the adult learner to achieve, not just academically but also personally. Programme provision will need to build in the supports discussed above. They will need to adopt an andragogical approach and methodological approach appropriate to adult learning.

This has a direct impact on the recruitment and training of staff. All teaching staff on adult education programmes will need to be familiar with the core principles and philosophical approach and teaching methodology of adult education.

Adult education programmes must become flexible in their provision and range of subject choice. Again this will have implications on the providers resources and brings to the fore the issue of how adult education is financed, particularly part-time education. While this study did not discuss funding of education, it is an issue which will need to be considered.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Having reviewed the conclusions and recommendations of this research and commented on its implications, there are a number of points of interest that emerge, which would require further research.

7.4.1 A Follow up interview with those who participated in this research

The interviewees for this research were drawn from a cohort of students who had completed a minimum of one calendar year of study. It is quite possible that some of those interviewed will, by now, have completed their studies. It would be interesting and enlightening to re-interview these participants on completion of their studies to see if there has been further transformative experiences and learning.

7.4.2 Post-graduation research

The ALBA programme has now begun to see students graduate. I recommend that research be carried out with those who have graduated to ascertain (a) the impact of their returning to learning and (b) the economic impact of having attained an academic qualification.

7.4.3 The female experience of being an adult learner

Based on the findings of this research (see sections 6.3.1(e) and 6.3.2 (d)), female learners experienced significantly less spousal and family support than did their male counterparts. Interviewees spoke of having to delay their

enrolment, of tension with their male spouse/partner as a direct result of returning to study, while others spoke of keeping their return to study a secret for fear of derision or lack of support. While this data is produced by this research and is noteworthy, the personal impact on female adult learners was not the focus of this thesis. It would however make for a worthwhile focus of another study.

7.4.4 Comparison between provision types

It would be of great interest to be able to compare research finding between researches undertaken with adult learners who returned to an undergraduate programme not specifically designed for adult learners with those who participated in a programme specifically designed for adult learners.

7.4.5 What is the experience of the teachers of adult learners

While research regarding the students experience is central to any further development in the field of adult education, it would be not just interesting but perhaps ground breaking to research the experience of those who teach the adult learners. How do the teachers of adult learners experience their teaching experience compared to working with traditional undergraduate students. Have the tutors been impacted in any personal way through the methodology of working with adults?

7.5 Concluding Comments

This chapter has laid out the conclusions and recommendations of the research undertaken. As part of the narrative of the research, and in giving context to the conclusions and recommendations, the chapter also presented a synopsis of preceding chapters. Finally this chapter discussed some of the implications of the research and suggested areas for further research within the field of adult education.

The conclusions were drawn from the analysis presented in the previous chapter. Most notably this research is able to assert that those who participated in the research were able to express their experience of personal transitions as a direct result of being on the ALBA programme. They reported becoming much more confident in themselves, of having a greater understanding of the learning process and of how their horizons had been broadened, both in terms of education and social responsibility.

In making recommendations, the role of this chapter was to present a number of areas in which future providers of adult education would pay attention to and implement. For adult learning to be truly transformative it is important that the philosophical approach to that education be based on a methodology of adult learning and on transformation theory.

A number of implications and recommendations for future research were outlined. It is important that when research is presented, it is acknowledged that it is research at a particular point and time. As a result there are implications to be drawn from the finding of that research and areas that were either not covered by the terms of reference, that need to be researched or need further attention.

This chapter has presented a comprehensive synopsis of the research, laid out its conclusions and recommendations, drawn from the research findings of the previous chapter, and presented a number of issues that need further investigation and consideration.

Finally, this research was initially motivated by my personal experience as an adult educator witnessing profound personal transformations in my students and professionally motivated by a desire to capture this reality. The aim of the research set out to establish if these personal transformations were as a direct result of participation in an adult education programme. A second aim was to then relate the experience of learners back to the theory of transformation, to find if their experiences were confirmed by the theory. Research was then carried out with a cohort of adult learners participating on a specific adult education programme, ALBA, which is new to Ireland, to see if this was a model of education that facilitates transformative learning.

Having presented in the previous chapter, chapter six the analysis of the research data and the conclusions in chapter seven, it is without doubt that the aims and objectives of this research have been met, that my personal and professional motivations have been satisfied, that the research was justified and the results are clear and unambiguous; participation in adult education is transformative and the ALBA programme is facilitating transformative learning through its structure, methodology and content.

