Learner identities and educational engagement:
A framework for understanding learner identities of Northern Australian regional learners with implications for educational pedagogy, policy and practice

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Faculty of Education, Health and Science

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

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signature                     date
Abstract
Learning is a social process, informed by social interactions and connected through place, time, language, culture and context. Addressing the inequities in educational outcomes impacts on individuals’, communities and nations’ employment and wellbeing and is underpinned by understanding the influences that inform adults’ decision making about engagement in formal education. Learner identities are socially informed and connected to learners’ communities based in school, peer, family, local and global contexts. These learner identities are mutable and non linear as they relate to complex sets of social relationships. This outcomes of this research examine the disparities between individuals’ learner identities and those operating in a range of learning contexts. The discontinuities in learner identity impact, significantly, on the meaning-making frameworks and resources that learners’ access to engage their learner identities and mediate their engagement in formal education.

The study analyses twenty regional adult learners’ in-depth narratives and identifies the key themes in their learning experiences that impact on their engagement in formal education. The research finds that peoples’ identities related to learning, that is, their learning identities, formed a core part of the adults’ decision making across a range of educational experiences, institutions and purposes over their lives. It also describes the ways adults’ engagement with post compulsory learning is mediated by an individual’s socially informed learner identity. The management of learning identity draws on and creates identity resources to manage the intersections of discordant, or opposing, learner identities. This learner identity work is described here in terms of a sense of agency within learning contexts.

This thesis identifies and typifies participants’ learner identities and provides a framework for describing learner identities by adapting educational institutions and experiences to support the development of learner identities that successfully engage with post compulsory learning. The resultant learner identity framework draws on social perspectives of learning and identity and social capital theory to describe the key features of different learner identities. The four broad groupings of learner identity are described as resistant,
The work of people and educational institutions to develop and maintain their identity, as it relates to being a learner, is conflicted, discontinuous, and can have an impact on behaviour without the overt knowledge of the participants. Developing an understanding of the underlying themes within the learning profiles can inform educational policy and practice in order to improve the engagement of disenfranchised regional learners. In addition it can improve learners’ perceptions of their relationships to educational institutions and their own social networks.
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# Table of Contents

1 Overview .................................................................................. 2  
1.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 2  
1.2 Significance ......................................................................... 3  
1.3 Statement of the Problem .................................................... 7  
1.4 Aims ..................................................................................... 9  
1.5 Research Question .............................................................. 10  
1.6 Research Design ................................................................. 10  
1.7 Limitations of the study ....................................................... 13  
1.8 Chapter Outlines: ............................................................... 14  
1.8.1 Chapter Two: Literature review ....................................... 14  
1.8.2 Chapter Three: Research methodology ......................... 15  
1.8.3 Chapter Four: Results and discussion ............................ 16  
1.8.4 Chapter Five: Summary, conclusions and implications ... 16  

2 Literature Review ...................................................................... 19  
2.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 19  
2.2 Social theoretical framework ............................................. 24  
2.2.1 Social theory ..................................................................... 24  
2.2.2 Critical theory ................................................................. 25  
2.2.3 Critical and social theories of practice ......................... 29  
2.2.4 Summary .......................................................................... 36  
2.3 Social, cultural and community capital ............................... 36  
2.3.1 Theoretical frameworks .................................................. 36  
2.3.2 Summary .......................................................................... 44  
2.4 Learning theory .................................................................... 45  
2.4.1 Introduction ...................................................................... 45  
2.4.2 Behaviourist theory ......................................................... 46  
2.4.3 Cognitive learning theory .............................................. 46  
2.4.4 Social theories of learning ............................................ 47  
2.4.5 Situated learning ............................................................. 50  
2.4.6 Learning communities .................................................... 53  
2.4.7 Lifelong learning ........................................................... 57
4 Findings and Discussion ................................................................. 137

4.1 Introduction ............................................................................... 137

4.2 Phase One Analysis: Thematic analysis of the interviews ..................... 138
  4.2.1 Individual and family contexts for learning .................................. 140
  4.2.2 Community contexts for learning ............................................. 142
  4.2.3 Educational contexts experienced across the lifespan .................... 143
  4.2.4 Formal and informal educational experiences ............................. 145
  4.2.5 Workplace contexts related to learning .................................... 147
  4.2.6 Individual’s insights into the nature of learning ......................... 148
  4.2.7 Critical learning incidents across the lifespan ............................ 150
  4.2.8 Synthesis of Phase One analysis ............................................ 153

4.3 Phase Two: Narrative Portraits .................................................. 154
  4.3.1 Portrait One ........................................................................ 156
  4.3.2 Portrait Two ........................................................................ 161
  4.3.3 Portrait Three ...................................................................... 167
  4.3.4 Portrait Four ....................................................................... 171
  4.3.5 Portrait Five ....................................................................... 174
  4.3.6 Portrait Six .......................................................................... 176
  4.3.7 Portrait Seven ...................................................................... 178
  4.3.8 Portrait Eight ....................................................................... 183
  4.3.9 Portrait Nine ........................................................................ 186
  4.3.10 Portrait Ten ......................................................................... 189
  4.3.11 Portrait Eleven .................................................................... 191
  4.3.12 Portrait Twelve .................................................................... 193
  4.3.13 Portrait Thirteen ................................................................. 196
  4.3.14 Portrait Fourteen ................................................................. 203
  4.3.15 Portrait Fifteen ................................................................. 209
  4.3.16 Portrait Sixteen ................................................................. 211
  4.3.17 Portrait Seventeen ............................................................... 215
  4.3.18 Portrait Eighteen ................................................................. 220
  4.3.19 Portrait Nineteen ............................................................... 224
  4.3.20 Portrait Twenty ................................................................. 231

4.4 Phase 3 Portraits’ thematic analysis ............................................. 236
  4.4.1 (Dis)Engagement in formal education and learning identities .... 237
4.4.2 Role of family and community identities.................................241
4.4.3 Strategies for managing learning and identity challenges ..........247
4.4.4 Identifying successes .................................................................252
4.4.5 Identity as a learner.................................................................254
4.4.6 Summary of Phase Three ........................................................256

4.5 Phase Four Theoretical Matrix .........................................................257
4.5.1 Persistent learner identity profile ...........................................261
4.5.2 Resistant learner identity profile .............................................268
4.5.3 Transitional learner identity profile .........................................273
4.5.4 Enacted learner identity profile ..............................................277
4.5.5 Purpose ..................................................................................283
4.5.6 Network: bonding, bridging and linking ties .........................285
4.5.7 Identity resources .................................................................289
4.5.8 Processes .............................................................................292
4.5.9 Alignment of identities ..........................................................297
4.5.10 Sense of agency .................................................................301
4.5.11 Access to information and resources ....................................303

4.6 Synthesis of the learner identity profile analysis .........................304

4.7 Synthesis of data analysis .............................................................310

4.8 Research findings and answering the research questions ............315

5 Summary, Conclusions and Implications .........................................325
5.1 Introduction ..............................................................................326
5.2 Summary ..................................................................................327
5.3 Conclusions of the study ............................................................338
5.3.1 Conclusion 1. ........................................................................339
5.3.2 Conclusion 2. ........................................................................339
5.3.3 Conclusion 3. ........................................................................340
5.3.4 Conclusion 4. ........................................................................341
5.4 Implications ..............................................................................341
5.4.1 Implications for provision of adult education pedagogy .................341
5.4.2 Implications for provision of adult education support ..................348
5.4.3 Implications for adult education systems and policy ....................349
5.4.4 Implications for adult education institutions ..............................352
5.4.5 Implications for research .........................................................355
5.5 Conclusion ..............................................................................................................355

6 References ..............................................................................................................360

7 Appendices ............................................................................................................387

7.1 Appendix One Non-school qualifications in regional areas .......................387
7.2 Appendix Two Plain Language Statement ......................................................388
7.3 Appendix Three Consent form ........................................................................389
7.4 Appendix Four Semi Structured Interview Schedule ..................................390
7.5 Appendix Five Analysis and comparison of the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Community Profile ..........................................................391
# Table of Figures

Figure 1 People aged 25-64 years with a non-school qualification by degree remoteness Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing. ..................................5

Figure 2 People aged 25-64 years: level of highest non-school qualification by degree of remoteness - 2006 Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing. ..........6

Figure 3 Claim-Affirmation Model of Modalities of Emergent Identity (Holmes 2002) ..................................................................................................................................................................................84

Figure 4 Research design framework .................................................................................................................................115

Figure 5 Research participant demography matrix ...............................................................................................................121

Figure 6 Semi structured interview schedule .........................................................................................................................126

Figure 7 Tabulated interview times ...........................................................................................................................................128

Figure 8 Narrative portrait analysis framework .........................................................................................................................134

Figure 9 Enacted learner identity theoretical analysis matrix ................................................................................................259

Figure 10 People aged 25-64 years with a non-school qualification by degree of remoteness Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing. ..................387

Figure 11 People aged 25-64 years: level of highest non-school qualification by degree of remoteness - 2006 Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing. ..................................................................................................................................................................................387
Chapter One: Overview
1 Overview

1.1 Introduction

Post-compulsory providers (both universities and vocational education and training (VET) providers) have particular, well-established identities informed by past experiences, relationships and interpretations of their stakeholders’ expectations. Long standing stakeholders of these providers also have established identities that match to varying degrees those of the providers. But what of those learners who have not historically seen themselves as part of formal adult education institutions or communities and who have therefore been disenfranchised from them? It is valuable to ask a number of questions, How do educational institutions connect with these disenfranchised learners? How do those learners respond to and potentially resolve the differences in identities about learning and workforce engagement between themselves and those of the established educational institutions? Addressing the disconnects between individuals, communities and educational institutions and their assumptions about engagement in learning activities involves understanding and being able to support the development of learner identities and relationships that inform and support engagement with post compulsory learning.

This thesis examines the key drivers of disenfranchised learners’ identities and the role of learning partnerships in both developing a learner identity that engages with post compulsory learning¹, and re-engaging regional learners. The research found that peoples’ identities related to learning, that is, their learning identities, formed a core part of the adults’ decision making across a range of educational experiences, institutions and purposes over their lives. An analysis of the participants’ portraits identifies and typifies the learner identities described by participants and provides a framework for describing learner identities and adapting educational institutions and experiences to support the development of empowered learner identities. The disparity between individuals’ learner identity and the learner identities that operated in

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¹The term ‘empower’ will be used as a shortened expression of ‘successful engagement with post compulsory educational institutions’ from now on. This is in accordance with Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2005 p. 309) definition of empowerment
learning situations, impacted significantly on the resources and models that learners accessed to maintain their learner identity and mediate their engagement in formal education.

The research explores the ways that many disenfranchised regional learners’ identities are constructed in opposition to those of educational institutions as educational institutions have presented themselves and that act to threaten the identities of many regional learners. Learner identities were connected to their communities: school, peer, family, local information networks and global information networks. Individuals’ strategies and resources to manage the intersection of these identities were also analysed in order to develop a learner identity framework. The framework describes the different learner identities that individuals draw on and provides a framework for understanding the underlying processes and resources. The ability of educators to manage the impact of any disparity between the reality of students’ experiences and their experiences of educational institutions or curriculum, influences students’ potential engagement in learning. The term ‘empowerment’ is used in this thesis to refer to successful engagement in formal education. Importantly, people’s identity or knowledge; their view of themselves, and the way they are identified by others, determines the ways they interact with educational institutions. This thesis then discusses the implications of these findings and outlines a series of recommendations for pedagogy, policy and practice that will support regional learners and providers. Of interest for professional educators are the influences of the learning communities, students develop to support their learning experiences and the roles learning communities’ members undertake as non-accredited partners in learning.

1.2 Significance

Participation in education and training is considered vital for a flexible and responsive workforce (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001) in a Western society characterised by an emphasis on a learning society, a knowledge economy and lifelong learning (Kearns, 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2000) yet with a strong connection between global connectedness and the well being of local and regional communities (Falk, 2001; Hugonnier, 1999). The Organisation for
Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) examination of 21 OECD countries found a correlation between investment in human capital, including improving engagement in formal education and national productivity (Bassanini and Scarpetta, 2002). The Australian Federal Government and Council of Australian Governments have identified the need to improve productivity through increasing educational participation and outcomes in the tertiary sector (Gillard 2008). The Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP has announced ‘through the Council of Australian Governments, (the Australian Federal Government aims) …to halve the proportion of Australians aged between 20 and 64 years without qualifications at certificate III level or above’ that in response to the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, the Australian Federal Government aims ‘that by 2025, 40 per cent of all 25-34 year olds will have a qualification at bachelor level or above’ and that by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be of people from low socio-economic backgrounds (Gillard, 2009 p. 1).

Improving the enrolment and qualification levels of adults is underpinned by understanding and being able to implement programmes that align with the underlying drivers of adults’ decision making about engagement in post compulsory education decision making.

Achieving an increase in the number of Australians with higher qualifications involves understanding the groups in Australian society who have the potential to significantly increase their participation and the pathways through VET to undergraduate qualifications. Such groups include regional and Indigenous learners who have disengaged from formal education and are underrepresented in higher level qualifications. The 2006 census demonstrates the number of people aged 25 to 64 years of age with a non-school qualification is inversely proportional to the degree of regionality or remoteness of their place of residence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). (see Appendix 1)

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2 Capitalising the word Indigenous follows the orthodoxy of referring to Indigenous Australians with a capital I, and using small i indigenous to refer to any indigenous group generically. The term Aboriginal is used when regionally appropriate.
The proportion of people with post school qualifications and level of the highest qualification over the same period also varies as the degrees of remoteness of the place of residence increases (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The table below shows that the highest qualification in major cities is a bachelor degree (19.1%) while in inner and outer regional areas the highest qualification is a Certificate III or IV (22% and 21.2% respectively). The people who live in remote and very remote areas predominately identify as Indigenous people who represent the smallest proportion of non-school qualifications in any area. A high proportion of the non-Indigenous people living in remote and very remote areas are employed in positions that require non-schools qualifications, for example, teachers, health workers and administrators. That is, in remote areas, Indigenous people account for 21.9% of the 43.2% of people with non-school qualifications and in very remote areas, Indigenous people represent 14.5% of the 35.6% of people with non-school qualifications.
Falk and Golding (1999), in articulating the vocational educational context in regional areas, as opposed to urban areas, found regional people have limited access to pursuing a range of aspirations, fewer opportunities to engage in work that is rewarding and locally based and have restricted access to a range of relevant vocational training that leads to qualifications. They found people in regional areas had reduced literacy levels, economic resources and interaction with learning communities to support individuals and groups.

Regional people represent a group with the potential to increase their levels of qualifications to meet equity and productivity goals. Any attempt to address the difference in qualifications levels needs to appreciate regional people’s reasons for engaging or disengaging from formal post compulsory education. The link between engagement in formal education and long term benefits for health, including mental health, wellbeing, employment and income have been well established (Karmel, 2007; Schwab, 1996; Vinson, 2007). The question for educators and policy makers, then, is why have regional people consistently lower levels of completed non-school qualifications despite the demonstrated positive influences on health, wellbeing, employment and income? This question suggests another question, how do some people achieve high level qualifications given similar backgrounds and opportunities?
1.3 Statement of the Problem
Considine, Watson and Hall (2005) in an analysis of Australian people who are not represented in VET enrolments noted there are two approaches commonly used to understand access and equity in education. These approaches focus on structural barriers or the individual characteristics of learners. While the structural approach identifies systematic and structural barriers that exist in the VET system to meet the needs of the Australian population, the individual focus analyses the ways individuals fail to fit the systems and structures that manage the population’s needs. They critique the focus on individuals as it ignores diversity within groups. An individualistic approach does not recognise the associated structural barriers as the focus is on attributes identified with an individual. On the other hand, a structural approach can ignore individuals and their reasons for wanting to engage or avoid accessing VET. Issues of multiple and cumulative disadvantage need to be considered and in broad focus may be ignored. Their study found social outcomes are important stepping stones to the achievement of economic outcomes and that social relationships are vital in successful programmes. Any study of under representation in formal education therefore needs to recognise, within their social context the complex interplay of influences on engagement in education and partnerships that impact on learning.

The OECD’s (2001) analysis of the determinants of school attainment found that social networks and norms were a more important foundation for learning across the lifespan than material inputs and pedagogical changes. International bodies such as the OECD now formally recognise the role of learning partnerships in achieving contemporary goals of developing knowledgeable, flexible workers and work practices in the pursuit of socioeconomic well being (OECD, 2001; Field, Hoeckel, Kis, and Kuczera, 2009). Falk (2001) noted the lack of correlation between employment and education and the assumption of government policy, that through accessing pre employment courses, employment skills based courses and literacy courses, people will become employable and employed. Of value for addressing disengagement of disenfranchised learners is to understand the drivers for engagement as experienced by disenfranchised people from a
similar background who have participated or rejected post compulsory education over their lives. Social capital theory has been used to analyse the interactions, networks and resources that operate in formal, informal and non-formal learning structures and processes.

Falk at el. (1999) noted the diverse ways of living in regional areas and the important role played by relationships, learning support networks and the importance of social activity through interpersonal relationships where learning, trust and credibility are generated by facilitating communication flow that achieves local outcomes. The disconnection between the understandings of the knowledge and skills that are accepted as valid and worth learning, can result in performance anxiety in students. In an environment that does not recognise their community membership and realities they believe they 'need to defend themselves against performance demands, which may mean sabotage or silence. To defend the self against devaluation, some students put much store on peer relations’ (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson and Wurst, 2004 p. 110). Lankshear and Knobel (2003 p. 179) found that addressing the discontinuities was influenced by the teachers’ lack of technical and content knowledge. Well-intentioned attempts at including the students’ knowledge by teachers who do not understand the context can result in educational practices that misinterpret or tokenise that knowledge and its references. There is a value in developing a connection to the complex uses and context of knowledge and recognising the related socially mediated practices in using that knowledge in the classroom. What is needed, then, is an understanding of, and the ability to implement, the pedagogies that recognize the social nature of learning and identity formation, through the communities in which people function and identify themselves.

The alienation and disconnection from formal education are reasons cited for disengagement from formal education and are explored by Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson and Wurst (2000, 2004) and Te Riele (2003 pp. 148-150) who noted the rigidity of school systems, negative relationships with teachers, lack of feeling accepted and supported or connection to the curriculum and their own lives each impact on students withdrawal from schools. Developing innovative and successful approaches to engage
disenfranchised regional learners in formal education necessitates an understanding of the ways people’s identities are entrenched in relationships within their networks, and in turn impact on the ways they manage relationships within the networks between their worlds and those of the formal education system. Falk and Balatti (2003) have indicated that a link exists between education and identity, that learners are affected by the ways they understand or define themselves, usually called identity and described aspects of identity in learning.

Understanding the key factors of learning engagement that impact on the different learner identities is dependent on understanding the identities on which individuals draw and the efficacy of those identities in negotiating new learning experiences. Just as learning is situated (Scott, 2001) and identities are informed by individuals’ contexts and practices (Gee, 1999) so learner identities are situated in their informing local, regional and global communities’ lifeworlds (Gee, 2003; Wenger, 1998).

1.4 Aims

The research aims to understand disparities between regional participants’ and school based constructions of learning impacts on students’ realities and assumptions about school institutions, curriculum and educators. The disjuncture may impact on students’ engagement in learning experiences that involve school based literacies and identities as learners in formal contexts. Specifically the research aimed to understand the nature of the relationships, with particular reference to the networks and trust that facilitate engagement in learning and the implications for practitioners, policy makers and post compulsory education in northern Australia. The findings sought to understand the influence of participants’ identities and their engagements in learning experiences in relation to the approach that training and learning facilities take to tailor learning for particular groups. The conclusions aimed to provide an understanding of identity as it relates to individuals’ perspectives of, and engagement within, a range of learning contexts and the implications for educational pedagogy, policy and practice.
1.5 Research Question
The research was conducted in a regional area of northern Australia that explored the following question with particular reference to adults from social groups in a regional area disenfranchised from educational institutions:

How does identity affect engagement with formal post compulsory education and training?