7.6 Valediction

In conducting qualitative research as I have done, it was important for me to be a reflective practitioner, allowing the process to guide and enlighten me. In conducting my recorded interviews I did not take notes during the interview session. I did immediately after the meeting, write up brief 'field notes' which included an initial summary of what I had just heard; the non-verbal communications - such as pauses, facial expressions, tears, gestures, body language and general atmosphere - that would be lost in later listening to the recording and in subsequent transcriptions. What Elliot refers to as the 'details of the interaction between researched and researcher' (2008:20).

During the transcription process I listened to each recording at least three times. Once to do an initial transcription, second to re check the transcription against the recording and a third to listen again after I had read and analysed

and coded the transcription in order to confirm, cross reference or gain new insights. This process has enabled me to not only reflect on the interviewee's content, but on my own experience of the process and insights gained on how I presented the information. This is important because at the heart of reflexivity is an awareness of oneself, of my actions and interactions, and of my presentation of the research experience.

Fine (1992) refers to the 'matrix' of what is known between the knower [interviewee] and the researcher, while Merrill speaks of the 'interrogation of self in relationship as a key element of the research process' (2009:181). For me, it was important to present myself to the interviewees. I wanted to be open and transparent about my involvement with the ALBA programme, as a member of two committees dating back to 2007, two years before the first ALBA student enrolled. I wanted them to know my passion for adult education and my previous ten years experience of working in that field. I needed to let them know what it was that led me to want to conduct this research. And finally I wanted them to understand that I too am a student, as I believed that this identification would enhance our relationship during the interview process. This self-disclosure is in keeping with what Cooper (2008) refers to as 'inclusive conceptualisation', that the researcher is not simply 'observing from a position of detachment' (2008:19).

In Linden West's (1996) opinion that all research is partly autobiographical, then the need to be honest and reflexive in the research process and the analysis is truly important. In this particular research, it was my idea to research adult students regarding the theme of transformation. This idea had developed over a number of years as a result of my daily work with adult students. I set up the interview, I framed the open questions and I have conducted the analysis. The resulting findings however are not about me but the interviewees. In order to maintain this validity it is my responsibility to be reflexive about my involvement, the role of my conscious and unconscious influences/biases/interpretations and my autobiography. In being a reflexive practitioner the resulting analysis is more the richer.

Conducting this research has impacted on me in various ways. It has confirmed my hypothesis that 'something' 'happens' to the person when an adult engages in education. It has provided a theoretical framework to this hypothesis. It has awarded me the experience of listening to thirty-two individual experiences of participation in adult education. It has caused me to become reflective, not just of my own educational experiences but of my professional practice as an educator.

Sitting in the interview room face-to-face with the interviewees was a privileged experience. I felt honoured to be the recipient of each individual story. I was humbled by the honesty, and personal depths to which people

shared their sacred information with me. The narrative methodology allowed people to speak freely on issues that were important and meaningful for them. Some spoke of the great sacrifices they and their families had to make to attend college. Some spoke of difficulties in their relationships and families as a result of their participation in ALBA. Some shared personal accounts of not being supported in their efforts while others found support and encouragement.

Conducting this research has left me with a deep and profound respect for each individual I interviewed and for all adults who return to education. I have listened and re-listened again to the interview recordings, they have repeatedly made me laugh and cry. I have read and re-read the recording transcripts, the wealth and depth of knowledge and wisdom held within have potential for so much more than this research could offer. However the journey of this research does not end with simply the telling of their stories.

My initial desire to show the existence of personal transformations has been vindicated through the data collected and presented. But so much more has happened. The process of conducting this research has opened up my own horizons, developed my own academic knowledge, and encouraged me to try new propositions. It has provided me with a theoretical language and framework on which to lay my experience and to instruct any future teaching. It has challenged me, at times frustrated me, stretched me but always enlightened me. In an honest appraisal and reflection on my own academic

journey over the past five years, I can make the statement that transformative learning and personal transformation has taken place.

As the ALBA students were able to describe their experiences I too have experienced transformative learning and personal transformations through this process. At first this surprised me. Initially I only considered myself as a researcher, and the interviewees my source of data. I transcribed their experiences and reflected them back to Mezirow's theory. I developed findings and drew conclusions and recommendations. I was author, researcher. But am I not also an adult student engaged in adult education and as such is not the theory of transformation and transformative learning not applicable to me also? It is. And I have experienced it. I am transformed academically and personally through the process of this research. My theoretical knowledge has expanded and I have a deeper awareness of my personal growth as a result of undertaking this process.

This research is the first piece of academic research into the ALBA programme. It conclusively documents what is working well, what is impacting on the learners, along with recommending improvements that can be made. It is for others to conduct further research on ALBA and on adult learners. There are so many areas of research which I now feel are opened up as a result of this research, some of which I will consider for myself and hope that others seize the opportunity.

There is a great message to be told emanating from this research. I hope to tell it. Hope others will listen and hope the journey of adult education and ALBA develops and grows within the Irish educational landscape.