Related sub-questions are:

1. How do issues of identity relate to learning engagement?
2. What are the barriers related to identity that hinder active engagement in formal education and training?
3. How do some adults learn from their experiences to effect change in their lives and on the institutions they engage with?
4. What are the ways the adults develop the skills, knowledge and identity resources to effectively engage with and affect change in educational institutions?
5. What are the constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training?
6. What are the implications of answers to these sub questions for post compulsory learning providers?

1.6 Research Design
Previous research has not examined the identity factors behind learner and institutional engagement in the post-compulsory sector. This research must therefore adopts a theory-building approach rather than being able to test and existing theory. A critical narrative inquiry approach (Cortazzi, 1993) using ethnographic techniques (for example, narrative and in-depth interview) has been selected to best build a theoretical basis for the area in question, and capture the richness and depth of contributing experiences of disenfranchised learners who are the subject of this thesis. A purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990) is employed in this study. The groups are selected to best represent the different residential components of a semi-rural/rural area on the
outer fringe of a major northern city and utilize stratified purposeful typology with a modified snowball sampling strategy (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data is gathered from three representative groups from the region:

- Group A are non participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- Group B are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- Group C are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

The representatives of this region, and their networks, are described as part of a regional community. As they represent different networks, they do not necessarily know each other or have any point of direct connection. For this study, it was realistic to select twenty participants, as the interviews sought in-depth information gathered over a number of interview sessions, follow up discussions about the outcomes and many of the participants were wary of research and unaccustomed to divulging this kind of personal information at the outset. While they were incredibly generous in their support of the study and wanted to see improved understanding of their experiences and educational outcomes, it is not the norm for them to dwell on negative experiences or appear to complain about a commonly accepted negative experience: educational engagement. It is more appropriate to use humour to deflect the difficult memories and focus on dealing with the present day's good fortune and issues. While participants did this in the interviews, once they were comfortable with the research process and their role within it, they also ultimately went beyond to recall the detail and their feelings of educational experiences across their lifespan. Reflecting on the detail in their personal experience was potentially connecting to upsetting memories.

The participants all have some experience of formal education in their lives although they have not necessarily completed secondary school and/or post
compulsory education or training. All participants live in the target region and some also work in that region. The interview design aimed to capture the complex and interrelated data about identities in relation to engagement in post-compulsory education. In particular, the interview structure focused on the strategies and experiences that have enabled them to engage successfully in post compulsory education and training and related institutions. The question of what constituted 'success' was kept open-ended as to whether it was defined in predetermined or institutionally driven ways. Of interest are the strategies and experiences that enable them to want to engage in, learn and manage an institutionally based system that has excluded others. The questions for this group focus on their view of learning as it relates to their worlds and how this influences their engagement in post compulsory education and training. The questions allow for collection of data and consideration of other apparently extraneous factors, qualities which may influence the nature or quality of their learning.

The annotated transcripts are analysed using narrative analysis techniques (Marshall and Rossman, 1999 pp. 122-3) extended analyses about identity use a framework developed by Falk et al. (2003) and a social capital analytic framework based on the work of Woolcock (2001). Together, these provide an evaluation of the role of horizontal and vertical linkages as facilitators of learning engagement. The final analytic pass focuses on the nature of learning for the participants and develops learner identity profiles to describe different types of learner identities. Through the discussion of the findings, major themes are identified and explored through the different voices and contexts described by participants. An important focus of the analysis is the maintenance of participants' voices; that is, recording their story as it relates to its context as well as recording their understanding of identity. Minor themes are developed through the same process to develop a clear understanding of the relationship between identity and engagement in learning. These understandings are used to discuss and develop pedagogical concepts that relate to effective learning for people in regional areas.
1.7 Limitations of the study

There are a number of variables that may affect the validity or reliability of findings. Each of these variables is assessed for acceptability when balanced against the optimum approaches to develop accurate and reliable information about disenfranchised learners’ understandings and experiences of the relationships between identity and learning.

The sample size is small and does not attempt to be representative of all regional communities across Australia. The results of the interviews are therefore not intended to be generalisable but instead give insight into disenfranchised people’s priorities by building theory for subsequent testing. The small sample size enables in-depth data collection over time and the development of a data analysis methodology that involves participants and reduces the rate of error of interpretation of qualitative data. The small sample size is also intended to provide the opportunity to build strong relationships with disenfranchised learners who may be distrustful of institutionally based research and associated processes. These strong relationships are essential to elicit in-depth information about life events that are personal, possibly uncomfortable to recall and go beyond usual rhetoric and self-effacing approaches to discussing formal education.

The findings are based on small numbers and, as noted earlier, the results are not intended to be generalisable in the scientific sense. Participants had been involved in a range of educational experiences including primary school (as a student, parent and teacher), secondary school (as a student and teacher), vocational education and higher education to Ph.D. level.

The researcher is a participant in the study and the community from which the sample was drawn. There is a potential that the approach to participant selection and analysis would be biased by personal relationships. The purposeful participant selection assists in identifying participants that represent the demographic groups with different levels of participation in post-compulsory education. That the researcher is a member of the local community is of benefit in supporting the engagement of disenfranchised and rural people who may be reluctant to participate in research or discuss
experiences of formal education. This also supports identifying and discussing key issues that require local knowledge and common language to understand the references.

The opportunity for participation of participants at all stages of the research process improves trust in the process and accuracy of the analysis. There is a potential contamination of the data: Participants were only able to comment on their own data to minimise identification of other participants and contamination of others’ data.

The study does not analyse the institutional identities or the myriad of identities that operate in formal educational institutions, staff and systems. Institutional identities are presented as perceived by participants and the relationship to their communities, although it does provide a basis for making implications for understanding relationships between individuals, communities and institutions related to learning.

1.8 Chapter Outlines:

1.8.1 Chapter Two: Literature review
The literature review chapter outlines the critical social theory which provides an overarching framework for understanding the nature of learning, engagement, identity theory and practice and the approach to undertaking research with disenfranchised learners. This framework establishes the social nature of processes and systems that are mediated by socially constructed concepts of justice and power and their relationship to learning and identity practices, interactions and systems. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding the processes, networks, and resources that impact on the outcomes for individuals and communities engaged in knowledge production.

The chapter, then, discusses social, cultural, human and community capital theory development and considers the networks and resources that underpin engagement in learning and identity development and change over a lifetime as an individual who functions in relation to a range of social systems at a local, institutional and global level. What follows is an analysis of learning theoretical perspectives over time through a series of different paradigms that
have attempted to explain the process and structures involved in the acquisition, development and reflection on knowledge sharing in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. This culminates in a discussion of social theories of learning, with a particular focus on adult learning, community perspectives of learning across diverse knowledge systems and their relationship to social capital and identity theories. The discussion focuses any consideration of disenfranchised learners on more than the challenges within people’s lives and emphasises understanding the interactions between learners and the social worlds that inform those interactions.

Identity theory as an individual and social concept is then examined to demonstrate the mutable and complex nature of identity particularly in relation to engagement in learning across the lifespan. The ways social constructions of identity have functioned to exclude, privilege and define different groups are examined within a range of social processes. This provides a structure for identifying the work involved in developing an empowered learner identity and its relationship to learning and learning engagement.

Finally, the literature review chapter discusses research theory and methodologies that draw on critical and social research, particularly critical and reflexive ethnographic, participative and narrative based approaches to research. This discussion provides a basis for the optimal research methodologies and techniques to understand social practices and interactions within social systems.

1.8.2 Chapter Three: Research methodology

Chapter three describes in detail the research methodology utilised in the study. The research project is informed by critical social theory and undertakes a critical ethnographical approach to undertaking qualitative research. Critical ethnography (Thomas 1993) is designed to use knowledge 'to speak to an audience on behalf of the subjects as a means of empowering them' rather than speaking for the subjects. The study focuses on adults in a regional area who are proportionally underrepresented in adult education enrolments and include people from social groups historically disenfranchised from educational institutions. The twenty participants all live in a regional area
in northern Australia and represent a range of cultural backgrounds, including approximately 28% Indigenous people from distinct families, regions, employment and educational backgrounds. The collection of twenty adult learners' in-depth narratives about educational histories is used to identify the key themes in their learning experiences and through three stages of analysis reported in chapter four. The approach is participative and involves participants across the data collection and analysis stages.

1.8.3 Chapter Four: Results and discussion

In Chapter four, the major themes are identified and explored through the different voices and contexts described by participants. The in-depth interviews are presented as portraits that outline the key milestones in people's journey with learning and describe the key concepts and strategies that inform participants' experience. The key themes in the narratives provide a structure to portraits of participants' lifelong learning experiences. The analysis of the portraits is used to develop a learner identity framework. The framework draws on social perspectives of learning and identity and social capital theory identified in the literature review and participants narratives to describe the key features of different learner identities.

An important focus of the analysis is the maintenance of participants' voices within their contexts and understanding of identity. Minor themes are developed through the same process to develop a clear understanding of the relationship between identity and engagement in learning. These understandings are used to discuss and develop pedagogical concepts that relate to effective learning for people in regional areas. The results provide a framework for subsequent testing and refinement that incorporates the nature and characteristics of different learner identities and the interaction between learner identities and engagement in formal and informal learning.

1.8.4 Chapter Five: Summary, conclusions and implications

Chapter five summarises the thesis as a whole then presents the conclusions of the research findings and analysis. The conclusions include specifics related to the nature and operation of learner identities, the differentiation of learner identity resources and strategies, a new way of understanding the
Introduction

groupings of learning identity incorporating agency, and the nature of learner identities as social partnerships. At the completion of the thesis, the implications of these conclusions for educational policy, practice and research are put forward.
Chapter Two: Literature Review
2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research develops an understanding of the ways identity resources are related to engagement in learning experiences by adults in regional communities who are disenfranchised from post compulsory educational institutions. This literature review is framed within the social and critical theoretical constructions of social reality. The review commences by outlining the overarching considerations and clarifications related to social theory. It then outlines and analyses social capital theory and its development to provide a framework to understand the identity resources that function and are drawn upon through social interactions. Learning and identity are examined and understood as social practices connected to, and informed by, the ways individuals, local, workplace and global communities interact. These interactions, their nature and the informing frameworks are the central consideration of this study. Finally the tenets of social science are discussed with particular reference to the critical ethnographic and narrative theoretical frameworks and techniques that have informed the research methodology.

For at least a century, social theories have been developed to describe the ways social processes and structures intersect with people's lived experiences, as they function within the social order. The central aspect of socially based research is to define, scope and describe the particular dimensions of society that build a clear picture of the elements and their interactions. To date, there has not been a sufficient basis for understanding the role of learner identity as it relates to the learning engagement, balancing a range of community memberships that may support that engagement or not or effect on risk taking behaviour by learners in order to engage identities that support learner engagement.

Critical social theory (Calhoun, 1995; Carspecken, 1996; Leonardo, 2004), a synthesis of critical and social theories, provides this explanatory power. Critical social theory developed as a branch of critical theory (for example, Habermas, 1987; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005) itself, but draws for its analytical power on the added dimension of ‘critical’ analysis. ‘Critical’ here means using approaches that analyse the relationships between culture,
power and societies over time, place and institutions to understand the ways social and cultural reproduction operate to legitimate, reject and reinforce the social order. An understanding of critical social theory assists the research here to understand the practices that include, exclude and have the potential to transform society. An understanding of critical social theories in practice informs any interpretation of the ways roles, identities and knowledges are produced and reproduced through social interaction and learning. Theoretical frameworks, informed by critical social theories, describe the processes networks, and resources that impact on the outcomes for individuals and communities engaged in knowledge production.

The term capital has been used to describe the different forms of capacity and resources that are drawn upon, utilized and produced in societies. The capital that operates in society has been categorized in terms of the economic, language, cultural and social resources (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital was defined by Bourdieu (1993) and then developed through the work of the following. Putnam (2000), described social capital as the social connections through norms and reciprocity, Coleman (1990, 1997) described the social resources available to individuals and Fukyama (1995) developed the idea of trust in social capital. In addition, Portes (1998) separated social capital from its outcomes and identified the negative or exclusionary effects of social capital, and Woolcock (1998) defined the bridging, bonding and linking ties that connect the various actors in social capital. More recently Falk explored the concept of identity in relation to social capital and, with Kilpatrick (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000), defined the identity and knowledge resources that operate through social capital. Field (2005) analysed learning in terms of social capital and Flora (2008) defined community capital in terms of seven kinds of capital that include social capital.

Social capital has been explored in order to better understand the resources and connections between people and social processes that impact on social outcomes and impacts. The bonding, bridging and linking ties or links based on relationships informed by trust and reciprocity, describe the interconnections and interactions that occur within and across social systems. Social capital theory provides an heuristic for better understanding the
knowledge and identity resources that are accessed in shared learning environments (Falk et al., 2000), that are central to developing critical approaches to learning (Falk, 2001). Understanding the relationship of learning, knowledge and identity resources has the potential to address the inequalities and potentially normative effects of social capital that are evident in learning experiences.

This literature review focuses on those areas of activity that impinge on the learners who are the focus of this study. These areas include learning, particularly adult learning, communities of practice, identity and its relationship to social capital, critical theory as a framework for learning, specifically constructivist learning and multiliteracies as an explanatory concept relating to communicative practices and engagement (Billett, 2001; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998). The learning literature examines the cognitive and behavioural theories of, for example, Piaget (1999), Skinner (1972) and Bloom (1956) and more recent social theories of learning includes the work of Vygotsky (1934) and Engeström (Engeström and Middleton 1996). One strand of the latter social theories of learning is the work on communities of practice (Lave et al 1991). In this study, the notion of communities of practice will be utilised to provide the rationale for learning. Another strand relevant to this study that underlies the critical theoretical position of the study is constructionism (Crotty, 1998 p. 42ff).

Learning theory has developed over time through a series of different paradigms that have attempted to explain the process and structures involved in the acquisition, development and reflection on knowledge sharing in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. The move from behavioural to social and situated undertakings of learning, have brought the focus of research to social construction of knowledge and learning. Learning as a socially mediated practice is concerned with the interactions that occur within inequitable and complex social systems. The impact of understanding the social nature of learning has been an exploration of the world in which learners live, engage and negotiate their membership over time. Understanding the experiences of disenfranchised learners is more than recognising the challenges in their lives and understanding the interactions between learners and the social worlds.
that inform those interactions. As Wenger (1998 p. 229), stated 'Learning cannot be designed: it can only be designed for – that is, facilitated or frustrated'.

Identity is examined as a socially based concept that informs and is informed by interactions with, and between, peer, community, workplace and global communities. Falk et al. (2003) described the dimensions of identity in learning in terms of the processes, the individual, group or place experience and the identity resources that are drawn upon. These dimensions of identity are developed by Falk et al. (2003) who worked from the multidisciplinary basis of identity literature that includes psychology (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Erikson 1974; Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983), sociology (Bandura, 1977b; Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986), anthropology including Indigenous knowledge work (Rose, D'amico, Daiyi, Deveraux, Daiyi, Ford and Bright, 2002) and post colonial theory to a coherent framework for identity. The importance of identity in the willingness to engage in learning is supported, for example, in the case of gender identity, in women’s low participation in traditionally male dominated areas (Hillman and Rothman, 2003).

Understanding learners’ worlds, their behaviour, decisions and community memberships, is supported by understanding their identities; as a person, in relation to others, their abilities and experiences. Individual’s identities have been explored by psychologists while sociologists examine the ways identity operates through relationships; the social aspects of identity. This study explores learning engagement through the lens of a social construction of identity. By understanding the ways identity is informed by social processes, historicity, place and relationships. Identity is defined as plural, mutable and connected to negotiated forms of local and global community membership. Social constructions of identity have functioned to exclude, privilege or define different groups within social and physical processes. The ways identities operate, as interpreted through a critical view of the social order, impacts on learners’ experiences of engagement or disengagement of learning systems. Disengagement could be described in this context as an action initiated by the learner while disenfranchisement is initiated by the educational system. This
can be understood as identity work; the work that people undertake to maintain, challenge and transform their identities and potential futures.

Learner centered education has developed opportunities to adapt learning to the individual’s needs but in practice hasn’t recognised critical aspects of their learning identities: their communities and interactions. The notion of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) has helped re-direct our focus to the learning communities in which people operate and their integral role in situating and influencing participation in learning. Just as communities of practice are socially situated, so is learning; constructed by a range of historical, social, cultural and regional influences. These findings suggest a need for learning approaches that utilize a community centred approach to the learner and recognise identity in terms of influential learning communities which would effectively support learners. This study explores this notion and the implications for pedagogy and accredited or unrecognised facilitators in professional education. Through sharing the participants' voices, the learning communities that operate in their worlds and their impact on learning are explored.

Research methodologies that are developed through recognition of social constructions of knowledge and social participation seek to understand the ways social constructions of knowledge, cultural reproduction, identity and learning are informed by social theory. Social science research draws on qualitative methodologies that seek to understand and record the ways people, systems and social processes interact. Critical ethnography provides the approaches to make explicit the underlying power relationships in social institutions. Reflexive ethnography incorporates the researchers’ own experience to reflect on the subcultures and makes explicit the researchers’ subjectivities. Qualitative methodologies draw on a set of principles to ensure the validity of data and analysis. These are particularly informed by participative approaches and narrative approaches that open the research process to internal and external review. Understanding identity, including the key processes and elements of interactivity, has the potential to understand learners’ engagement and disengagement in a range of learning experiences in their lives and inform the provision of formal learning opportunities.
Finally the research related to the research methodology for the study draws on critical and social research and particularly critical and reflexive ethnographic, participative and narrative techniques as the best way to understand social practices and interactions within social systems mediated by power systems, qualitative methodologies that inform the development of effective data collection and analysis models in ways that understand the subjective nature of knowledge and society. The concluding synthesis draws the various threads together at the end of the chapter to provide a coherent organizing framework for analysing the research findings. Therefore the literature review describes the existing research in these areas: social and critical theories of knowledge, learning, identity and research with an emphasis on their interactions.

2.2 **Social theoretical framework**

2.2.1 Social theory

Social theory, the overarching theoretical framework for this study, is the general term used to apply to the analysis of social behaviour across social systems, and is utilized by a range of discipline areas. Research using social theory is therefore concerned with the analysis of social systems (Coleman, 1990) and the social forces that operate. Social theory developed from the work of Comte (1987) (social statistics and dynamics), Spencer (2001) (societal evolution), Durkheim (1966) (society is more than the sum of its parts), Weber (1978) (organisation processes) (further developed Clegg, 1990) and Marx (1976) (historical materialism) (see also Kuhn 2005). Over the 20th and 21st centuries social theorists have explored a range of perspectives that inform understandings of institutional and community relationships, their power relationships, behaviour and knowledge systems, as perceived by those groups and others. During the 1950s modern social theorists associated with the Frankfurt School, including Horkhiemer, Adorno, Macuse, Benjamin, Fromm, Habermas and Pollack (Wiggershaus, 1995; Kompridis, 2006) considered the critical aspect of theory and cultural domains. Postmodern theorists like Baudrillard (1988), Foucault (2002) and Scheper-Hughes (1995) critiqued modernism as the result of social, economic and cultural change and discuss the interaction and intersubjectivity of a
globalised society without a dominant centre of production of power (Crotty, 1998).

Denzin’s (1986 p. 194) analysis of the common issues that are being addressed by postmodern social theory identified the following:

(1) a desire to conceptualize societies as totalities: (2) an attempt to wed the micro and the macro levels of experience: (3) an effort to form sociology into a science of society: (4) a desire to speak to the conflict and crisis that appear in post- or late-capitalist societies. At the same time there is an undertheorizing of language, the human subject, the mass media, commodity relations in the consumer society, and the legitimation crisis surrounding science, knowledge and power in the modern world.

In light of recent events, social theorists such as Calhoun (2006) have continued to question the relationship between social institutions and the equitable distribution of resources, the role of the public and private institutions in society and who will benefit from that allocation of resources. Geuss (1981 p. 56) discussed the role of agents in understanding their society. He notes agents have their own beliefs, realities and critique those values to define and reproduce their knowledge and processes. Geuss (1981) and Denzin (1986) noted agents’ social reproduction processes evolve continually in response to changing contexts and issues. These social processes, their evolution and connection to other’s social processes impacts on the inclusion or exclusion of members and others as they are framed by their social contexts.

2.2.2 Critical theory

Critical theory is a paradigmatic sub-section of social theory (others include scientific realism and poststructuralist perspectives (Greene and Caracelli, 1997) and focuses on the relationships between culture, power and domination, the forms of meaning constructed in different cultural domains and the impact of media and other social discourses on culture and cultural production as it generates knowledge, influences, values and identities. As such, it provides some additional explanatory power in relation to this study of
learners’ identity as defined by socially mediated processes and structures. Critical theory is concerned with understanding cultural pedagogy, the ways cultural agents produce ways of making meaning within power structures. Agger (1998 p. 4) described knowledge in terms of critical social theory as ‘an active construction by scientists and theorists who necessarily make certain assumptions about the worlds they study and this are not strictly value free…(and that) society is characterised by historicity (susceptibility to change)’.

Many of the participants in this study are marginalised from mainstream social processes and institutions. Critical theory is therefore utilised here to analyse individuals’ engagement in learning and understand the ways those experiences demonstrate the power inequities and struggles that operate in societies. It is also used to explore and understand the role and consequence of privilege and marginalization in education and the ways these are contested and protected. Critical theory analyses the forces that prevent individuals from controlling the decisions that direct their lives and rejects economic determinism as economic factors cannot be separated from the many sources of societal power, as previously listed. In this framework, power is understood to be complex and ambiguous. Kincheloe et al. (2005 p. 309) described that ambiguity noting power is ‘oppressive and productive…we are all empowered and we are all disempowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our abilities. Power works to ‘dominate and shape consciousness’. Critical theory is concerned with the ability to empower, establish a critical democracy and engage marginalised people in reframing their roles in the sociopolitical processes.

Critical theory has, and continues, to develop approaches to understanding civil society and the ways their agents, institutions and systems interact. Critical theory was developed from the work of many theorists and draws on concepts developed by initiators of critical theory thinking, primarily Marx, Horkheimer, the Frankfurt School and Kant (Kincheloe et al., 2005), Habermas (1987) and considered the processes that operate between the analysis and production of the public sphere and people mediated by culture, communication and consciousness (Brookfield, 2001; Kincheloe et al., 2005,
Critical theory has many aspects, and this research is informed by the research elements that have informed thinking about learning and identity of disenfranchised learners. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2003 pp. 436-7) noted, with reference to foremost theorists over the past 70 years, critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourse, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system.

They note the development of critical theory has challenged the notion that, in nations in the West and uncomplicated free democratic societies, an individual’s views of themselves are strongly informed by social and historical influences.

Habermas (1987), in his description of a critical theory of society, challenged previous thinking based on history of philosophy and outlined a theory of communicative action. Critical theory can be understood through Habermas’ (1996) analysis of the ‘lifeworld’ that incorporated the action and knowledge systems that include systems of cultural reproduction and socialization such as schools and family and validity systems that communicate what is considered true or right. The public sphere, the filtered communication network of public opinion, communicates in the social sphere. People and institutions, the agents in that society, have an active role in influencing and changing the way communication flows and the interpretations that are made of issues and ideas. The power structures within society influence the ways that knowledge is legitimated, represented, organized and acted upon and the ways that analysis accords or challenges the status quo. The issue of interest for Habermas (1996) was: who is empowered to determine the agenda and decide communication flows? Language is recognized within the communication flow as

an unstable social practice whose meaning shifts, depending on the context in which it is used…is not neutral and objective.

Language is normalized in relation to discursive practices which are
defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant (Kincheloe et al., 2005, p. 310).

Foucault (1983, p. 218-9) in describing the ways power functions in educational institutions noted:

- the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organized there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another there, each with his own function, his well-defined character – all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power

Foucault noted power functions include the communications in education processes. Critical theory has been critiqued by minority groups’ theorists such as Tuhkawai Smith (1999), Mohanty (1984), Hill Collins (2000), who have challenged dominant views of understanding the world and have contributed to the recognition of the impact of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and diversity on framing understandings of social knowledge, structures and processes. These aspects explore individuals’ perceptions of their lifeworld as being impacted on by social and historical forces, to a greater extent than expected. Cultural production and education processes are now a part of critical social analysis (Giroux, 1983: Levinson and Holland, 1996).

Critical social theory is a synthesis of critical and social theoretical perspectives that places critique ‘at the center of its knowledge production’ (Leonardo, 2004, p. 12). Calhoun (1995) in his discussion of critical social theory challenges critical theory to understand social diversity within a framework committed to emancipatory principles and connects to a multidisciplinary focus. Critical social theory is concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourse, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (Kincheloe et al.,
Critical social theory has provided frameworks to examine educational institutions, processes and structures.

Freire (1973) in promoting emancipatory action in education asserted that transformative action is dependent on the direct participation of the oppressed in change. Freire contends that, through the process of conscientisation, enacted through situated groups of learners is to ensure the oppressed voice is heard and is transforming. Apple (1998 p. 423) argued that ‘…(e)ducation is deeply implicated in processes of social and cultural differentiation’ and change can only be understood by examining the multiple levels and ways that power operates within education as a social process. Leonardo (2004 p. 13) noted that critical social theory critiques ‘systemic and institutional arrangements, how people create them, and how educators may ameliorate their harmful effects on schools’. In particular, critical theoretical perspectives recognize and name oppression and the ways it operates, working from the assumption that oppression exists and is a formidable force in people’s lives.

Critical social theory informs this research project’s construction and analysis of knowledge as it is produced in the social world mediated by issues of power and control. The ways that critical social theory assists in understanding the reproductive and emancipatory potential of educational systems is explored in detail in the next section. This is not to imply that critical social theory always has the answers, rather, it provides a framework to ask questions, to name and challenge inequalities. By understanding that knowledge is constructed in social contexts and the relationships between power, control and educational systems, this study will be able to better interpret participants’ experiences and develop a model for explaining learners’ experiences and the implications for educational provision.

2.2.3 Critical and social theories of practice

Critical and social theorists have informed understandings of the structures and processes within society. The impact of these theories in relation to learning, education and social and cultural reproduction is evident in critical perceptions of knowledge, agency, cultural and social practice. A consideration of learning and engagement in formal and informal learning experiences is informed by an analysis of key concepts within the social order.
Developing a sound understanding of critical and social theories in practice, provides a basis for examining the key elements in learning engagement as a critical social practice, particularly learners who have been disenfranchised over their lifetime from a range of educational institutions. Lave et al. (1991 p. 50-1) in their description of a social theory of practice noted the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing. It emphasizes the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of thought action of persons-in-activity. This view also claims that learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted; objective forms and systems of activity, on the one hand, and agents’ subjective and intersubjective understandings of them, on the other, mutually constitute both the world and its experienced form.

For Bourdieu, knowledge is socially constructed, mediated and open ended, developed through individual and collective action. A social theory of practice is used to understand the practices that inform social systems and institutions and impact on individuals and groups in society. Bourdieu (1990), in describing habitus, the social constructed systems or principles that generate and organize practice and representations, explored the essentially socially negotiated nature of meaning. Habitus is historically produced, producing individual and group activities, social practices can be understood in terms of the conditions under which they are generated and implemented, and the interrelationship between the social worlds that habitus performs, while concealing it, in and through practice (Bourdieu 1990). Cultural production and reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Bourdieu, 1997) occurs in a contested social world, where agents contest what is legitimate, and how it should be managed and communicated. As Bourdieu (1990) noted, legitimacy is defined by the different groups in society which extends to the hierarchy, bourgeoisie mass popular culture. He stated that within the field of
production, the relationships within and between individuals and institutions are continually generated.

Hesmondhalgh (2006) noted that Bourdieu’s work has been critiqued as having little analysis of large scale mass media cultural production. Through his work on cultural reproduction theory, Bourdieu also described the ways schools operate to ‘reproduce rather than transform existing structural inequalities’ (Levinson et al., 1996 p. 5). Lauglo (2000 p. 167) contended that there is a need to critique the work on cultural reproduction as it doesn’t explain social advancement and fluidity demonstrated through individual success of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds who do not have the background resources deemed to be successful in education. The resources drawn upon by learners and ties that operate between learners and learning communities to mediate engagement are described in the social capital literature. This will be examined in the next section.

Carspecken (1996) proposed that the general form of system milieu is reproduced during the course of normal social routines: ‘reproduction occurs when people act consistently with respect to broadly distributed conditions. ‘Acts are always free, in principle, to act against such conditions – to challenge them or transform them’ (Carspecken, 1996 p. 38). Giddens (1976) in his discussion of social systems as a production of agents’ transaction describes action as agency, the ongoing flow of people’s real and considered acts as part of the events that comprise the social order. He noted institutions are a result of human agency and that acts are situated and as such connected to historically and culturally informed modes of activity. The degrees to which agents’ articulate their reasons for action are subject to tacitly understood shared knowledge (Giddens, 1979). Action is reflexively monitored by agents within the context of rationalizing that action, which means that individuals’ reflexive monitoring of their behaviour is informed by the context of and the other agents operating in the relevant setting. As such agents’ reasons for action ‘stand in relation of some tension to the rationalisation of action as actually embodied within the stream of conduct of the agent’ (Giddens, 1976 p. 57). Understanding students’ sense of agency and self efficacy in the learning situation and the social influences that impact
on their engagement in education informs our understanding of educational practice.

Bandura (1977a) found that an individual’s beliefs about their efficacy influences their engagement, effort, persistence and choice. In terms of education, this means ‘students with a high sense of efficacy are more likely to participate readily, work hard, and persist in the face of difficulties, success then led to building.’ The impact of self efficacy on persistence and consequently skill acquisition, directly and indirectly has been supported by the work of Schunk (1981). Zimmerman (1995) described self efficacy measures as judging abilities to undertake relevant tasks, being context dependent, multidimensional and connected to different ways of working and is measured prior to undertaking an activity. He contended that embedding efficacy theory in a social theoretical framework ‘can integrate diverse bodies of findings in varied spheres of functioning’ (Zimmerman, 1995 p. 205). Self efficacy is developed primarily by master experiences that provide authentic evidence of whether a person has what is needed to succeed. Zimmerman (1995, 2000) and Bandura (1977a, 1982) noted success builds belief in one’s ability and modeling by observing similar people succeed impacts on self efficacy, the greater the similarity the more convincing, the corollary is that observing unsuccessful engagement reinforces a poor sense of self efficacy.

Social systems are essentially involved in human activity; they are patterned human activities that require continuous reproduction to exist. Giddens (1990) has described the relationships and interactions between as ‘structuration’ which is understood in terms of the mutual dependence of agency and structure that has the potential to enable and constrain social actors’ behaviours. Education institutions and processes ‘contribute to the production and reproduction of the overall patterns of social, economic, political and cultural difference, differentiation and distinction’ (Thomson 2002 p. 6), this includes the maintenance of the status quo and change: emancipatory or otherwise. Zimmerman (1995, 2000) noted that a sense of efficacy is not centered on taking on a set of habits, development of self efficacy concerns the acquisition of the socially constructed tools to respond to continually changing situations in life. Zimmerman (1995), Bandura (1977a), Wood and
Bandura (1989) found that those with a strong sense of efficacy can imagine themselves succeeding, while those with a low sense of self efficacy visualize failure and that a strong sense of self efficacy was required to stay focused on activities in the face of challenges that have social and personal repercussions.

The notion of self efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1982) is supported by modeling that provides a series of strategies for managing the context, and social persuasion that affirms the ability of people to achieve, which suggests the opposite, that negative modeling and beliefs about people are also powerful in reducing a sense of self efficacy. The concept of community efficacy has been explored by Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2007), was developed through considering the impact of community participation, shared values and norms, extensive networks and previous experiences of success through perseverance on feelings of efficacy; consequently, this concept describes failure as undermining efficacy. Effective strategies to manage feelings of efficacy described as being related to the ability to manage stress in times of uncertainty, being able to turn potentially negative experiences into positive ones, to build positive experiences and work across systems. The connection between social systems and the physical environment have been explored by Nespor (1994) and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002). This connection between the physical and the social recognises the importance of understanding local places or any places as not being distinct from social experience rather they are linked to social relations and networks of power (Solomon Boud, and Rooney, 2003 p. 118). For Gruenwald (2003 p. 647) place is profoundly pedagogical as it describes centres of experience, places teach us about how the world works, and how our lives fit into spaces we occupy. Further, Gruenwald noted that as occupants of particular places with particular attributes place shapes our identity and, therefore, our possibilities, that is, places make us.

Social institutions and the inherent elements of social order, are understood through the framework of the embedded knowledge systems that inform the societal structures’ norms and practices (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Knowledge is socially constructed, Berger et al. (1966) found that society and
Institutions are produced by people, people are socially produced and then experience the world they have created objectively and with the transmission of that social world to the next generation, the whole process is enacted. As discussed by Wenger (2004), the membership in terms of a range of local and global communities informs individual’s view of themselves and others, this forms their identity. Berger et al. (1966) described the ways that the institutions require legitimisation and justification, institutions are understood in terms of the knowledge of its members; this knowledge institutionalizes members' behaviour and intersections. ‘Since this knowledge is socially objectivated as knowledge, that is, as a body of generally valid truths about reality, any radical deviance from the institutional order appears as a departure from reality’ (Berger et al., 1966 p. 51). Knowledge is fundamental to the functioning of society, ordering the world, the language to describe it, understanding and reproducing social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Knowledge that is utilized by communities contains tacit knowledge, that is, knowledge that is implicitly represented and developed through practice and connected to specific contexts and relationships (Polyani 1966). The language to describe community knowledge is difficult for community members to articulate and codify, it is embedded and developed through shared practice and shared most efficiently through established, trust based relationships (Field, 2005). Levine and Moreland (1991) described cultural knowledge as the shared thoughts of community members, to a large extent these groups of thoughts are implicit and tacit in the group’s interactions; their language and behaviour. Cultural knowledge is a way to make meaning of experiences rather than another form of knowledge. For Widdicombe (1998, p. 197) ‘the exercise of power, the production of knowledge, and institutional practices work together to produce multiple, overlapping and contradictory discourses which in turn create different types of subjectivities. Some subject positions are long-term, others temporary and fleeting; therefore the self, which depends on the changing positions we take up or resist, is in constant flux’.

Gore (2001) recognised the importance of understanding the ways power relations operate at a micro level of pedagogical practice that function through surveillance, normalisation, exclusion and distribution. Understanding the social practices related to learning, the representations of knowledge systems
and governance and their impact on learners, provides insight into the processes and institutions that operate and ways to proactively respond to the outcomes. This is particularly valuable in highlighting the invisible but transformative processes that impact on learning engagement and outcomes. Scott (2001 p. 32) described participation in learning as involvement in a social practice, which transforms both the learner and the practice. This practice is differentiated and stratified socially, impacting on the content, context and pedagogy of learning experiences.

For Scott, learning activities are essentially engaged in the broader relevant social based structures and discourse and learning is embedded in the knowledge and power relationships in the structures and pedagogies employed in learning situations. Activities in defining and reinforcing social systems and people’s roles within them include knowledge systems, language and literacies, which are located in social practice and structures. That language is socially based is demonstrated in that the correct language to use is context specific, a context determined by the social norms and expectations of the situation and its participants. Gee (1996) noted language incorporates more than words, the language we use to communicate includes people’s actions and the interaction between them. Gee observed that our words and actions are also understood in terms of the values, beliefs or attitudes that are expressed and (re)interpreted that link the message to its intent and social, cultural and historical location or reference. Within this broader framework, literacy is described as a communicative practice (Grillo, 1989) a channel for language and communication.

Literacies are, then, recognised as social practices, located not only socially, but culturally and historically (The New London Group, 2000; Lankshear et al., 2003; Gee, 2003). Literacy practices are the relationships between reading and writing and the social structures in which they operate and are situated (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič, 2000; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995). Street’s (1995) approach to literacy synthesised the technical and cultural or social aspects of literacy as essentially connected. Lankshear et al. (2003) noted the term literacy indicates competence or proficiency. Consider the meanings attributed to financial literacy or computer literacy. These indicate
proficiency in understanding and managing money matters or with using computers. Literacies, then, are understood to be more than coding and encoding written text or replicating existing power hegemonies based on proficiency in using texts.

2.2.4 Summary
A critical understanding of social theory seeks to develop models and explanations that describe agents, institutions and systems that interact and the impact of power structures on the ways knowledge and behaviour are accepted, rejected or mediated. Representations of power and justice are connected to the socially constructed notions of ethnicity, culture, gender, discourse, social stratification and cultural systems among others socially informed systems. A socially constructed view of social processes; the knowledge agency, cultural and social practices, informs an understanding of social institutions and their drivers. As learning is a social practice, conducted in relation to social institutions, a critical view of learning supports an understanding of the ways power relations operate in learning structures and the cultural reproduction of social and cultural patterns. Theoretical frameworks, informed by critical social theories, describe the processes, networks, and resources that impact on the outcomes for individuals and communities engaged in knowledge production.

2.3 Social, cultural and community capital
2.3.1 Theoretical frameworks
Bourdieu’s work in describing cultural reproduction has been discussed earlier in order to understand the socially mediated nature of knowledge, the ways social systems reproduce knowledge and the contested views of what is considered legitimate in social systems. His work has been used in the development of the concept of social capital. Social capital assists in understanding learning as embedded in networks (Field, Schuller and Baron, 2000 p. 261), the resources that are drawn upon through learning engagement, connections through ties that link, include and exclude learners from a range of communities. Social capital theories assist in understanding the tensions that inform engagement and disengagement of learners.
Bourdieu (1984), in his analysis of cultural production discussed capital as the powers and useable resources that individuals possess or draw on, this could include economic, language and cultural knowledge resources. Bourdieu (1986) referred to three forms of capital; economic, cultural and social capital, although he later added functional, linguistic, personal, political professional and symbolic (Bourdieu 1991). Cultural capital is described in terms of its’ three subtypes embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Bourdieu claimed that the embodied states relate to the capital developed through socialisation and enculturation and are related to a person’s habitus, the objectified state relates to cultural artefacts that are owned or consumed as part of a cultural practice and the institutionalised state which relates to the recognition by institutions of cultural capital, such as a qualification or job title and is used to convert cultural capital to economic capital.

For Bourdieu (1997) social capital is the collected resources; actual and potential, linked to ownership of a resilient network of relationships that are institutionalised to varying degrees and based on relationships of shared recognition and provides the members with the support of collectively-owned resources. He took an instrumental view of social capital, discussing the ways owners of social capital deliberately construct elements of the social space to create the resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is mediated by people and depends on the context, time and space in which it is located. While noting that social capital is a neutral resource, he explored the mediation of social capital within the social order, and the ways that power structures impact on the benefits or otherwise experienced from utilizing social capital. Bourdieu described social and cultural capital outcomes as reducible to economic cultural capital although the processes of social and cultural capital are more than economic processes. He also claimed social capital had a multiplier effect on the other two forms of capital.

Coleman (1994 p. 300) developed the concept of social capital in a parallel process and defined the concept of social capital as a ‘particular kind of resources available to an actor’ made up of a ‘variety of entities’ which include ‘some social structures and actors – people or corporate within the structure’. He describes social capital in terms of the set of resources that are inherent in
families’, communities’ and social organisations’ relationships. Social capital can be accessed for the socialisation and cognitive development of young people. For Coleman, most applications of social capital occur as a consequence of activity undertaken for social purposes where there is little social capital investment (1994 p. 312). Forms of social capital identified by Coleman (1994) include establishing trustworthiness, expectations and obligations to create information channels and establishing social norms and associated sanctions. He described trustworthiness in terms of obligation and reciprocity mediated by social networks and contracts (Coleman 1994). Social capital then contributes to the creation of the shared norms in closely connected communities and embargo deviation from those norms. Coleman (1990, 1994) described ‘closure’, the dense multiple relationships between people and institutions, between networks, and a shared identity, as supporting the creation of social capital. Coleman extended the scope of the concept to encompass the social relationships of non-elite groups, seeing social capital as an asset for addressing disadvantage.