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Appendix A.

Philosophical categories of education on the development of adult education

Liberal adult education:

Liberal education has its historical origins in the philosophical theories of the classical Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. This liberal education tradition was adopted and adapted in the Christian schools in early, medieval, and modern times. It became the predominant educational theory in the Western world and is still a strong force in educational thought today. The emphasis in this tradition is upon liberal intellectual organised knowledge, and the development of the intellectual powers of the mind.

Progressive adult education:

Progressive education has its historical origins in the progressive movement in politics, social change, and education. This approach to educational philosophy emphasises such concepts as the relationship between education and society, experience-centred education, vocational education and democratic education. Leading progressive educators include James, Dewey, and Lindeman.

Behaviourist adult education:

Behaviourist education has its roots in modern philosophic and scientific movements. Behaviourism in adult education emphasises such concepts as control, behavioural modification, learning through reinforcement, and management by objectives... Pavlov, Watson, Skinner.

Humanistic adult education:

Humanistic education is related in its development to existential philosophy and humanistic psychology. The key concepts that are emphasised in this approach are freedom and autonomy, trust, active cooperation and participation, and self-directed learning. Philosophical roots are found in Heidegger, Sarte, Camus, and Buber. The third force psychologists have been equally responsible for the development of this particular approach to education: Maslow, Rogers, May, Allport. Malcolm Knowles is prominent in espousing this orientation in his needs-meeting and student-centred andragogical approach to adult learning.

Radical adult education:

Radical education has its historical roots in the various radical movements that have emerged in the past three centuries: Anarchism, Marxism, Socialism and left-wing Freudianism..... a prominent adult educator of this philosophic position is Paulo Freire who has proposed radical conscientisation as the true function of education among the oppressed.

Analytic philosophy of adult education:

Analytic philosophy of adult education is the most recent approach to the philosophy of adult education. Its historic origins lie in such movements as logical positivism, scientific positivism, and British analytic philosophy. This approach to philosophy emphasises the need for clarifying concepts, arguments, and policy statements used in adult education. Notable figures are Lawson and Paterson.

(Adapted from Elias and Merriam 1995:9-11)

Appendix B. ‘My pedagogic creed’ (Dewey, John. 1897)

I believe that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race...

I believe that the only true education comes through stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself...

I believe that this educational process has two sides – one psychological and one sociological; and that neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected ...

I believe that knowledge of social conditions, of the present state of civilization, is necessary in order to properly interpret the child’s powers.....

I believe that the psychological and social sides are organically related and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other.....

I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals....

Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child’s capacities, interests, and habits...

I believe that school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process,

I believe that the school must represent present life ... home life is the form of social life...child develops in...

I believe... that the true centre of correlation on the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child’s own social activities...

I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction...

I believe that in the ideal school we have the reconciliation of the individualistic and the institutional ideals...

I believe that the community’s duty to education is, therefore, its paramount moral duty...

(Dewey, John (1897) ‘My pedagogic creed’, *The School Journal*, Volume LIV, Number 3 (January 16, 1897), pages 77-80. Also available in the *informal education archives*, <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/e-dew-pc.htm>.

Appendix C. Different settings for adult education

Formal/Non Formal/Informal Education

Formal Education refers to education that takes place in educational institutions, following a set curriculum, most likely leading to certification; it includes formal assessments, strict time frames and defined progression routes.

Non Formal Education refers to any organised educational activities that take place outside the formal educational setting, is typically less structured, and more flexible. This form of education is mostly community based; often responding to local needs and has a tradition of being associated social issues and with literacy initiatives.

Informal education is used to describe learning that is mostly unplanned and occurs in people's everyday life experience. Coombs (1985) refer to it as '*learning acquired from daily living*' (1985:21).

Community Education

Community education could be understood to broadly include any form of education, formal or informal, that takes place in the community. Lovett et al (1983), Jarvis (2002) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) purport that there are three main categories of community education: (1) education for community action and/or development; (2) education in the community; (3) education beyond the walls – extra mural education. What all of these have in common is the focus on learners taking control of their own lives, of education having a social impact for the betterment of the local community.

Continuing Education

There is general acceptance Schuller and Megarry (1979), Jarvis (2002) and Merriam and Brockett (2007) that the term 'continuing education' refers to education which is an extension of initial formal education, for adults and offered in a planned, organised, and structured format.

An official definition given by the Accrediting Commission of the Continuing Education Council of the United States, and quoted by Apps (1979) is:

The further development of human abilities after entrance into employment or voluntary activities. It includes in-service, upgrading and updating education. It may be occupational education or training which furthers careers or personal development. Continuing education includes that study made necessary by advances in knowledge. It excludes most general education and training for job entry. Continuing education is concerned primarily with broad personal and professional development. It includes leadership training and the improvement of the ability to manage personal, financial, material and human resources. Most of the subject matter is at the professional, technical and leadership training levels or the equivalent.
(Jarvis 2002:28-9)

Vocational Education

As the title suggests, vocational education is primarily focused on equipping the individual with the skills needed to find, sustain and progress in the economic world of work. It can be provided by the employer or an outside agency and is generally part-time.

Recurrent Education

The definition that seems to be agreed upon by most commentators is that of Shulman (1975):

The recurrent education concept, which originated in Europe, is understood primarily as the development of a national policy that would provide citizens with opportunities to alternate periods of work with periods of formal training throughout their lives. In general, the learning experiences are to be related to career goals (Shulman 1975 in Schuller and Megarry 1979:114).

Recurrent education is formal, preferably full-time and is undertaken in alternating periods of work, leisure and education, throughout the course of a person's life, with a primary focus on career development.

Popular Education

According to Hamilton and Cunningham (1989) the assumption of popular education is that knowledge resides with the people in their own community and there are a number of elements which are usually present in popular education: (1) horizontal relationships between facilitators and participants; (2) response to a need expressed by an organised group; (3) group involvement in planning the training and political action; and (4) acknowledgement that the community is the source of knowledge (1989:443).

Jarvis (1990) defines popular education as

education which is designed for the people by the people; and instrument in the ideological class struggle, radical and often revolutionary; and education which involves praxis in as much as the education learned is then put into practice in the class struggle (1990:269).

While Merriam and Brockett (2007) speak of popular education valuing people's own culture and drawing knowledge from the local people themselves.

Experiential Education

The central figures in experiential education are Lindeman, Dewey and Kolb, who have been discussed above. The central element of concern here is (a) the experience of the learner, (b) the meaning derived from that experience.

Critical Education

Critical education engages the learner in forming a new framework to critique economic and social structures, and societal power dynamics. The work of Freire, Dewey and Mezirow and Habermas are important reference points for the development of critical education. For Merriam and Brockett (2007) the central theme of critical education is the necessity to ensure that the voices of those people who have traditionally been marginalised due to race, sex, or lifestyle factors are

fully engaged in the learning process. There is an important emphasis placed on the teaching-learning transaction, which for bell hooks [sic] (1994) is central for the empowerment of students.