Putnam (2000) distinguished social capital from physical (objects) and human capital (individuals’ properties) and describes social capital in terms of connections among people, and the properties of those connections: social networks, the norms related to trust and reciprocity (Putnam 1993). Putnam (1996) contended human and physical capital is owned by individuals while social capital is generated by and benefits the members of a social structure. For Putnam (1993), social capital is related to the attributes of social structures that contribute to the efficiency of society to facilitate coordinated action, such as trust, norms and networks. Putnam (1996) explored the ways social interactions act to support people to build communities, make commitments to each other and develop a network that creates a sense of belonging, to enable actors to pursue shared goals and impacts of social outcomes. Putnam (2000) made the distinction between bridging and binding social capital in relation to organisations. Field (2005), in discussing critiques of Putnam’s work, noted that Putnam viewed social capital as a form of social good and unproblematic, failing to address issues related to power and control and his lack of recognition of the role of political decision making in impacting on developing structures that enable civic activity.
Fukuyama (1992) focused on the concept of trust in considering social capital; trust is the most pervasive cultural characteristic that conditions culturally based engagement. Fukuyama (1995) contended that in creating and understanding social and economic order trust is the belief that honest, predictable and co-operative behaviour in a community is based on shared values, that monitor and is controlled by the moral agreements that underpin relationships rather than by legal agreements. Mutual trust, then, regulates behaviour in relation to others in the group, the circumstances that impact on success are evident in the ethically based habits and reciprocal responsibilities within the group and arises from the community’s expectation ‘of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms’ (Fukuyama 1995 p. 27).

Portes (1998) defined social capital as agents’ ability to gain benefit from membership in social structures. Portes’ analysis of Bourdieu’s work was critical of over valuing close ties and playing down the role of loose or weak ties. He critiqued Coleman for having weak definitions open to naming many attributes as social capital. Portes (1998) cautioned analysts of social capital to ensure the definition of social capital is separated from the outcomes claimed, being able to demonstrate an evidence base to show change over time and to isolate the impact of social capital and to systemic understand the historical basis for social capital in a community and over claiming the impact of social capital.

In relation to this study, social capital theory (Woolcock, 1998; OECD, 2001) provided the final necessary set of literature concerning the ways in which people engage with or are disenfranchised from learning institutions and the ultimate socioeconomic impact of those relationships. Woolcock (1998 p. 185), through his work examining social capital in action in community development, asserted that social capital should be understood in terms of ‘its sources rather than its consequences’ and describes social capital as ‘encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit’ (p155). Any description of forms of participation in learning is informed by an understanding of the nature of the participants’ bonding, bridging and linking ties as described by Woolcock (2001). These ties impact
on the social capital that operates in networks and relationships (Grootaert, Narayan, Nyhan Jones, and Woolcock 2004). Bonding social capital is described (Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000) as the strong connections between like-minded people, in a homogenous community, that acts to include or exclude, benefit its members and reinforce social cohesion.

Bonding social capital describes the ties between people who have similar socioeconomic characteristics and often know each other such as family members, neighbours, friends (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000); bonding ties are related to sharing and internalising achievement norms, high levels of reciprocity and likely to support formal education participation although when ‘associated with norms of low achievement, it is more likely to discourage participation in formal education and training’ (Field, 2005 p. 32). Bridging social capital describes the ties across heterogeneous groups, people who do not share the similar demographic characteristics, with loose connections that act for cooperation and connection across institutions, communities and their members (Gittell et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000). Those communities and individuals ‘may well be associated with formal education and training but may also offer alternative – and arguably more reliable – ways of gaining access to new ideas, information and skills’ (Field, 2005 p. 32).

Woolcock (1998) asserted that bonding and bridging social capital can have opposing effects as inclusion and exclusion from different groups place a person or a community in conflict. Putnam (2000) and Narayan (1999), too, emphasised the tensions and tradeoffs that exist between bonding and bridging social capital. That is, strong ties of inclusion and identification within a homogenous community can act in opposition to engagement in broader heterogeneous networks. Woolcock (1998) also identified linking social capital that relates to vertical connections across stratified communities and intuitions that are dissimilar. Linking social capital has been described by Woolcock (2000) as the vertical connections between people, institutions and resources where, according to Field (2005 p. 34) ‘trust and reciprocity may be circumscribed by competing demands’. Like bridging social capital, linking social capital offers different ways of accessing information. Each has its
benefits and weaknesses in terms of learning engagement and operate in contrasting ways (Field, 2005), more is not necessarily better.

Leonard and Onyx (2003 p. 225) asserted that as ‘loose and strong ties are not synonymous with bridging and bonding’ and people connect to those from other groups through their own strong ties, society operates on a model where groups connect through chains of intersecting groups where those groups have strong internal bonds. Falk and Surata (2007 p. 320) suggested that ties are better described as a ‘specified set of interactions’ as the term ties infers that people operate one tie which is dependent on a relationship. They found that interactivity is classified in terms of interactive fields and their stages of production, or the relationships between those people who are interacting: an interactive set that shares a purpose or outcomes; the type of interactive set, bonding, bridging or linking tie and the identifying the ‘interactive productivity’ as it occurs. Lauglo (2000) explored the nature of engagement of immigrant youth in schooling. He noted the dichotomy of personal efficacy that empowers change and maintains strong community membership. Lauglo (2000) asserted that a strong individual sense of efficacy is not necessarily in conflict to maintaining strong ties as constructive engagement with schooling depends on the group, ‘presumably on the norms that prevail in that group’ and that ‘(p)urposeful engagement with the world is activated in most human beings whenever there is a clear and present need’ (p167).

Onyx and Bullen (2000) in a study of social capital in small communities described the four building blocks associated with capacity building: feelings of trust and safety, tolerance of diversity, proactivity in social contexts, appreciation of one’s life values, these are linked to arenas of operation such as participation in community, neighbourhood connections, family and friendship connections and work connections. They found that rural communities had higher overall levels of social capital compared to small outer metropolitan and inner city communities particularly in relation to trust and safety, participation in community and neighbourhood connections but lower levels of proactivity in social contest and tolerance of diversity.

Johnson, Headey, and Jensen (2005 p. 26) asserted the fallacy of assuming high social capital is positive and note there are some beneficial or harmful
social, political and economic consequences of increased social capital. Johnson et al (2005 p. 49) cautioned that the measurement of social capital, the measurement of the relationships between structure and content needs to be assessed empirically rather than assumed.

It is a mistake just to assume that community groups and networks are always benign, and are characterised internally or in dealings with other groups by trusting, cooperative or pro-social relationships.

Field, Schuller and Baron (2000 p. 250) in their analysis of social capital described the relationships between actors and networks they create, where social capital is measured by participation in networks and linked to economical and diffuse outcomes related to social cohesion and generating more social capital. They noted human capital focuses on the individual, and is measured by educational qualifications and in relation to income or productivity.

Falk et al. (2000) defined social capital in terms of the accrued knowledge and identity resources that communities access for their own purpose. Falk et al. (2000) differentiated between social capital and the processes that produce social capital when they explored the ‘nature of the interactive productivity between the local networks in a community’. Falk et al. (2000) and Falk and Balatti (2002) described the resources that are accessed in the collective processes associated with learning environments. Falk (2001) described social capital in terms of knowledge resources and identity resources. Knowledge resources include people and common resources that support action through the interactions of people. Knowledge resources are described as the internal and external community networks, available knowledge and skills, sites of communication, community values and the rules or procedures that govern behaviour. Identity resources are concerned with people’s need to change and foster identities to encourage self confidence and a willingness to act for the communities’ benefit. While each of these are important they are only used or useful when ‘brought into play through the interactions between people’ (Falk 2001 p. 6). Identity resources include ‘(c)ognitive and affective attributes, self-confidence, norms, values, attitudes, vision, trust (and) commitment to community’ (Falk 2001 p. 6). Falk argued that understanding
the reciprocal intersections between knowledge and identity resources is key to ‘critical learning’ (Falk 2001 p. 6-7). Falk et al. (2000), noted that knowledge and identity resources are crucial in the development of social capital, these resources are only of use through interaction, as such engagement is important in their utilisation. Falk et al, (2000 p. 1) have used the term ‘interactive productivity’, to describe social capital production and as a consequence, its impacts, outcomes or products.

Flora (2001, 2004, 2008), developed a community capitals framework which incorporates seven forms of capital, critical in ensuring programs address issues in systems. They operate at a community level to result in more than the sum of the parts. The community capitals are informed by Durkheim’s (1902, 2001) sociological ‘science of social facts’ view and seeks to explain individuals' behaviour in terms of their attitudes and characteristics and communities behaviour in terms of their structures and collective histories.

Flora described community capitals as resources that can be reduced, saved or invested to produce new resources. She described capital as the long term investment of new resources. The different forms of capital are means to an end and an end in themselves and need to be balanced with each other and investments to develop sustainable strategies. Flora (2008) has discussed community capital and the conflicts over access and its use as seven types:

1. Natural capital refers to the natural, location based assets connected to weather, natural resources, natural beauty, geographic isolation. Access to resources is socially, culturally and regionally based and involves conflict,

2. Cultural capital refers to people’s traditions, languages and ways of being, interpreting and acting within the world,

3. Human capital refers to the abilities and skills people bring to develop their resources, access other resources and knowledge to identify effective practice, increase understanding and access data that will invest in community capital development,

4. Social capital refers to the networks of people, organisations and the connections that generate action. Connections include trust,

5. Political capital refers to a group’s ability to influence regulations and their enforcement that decide the ways resources are distributed and used and contribute to community well-being. Political capital refers to access to power, connections to resources, institutions and power brokers,

6. Financial capital refers to the financial resources available for a community to invest in capacity building, underwrite key activities and accumulate wealth for future development

7. Built capital describes the infrastructure that supports and can impact on the quality of other capitals

Flora (2008) contended that the first investment in community capital development is in bridging and bonding social capital, investing in the time to build trust and a sense of mutual commitment and to work with diverse groups in society. Falk et al. (2007 p. 309-10) have critiqued community capitals as ‘it does not indicate how these resources are made available for use in achieving socio-economic outcomes, and this is the notion of interactive productivity’. They argued the resources that are required to achieve different purpose are related to the purpose, place and time, and as such the ‘interactive ties’ differ. They noted that social science research needs to see people as connected to interactions with others, objects and places.

2.3.2 Summary

The resources accessed and produced through social engagement, related to social and other forms of capital, are engaged through social processes such as norms, trust, reciprocity, networks and interactivity. The connections are defined in terms of bridging, bonding and linking ties (Woolcock and
Sweester, 2002) that describe the ties within, between and across social groups. The knowledge and identity resources (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000) that underpin social capital production are useful when enacted through interactions between people. It is the development of an understanding these resources, and the nature of the interactions, that informs a consideration of social processes such as learning. Describing the interactive nature of learning within social systems by drawing on social and cultural capital, bonding, bridging and linking ties, provides a framework for examining disenfranchised learners experiences and the key reasons for making decisions about engagement in formal learning systems.

2.4 Learning theory

2.4.1 Introduction

The socially mediated nature of society, knowledge and resources has been established in the previous sections. An understanding of the nature of learning and development of learning as a social process is central in understanding the connections between identity, learning and engagement. Learning is the ‘active process by which we engage with our changing environment and try to take control of our lives’ (Field, 2005 p.3). Gee (2003:26) noted that learning is involved with understanding how to ‘situate (build) meanings for that domain in the sorts of situations the domain involves’. Wenger (1998) described learning as social and experienced as part of social contexts where people utilise their relationships to engage in meaningful experiences where they negotiate their shared understandings of the world.

The terms formal, informal, non-formal and incidental learning have been used to describe learning as it relates to different levels of formal recognition through qualification. Formal learning relates to that which is recognised and assessed through a formal institution and qualification, non-formal learning relates to education that occurs through organisations whose main purpose is non-qualification focused, informal learning that relates to the lifelong, supported learning that occurs through daily life and work. It is unorganized, rather than involved specific instruction. Incidental learning, then, is the learning that occurs when people are unconsciously engaging in learning,
although this may not be accidental (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Jeffs and Smith, 1990; Colletta, 1996; Hamadache, 1993; Field, 2005).

As Tough (1979) found, the difference between formal and informal learning is the intent of the learner; the degree to which learners pursues education in a programmed or experiential way. Learning transcends classrooms and workplaces, it is a ‘continuous, cultural process – not simply a series of events… organizational learning is as much about what happens outside formal learning programs as it is about the programs themselves’ (Rosenburg, 2001).

2.4.2 Behaviourist theory

Behaviourist theory was developed from psychology and focused on observable changes in behaviour, Pavlov (1927) described classical conditioning, learning as a reflex action responding to unconditioned stimuli, Skinner (1974) developed thinking about learning operant and understood behaviour as a consequence to experiencing a conditioned stimuli. According to Skinner, students are passive, the learner starts as a clean slate, and their learning behaviour is shaped by positive or negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement would provide stimuli to encourage or reward preferred behaviour while negative reinforcement such as punishment or withholding would decrease the likelihood of repeating that behaviour. In this paradigm learning is a change in the learner’s behaviour and mediated by previous reinforcement, the antecedents of learned behaviour is related to previously experienced consequences (Atherton, 2005). Schooling then would provide a series of connected experiences that reinforce positive behaviours related to learning in a hierarchy of lower to higher order skills (Roblyer, Edwards, and Havriluk, 1997).

2.4.3 Cognitive learning theory

Cognitive learning theorists are interested in the brain’s thinking processes that inform learning. In analysing the constructs of learning, cognitive theorists are interested in internal locus of control and in the Atkinson-Shiffrin memory model (Atkinson and Shiffrin 1968), encoding information to move from sensory, short to long term memory are important. Burns (1995 p. 99) conceptualised ‘learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour with
behaviour including both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions’. Tolman (1932, 1959) proposed an understanding of learning as a cognitive process, that is, learning could occur without reinforcement or behavioural change and results in an organised set of knowledge. Gestalt psychologists (such as Wertheimer, 1935; Köhler, 1972 and Koffka, 1935) believed learning is more than observable behaviour, it is about patterns and related to perception and problem solving and that an experience is a whole not just a set of discrete activities (Kohler, 1972).

Gagne (1965) explored the development of learning objectives that relate to instructional design. Gagne’s taxonomy of learning outcomes has five categories: verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive skills, attitudes and motor skills. The critical learning conditions, for acquiring this knowledge are distinguishing defining information from other forms that is, print and spoken language and in a meaningful context, information is grouped into chunks to be learnt and associated with cues for recall. Learning approaches, or instructional design, are designed in terms of what Gagne (1985) distinguishes between the internal (attention and recall) and external conditions (timing and environment) for learning. The internal conditions can be described as ‘states’ and include attention, motivation and recall. The external conditions can be thought of as factors surrounding one’s behaviour, and include the arrangement and timing of stimulus events. Thus, his phases of learning are; learners receiving a stimulus, acquisition of skills and knowledge, storing and then retrieval of knowledge or skills. In this model (Gagne 1965), learning is segmented, taught sequentially, builds on previously acquired skills and expressed in concrete behavioural terms reinforced positively and repetitively. Piaget (1997) proposed that recognition of the common elements between language and cognition meant that the cognitive changes he had identified for sensorimotor development was generated by the same processes as those for language development.

2.4.4 Social theories of learning
Piaget (1973, 1977) described children’s development in terms of becoming social beings. He is interested in the interpersonal interactions at the individual level and contends that as children develop, they create new
schemas and connect to the social and environmental world, developing their own view of their world. Piaget (1985) described learning in terms of equilibrium where they are able to analyse and understand the world in terms of existing schemas, or disequilibrium where they are unable to explain a new situation or knowledge set and will return to a state of equilibrium by reorganising their thoughts. Piaget (1973, 1977) proposed that cognitive development can be mapped in four distinct stages across children’s development stages, starting at birth and the last stage starting after the age of 11 or 12. The stages are: the sensorimotor stage: an awareness of what is directly in front of them; the preoperational stage where language and logic develops to a degree; concrete operations is the stage where children apply logic to objects and can conserve number; the final stage formal operations refers to continuing development and the ability to manage abstract and hypothetical information. These stages are challenged in terms of different cultural communities’ development stages (Piaget, 1999).

Roblyer et al (1997 p.70) described constructivism’s focus as on pedagogy where students work collaboratively to solve practical real life problems rather than the sequence of learning. The pedagogy uses projects to develop solutions, while the teacher marshals the resources and guides students’ learning through self direction. Constructivism relates to the theories of Dewey (1966), Vygotsky (1934), Piaget (1973) and Bruner (1991) who viewed learning as an active process where learners construct knowledge in relation to its context, as opposed to acquiring it. Within this construct, learners are imbued with cultural and social knowledge informed by historicity and social experience which are brought to the learning experience. Vygotsky (1978), through interpreting thinking as generated by social activity, develops the concepts to understand learning and the intersection with social activity. He describes the process by which children internalise social activities as mental activities as internalization, Vygotsky described the ‘zone of proximal development’, which is the zone that promotes the maximum potential cognitive growth. The zone is the space between existing levels of competence and that where learners can achieve with assistance of those who have advanced knowledge or skills. Developed from the zone of
proximal development, Vygotsky describes scaffolding, the use of progressively challenging activities to support learning development.

Activity theory is found in the work of Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (1985) and Engeström (1987). Activity theory emphasises learning activities that are structured as historically constructed entities. Freire (1985; Freire and Macedo, 1987) in considering the political and potential emancipatory role of education, proposed an educational theory, a critical pedagogy, that promotes raising conscious awareness where students are becoming critical subjects rather than objects of the world. Freire challenged ‘banking’ notions of learning and describes knowledge as a social construct and learning therefore is concerned with examining, shaping and reflecting on that knowledge. Students construct knowledge with teachers who understand their worlds, Freire asserted that teachers are also learners, who develop their teaching by understanding students' worlds and constructing knowledge in meaningful ways.

Gee (2004) asserted that people learn better through embodied processes, where content is related to activities, discussion and sharing ideas. Embodied knowledge is embedded in educational systems’ elements and interactions (Sharples, Taylor. and Vavoula, 2007). Through these interactions and experiences related to specific contexts, people learn and become partners in creating ways of understanding those elements in that context. The interactions related to learning create connections that are mediated through communities of common interest, that may be connected through learning processes across regional, social and workplace boundaries, just to name a few. Gee (2003) described the communities of learners as affinity groups that form around a common endeavour first and secondarily about sociocultural connections, their knowledge is holistic rather than separated into a specific narrow disciplines and intensive, deep knowledge about matters of importance to the community.

A recognition of the complex nature of learning as a social and mediated practice is connected to understanding the interplay of learners, communities and educators' identities and the institutional or context specific nature of learning. This is underpinned by understanding that the power relationships
inherent in education are often hidden or accepted across a number of levels of policy, pedagogy, curriculum, knowledge systems, communities and institutions. This does not necessarily involve overly complex processes but does imply practitioners need to understand the underpinning theory before using and adapting the processes. Wenger (2004 p. 4) identified the importance of supporting communities of practice ‘mutual engagement in a process of practice development’. Through this process, practitioners can draw out the issues about organisational silos, valuing diverse engagement by members, community boundaries, interconnections across sub groups and other issues relevant to the group. Learning communities may usefully include people who are not within the same team or area and establish processes to link to those who share similar issues in different contexts.