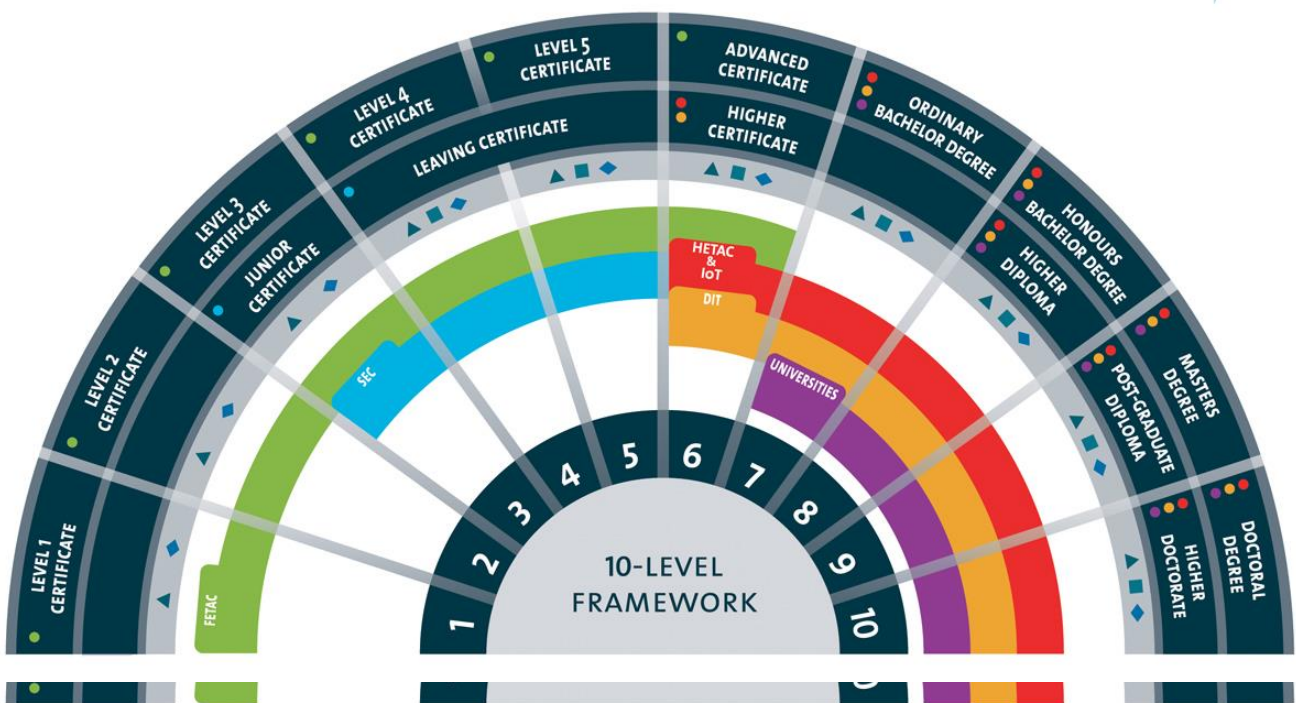
Feminist Education

There are many 'branches' of feminist education including; Marxist, Black, Liberal, radical amongst others. However the primary focus concerns the experience of women in the learning process. For many this experience has been one of oppression, the feminist approach attempts to *recover women's voices, experience, and view points and use these to make systems of privilege, power, and oppression visible...* (Merriam and Caffarella 1999:359).

Appendix D. FETAC National Framework of Qualifications

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann
National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland



Appendix E. Adult Learning BA, Four Strands

Adult Learning Strand

This strand covers critical thinking, research and communication skills. All students take this course through nine modules in All Hallows College.

Modules:

Foundations of Adult Learning 1

Foundations of Adult Learning 2

Scholarly Writing

Information Technology

Quantitative Reasoning

Critical Thinking

Collaborative Learning

Ethical Acting

Summit Seminar

Human Development

This strand covers topics relevant to people and their cultures. Learning Outcomes in this area focus on three categories:

Individual Development

Outcomes in this category focus on personal growth and change, enabling students to understand and interact more effectively with others.

Communities and Societies

Outcomes in this category emphasise the ideas and abilities that help individuals thrive in an increasingly independent world.

Institutions and Organisations

Outcomes in this category help individuals understand and interact with social, cultural, political and economic institutions and organisations

Arts and Ideas

This strand addresses the creative and reflective aspects of life.

Learning Outcomes in this area come under three categories:

Interpreting the Arts

Outcomes in this category allow students to relate their own experience to the work of artists, writers and other thinkers.

Creative Expression

Outcomes in this category encourage students in original creative activities and reflection about the creative process.

Reflection and Meaning

Outcomes in this category challenge students to explore fundamental questions about the meaning, purpose and values of their lives.

Professional Focus

The Professional Focus Strand is where you the student take direct ownership of your BA degree programme by choosing an area of particular interest to you to pursue in a very focussed, very concentrated way. It may be project management & teamwork; business systems in IT; effective communications; manufacturing and business organisation – or something completely different. Whatever your area of interest is, your mentor and the staff will work with you in designing a course of study based on your exact interests and goals. All Hallows College is beginning the programme with six focus areas; other areas will be added:

Focus Areas:
Pastoral Studies
Facilitation Studies
Computer Applications
Business Studies
Family Studies
Community Development

(Adapted for course promotional material)

Appendix F. Letter of Invitation to Participate in a PhD Research Thesis

Date

RE: Research Title:

An examination of the Transformative Learning Threshold experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the Adult Learning BA (All Hallows College, Dublin) on completion of their first year of studies.

Dear Student,

I am undertaking PhD research studies in All Hallows College, and to complete my studies, I am writing a thesis on the above subject.

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Programme Board, and the Research Ethics Committee of All Hallows College. The research will be carried out in accordance with the recommended protocols set down by All Hallows College, with particular emphasis on the preservation of participants' anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. Participants will not be directly or indirectly identified. Approved procedures will be observed in the safekeeping and ultimate disposal of all interview data.

The research will be carried out by way of face-to-face interview, using the style of 'Narrative Inquiry'. Interviews will be digitally recorded and will later be transcribed.

I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in my study. Your consent is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. Attached you will find

(a) Information regarding my research (b) A consent form

If you agree to be part of this research initiative, please complete the attached form and return to me via the Post Graduate Office in Drumcondra House.

I appreciate your time in reading this information and look forward to meeting with you if you choose to become part of this research. If you have any further queries regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ciarán Ó Mathúna
C/o Post Graduate Office.
Ph: 01-8520756

Appendix G. Research Information

Research Title:

An examination of the Transformative Learning Threshold experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the Adult Learning BA (All Hallows College, Dublin) on completion of their first year of studies.

The intention of this research is to record the transitional experience of a cohort of adult learners who are enrolled on the Adult learning BA (ALBA) in All Hallows College, Dublin. Using the methodology of 'transformative narrative' the research will:

- evaluates/assess the influence/impact of each individual's life's experience, prior learning, their transition into the education programme
- their experience of participation
- their reflection upon completion of one year of study

The importance of documenting the experience, the transition into the world of study' the impact that decision has made on individuals, alongside the formal academic learning and their personal reflections are a much needed resource in the field of adult education. Indeed it is the very lack of such information that has led to this research being undertaken.

This research will emphasise the phenomenon of Adult Education. It will draw on the academic work of influential figures within adult education such as Eduard Lindeman, Peter Jarvis, David Kolbe, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow, Stephen Brookfield amongst others.

It will explore the notion of Adult Education- its historical and philosophical development. Adult Education in Ireland, the development of the ALBA course. It will explore issues such as Learning, Knowledge, Intelligence, Transformation and Critical Reflection.

Currently I am in my third academic year of studies and have completed chapters covering the above mentioned areas. The next stage of my study is to conduct the research. I hope to complete my studies within the next eighteen months.

I will be glad to make the findings of my research known to you upon completion.

Ciarán Ó Mathúna

Appendix H. Participant Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled

An examination of the Transformative Learning Threshold experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the Adult Learning BA (All Hallows College, Dublin) on completion of their first year of studies.

That is being conducted by **CIARAN O MATHUNA**

Who is a student at All Hallows College required to conduct research for a degree in
PhD IN HUMANITIES

Under the supervision of **DR. EUGENE CURRAN C.M.**

Contact number of College: **01- 8373745**

The student will provide you with fuller information about the research study, including its purpose, procedures, and participation, as well as the arrangements for confidentiality, anonymity, and the preservation of privacy. Participation by organizations or individuals is entirely voluntary, and a participant is free to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask the researcher, or contact the supervisor. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Programme Board for the degree and the Research Ethics Committee of All Hallows College.

I freely consent to my participation in this research project.

Signature

Name in Block Letters Date
.....

Appendix I. Interview Guide

Social Profile	About Self.... Family... background.... Educational background.... Previous experience.... When finished formal education.... further training.... Work placed learning....	Tell me about yourself, your background, educational background, work experiences. Tell me how you ended up in that seat today?
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Mezirow 1. A disorienting dilemma	What was the reason that this person decided to return to education at this point in time in their life?	Can you describe what it was that led you to return to education? How did you come to chose ALBA? How did you hear about the ALBA course? Why did you come on the ALBA course? What were your main reasons for taking part....
---	--	--

Mezirow 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame	How was the person's emotional state before returning to study and did that change during the course of study?	What was it like to return to study.... Once you decided to do this course... did you encounter any barriers? How did you feel about being a student? Or What was it like for you to be called a student? How does the title 'student' sit with you now? Can you tell me about any apprehensions you had about returning to study? Can you describe any feelings you had prior to starting the course? How did you feel on the first time you came up the avenue to attend class?
--	--	--

Mezirow 3. A critical assessment of assumptions	Did the person has assumptions about adult education, about ALBA? What were these assumptions? What did they understand adult education to be? What was there prior knowledge of adult education? Has their understanding of adult education changed as a result of being on ALB? Has their knowledge of adult education changed? Did they have expectations about the course? Did they have expectations about their own participation? Were their expectations about the outcomes?	Before joining ALBA if you heard the term adult education what did it mean to you? What were your views about Adult Education before you started? What did you think the course was about? Can you describe where you were at as a person before you started ALBA? What was life like for you personally before you decided to return to study? What were your expectations before you started the course? In what way were your expectations met? Have your views changed about adult education since being on the course? Can you talk about any assumptions you had about adult education, before you started studying? How would you describe adult education? What can adult education do for a person? Would you advise somebody else to do ALBA?
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Mezirow 4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared	Has the person become aware of changes in their personal make-up as a result of being on the course?	Have you noticed any changes in yourself since being on the course? Can you tell me about them? Has your understanding of yourself changed since being on the ALBA course?
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Mezirow 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	As a result of their participation on the course, and having acquired new learning, new knowledge, has the person explored or become conscious of ways this knowledge or insight has developed beyond the walls of the college?	Since being on ALBA what kind of changes have you seen/observed in yourself? In your opinion, would you say your family noticed any changes in you since joining the ALBA course? In your opinion, how do you think your family would describe you since you returned to study? In your opinion, what impact has your return to study had on you.../ your family...? Have you take on any new roles or done new things since becoming a student? Has ALBA prepared you for any new roles? In what way has ALBA helped you? In what ways can you put into practice what you have learned? In what way have your personal attitudes to life in general changed? On reflection, what kind of changes have you seen in yourself? Has the ALBA course (helped to) change you? Can you tell me if there have been any changes in your personal circumstances since returning to education? How do you see yourself? Have you taken on any new roles? Changes in your relationships? Changes in activities? Have your attitudes towards education changed? Have any of you personal attitudes (to life in general) changed?
---	--	---