2.4.5 Situated learning

Lave et al. (1991) contended learning is a social activity where learners participate in a community of practice which requires new participants to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of the community. Situated cognition, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) argued, is the connection between learning, doing and place. Situatedness is ‘about the relational character of knowing and learning, about the negotiated character of knowledge, learning, about the negotiated character of meaning, and about the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved’ (Lave et al, 1991 p. 33). When exploring the social nature of learning, Lave et al., (1991) found that the social process of learning is situated in a social and physical environment, they identified situated learning as the process by which learning processes are embedded in arrange of social practices. Lave et al. (1991) asserted that all learning is situated. Situated learning theory (Scott, 2001) described learning interactions as a social practice, constructed by and through communities. This concept emphasises the ways people acquire new knowledge and skills and generate new constructions of meaning through participating in a community of practice. Lave et al. (1991) found understanding situatedness is related to more than space and time, being dependent on other people and the related social setting.
Falk (2006 p. 22) described engagement as the essence of learning which is ‘situational formed and determined’. A social theory of learning which is based on the notion that people are social beings, that knowledge is generated and interpreted in relation to meaningful activities and enterprises that are valued by societal structures (Wenger, 1998 p. 4). ‘Participation in social learning is a social construct, in which both the learner and the practice are transformed’ Scott (2001 p. 32). This practice is differentiated and stratified socially, impacting on the content, context and pedagogy of learning experiences. A social perspective of learning challenges the notion of learning as focusing on grouping, organising and presenting information in a logical way as units, that will can be understood and stored in the brain. If learning and knowing is primarily based on active engagement in social communities and to a lesser degree storing some information then the practices associated with learning, that is, the making of meaning activities, need to be assessed and constructed with their social construct (Wenger, 1998 p. 10). Lave et al. (1991) discussed situated learning as placing an emphasis on the social relations that operate in the scaffolding approach (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1978). Lave et al. (1991 p. 29) described the relations between participations, newcomers and old timers, and the ‘activities, identities, artefacts and communities of knowledge and practice’ as legitimate peripheral participation.

Scott (2001 p. 32) described the learner as situated in learning activities that are essentially engaged in the broader relevant social based structures and discourse. Learning is then embedded in the knowledge, and power relationships evident in teaching and learning pedagogies and the structure of the learning environment (p37). Scott (2001) noted the stratification of those who have power to decide what is regarded as legitimate knowledge. Knowledge-gathering is based in places where people have access to different identities. ‘By adopting a particular way of working, a particular understanding of knowledge the learner is rejecting or turning aside from other frameworks and this itself is an act of power’ (Scott, 2001 p. 39).

Gee (1998 p. 138), in his critique of many schooling practices, theorised that
‘learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life-experiences that trigger conscious reflection. This teaching or reflection involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter’.

The processes of learning and knowing are understood as a function of the interconnected elements of social participation. Learning, thinking and knowledge structures, then, are generated by the activity that people engage in and their relationships within the systems of a socially constructed world (Wenger, 1998). Learning and knowledge production that engages with learners’ and systems understanding of reality can be defined as co-construction: that is, that which neither part in a learning relationship could generate without the others’ input (Damon, 1984; Rafal, 1996).

Falk at el. (1999) noted the impact of relationships and learning support networks for learner in regional communities and the importance of social activity through interpersonal relationships, group learning, trust and credibility in facilitating communication flow to achieve outcomes at the local level. How then do individuals and systems recognise the social constructions that underpin these relationships and the knowledges, learning, cultures, discourses and activities that are often ignored or unrepresented in regional learning and educational contexts? The relevance of Freebody’s (2003 p. 127) ways of analysing interaction as social practices in educational settings lies in the idea of interconnectedness and the accumulation of understanding through the process, which confirms the previously reported research by Falk on interactivity. Gee (2007 p. 123) asserted the value of learning situations where learning is ‘situated in the sense that meaning is situated…and in the sense that skills and concepts are learned in an embodied way that leads to real understanding’. Scott (2001) noted that learning activities are essentially engaged in the broader relevant social based structures and discourse; that learning is embedded in the knowledge and power relationships in societal structures and pedagogies employed in learning events. Social aspects of
learning include an understanding of the students’ learning community, community membership (as described by Wenger, 1998 p. 149), multiple ways of knowing and expressing ideas (for example, multiliteracies as described by The New London Group, 2000), and community priorities. These may accord with or challenge an educational institution’s curriculum and accepted knowledge base. The New London Group (2000 p. 10-18) have explored pedagogical approaches that recognise issues related to language, culture and gender to minimise their negative impact on educational success.

Gee (2003) described thirty six learning principles that are developed from a situated learning perspective explored through examining the learning processes and contexts of video gaming. He described learning as situated and embodied, and draws on situated cognition, New Literacy studies (that describes literacy as historically, socially and culturally constructed (see Kalantzis and Cope (2008), and Gee (1999) and the concept of connectionism (see Bechtel, 1953 for the connection between cognition and learning) to discuss the ways learners discover patterns and network with others. He argued that learning in semiotic domains involves accessing and exploring identities: ‘it requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one’s old identities to the new one (Gee, 2003 p. 51). Gee asserted that learning is a critical and active process of engagement, knowledge and meaning are developed though multimodalities, learners are active producers and consumers of knowledge and that learners form an ‘affinity group’ (Gee, 2003 p. 212) connected by their practices and purpose. Gee (2003) developed this concept further to connect learning and identity, which is discussed in a later section of this chapter.

2.4.6 Learning communities

Situated learning theory, as a branch of social learning theory, is developed through the communities of practice framework (Lave et al., 1991) as noted in earlier sections of the chapter. Learning community theories provide frameworks to describe the way learning operates in groups, not necessarily in formal educational environments and connections between group processes, identity and learning. Wenger (1998 p. 4) based the concept of communities of practice within a social theory of learning. Wenger has
defined communities’ of practice as being understood through four premises: that people are social beings, knowledge is developed and understood in relation to activities and enterprises and they way they are valued, knowing is related to active engagement in society and the world and that these activities, engagements and knowledge are meaningful. In this way, the processes of learning and knowing are understood as a function of the interconnected elements of social participation; the way we make meaning of our life and experience, the practice of talking about resources, frameworks, and perspectives that engage and sustain interactions, the communities constructed in different ways in which people interact and align with identities and the way learning changes the people perceive themselves and are understood in community contexts (Wenger, 1998 p. 4-5).

Wenger (2004 p. 2) described communities of practice as social structures brought together by a commitment or interest in shared practice or knowledge base to interact regularly and develop their understandings, skills and knowledge. To become a full participant of the community the person’s learning intention is engaged and mediated through participating in a socio-cultural practice; the learning of knowledgeable skills. Wenger, McDermot and Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as groups that exist for a period have shared, as well as, diverse expressions. They are large or small, located together or distributed in different areas or sections of an organisation(s), composed of people from different or similar discipline or function, spontaneous or intentional; unrecognized or institutionalised and work in and across boundaries. Wenger et al (2002) noted that while they are diverse, communities of practice share a fundamental structure, a domain of knowledge or values, a community of people who are concerned with the domain and a shared practice that will support their effective participation in the domain.

While communities of practice can have different forms they share a certain structure, ‘a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain’ (Wenger et al., 2002 p. 27). The domain affirms the
group’s identity, the shared purpose and value to the group and others which inspires participation and informs making meaning of action. The community provides the ‘social fabric of learning’ (Wenger et al., 2002 p. 28) and fosters relationships based on mutual trust, respect and risk taking within the group. ‘The practice is a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share’ and a ‘socially defined way of doing things in a specific domain’ (Wenger et al., 2002 p. 29). The group expects members to have mastery of the core knowledge set (Wenger et al., 2002).

Communities of practice are about content – about learning as a living experience of negotiating meaning – not about form. In this sense, they cannot be legislated into existence or defined by decree. They can be recognized, supported, encouraged and nurtured, but they are not reified designable units (Wenger, 1998 p. 229).

Wenger (1998 pp. 234-48) noted the aspects of communities of practice that inform its development, support effective mutual learning experiences. The members of communities of practice are involved in the design of the learning experience as they decide what will be in the curriculum, who will be involved and how newcomers should be introduced to the community. Importantly the negotiability of the community affects how members understand their influence, the elements of the curriculum, the problems to be addressed, the ways information and resources are utilized, the group’s priorities and allegiances. Communities of practice are managed through interactive communication flows. The negotiability of the community’s purpose and activities then influence its identity: the ways it sees and understands itself in relation to other community members, stakeholders and ability to transform and understanding of what is possible. Designing the learning experience is linked to the identity of the members of the learning community in terms of creating a focus of identification with or in opposition to the community and its experience and for developing ownership of meaning (Wenger, 1998 p.235).

Wenger et al (2002 pp.139-143) noted there are limitations in the ways communities of practice function. These limitations can be categorised into a
community that doesn’t function well and a community that is functioning well but is prone to the limitations or prejudices of its members. A community that is not functioning well may have a domain that is not engaging or sufficiently important for the community members, the community members may not develop the trusting relationship to analyse practice and practice can be stultified, unable to change and test innovation. In the case of a community that is limiting its potential, the domain can be defined in such a way by its members, hat it becomes exclusive and unassailable. The ownership of the domain can become an issue of control where members feel they need to compete for the rights to the knowledge or innovation which can become more important than the working together. The focus on ownership of knowledge can also lead to narcissism, characterised by members concentrating on their own development and status. Marginality can occur where the community’s domain is not legitimized as it is not valued in the organisation and can become a site to share discontent and dissatisfaction rather than change and innovation, and finally factionalism can occur, where the commitment to the domain can encourage groups to form conflict internally, a process that can become all encompassing.

The community can exert powerful influences on its members and the practice that occurs through what is described as cliques of dependence or stratification (Wenger et al., 2002). The impacts of community processes on individuals and their engagement in learning can be seen as negative and positive:

- they can become exclusive and operate as a clique that protects the clique and dominates the group to the exclusion of other priorities, stagnating action and process; egalitarianism,
- the normative effect of equality can constraint individual growth and inspiration; dependence, where the reliance on the leader silences others, and decreases diversity; stratification, creating a difference between experts and participants works against building a sense of community;
• through disconnectedness, the group is too large or members are not able to identify, engage and commit to sufficiently and in a reciprocal way and is not a community, and

• localism, where the organisational or geographical boundaries limit the interactions between groups and people activities and ideas (Wenger et al 2002, p. 145-6)

2.4.7 Lifelong learning
This research is concerned with understanding the experiences of people’s engagement in learning across their lives and the ways those experiences have impacted on their identity as a learner and ongoing engagement in learning as adults. Adult education is described by Jarvis (2004) as focusing on individuals’ learning and understanding in an environment where the participants are perceived by themselves and others as socially mature which is reflected in the educational approach, much of which is vocational in nature. Legge (1982) and Knowles (1980) did not make an absolute distinction between child and adult education that is this is not seen as a dichotomy. Knowles (1980, p.25) states adult education is the process that organises educational institutions' activities and brings ‘together in a discrete social system all the individuals, institutions and associations concerned with’ adult education.

This section of the literature review focuses on the research associated with lifelong learning which embraces adult education and adult learning, formal, informal and non-formal learning. As such, lifelong learning has been critiqued as lacking a clear definition (Aspin and Chapman, 2007), application (Jarvis, 2004) and implementation through policy (Field, 2000). Nevertheless Field et al (2000 p. ix-xii), in recognising some of the problems with policy, considered the concept worth exploring as it recognises that learning is essential across the lifespan to make informed choices about life trajectories, identity and engagement, the concept has had an impact on policy and understanding of learning and that the impact of the knowledge based economy means lifelong learning creates and reinforces inequalities. Field (2005) examined social capital in terms of understanding lifelong learning and notes that at a general
level, the continual recreation of social capital is a process of ‘continuing (re)cognition’ (Field, 2005 p. 29). More specifically, skills are learnt through connections, which are managed by relationships of trust, confidence, tolerance, sense of self worth and cooperation (Field, 2005).

Field (2005) described learning as lifelong, occurring across and throughout the spans of people’s lives within and outside the classroom and includes more than the intended curriculum (Field, 2005).

Learning transcends classrooms and workplaces, it is a continuous, cultural process—not simply a series of events…. learning is as much about what happens outside formal learning programs as it is about the programs themselves (Rosenburg, 2001).

Lifelong, or lifewide, learning relates to the ‘many different areas of life in which people continue to acquire and create new skills and knowledge throughout their lifespan’ (Field, 2005 p. 1). The concept of lifelong learning was first articulated by Yeaxlee (1929). With Lindeman (1926), Yeaxlee developed an intellectual basis to understanding education across everyday life. Lifelong learning has been used to discuss workplace learning and education, which is evident in the work of Fauvre (1972), and revitalised by the work Field and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the Delores Report (Delores, 1996) that outlined the four pillars of individual development as learning to do, be, understand and to live together. Field (2000) argued that learning is organised across the lifespan so that it has become sufficiently common to be accepted as a normal part of life. Field (2005) described lifelong learning in relation to the emergence of the learning society and civic participation. He referred to lifelong learning as a process connected to a broader range of institutions, community groups and individuals, becoming less reliant on established authority figures and more self directed.

Lifelong learning has been used for policy formation internationally by the OECD (2007), The World Bank, European Union and international organisations (Bank, 108) and focused on learning as it occurs outside schooling. A lifelong learning approach recognises and engages formal, non-
formal and informal learning concepts. Eraut (2000) made the case for including the term non-formal learning as formal learning is characterised by a required learning framework, organised learning activity, involvement of a trainer, recognition of learning though a qualification and externally specified outcomes while informal learning is considered to be that which is not formally organised or implemented and broadly applied to daily situations. Eraut argued the need to describe active learning that is not undertaken in formal situations as non-formal learning when it relates to learning associated with daily non-repetitive tasks and has an impact on changing understanding or skills competence.

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For Field (2005 p. 128), the interplay between networks and learning is not simply part of the process by which skills and techniques are shared, and information is passed around. It is also an active part of the process of making sense of the world, by talking about feelings in complex and apparently contradictory ways.

2.4.8 Engagement and agency in learning

While the theoretical perspectives in the previous sections have provided a framework for understanding the nature of learning, The following section considers the reasons that people then engage in learning experiences:
formal, informal and non-formal. The following analyses the ways that people engage or disengage, the roles of agency, identity and their connection to the individuals and social systems that impact on those decisions about engagement. Searle, Funnell and Behrens (2005), Rennie, Wallace, Falk and Wignell (2004), Wallace and Turnbull (2005) have explored the disjuncture between teachers’ and students’ relationship to the knowledge, learning environments and pedagogies recognised in schools. Lankshear et al. (2003 p. 179) studied the disconnections between the cultural identities and experiences of teachers and students that made it difficult for teachers to connect learning to students’ experiences, teach for diversity and lessen disadvantage. Pakoa’s (2006) findings supported these findings in a study of the impact of identity and socially based expectations on the educational experiences and outcomes of Melanesian post graduate students in Australia. Smyth et al (2004) argued school experiences that alienated young learners were related to the mismatches between their developing identity as a person and the narrow identities schools expect. Smyth et al. and Pakoa’s studies found students felt marginalised by others’ commonly shared misunderstandings that everyone has the same resources to succeed in education.

Social theories of learning and particularly formal learning systems manage the complexity and deviance of diversity within educational systems as Giroux (1988 p. 6) found:

The rationality that dominates traditional views of schooling and curriculum is rooted in the narrow concerns for effectiveness, behavioural objectives, and principles of learning that treat knowledge as something to be consumed and schools as merely instructional sites designed to pass onto students a “common” culture and set of skills that will enable them to operate effectively in the wider society …The issue of how teachers, students, and representatives from the wider society generate meaning tends to be obscured in favour of the issue of how people generate meaning… how people can master someone else’s meaning, thus
Literature Review

depoliticizing both the notion of school culture and the notion of classroom pedagogy.

The alienation and disconnection of learners from formal education institutions and experiences has been explored by Smyth et al. (2004) and Te Riele (2003 p. 148-150) who noted the reasons for disengagement from formal education relate to the rigidity of school systems, negative relationships with teachers, lack of feeling of acceptance or support and the lack of connection between the curriculum and students own lives. Education is not just about the (re)production of the social order but also about its change (Thomson, 2002 p. 7). Changing the mediating practices of schooling is no simple matter. It is not just about redistributing resources, redesigning pedagogical processes, improving the performance of particular schooling actors (individual teachers and principals) and/or reforming schooling structures and cultures. Each of these is necessary - and more besides. (Thomson, 2002 p. 12)

Falk et al. (2000) noted that the micro, meso and macro processes that produce social capital show benefits when people are engaged in learning interactions that are experienced as they tackle common problems in their everyday lives. While Thomson (2002 p. 51) referring to the work of Newman (1999), and Shirk et al (1999) noted that work-poor families have maintained a work ethic evident through involvement in the ‘black economy’ ambitious home and garden project, undertaking sporadic casual work when available and in their traveling distance to home. He noted that what has changed is the degree of faith and hope in government and schools; ‘They openly say that there is nothing that they can get from schools that will help them’ (Thomson, 2002 p. 51). Alienated students are skeptical and see little evidence in their neighbourhoods that there will be long term benefits from school and refuse to participate in the curriculum. These learned behaviour patterns begin in primary school; have strong associations with failure, often in language, literacy and numeracy, and are evident in learners being turned off by remedial or vocational programs that are meant to support their engagement.
The New London Group (2000 p. 10-8) explored approaches to pedagogy that recognise issues related to language, culture and gender so they are not barriers to educational success. For schools to recognise and integrate the plurality of the society in which it operates, to be relevant to the participants’ schools experiences, we need to recruit rather than tokenise, ignore or erase difference; understand and explore the diverse ways students exist, live, operate and negotiate their lifeworlds and associated literacies; their languages, discourses and registers. The power of normative processes are demonstrated in families behaviour related to school choice and interaction, the privileged send their children to schools that reflect the work, life interests cultural and social capital of parents and they are armed with the appropriate rules of the schooling game to perpetuate certain kinds of knowledge and advantaging those that reflect the people who were brought up in that knowledge. On the other hand the work, life and interests of working class families were more often at odds with the practices of schools. Connell et al’s (1982) work discussed the connection between different educational outcomes across social groups and saw the outcomes as more about power relationships than educational disadvantage.

So-called ‘deficit thinking’ has been used in education to explain lack of achievement and disengagement. Valencia (1997 p. xi) noted that the term deficit has been used to blame the victim and ‘is a model founded on imputation, not documentation’ that was used in the 1960s, was socially constructed and used to explain outcomes in terms of ‘underachievement’ (Hess, 1970) and cultural disadvantage (Black, 1966). Valencia (1997 p. xii) described the six aspects of deficit thinking as:

1. a process of blaming the victim;
2. a form of oppression;
3. pseudoscience in its pursuit of knowledge;
4. a dynamic model, changing according to temporal period in which it finds itself;
5. a model of educability: that is, it contains suggestions or actual prescriptions for educational practice;
6. a model so controversial that dissent, and in some cases heterodoxic discourse, is inevitable.
Understandings of students’ experience in education have developed with particular reference to the ways education operates across cultural divides. Keeffe (1992) in his exploration of Central Australian Aboriginal students’ experience of Aboriginality in schooling described the perception of Aboriginal students’ engagement in formal education in terms of persistence, a commonly shared, unchanging, unique, continuous set of beliefs and identity shared by all Indigenous students. A concept of an enduring, essential, and unilinear Aboriginal culture, transmitted genetically, and reproduced constantly despite non-Indigenous people and institutional intervention; and as resistance, consisting of a dynamic set of beliefs and cultural practice that interact with different societies and act in defiance of dominant non-Indigenous authority, through unity and political struggle. Keeffe (1992) described persistence and resistance as a duality that competes for supremacy in describing engagement and disengagement in learning and each contradict the other. The terms persistence and resistance provide a dichotomy that challenge those involved in learning to consider students’ motivations in learning engagement as informed by cultural and social processes. This framework has been used in relation to analysis of the data collected in this study to reconceptualise regional learners’ perspective of learner identity. While the ultimate use of these terms in this thesis differ from Keeffe’s, this work was central in developing a framework that describes the different learner identities that are enacted through a lifetime.

Arnott, Benson, Crawford, Herbert, Leybourne and Spiers (2001), in a study of the learning processes of pastoralist stakeholders in the tropical savannas, found that pastoralists each saw their context as unique and use networks to access experts that have credibility because they have the appropriate experience. Learning processes appeared on an ad hoc basis and occurred on the basis of need, time, access and opportunity rather than a set programme. Learners retained control over their learning. The pace of learning reflects participants’ other demands, and the timing, urgency, priority or opportunity of the learning experiences. As much of the learning is individual the process is open to ‘vagaries’ such as whether learning processes are followed through. Common sense knowledge is the domain in which learning occurs and therefore is rarely challenged, reflected on and
remains hidden. In this study, pastoralists prefer trying a pilot to explore and test new knowledge although this is in conflict with the notion of teaching practice facilitated by the expert.