Mezirow 6. Planning a course of action	Has the person made any future plans?	As a result of ALBA have you made future plans? How do you see your future? Can you tell me if you have made any plan or course of action for yourself?
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Mezirow 7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans	Is the person aware of any new knowledge, new learning, new skills? Can they see any benefits practical benefits within their own lives, to this new knowledge they have gained	What kind of new learning and knowledge have you gained? What kind of new skills have you gained? In your opinion what difference does the gaining of new skills make to your life? In your opinion what difference does the gaining of new knowledge and learning make to your life? Can you give me an example of how you have been able to use your new knowledge in your everyday life?
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Mezirow 8. Provisional trying of new roles	Has the person taken any positive action to try out new roles, new insights, new positions?	As a result of the ALBA course have you tried out any new ideas? As a result of the ALBA course has it helped you to try out new roles? As a result of the ALBA course has it helped you personally? As a result of the ALBA course has it changed your mind about trying new things/ideas? How did it manifest itself in Family.../. Life.../ Community...? As a result of the ALBA course in what ways has it led you to try out new
--	--	---

		ideas.... Self.... / Family..../ Community...? Can you describe to me if you have tried out new roles? Ideas?
--	--	---

Mezirow 9. Building competence and self- confidence in new roles and relationship	How would they describe your self confidence before embarking on the course? Did the person experience any changes in their self confidence since participation in education? Are they able to compare their self confidence before ALBA and now? Have changes in your self- confidence shown themselves in your new roles/ relationships?	How would you describe your self confidence BEFORE the ALBA course? How would you describe your self confidence AFTER the ALBA course? In what ways does the course help build a persons self confidence? In what ways did the course help build your self confidence? How would you describe it Now....? [Ask for examples] Can you think of any experience you had were the change in your confidence showed itself? Can you think of any examples of how your role has changed? Can you think of any examples of changes in your relationships with family, friends? How would you describe your self confidence? Do you see any changes in your self confidence since participation in education? Are you able to compare your self confidence before ALBA and now? Have changes in your self confidence shown themselves in your new roles/ relationships?
---	--	---

Mezirow 10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.	To find out here if the person is able to integrate their learning/new perspectives/ new sense of self into their every day life responsibilities and duties.	What have you learned about yourself during the course? How have you put it into practice? What you have learned about yourself from your studies? In what ways have you turned this into practice...? Can you say something on how this new knowledge/understanding is expressed in your everyday life?
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Futuristic Questions	Has the person begun to think about the future/is the person making future plans	What does the future hold for you now?
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Wrap up questions	Final questions to bring the interview to a close.	What advice would you give to somebody else doing the ALBA course? What recommendations would you make for studying on the ALBA course? What do you see as TWO main advantages of the ALBA course? What do you see as TWO main disadvantages of the ALBA course? Any other comments? Anything you would like to add? Any questions they would like to ask?
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Appendix J. Ethics Form

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ALL HALLOWS COLLEGE

FORM 2 PROPOSAL FOR OUTLINE RESEARCH APPROVAL

To be completed at first meeting with your supervisor. Answer question 1-4 first.
Then follow instructions.

1. Name: CIARÁN Ó MATHÚNA

Your own contact address:

Your own telephone:

Your own e-mail:

Degree (please circle): Undergraduate Masters(specify programme)
Doctorate

.....

2. Provisional Title of Research Project:

An examination of the Transformative Learning Threshold experiences, in the self-evaluation of participants in the Adult Learning BA (All Hallows College, Dublin) on completion of their first year of studies.

3. Supervisors Name: DR. EUGENE CURRAN C.M.

Please answer the following questions.

4. Does the Research Project involve (Please circle YES of NO for each option)

A. A survey or questionnaire? _____

YES/NO

B. Interviews or focus groups? _____

YES/NO

C. Observation of participants without their knowledge? _____

YES/NO

D. Participant observation? _____

YES/NO

E. Audio or Video Taping interviewees or events? _____

YES/NO

F. A vulnerable population (e.g. children, mentally disabled)? _____

YES/NO

G. A situation where participants may feel obliged to take part
(e.g. pupils, workers in their workplace, patients in a hospital)? _____