Understanding disengagement or disenfranchisement, then, involves understanding the socially constructed experience of formal and non-formal learning. Field (2005) cautioned that any consideration of disengagement should not be viewed simplistically or as undifferentiated; he noted a description of disengaged learners is not merely defined in terms of opposition to engagement in learning but that there are degrees of engagement relating to involvement in a range of civic activity and related attitudes. He noted that an association between learning and engagement exists although there is ambiguity in research data. Disenfranchisement, then, would appear to relate to more than disengagement, and relate to the active choice to disengage, an act taken in opposition to a set of perceived institutional social structures, beliefs or experiences. In turn, engagement is related to having a sense of agency within an educational system. That is, disenfranchised learners have a sense of agency that is enacted in opposition to, or defiance of, an educational system and in accord with the other community identities and priorities. Wenger (1998 p. 171) stated that (w)hen relations of non-participation are mediated by systematic institutional arrangements, they can reach deep into the definition of a practice’. Scott (2001 p. 39) supported an active (as opposed to passive) view of students’ disengagement as he found that by ‘adopting a particular way of working, a particular understanding of knowledge the learner is rejecting or turning aside from other frameworks and this itself is an act of power’.

Field (2005 p. 99) grouped people’s attitudes to lifelong learning engagement (or disengagement) into three broad clusters:

- those who are skeptical about education’s potential for achieving social change,
- those who participate/or, reject some kinds of participation to avoid indecision, and
- those who actively engage in lifelong learning as part of personal development and community participation.
Wenger (1998 p. 169) stated that non-participation can be interpreted in a number of ways: as a compromise, that is, a reciprocal relationship between parties who are in a power relationship that sustains non-participation, as a strategy to maintain a role or as a cover that disconnects an individual from their institutional environments. Marginalising the knowledge experiences and expectations of non-dominant social actors in social processes and institutions has contributed to the disenfranchisement of learners as members of certain communities of practice.

Whereas certain members can be in marginal or peripheral positions with respect to a community of practice, the community of practice itself can be in a peripheral or marginal position with respect to broader constellations and institutional arrangements… It is often the case that, rather than being direct boundary relations between communities and people of among communities, relations of non-participation are mediated by institutional arrangements (Wenger, 1998 pp. 168-9).

Marginalisation is supported by the behaviours that are described as ‘othering’, the processes that objectify difference defined through social processes and make it essential, oppositional and exotic (Bishop, 2005). The processes that work to disenfranchise and exclude can be understood through the othering construct, the nature of these marginalisation processes needs to be understood to make explicit in their influence when collecting the data and its analysis.

Field (2005) argued that those who are most socially engaged demonstrate the values and attitudes related to a sense of agency and being able to ‘exert control over key parts of one’s life’ (Field, 2005 p. 144). Those who are disengaged from formal education are disenfranchised from associated knowledge resources including a sense of efficacy as a learner at an individual and community level (Field, 2005). Engagement could then relate to engagement in schooling or formal education’s processes or rejection of formal education to facilitate engagement in a person’s informing community.
Learning agency has always been seen as implicit rather than explicit knowledge – it is ‘experienced’ rather than ‘taught’ which make(s) it all-pervasive and relatively resistant to change’ (Pillay, Clarke and Taylor, 2004 p. 100). Pillay et al., (2004 pp. 98-9) coined the term ‘learning agency’ to describe the environmental effects in learning – the outcomes of the knowledge and intelligence designed into the environment:

Learning agency is the effect on learning of the knowledge designed into and available within a learning context, and which acts to shape how learners engage in and with that context.

They proposed a view of learner engagement such that ‘learning agency’ is a total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which guides the pragmatic action in social, cultural and professional environments. This concept then suggests the question: what then is the connection between agency and engagement in learning?

Through a systematic review of research concerning the factors in training that meet the aspirations of Indigenous Australians, Miller (2005) noted the aspirations of Indigenous Australian people include the enhancement of self development skills, completion of educational subjects and courses at all levels, employment, self determination and community development. These are the key starting point for developing and implementing an education framework and implementing pedagogy in partnership with Indigenous people, the educational institution and relevant industry representatives. These principles could be considered when attempting to understand and be inclusive of disenfranchised students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The principles identified by Miller in relation to Indigenous `education are underpinned by recognising the local context, negotiated curriculum and supporting students’ sense of agency. While developed for vocational education and training, the seven factors Miller (2005) identified are relevant for other levels of adult education for Indigenous people and must be considered regardless of the location, time or context.

In exploring partnerships and effective practices in delivering VET with rural and remote Indigenous communities, Langton, Dembski, Marika-Mununggiritj,
Arnott, Clarke, Clarke, Henry and Wells (1998) found, through the *Djama in VET study*, six interconnected issues in VET delivery with Indigenous communities that contribute to best practice. These resonate with Miller’s considerations and develop an understanding of key concepts in approaches to learning with disenfranchised communities. They include ensuring community culture and knowledge are completely integrated and the relevant community has control over all aspects of training delivery, matching with current and developing work that is embedded into community and community business and preferably taught by local trainers. The trainers needs to ensure that training is based on meaningful partnerships between VET providers and community based enterprises where roles, practices and contexts related to training are negotiated, that learning relationships respect and are sensitive to local cultures and community development interests and local authority is of central importance in all aspects of the programme implementation. This is evident through the use of curriculum materials developed and tested for local communities, full participation of community elders, employers and trainers, transparent processes and procedures to conduct the training and formal agreements that outline these principles and mutual responsibilities for all parties. Underlying these issues is the shared ownership of learning and relationships that underpins learning partnerships.

2.4.9 Summary

Knowledge, its transmission and production is socially situated and informed by the power relationships evident in teaching and learning pedagogies and learning structures. Learning is mediated by participation in and relationships to communities of practice. Knowledge and learning are socially constructed; the social relationships that inform engagement in learning operate within the social order to benefit learners as they relate to their diverse worlds and community membership. Understanding disengagement or disenfranchisement, then, involves understanding the socially constructed experience of formal and non-formal learning. By interpreting disengagement as defiance, or a way of maintaining an existing identity or as an asset, the social nature of learning is revealed. Learning across the lifespan is seen as an integrated and ongoing social process. Collaborative approaches to learning that recognise learners’ knowledge and actively address the
inequities associated with the social structures in which learning operates then have the potential to address the disenfranchisement of marginalised learners. A sense of agency emerges in the literature as an essential element in developing an identity as an efficacious learner that can be enacted through social engagement and empowerment. The elements of empowering learning experiences are described in relation to marginalised Indigenous communities have resonance for other disenfranchised communities that do not readily identify with or participate fully in mainstream educational systems. While identity is not overtly discussed in the learning literature, many elements in the social constructions of learning and identity do align.

2.5 Identity theory

2.5.1 Theories of identity and identity formation

As demonstrated in the learner engagement literature in the previous section, identity and its impact on engagement in social institutions and processes, has a significant role in understanding the ways individuals, groups and educational organisations interact. Identity is theorised here as an individual’s understanding of self which occurs through the social interactions that are framed in an individual’s social experience. Identity theories seek, in the broadest terms, to understand and explain the ‘experience of being a person’ (Davies, 1994 p. 3), why ‘one role-related behavioural choice is made rather than another’ (Stryker 2002 p227) and have developed through the work of a number of intersecting and contrasting disciplines drawn from influential theoretical perspectives, including psychology (Erikson 1968), philosophy (see Taylor 1989), sociology (Tajfel 1982), education (see Giroux and McLaren, 1992; Giroux, 1993; 1996, McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; Apple, 1996) and cultural studies (see Hall, 1990; Kellner, 1995). The development of identity theory has intersected in the development of social theory that has developed from a view of individuals within the social order to that which incorporates a critical view of society and the influence of power, membership and making meaning. Whitebrook (2001 p. 4) described identity as ‘what the self shows the world…the self that is shown to the world’ and ‘what of the self is recognized by the world’. Within this framework, identity is negotiated by the self and community (Whitebrook, 2001).
Mead (1934), in an exploration of the existence of the sociology of the mind, suggests that consciousness created by making meaning and interactivity is dependent on the capacity to know of oneself as an object within an environment. The development of language and gestures, crucially language, informs the process of reflexivity, that is, the ability to ‘take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself [sic] in that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it’ (Mead, 1934 p. 134). Mead theorized about the existence of more than reflexive individuals, an organised community that individuals are connected to and against, the reflexive individual assumes an internal dialogue in relation to the community. Mead (1934), and Stryker (1968), described the interactivity between individuals and others in society to form an identity as ‘identity negotiation’. Identity negotiation is described as the stable set of behaviours that establish and support an individual's identity, each identity as a staff, family or team member, are negotiated individually through interaction with the people relevant to that identity or role. Turner (1999) explored identity as the articulation of the relationship between the individual and social structures, where self is described in terms of individuality that is developed through engagement with society. The changing view of identity moves from a focus of the individual and their similarity to others, to that of an individual informed by engagement and membership of different social groupings.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) posed a theory of social identity through an understanding of group membership and discrimination. They discuss social identity in terms of: categorisation, the socially defined groups that are used to label groups (such as gender, ethnicity, activity, religion), identification where individuals assign membership of a group, comparison with other groups to affirm existing membership and psychological distinctiveness from and in terms of other groups. Crenshaw (2003), explored identities as socially constructed, with particular reference to socially constructed notions of gender and race and their impact on identities, Crenshaw is part of a large body of work by socially disenfranchised researchers to examine social processes through an analysis of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in identity. Tajfel (1982) described identity in terms of social and psychological understandings of
group behaviour and the impact of group membership on interactions between individuals. Tajfel asserted that behaviour is informed by personal identity, an individual’s characteristic and relationships, and social identity, membership of a group. Based on the social context, an individual makes decisions about which of this repertoire of identities, from the interpersonal to the intergroup, to draw on and in what combination.

Widdicombe (1998) described two broad uses of the term identity used by social scientists to make social classifications and to explain social phenomena. The first is related to describing society in terms of essential social structures and institutions as such it is useful for describing individuals in terms of groups, status, roles simultaneously. Identity is more than a descriptive label. It refers to the content and defining criteria of a category: common experiences, origins, cultures that are different to others. Role identity theory (Burke, 1980; McCall et al., 1978; Stryker, 1987), then, portrayed society as made up of roles which are internalized as identities that people try to live up to. Social identity theoretical constructs (Tajfel et al., 1979) assume social identities have a social reality through their relation to social groups. Tajfel (1978) argued that people grow up and challenge assigned identities as they develop their awareness and preference for ‘my groups’ over ‘outgroups’. Self categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) examined the psychological processes are at the root of people in groups who act in relation to an identity. Turner et al (1987) argued that identity is related to defining the difference between categories and finding where one fits. Being depersonalized and acting as a group then brings the group to life. As a social phenomenon, identity is seen as a way to describe resource allocation such as power and status identifying people in terms of class, ethnic group, age and gender. People try to explain how social structures affect lives and explain social behaviours in these terms(Widdicombe, 1998). Underlying these is a notion of identity that is essentialist and realist that there is a correspondence between identity and an aspect of social reality. The related research then looks at the identities people have, the criteria to distinguish them and the role identity plays in maintaining and enabling social institutions.
Giddens (1991) developed structuration theory to explain and integrate the interrelationships between human agency and social structure as ways to understand social action. He defined structuration as ‘the structuring of social relations across time and space, in virtue of the duality of structure’ (p376). Giddens (1991) also studied the ways social systems are reproduced through social interaction composed of social actors who undertake social action and knowledgeable behaviours and the rules, social relationships and resources reproduces through social interaction. In this same work, Giddens (1991) contended that social activities are self-reproducing and recursive, social actors, therefore, are continuously recreating social activities through the means by which they express themselves. Giddens explored the operation of social identities to describe the social processes that have a significant impact on group behaviour and consequently social identity. The forces Giddens (1991 p. 2) described are the ‘normative rights, obligations and sanctions which, within specific collectivities, form roles. The use of standardized markers, especially to do with the bodily attributes of age and gender, is fundamental in all societies, notwithstanding large cross-cultural variations’.

Erikson (1968) in exploring identity formation and social interaction across the lifespan described identity as bringing together psychological and social views. He discussed a personal identity, an individual’s distinguishing personal traits and the ways people interact with society and an individual’s roles established through community engagement called the social identity and cultural identity. He also described the ego identity, the conscious awareness of self which is constantly changing as a result of experiences and interactions. He found that successful management of the psychosocial development through a series of stages will result in a sense of mastery described as ego strength, while if this is not managed well, an individual will feel inadequate leading to an identity crisis.

Côté and Levine (2002) explored the multidimensionality of identity, where individuals synthesise their psychological, personal, and social identities in order to make sense of their own identity internally and externally, that is, to the broader society. The resolution of these identities is then connected to success in interacting with social structures and processes. For Côté et al.,
identity work is undertaken while young, in order for the young adult to emerge with an understanding of themselves and their relationship to their communities. Côté et al. (2002) defined a typology of behaviours that comprise an individual’s identity formation strategies that are drawn on to manage their relationship with the social world which includes the:

- Refuser, who avoids cognitive development and is dependent on others
- Drifter, who has some resilience, is apathetic about their connection to the community
- Searcher, who has high expectations of themselves and has disdain for their community
- Guardian, who has a strong social identity that informs a rigid personal code and identifies with adults
- Resolver, who actively seeks new skills and competencies and responds to communities where there are opportunities for development.

Gergen (1991) extended the typology, adding the
- strategic manipulator who considers identity as role playing and is disconnected from their own social self
- pastiche personality, who abandons their own self and becomes the roles they play
- relational personality, who only connect to their external social self and abandon a sense of an exclusive self.

In this social and historically based view of identity, there is an essential nature to identity that individuals negotiate in terms of their social interactions and connections. Individuals make choices about themselves in terms of their connections with socially constructed groups. Hall (1996) defined identity as the intersection between practice and discourse that connects individuals’ consciousness to an understanding of themselves as socially constructed subjects of discourses. Within this framework, identity is about more than understanding who an individual is, a given identity, identity is understood in terms of creation and production. Hall described identity in terms of connections to individuals, groups or an ideal. This ‘discursive approach sees
identification as a construction, a process never completed’ (Hall, 2000 p. 16). In the context of the associated material and symbolic resources and associated ‘determinate conditions of existence…identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency, ‘once secured, it does not obliterate difference’ (Hall, 2000 p. 17).

Cabral (2003 p. 56) integrated the notion of culture into the social theory of identity and the impact of a cultural identity on social and political action. He asserted that, once it is accepted that culture is a dynamic synthesis of the material and spiritual conditions of the society and expresses both between man and nature and between different classes within society, one can assert that identity is, at the individual and collective level and beyond the economic condition, the expression of culture. This is why we attribute, recognise, or declare the identity of an individual or group in the framework of a culture. Cabral maintained that the main prop of culture in any society is the social structure, and that one can therefore draw the conclusion that the possibility of a movement group keeping (or losing) its identity in the face of foreign domination depends on the extent of destruction of its social structure under the stresses of domination.

Understanding the contexts in which learners operate, the role and implications of learning practices, means understanding the role of identity in learning. Falk et al. (2003) found that a link exists between education and identity, that learners are affected by the ways they understand themselves and understand their identity as a learner in relation to both formal and informal education. They described the dimensions of identity as the processes applied to experience (the interactive elements of forming, reforming and co-constructions that happen through learning), the categories of experience for identity in learning (the identities that are created through the individual, community and place) and the identity resources produced from the processing experience (the behaviours, beliefs, feelings and knowledge that are accessed through interactions). This builds on the work of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) describing knowledge and identity resources (as previously discussed).
Crenshaw (2003) contended identities are socially constructed, with particular reference to socially constructed notions of gender and race and their impact on identities. A person’s identity, their knowledge and view of themselves or the way they are identified by others, impacts on the way they interact with learning domains. In terms of its relationship to learning, Gee (1999) noted the concept of ‘socially situated identity’ describes the multiple identities that people take on in different practices and contexts while the term core identity is used to describe the continuous and relatively fixed identities that underlie the social constructions of multi-faceted identities. Socially situated identities are developed through peoples’ relationship to a range of family, local, peer, workplace and global communities. They are ‘concerned with situated means, social languages, cultural models and Discourses. Discourses cover what has been described as communities of practice, cultural communities, distributed knowledge or distributed systems’ (Gee 1999 p. 38).

2.5.2 Relational/interactional constructions of identity
Conquergood (2003 p. 359) described the rethinking undertaken in relation to identity theory from an essential and ontological perspective to one that is ‘constructed and relational’. In this framework, ‘(m)eaning is contested and struggled for in the interstices, in between structures. Identity is invented and contingent, not autonomous’ (Conquergood, 2003 p. 359). Identity is understood as a social practice that is informed by social construction, relationships and interactions framed by culture, history, place, power and institutions. Hall (2000 p. 227) challenged the concept of a singular or unified identity, describing identity as constructed in multiple ways ‘across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation’. Hall (1990 p. 225) described identities as the ‘names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’. Hall (2000 p. 217) argued that identities are constructed within discourse and, as such, as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of
power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an identity.

That is, although invoked through sameness, identities are constructed through difference.

Identity is about the recognition and acceptance of difference, not just about access to resources. Alcoff (2003 p. 7) found that as category distinctions are constructed and perceptual practices are trained to highlight differences, the characteristics of identities themselves are argued to be made, not found, and made under contradictions of oppression that should not be reinforced by the recognitions demanded by identity politics.

Rosaldo (2003 p. 337) stated that ‘(i)f issues of class and the equitable distribution of resources were resolved, matters of recognition and fair treatment in the face of bias regarding sexuality, gender, and race would still remain’. Mendieta (2003 p. 407) described identities as continually constituted, constructed, invented, imagined, imposed, projected, suffered, and celebrated. Identities are never univocal, stable, or innocent. They are always an accomplishment and an endless project and empowering forms of ownership of meaning.

For Mendieta (2003 p. 409) the concept of identity encompasses more than the individual or the local, identity is, complex in terms of the self, societal, historical and oppositional constructs' and enacted through relationships between those constructs, individuals and institutions. Mendieta described identities as plural with plural representational forms that have shifted with cultural and social change. Mendieta (2003 p. 409) referred to race, gender, ethnicity and so on as vectors of identity – some of which have a polarity for example, black and white, male and female and that it has a locality, a social locus and is ‘a function of social topography’. Social topographies themselves have changed in accordance with the stability and potentiality of some of the forces that constituted the web of forces determining the space of social interaction’ (Mendieta, 2003 p. 408).
Hall (2000), in developing the concept of social identity, stated he has ‘(n)o desire whatsoever to return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice, or to restore an approach which ‘places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity- which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness’ (Foucault, 1970 p. xiv). Mato (2003 p. 284) described identities as produced socially rather than a legacy that is passively assigned. Identities representations are produced continuously by individuals and groups

who constitute and transform themselves through both these very symbolic practices, and their relation (alliance, competitions, struggle, negotiation, etc.) with other social actors’.

Mato (2003 p. 284) described identity as a social practice that aims to address issues of social, economic and political injustice, that is understood by means of those assertions of difference, be they related to race, ethnicity, class or socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, local experiences, international and transnational relations of domination, or any other relations of power.

For Gee (2001 p. 100) identity is defined in four ways: (a) in terms of the genetic makeup of an individual, (b) the institutional identity defined in terms of an individual’s relationship to authority, (c) the discursive identity which functions in relation to being recognized by discourse or language use and (d) affinity-identity or identifying as a part of group with similar interests or experiences and share certain practices. There are connections and tensions between these types of identity as we define ourselves through belonging to a range of local Discourses that are also located in our global understandings of the world. The ways that genetic elements of identity such as skin colour, body type, or height are interpreted by people within their social milieu, means they can then be interpreted in a social context.

Alcoff (2003 p. 7) contended identities as ‘plural, multiple, and fluid, merging into one another rather than facing each other as if from separate corners of the ring’. Internally, learning is a reconfiguration of its own structure as community and economy of meaning. Externally, a learning community
Literature Review

confronts issues of identification and negotiability through its position in broader configurations (Wenger, 1998 p. 219). Timms (2007 p.2) noted ‘there is a close relationship between personal identity and community identity, encapsulated in the definition of communities as’ ‘networks of inter-personal ties that provide sociability, support information, a sense of belonging and social identity’ (Wellman, 2001 p. 18).

The term community relates to ‘many different kinds of human groupings’ (Bopp and Bopp 2001 p.9) which can be based on any combination of regional, ethnic, culture, political, religious, professional, discipline or other characteristics. As Bopp and Bopp (2001 p 12) note ‘the common oneness can be all inclusive (addressing all parts of life) or very specific….most people in the world live in multiple communities at the same time. A city and most rural areas are usually a community of communities…within and between formal organisations and informal networks are many overlapping circles of friends and associates’.

‘Communities of practice’ function as the social fabric of knowledge (Wenger 2004 p. 1) where the communities involved decide what is articulated and how it can legitimately be described. Use of the concept of communities of practice (Wenger 1998) focuses on the ways in which people operate and their integral role in situating and influencing participation in learning. Just as communities of practice are socially situated, so are learning and identities. They are constructed by a range of historical, social, cultural and regional influences. As such it is important to ensure there is a way of understanding the knowledge people bring to learning and what is important to be a part of your community (Wenger, 1998 pp. 159-160).

Communities emphasise the ability of social configurations to constitute our identities through relations of belonging or not belonging’ while the overlapping ‘economies of meaning emphasize the social productions and adoption of meaning, and thus the possibility of uneven negotiability and contested ownership among participants. (Wenger, 1998 p. 210)
Mato (2003 p. 284) contended that social actors take part in identity-making processes in a wide range of social collectivities, like so-called ethnic, local, regional and national societies. Crenshaw (2003) depicted identities as socially constructed, with particular reference to socially constructed notions of gender and race and their impact on identities. A person’s identity, their knowledge and view of themselves or the way they are identified by others impacts on the way they interact with the literacy domains. Crenshaw (2003 p. 175), in discussing the intersections between identity, politics and violence against women of color, noted that ‘ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups, and the problems of identity politics which bears on efforts to politicize violence against women’. In terms of its relationship to learning, Gee (1999) noted that a socially situated identity includes the multiple identities that people take on in different practices and contexts while the term core identity is used to describe the continuous and relatively fixed core that underlies multi-faceted identities.

The concept of socially situated identities is mutually constructed and concerned with situated means, social languages, cultural models and Discourses (Gee, 1999 p. 38). Gee (2003) described communities of learners as affinity groups that form around a common endeavour first, and secondly about socio-cultural connections. Affinity groups’ knowledge is holistic and intensive involving deep connected knowledge about matters of importance to the community and their relationships to other valued knowledge sets rather than separated into specific narrow disciplines.

People adopt a range of different practices, draw on identity resources and relate these to contexts informed by their complex situated identities as learners and members of a range of communities. For example, the practices and Discourses developed around the use of digital resources by Aboriginal people in East Arnhem land using digital resources in a social context as props or artefacts, in the same way that they would use nondigital resources like paintings, photos, diagrams, ceremonial objects, and of course the land itself and natural phenomena in talking about and representing themselves and their histories, and making agreements… the use
of Aboriginal digital resources is serious business, making claims about ownership, about rights and responsibilities, and appropriate behaviour. In these cases the ways that the resources are identified and validated, the way they are accessed and displayed and the ways assemblages are put together and used in context, is a crucial part of the knowledge production process, and negotiations over resources (Christie 2007 pp. 2-3).

Learners, whose learner identity includes being part of a particular community of practice, make active decisions about using the available learning resources in their learning and work according to the community’s established and agreed rules. The availability of those resources, the ways people negotiate their access, on what basis and the risks involved to learners’ identities could impact on their engagement. Zimmerman (1998 p. 90) described discourse, situational and transportable identities. Discourse identities function in close proximity, both in terms of space and time to the person’s interactions and related to participants responses in a conversation and are subject to revision ad/or acceptance through those discussions. Situated identities are locally connected; the associated agenda and activities are aligned with the roles of players (caller or receiver) in a situation. Transportable identities transfer across locations, situations and may be relevant across interactions. These identities are observable and relate to physical or cultural representations that can be interpreted and categorised accordingly.

Identity as social and relational constructs function within a complex social, cultural, political and geographical system, where individuals experience their multiple identities and their intersections at levels of awareness and visibility. Mendieta (2003 p. 409) described identities as global products framed by ‘an intricate web of commercial, political and colonial dependencies and hegemonies’ and marked by the history of colonial power:

Positionality is conditioned by a topography of simultaneous webs of power, which harbour and preserve the traces of their historical origins… someone’s position within this world system enables or disables certain
forms of force and coercion, resistance or subjugation. (Mendieta, 2003 p. 409)

So identities are continually negotiated and changing within complex regional, social, cultural and political structures. Identity then is defined internally and externally in terms of social action, practice and discourse. Drawing from a range of perspectives, Jenkins (1996 p. 20) argued that 'an understanding emerges of the 'self' as an ongoing, and in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others’. Portes (1998 p. 8) described what amounts to social identities as ‘bounded solidarity’. Foley (1997) emphasised the dual function of togetherness and sharing to ‘act as symbols of distinctiveness and of resistance to the processes of individuation and incorporation within the wider society’.

For Wenger (1998 p. 155), identity in practice is a *negotiated experience*, where people are identified by their participation, or lack thereof, in a group, as *community membership*, where people understand what is familiar, or not, as a *learning trajectory*, defined in terms of historical influences. Wenger described identity in terms of a nexus of membership and is defined by the reconciliation of different types of individuals’ membership of different communities. These communities can be at a local and a global level. The tensions and decisions made about learning and literacy based on identities and identification with social agendas or communities can impact on educational experiences, decisions about involvement in learning and definition as a learner. A range of different practices and contexts are taken up by learners while engaged in different sorts of learning. An identity as a learner that underlies the continually shifting multiple identities that operate in, and driven by, learning contexts (Gee, 1999 p. 38).

Wenger (1998) described identity in practice in a number of ways: as a negotiated experience, being identified by oneself and others in terms of participation in communities, as community membership, in terms of what is familiar or not, as a learning trajectory, in relation to historical, current and future experiences. Identity is also the nexus of memberships in different communities and the reconciliation of different types of membership that
individuals have demonstrated through local and global understandings of discourse and people’s perception of their relationship. This involves negotiating diverse ways of engaging in practice that reflect individuality, accountability to significant communities, and managing elements of performance that may not be acceptable with certain relevant communities.

Identities are understood as the nexus of memberships in different communities and the reconciliation of different types of membership that individuals have demonstrated through local and global understandings of discourse and people’s perception of their relationship (Wenger, 1998). This involves negotiating diverse ways of engaging in practice that reflect individuality, accountability to significant communities, and managing elements of performance that may not be acceptable with certain relevant communities (Wenger, 1998 pp. 159-160). These communities can be at a local and a global level. Identity is being continuously renegotiating through participants’ interpretation of themselves in terms of learning events and contexts and their membership with relevant communities. This practice involves negotiating diverse ways of engaging in practice that reflect the participants’ individuality, accountability to significant communities, and performance elements that are recognised or not as valid by the relevant communities (Wenger, 1998 p155).

Sarbin (1983) explored the connection between social and place identity, as place is the context for identity. Proshansky et al (1983) have commented on the relationship between place and identity as individuals who have strong cognitive connections to place through memory, attitudes, values and understandings of the world and behaviour, it has a historicity as it connects to identities over time and their experience (actual or anticipated) or relationship to place. Wellman (2001 p. 18) found an individual’s identity is related to a sense of belonging to those similar and ‘the negation of identity has involved interaction with others physically sharing time and space’, so proximity and physical manifestations of community are defining components of identity creation and maintenance of identity. Twigger-Ross and Uzell (1996 p. 206) found that place-identity is not concerned with place as defined socially, they note ‘all aspects of identity will, to a greater or lesser extent, have place-
related expectations', that an individual’s environment is not just a context in which identity is developed and affirmed’ and is connected to feelings of self efficacy when environments are not an impediment to action.

Falk et al. (2003) have also identified place as a significant aspect of identity in learning, where place includes buildings and institutions and the places of interaction (see also Falk et al., 2000). Falk et al. (2004) reference place identity as it is understood in psychological, post colonial, sociological, linguistic and Indigenous theological theoretical frameworks and described place-identity as core to peoples and communities’ lives and knowledge production. They concluded that identity is then about the self, group membership as well as place-identity which challenges educators to utilise pedagogy and programs that ‘capitalise on the unique pools of identity resources that learners bring with them and to provide the opportunities to transform or add to those pools to meet their learners’ and their communities’ needs’ (Falk et al., 2004 p. 10)

Wenger (1998 p. 173) noted identity is more than participation and non-participation but is also about people aligning with and interpreting events, whose structures, forces, and purposes lie outside their community of practice. Individual’s identities are affected by the picture people have built of their position in society. Within this framework, Wenger described three modes of belonging

1. engagement – active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning’– risk of engagement is that it can become insular and not allow other points of view

2. imagination – creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience’. The way two people see what they are doing or what is happening or how it fits quite differently is imagination. Imagination can be based on stereotypes which are disconnected or ineffective.

3. alignment – coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises’ which are mediated by power and can span significant distance: socially and
physically. Alignment can make it all seem possible to achieve or emphasise unquestioning allegiance but can be blind to negative outcomes.

As Wenger (1998 p. 173) noted ‘(a) cross boundaries between communities of practice, multimembership can also give rise to coexisting identities of participation and non-participation’. In many of these culturally and socially defined practices (for example, ethnicity, religion, gender) non-participation defines identity ‘Non-participation then is a defining constituent of, being outside. This situation makes boundary crossing difficult, because each side is defined by opposition to the other and membership in one community implies marginalization in another’ (Wenger, 1998 p. 168).

2.5.3 Identity, identity work and learning

Wenger (1998 p. 173-84) noted the link between identity and learning; workers define and understand themselves by aligning their activities and understandings to their community of practice, their engagement in social process and configurations that extend beyond their own practice. The processes of learning and its connections to forming an identity can be considered three modes of belonging; engagement in shared processes to negotiate meaning, imagination of the world based on a projected understanding of an individual’s experience and alignment to broader structures and contribution to broader enterprises. As engagement in practice involves a combination of these modes of belonging, which change in importance and can be in conflict with each other, they provide a framework to understand the learning communities in which people operate:

In educational activities, individuals draw upon, disclose and reconstruct specific, relevant features of their biographical and institutional identities in accomplishing social activities such as…. (t)eaching and learning in homes and classrooms. In interaction, the focus is on how certain subjectivities – forms of consciousness-for-this-event – are jointly constructed. These intersubjectivities locate speakers in cultural and oral reference groups, and project, in the case of schooling, learners’ possible future educational trajectories, their success or otherwise as ‘doing teacher’ and ‘doing learner’. (Freebody, 2003 p. 127)
An important aspect of understanding the contexts in which learners operate and the role and implications of social practices means understanding the role of identity in learning. Holmes (2002) proposed a claim-affirmation model of the modalities of emergent identity. The model described the outcome of the claims, or rejections of any claim, made by an individual in relation to a socially viable identity and the affirmation, or rejection, of that claim by others who are socially significant in the relevant social world. The outcome is not fixed, it is continually renegotiated and fragile moving in relation to a state of relative stability.

Holmes (2002) proposed a model that described the trajectory of an emergent identity in an educational context. At the start of the process, a new participant in an educational setting would have an indeterminate identity and aiming to have an achieved identity. As learners are involved in the educational experiences, they move to an under-determined identity. Depending on what occurs an individual may experience rejection, what Holmes (2002) termed disaffirmation, rather than affirmation of their identity and may move to a failed identity or to an imposed identity, that is, an attributed identity that the learner would dispute. This is represented by Holmes (2002)' figure below

![Figure 3 Claim-Affirmation Model of Modalities of Emergent Identity (Holmes 2002)](image)

Taking a view of learning trajectories that focuses on participation forms, Wenger (1998) found that:

(newcomers, for instance, may be on an inbound trajectory that is construed by everyone to include full participation in its future. Non-
participation is then an opportunity for learning. Even for people whose trajectory remains peripheral, non-participation is an enabling aspect of their participation because full participation is not a goal to start with. Conversely, long standing members can be kept in a marginal position, and the very maintenance of that position may have become so integrated in the practice that it closes the future…. Forms of participation may be so ingrained in practice that it may seem impossible to conceive of a different trajectory within the same community. (Wenger 1998 pp. 166-7)

Wenger (1998) also found that identities are defined through a mixture of participation and non-participation that reflects individual’s power to define themselves as individuals, in terms of communities and relationships with the world. This work affects the ways individuals position themselves in the social landscape, decide what or who matters, is worth knowing or committing energy to, or not, and how individuals attempt to direct their trajectories (Wenger, 1998 pp.167-8).

Fevre (2000 p. 100) described the ways social capital ‘furnishes’ identity and provides the means for transforming identities. His study describes the impact of social and technological change on a workforce and the associated community. In response and through political action, workers developed new identities that rejected reproduction of those of their community in the past and engage in education to create a new reality and roles for themselves and their community:

Here the traditional sources of identity provided the rationale, in fact the imperative, for self-transformation…Commitment to self-transformation obviously means a commitment to more education and training for longer periods, because education and training are in principle the essence of transformative activity; but the sort of education and training that will be chosen will also be affected with a strong preference being shown for more transformative activities. (Fevre, 2000 p.101)

Falk et al. (2003) observed the link that exists between education and identity, that learners are affected by the ways they understand themselves and
understand their identity as a learner in relation to education: both formal and informal. ‘Deep learning requires the learner being willing and able to take on a new identity in the world, to see the world and act on it in new ways’ (Gee, 2007 p. 172). Understanding the work of identity as it relates to social participation, change and learning, internally and externally is key in developing engaging and responsive learning experiences; formally and informally. McConaghy (2000 pp. 264-5) noted that a critique of the cultural constructions of education, necessarily analyses the identity politics that determine the roles as an insider or outsider, which individuals and groups can speak and on which topics, the knowledge and processes that are legitimated within the political, cultural structures and the consequences for pedagogy, resources, and representations of knowledge and roles.

Wenger (1998 p. 215) found that learning is an ‘experience of identity…a process of becoming’ or avoiding becoming that necessitates the interaction of both a place and process. He suggested that schools can be places where it is difficult to negotiate identities, educational processes challenge students’ identities by colonising knowledge, knowledge territories are claimed, knowledge sets are legitimized and the definitions of success or failure are contested. Within educational processes, practice acts to privilege certain forms of knowledge, identities and success. What is not readily available are the resources to negotiate identities, emphasising compliance with existing expectations and abandoning learners’ non-schooling identities, knowledge and practices where they conflict with the prevailing sets. In fact, for many students, school presents a choice between a meaningful identity and learning – a choice that creates a conflict between their social and personal lives and their intellectual engagement in school.

What appears to be a lack of interest in learning may therefore not reflect a resistance to learning or an inability to learn. On the contrary, it may reflect a genuine thirst for learning of a kind that engages one’s identity on a meaningful trajectory and affords some ownership of meaning. To an institution focused on instruction in terms of reified subject matters sequestered from actual practice, this attitude will simply appear as failure to learn. In terms of learning, identification with or alienation from an institution
of learning, will have ‘deeper effects than success or failure in acquiring elements of a curriculum’ (Wenger, 1998 pp. 269-70). Timms (2007) found a strong relationship between personal and community identity where communities are defined as ‘networks of inter-personal ties that provide sociability, support information, a sense of belonging and social identity’ (Wellman 2001 p. 18) and a strong connection between time, place and space in a community as they relate to the establishment and maintenance of identity.

Smyth et al (2004 p. 97-101) in an analysis of young people’s experiences of schooling, described the formation of youth identity in relation to a formal school experience as a struggle to balance an appreciation of individual’s uniqueness and generalise about individual’s commonality within diversity. They described identity in terms of class, gender and ethnicity which youth accept, or reject, in terms of the ways they understand their own identities, aspirations and available resources. The challenge for student’s identity, then, is resolving the dispute about what is valued in schools, that is, which identities are valued or devalued and how schools’ reproductive processes reinforce certain identities impact on students engagement. They found that to be a student who succeeds in the formal schooling system is dependent on an identity that supports a high level of commitment despite all challenges.

The challenges to a learners’ identity include:

- Managing personal geographical and emotional spaces in a way to concentrate on teachers’ demands and a series of inflexible deadlines or capacity to respond to changes on students’ lives
- Compliance expected in the face of widely varying teaching standards.
- Ensuring access to a range of physical intellectual and cultural resources as required by learning tasks
- Developing urgently required skills, not explicitly taught in school.

(Smyth et al 2004 p. 97-101)

Smyth et al (2004 p. 109-10) found that in response to these challenges
'young people are making sense of themselves in a context of an almost unlimited expectation for commitment. There is an ever present and escalating performance anxiety as students make their way through school. They need to defend themselves against performance demands, which may mean sabotage or silence, some students put much store on peer relations. They go to school for their relationships with friends. Such “work” is an alternative to academic success’.

As Gee stated (2003 p. 67) ‘(l)earning involves taking on and playing with identities in such a way that the learner has real choices … and ample opportunity to mediate on the relationship between the new identities and the old ones’.

2.5.4 Summary
Identity, like knowledge production and transmission is socially constructed, the identities enacted through learning. Identities are mutable, connected to social worlds, individuals views of themselves and the ways socially constructed identities are interpreted by others. Identity is connected then to the social processes related to learning and producing knowledge in many different forms. The work of managing identity through social engagement is complex as it is defined by tensions about inclusion, exclusion and the ways identities are interpreted in different and unique situations. Learners benefit from the opportunity to experiment and explore different identities in their learning practice. The lack of provision of opportunities and resources to undertake this identity work could be linked to learning outcomes for students who choose not to engage in formal learning experiences.

2.6 Research theory
2.6.1 Social science research
The research reported in this thesis is concerned with social actors living and working in the social order. It is therefore in the domain of social research, which seeks to identify and understand patterns of behaviour in society through logical and empirical investigation. Ragin (1994 p.55) found that ‘(s)ocial research involved the interaction between ideas and evidence. Ideas help social researchers make sense of evidence, and researchers use evidence to extend, revise and test ideas’. Social researchers (for instance,
Babbie 1992) note that social theory is developed through logic and empirical study of society, it aims to explain the accumulated patterns of behaviour in the social order over time. Social research can be inductive, that is theory developed from observations, or deductive, developed through identifying a set of general principles and then examining the social order for proof or refutation. Social science interacted with philosophical thought over the 20th century, to create positivism, postpositivism, structuralism, Marxism, feminism and critical realism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005 p.13; Atkinson et al.,1988). The theoretical basis for the study is provided by critical theory as formalised in the Frankfurt school by leading figures such as Habermas and Horkheimer as elaborated in Crotty (1998 pp. 61-2) where it is theorised that the forces associated with gender, ethnicity and class and the different ways the constructions of reality form power relationships that enfranchise some and disenfranchise others. Issues of power and empowerment especially in relation to disempowerment will be provided for in this research through Freire’s (1972) work. To cover the question of interaction and engagement between participants of this study, their co learners and the institution in which they engage, the research related to the multiliteracies of The New London Group (2000) is used.

Kincheloe at el. (2005 p. 320) defined social research as concerned with investigating 'the relationship between individuals and their contexts….this relationship …is a connection that shapes the identities of human beings of the complex social fabric'. Social science research is undertaken in social sites and seeks to understand the basis of the interactions:

Social sites are regions within society in which routine activities, usually including interactions, take place. Social sites are delimited both geographically and temporally: they exist within specific geographical areas, and humans interact within them at specific times. When human beings coordinate their activities with each other in some manner that relates to geography and time, we have a social site (Carspecken, 1996 p. 34).

Carspecken (1996 p. 36) described social patterns as shaped through society. The social settings are framed by geography, time, interactions, norm, and
social patterns related to those and associated sites. The ‘tacit, shared understandings shift frequently during normal social life’ (p. 34) in settings that are not observable. The settings are ‘defined by a tacit understanding shared by actors that makes their interaction possible. Settings shift when one actor signals the desire to change to a different type of interaction and other actors consent to the change’ (Carspecken, 1996 p. 35)

The development of social science research is informed by that of social theory. Habermas (1971) discussed the views of social science in terms of three models of inquiry. A natural science model of the world measures, tests and makes predictions about the social world through empirical analysis, by an invisible researcher. An historical or interpretive model on the other hand, describes social phenomena’s meanings and operations through the researchers’ balanced and philosophical discussion and descriptions. The critical theory model, represents and interprets the social order with a politically informed view that analyses and seeks to view social oppression through the explicit polemics of the researcher.