YES/NO

H. Access to records that include personal information? _____

YES/NO

I. Risk to a participants reputation? _____

YES/NO

- J. Risk that people may suffer economic loss because of the research? ____
YES/NO
- K. Risk that people might be stigmatized because of the research? ____
YES/NO
- L. Political or physical risk to any person while abroad? ____
YES/NO
- M. Risk to a person arising from confidentiality (e.g. the law)? ____
YES/NO
- N. Risk of creating psychological stress? ____
YES/NO
- O. Risk of identifying distressed or disturbed individuals? ____
YES/NO
- P. Risk to the participant from lack of anonymity? ____
YES/NO
- Q. Procedures that involve deception? ____
YES/NO
- R. Remuneration or compensation paid to a participant? ____
YES/NO
- S. Action Based Research/ Evaluation Research ____
YES/NO

IF your research involves pupils or students in a school or class concerning teaching, learning or education,

Yes, it does..... No, it does not..... (Please check what applies)

OR IF your research involves interviewing or surveying professionals about their professional work and that alone, Yes, it does..... No, it does not..... (Please check what applies)

CHECKLIST OF ATTACHMENTS (check the ones that apply):

- One page summary of proposal..... ☐
- Advertisement for recruitment..... ☐
- Information Sheet for consent by participants, parents or organisation..... ☐
- Informed consent form..... ☐
- Permission of Parent or Guardian or Responsible Person Form..... ☐
- Evidence of Approval of External Bodies relevant to research..... ☐

"I confirm that the information given above is correct and that I have read, understood and endorse: ethical guidelines provided by the University or College,

and (if appropriate) research guidelines relevant to the specific area of my work, as well as any specific guidelines provided by my Supervisor.”

Signature Date
.....

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SUPERVISOR

Do you foresee any ethical problems with this research?
YES/NO

If YES, please give details.

Signature of Supervisor Date
.....

DECISION OF RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

- (i) Authorised
- (ii) Authorised subject to the following additional measures.

- (iii) Not authorised for the reasons given (see overleaf)

Name(s)

Signature(s).....

Date:
.....

When the approval has been given, please pass this form to the supervisor. If the proposal is not authorised, the applicant should seek a meeting with the Research Ethics Committee.

Comments: Any substantial amendments to the original proposal must be checked with the supervisor to ascertain if the proposal needs to be resubmitted to the Research Ethics Committee. As a condition of approval, researchers are required to document and report immediately to the Research Ethics Committee any adverse events, any issues which might negatively impact on the conduct of the research and/or any complaint from a participant relating to their participation in the study.

Appendix K. List of ALBA modules available 2012

Adult Learning
Anglo Irish Novel
Art of stillness
Advanced writing skills
Advanced communications
Anglo Irish poetry
Community Learning and Development
Creative writing
Children's literature
Cultural studies
Critical thinking
Collaborative learning
Comparative study of education
Communications
Cultural perspectives on migration
Continuity and change
Digital photography
Developing person
Ethics
Environmental design for living
Ethics today
Ethical acting
Foundations
Film and society
Global perspectives on poverty
Ireland on screen
Information technology
Irish cultural studies
Introduction to counselling
Ireland and the EU
Immigration to Ireland & barriers to social integration
Project management
Power
Preparing to work with community groups
Quantitative reasoning
Social Science approaches to Community Development
So you want to sing
Social identity
Social identity and organisations
Stained glass
Social policy
Soul of leadership
Scholarly writing
World faith and Christian denominations

ALBA students were also able to take courses in the BA day course, modules included:

Psychology

History of Psychology;

Biopsychology;

Cognitive Psychology 1;

Social Psychology 1;

Infant and Childhood Psychology;

Health Psychology (pre-requisite is Biopsychology)

Abnormal Psychology -Adult (pre-requisite is Biopsychology)

Cognitive Psychology 2 (pre-requisite is Cognitive Psychology 1)

Family and Relationships (pre-requisite is Social Psychology 1)

Adolescent and Adult Lifespan Development (pre-requisite is Infant and Childhood Psychology)

Theology

Introduction to the Old Testament (no pre-requisites);

Introduction to the New Testament (pre-requisite [possibly] TH1);

Church History 1 (no pre-requisites);

Sacraments of Initiation (no pre-requisites);

Religion and Science (no pre-requisites);

Work and Ecology (no pre-requisites);

Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Dialogue Partners (no pre-requisites);

SIM 3 Introduction to Feminist Theology (no pre-requisites).

English

The modules for English can be taken as stand-alone modules and so are open to ALBA students. However, it should be noted that it would benefit the student if they take some first and second year modules before taking year three and four modules so that their prior learning experience is similar to those on the undergraduate programme.

Philosophy

There are pre-requisites for some philosophy modules. For example, Philosophical Anthropology 1 needs to be completed before a student can take Philosophical Anthropology 2.