Freebody (2003) described the critical science tradition as distinct to natural, and social or cultural science as interested in understanding societies’ structures through patterns of daily life as they show the experience of marginalised groups in society. The goals of critical science inquiry are to explore, critique and transform our understanding of marginalisation and, in educational research, the impact of educational practice on subgroups as it relates to those poorly served or ignored by educational systems. The critical theory tradition examines the constructed meanings that culture bestows on us and emphasises where some meanings come from and serve hegemonic interests. Sets of meaning supporting particular power structures resisting change for more equity and supports manipulation, oppression and injustice (Crotty, 1998 pp. 59-60).

We tend to take ‘the sense we make of things’ to be ‘the way things are’. We blithely do that and, just as blithely, hand on our understandings as quite simply ‘the truth’. Understandings transmitted in this way and gaining a view of the world take deep root and we find ourselves victims of the ‘tyranny of the familiar. (Crotty, 1998 p. 59)
Freebody (2003 p. 127) noted that the strength of ‘analyzing interaction as social practices in educational settings’ lies in ‘their interconnectedness and the accumulation of understanding through the process’. The aim of research is not about a predetermined sense of what is good or bad or what current practice is but to explore what people do.

2.6.2 Qualitative research

Following Freebody’s (2003) aim to understand the ways people interact, this study is concerned with analysing the interactions related to social practices concerned with engagement with post-compulsory learning experiences. The research methodology chosen is associated with analysing interactions positioned within the qualitative paradigm. Within social science, qualitative and quantitative methodologies have developed to undertake research to represent and understand the social order. Cresswell (1998 p. 15) described qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Ragin (1987) compared qualitative and quantitative research as follows; the former is concerned with analysing many cases in terms of a limited number of variables while the latter considers a few cases in terms of many variables. Maxwell and Mohr (1990 p. 2) described qualitative and quantitative data as follows:

quantitative data (is defined) as categorical data, with either enumeration or measurement within categories. A conceptual dimension that is itself a category subdivided by measurement, or that is divided into subcategories for enumerative or frequency data, and is generally called a “variable”: which is a hallmark of the quantitative approach. Qualitative data, in contrast, are typically textual in nature, consisting of written or spoken words, but may include video recordings and photographs as well as narrative text.
Maxwell and Loomis (2003) noted that analysis in quantitative research involves data that is quantified easily and the aggregation and comparison of data sets, qualitative data analysis is managed through investigation of the connections between processes ‘that rely in various ways on the treatment of focal entities as singular wholes in context, with an emphasis on the identification of meaning and process (Maxwell and Mohr 1999 p. 2).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible’ (p. 3). Qualitative inquiry was identified and developed by sociologists (Chicago school) and anthropologists (for example, Mead 1934) in the 1920s and 1930s, and utilised in a range of social and behavioural sciences (Charmez, 2005) that sought to know the other (Vidich and Lyman, 2000). Research is not value free, as evidenced by critiques of researchers such Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Bishop (1998). These researchers see research as a form of colonial power and domination which has been used to catalogue, define and provide evidence that is presented as true and objective ways to interpret indigenous peoples’ behaviour and to other indigenous peoples. Denzin et al. (2005) described qualitative research as a gendered and culturally informed process that utilises a range of approaches in conjunction with connected interpretative practice that are associated with the traditions of ‘foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives’ (Denzin et al., 2005 p. 2). Fine (1994 p. 17) suggested three perspectives that operate in qualitative research: the ventriloquist position promotes neutrality and a researcher who aims to be invisible in the research’s report, the positionality of voices focuses on the research’s subjects’ voices which communicate local meaning in opposition to dominant practices and discourses, and the activism position which recognises the researcher as an advocate for exposing marginalised practices and their local impacts.

Marshall et al. (1999 p. 57) drawing on the work of Marshall (1985, 1987) described the qualitative research methodologies are valuable where research is in-depth considering complexity and process, considers innovation or
phenomena that are not well known, exploring the discontinuities between policy and local practice and knowledge, and where research considers informal connections and processes and authentic organisational goals. It cannot be undertaken through experimentation for ethical or practice reasons and where relevant variables are not yet identified. Marshall et al (1999) asserted that a qualitative research proposal assumes that the researchers’ subjectivity will frame the approach and that methods used need to develop in-depth understandings and increase the chance of describing complex social worlds. Stake (1995) noted that qualitative research is subjective, where subjectivity is an essential element in developing understanding, the associated risks of bias or inaccurate findings need to be addressed through rigorous application of data triangulation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have outlined the questions that social science needs to address in order to comply with canons of quality research which can be summarised as: the credibility of the outcomes as they relate to the research approach, the transferability of the research, to other contexts and groups, dependability, that the changing conditions in the particular case is managed in the approach, replicability of the study with a similar group in a similar context and reflection of the data not the researchers' biases. Lincoln and Guba noted the findings of a study need to be able to be confirmed through another study, placing the burden of confirmability on the data rather than the researcher's ability to be objective, if, as they noted, this is ever fully possible. They also contend that qualitative research needs to be able to engage with the complexity of a case and the changing social world rather than trying to control that situation to ensure replicability. Cresswell (1998) described the characteristics of good qualitative research as employing rigorous data collection which includes multiple forms of data collected over an adequate time period, a focus on inquiry and is founded on understanding an idea with a single focus, rather than a causal relationship. The rigorous approach to data collection, analysis and reporting applies various means of verification and at multiple levels of abstraction.

An effective data collection model will assist educators to consider the factors that may be at play and the key stakeholders’ perspectives that inform the
understandings built throughout a study. The approach to the analysis supports educators, and other stakeholders, understanding of the interplay between internal and external factors, challenge assumptions about relationships and practice, and identify some of the key practices that have significant impacts in educational environments. As learning is situation specific it is often difficult to compare across sites or cases, the analysis process can assist in identifying these differences and clarifying observed outcomes. The role of facilitator is key here, as Geertshuis (2009) noted there is considerable research to show people tend to find and interpret information to reinforce their own beliefs and rely on familiar sources for expert knowledge, no matter their actual expertise in the particular area or evidence to the contrary.

Carspecken (1996 pp. 88-9) noted the difficulty in assuming objectivity in utilising research and outlines that the techniques to promote claims for validity include:

- Triangulation through more than one source of observation
- Engagement over time with participant communities
- Reviewing data and analysis of data with peers
- Confirmation of data with participants
- Incorporation of conflicting records in the data set
- Establishing relationships with participants that are based on trust and equity principles that support the researchers’ perceptions are challengeable by participants who are protected.

Marshall (1985, 1990) added the following criteria for establishing the trustworthiness and value of qualitative research; that the methods are detailed explicitly, data is managed reliably, any underlying biases and subjectivities are examined and articulated, recognises the researchers’ tolerance for ambiguity, utilises triangulation (see also Stake, 1995) to ensure findings are strong and well founded, includes negative examples and elicits cross cultural views to avoid ethnocentric explanations. Preliminary observations generate the research questions, findings are represented
clearly, adequately and accurately that means other researchers can use the findings. The limitations of the findings’ generalisability are recognised while connection to the big picture and usability of the findings of the study in other contexts needs to be discussed by the researcher.

Cresswell (1998), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Merriam (1988), have described concepts that underpin effective qualitative research. They include ongoing in-depth engagement with participants and their communities, triangulation of data using a range of methods, sources and theories, peer review to challenge the researchers’ assumptions, findings and logic, the inclusion of case studies that do not fit with the hypothesis, clarification of the researcher’ biases shaped by their socially constructions of meaning, descriptions that are rich and thick that assist in making inferences about transferability and external auditing to test the findings.

2.6.3 Ethnography

In order to bring a capacity to critique the interactions of the participants of this study in relation to the wider social order within which they negotiate meaning, the study employs principles of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography was developed through the intersection of ethnographic theory and critical theory. This section initially outlines the ethnographic theory before discussing the development of critical ethnography. Ethnographic processes are well placed to be incorporated into the critical theory tradition (as described earlier) as it seeks to understand specific encounters and daily experiences into a broader and meaningful context. Ethnography, as it involves fieldwork, makes meaning of experience and behaviour with the researchers’ personal connection to the context being explored (Tedlock, 2003). To ensure the research speaks on behalf of participants accurately and reflects the stated beliefs about learning, the research adopts techniques to interview participants that are inclusive, flexible and value diverse socially, culturally and historically constructed identities, experiences of education and communication styles. As meaning is socially constructed and negotiated, that is, meaning is shaped by the readers’ community discourse, it is important to understand the audience in the writing of the ethnographic study (Tedlock, 2003 p. 171).
The central assumption of an ethnographic approach is that through close and prolonged interactions with people’s daily lives, ethnographic researchers are able to better understand participants’ motivations, beliefs and behaviours (Hammersley 1992). By incorporating critical theory, critical ethnography examines the critical issues of power and control that operate in social processes and institutions. This study does not use an ethnographic approach, rather it utilises critical ethnographic methodologies. Critical ethnography is well placed as a process within the critical theory tradition as it seeks to understand specific encounters and daily experiences into a broader and meaningful context. Critical theory has been discussed previously, and this chapter describes the development of ethnographic methodology, the subsequent development of critical ethnography as it informs the implementation of this study.

Ethnography was established through the work of the members of the Chicago School, particularly George Mead (1934), Park and Burgess (1925) (focused on urban landscapes), Dewey (1938) (pragmatism) and Blumer (1969) (symbolic interactionism) and instituted ‘a vibrant and increasingly methodologically sophisticated program of interpretive ethnography’ (Thomas, 1993, p. 11). Critical ethnography theory examines the unseen social world, also takes us beneath surface appearances, upsets the status quo, and challenges assumptions that have been taken-for-granted by revealing the often unseen functions of power in society bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control (Carspecken, 1996; Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, and Murillo, 2004; Thomas, 1993). The main influences on ethnography, in broad terms, have changed from a naturalistic perspective (Matza 1969) that seeks to appreciate the natural world without having an impact on it and learning the culture in that world, to one informed by post-structuralism (Derrida 1981), Foucault (1983) which recognises the instability of meaning and a critical view of society. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that the naturalistic approach is critiqued in terms of the degree to which anyone can know another culture, be able to interpret the ways people act and what behaviours mean while post-structuralist views recognise the impact of political, historical and cultural influences and those of the researchers’
socio-historical background on the accounts produced through research (Warnke 1987).

As Tedlock (1991 p. 165) expressed it:

The ongoing nature of fieldwork connects important personal experiences with an area of knowledge; as a result, it is located between the interiority of autobiography and the exteriority of cultural analysis. Because ethnography is both a process and a product, ethnographers’ lives are embedded within the field experiences in such a way that all if their interactions involve moral choices. Experience is meaningful and human behaviour is generated from and informed by the meaningfulness.

Tedlock (1991) described the shift in crucial practice and the new vantage point as a shift from participant observation to observation participation as the ethnographer and participants observe and experience their own and other co-participation in the encounter. Ethnographers have become aware of their own political, ethnic and racial backgrounds and prejudices, the nature of their participation in ethnography and its impact on the research. Ethnography is about more than collecting stories it is about placing specific understandings into a more complete understanding of accounts and socially situated accounts of individuals’ and communities’ lives.

2.6.4 Critical ethnography

Madison (2004) described critical ethnography as enactment of critical theory, or as Thomas (1993 p. 4) states, ‘conventional ethnography with a political purpose’. Kincheloe at el. (2003 pp. 462-3) discussed postmodern ethnographic writer’s concern with objectifying difference and thereby recreating the postcolonial structures being described. Silverman (1990) notes the focus on a critical understanding of experience. Kincheloe at el. (2005 p. 117) asserted that ‘(r)ather than fixing culture into reified textual portraits, culture needs to be better understood as displacement, transplantation, disruption, positionality, and difference’. Critical ethnography draws on a combination of critical theory and ethnography (Carspecken, 1995). Critical ethnography theories aim to make explicit the underlying
political impetus and outcomes of educational practice and the activities that educators and communities might undertake to address these issues (Freebody, 2003). Critical ethnography intends to use knowledge ‘to speak to an audience on behalf of the subjects as a means of empowering them’ rather than speaking for the subjects (Thomas, 1993 p. 4). Critical ethnography can provide a methodology to question the conditioning that occurs through societies’ social and cultural conditions.

Research methodologies that utilise emancipatory approaches involve techniques that make visible the existing and accepted ways of living in the world that are based on social relationships informed by injustice, inequality and exploitation (Kincheloe at el., 2003). The objects of inquiry focus on the structures in society, the related patterns of daily life, the marginalizing and silencing behaviours that impact on groups. Carspecken (1995) contended that critical ethnography needs to differentiate ontological categories. The subjective, objective, normative- evaluative categories rather than accept a multiple realities position: ‘rather than rely on perceptual metaphors found in mainstream ethnographic accounts, critical ethnography, in contrast, should emphasise communicative experiences and structures as well as cultural typifications’ Carspecken (1995 p. 469). Freebody (2003) described critical ethnography as a methodology that aims to make the underlying political impetus and outcomes of educational practice explicit and understand the activities that educational communities and participants might undertake to address these issues. Noblit et al (2004) described postcritical ethnography as engaging the researcher’s own perspective, and that the critical ethnographic researcher needs to overtly consider the impact of their acts of research and representations of people and contexts are acts of dominance.

2.6.5 Reflexivity

Within this study, the researcher participates as a subject of the study, as a full member of the participants’ community and brings their own knowledge of the community to the design and analysis and the involvement of community members who are disenfranchised from dominant social systems. The objective is to make the researcher’s perspective explicit, establishes a process to recognise and locate the researcher’s input and establishes that
the researcher’s perspective is shared and open to scrutiny to encourage the involvement of disenfranchised learners as participants. An important aspect of the ethical considerations of research is the contract between the researcher and researched, as has been described by Stake (2003). Stake observed that there need to be limits to the information that is sought, that risks be inventoried and participants have opportunities to comment on the drafts of the ways their information will be presented and interpreted. As a participant-researcher whose involvement in the community is long term and extends beyond the life of the research and whose relationship with participants is not limited to the research data collection period, the articulation of the contract is vital. Beyond these factors, the researcher’s experience has informed the construction of the study and needs to have an explicit place in the data collection and analysis to ensure alternative views are not subsumed or reinterpreted through this lens.

Undertaking research in one’s own community brings to the fore many of the issues that are implicit in educational research as the researcher will continue to participate in that community long after the research has been completed. Using the reflexive voice has assisted the researcher to examine and understand the issues in undertaking research in their community on a topic on which they have strong personal views. Defining and describing the methodological issues has developed an understanding of the ways the reflexive process operates in a research project. The research process has challenged the researcher’s identity as a learner, researcher and member of the community. The resultant model incorporates these perspectives into the methodological approach with a focus on the data interpretation and representations of participants’ voices. Adler and Adler (1987 p. 321) noted that negotiation about research demonstrates the relationships between researchers and participants. They comment on the value to the researcher of feeling comfortable and to take control to ensure the study maintains ‘technical accuracy’, negotiation through face-face contact and relationships that are reformed continually over time and to have respondents arbitrate about the credibility and plausibility of the research. When complete member-researchers (Adler et al., 1987) explore a group of which they are members, their personal experience becomes important in critically analysing the group
and experiences being studied thus recognising the objective and subjective readings of a situation or interaction.

As the researcher is a member of the community participating in the research and articulating the social and cultural influences on the researcher as participant, the notion of reflexivity has been incorporated into the ethnographic methodologies employed in the study. A reflexive approach seeks to develop the researcher’s understanding of the objective and subjective interpretations of an event or practice, the social, cultural and historical constructions and educational implications (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003). The notion of reflexivity is an important one as it incorporates the voice of the researcher. Gergen and Gergen (2003 p. 579) noted the use of reflexivity to demonstrate the researcher’s biases, investment and developing understandings within the research. It is a way of recognising and incorporating the researcher’s history and experiences, seeing the researcher’s work as located socially, culturally and personally and, historically.

Reflexive ethnography provides a methodological framework to address any potential bias and guide the researcher’s data collection and analysis to achieve a high quality study. A form of critical ethnography, reflexive ethnography identifies the researcher as part of the investigation subject that can identify between the observer and observed, questioning its authority and understanding its place in the research (Kincheloe et al. 2003 p. 469). Moon (1983 p. 30) noted that for critical theory to challenge the ways social science is conceived of and implemented, it must become truly reflexive. Reflexive ethnography focuses on a subculture where the author uses their own experience in that culture to ‘bend back’ on themselves to deeply analyse interactions with others. When full member-researchers (Adler and Adler, 1987) explored a group, of which they are members, their personal experience becomes important in critically analysing the group and experiences being studied thus recognising the objective and subjective readings of a situation or interaction. For reflexive ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2003 p. 211):
the researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one’s own experience to ethnographies where the researcher’s experience is actually studied along with other participants, to confessional tales where the researcher’s experiences of doing the study become the focus of investigation.

There are two sets of information that need to be recognised in this research. The first is the experiences of the participants as learners and participants in the formal and non-formal education sectors. The second is the researcher’s own self narrative understood in terms of a relational identification (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates 2003), a reflexive process where a life experience or history is interpreted in relation to the social and cultural definitions of identities. It is important to maintain the clarity of participants’ voices throughout the process and to ensure that the content of their information is reflected honestly and within its contextual base. The researcher also needs to be able to move from preconceptions to new knowledge as the data collection and analysis dictates, through the examination of new and unexpected concepts and experiences.

Freebody (2003 p. 128) claimed that the levels of analysis used to understand educational interactions represent the reflexive nature of educational activities and the reflexivity in documenting and analysing the activities. Kincheloe et al. (2003 p. 462) noted the main challenges in developing a reflective approach to ethnographic writing are considerations about the ways the ‘knowing subject’ comes to know the other and researchers act to respect the others’ perspective and invite the other to speak. Madison (2004) added to that noting reflexive ethnography critiques objectivity and subjectivity, and contends that critical ethnography brings together multiple perspectives that include the perspectives of Others that seek to negotiate and make meaning that make a difference in Others’ worlds.

2.6.6 Participatory research

Participative or participatory research as it is alternatively known, is utilised to describe the processes by which participants are engaged in all stages of the
Literature Review

research and provides the framework for developing reflective cycles of data collection and analysis. Here the word ‘participatory’ is used to be consistent. Reflexive methodology and participatory research methodologies are complementary as they provide the basis for managing complex subjective data and undertake rigorous analysis and draw evidence driven implications. Participatory research, a form of social research, has been associated with social transformation and is characterised by ‘shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems and an orientation toward community action’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005 p. 560). Kemmis et al. noted participatory action research is optimally undertaken in collaboration with co-participants and that the stages described may not occur in the distinct stages as described. It is a social process that studies, frames and reconstructs social practices through self reflection. Participative action research draws on Freire’s (1979) theories of emancipation (Marshall et al., 1999). Critical participatory action research involves a series of self-reflective cycles that include:

- planning a change
- acting and observing the process and consequences of the change
- reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
  o replanning
  o acting and observing
  o reflecting, and so on. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003, p. 381)

Higgs, Fish and Rothwell (2004, p. 98) described a process to make sense of observations and ideas through a ‘number of interactive, spiraling, reflexive, cognitive and communicative processes and actions (which) can usefully contribute to knowledge development’. Higgs et al.’s framework for undertaking critical participatory action research describes a process that commences with the formulation of an idea and then develops an understanding of the concept or event. The evidence base for the knowledge is generated through evaluation and critiquing that result in a sense of conviction or validation of the knowledge. The concept is then released for
public critique so that it can be accepted and developed through interaction
with the broader professional community (Higgs et al., 2004, p. 97).

Bishop (1998) and Tillman (2002) discussed the embodiment of a
commitment by the researcher in a participatory approach to research that
explores the participant perspective. Participatory researchers are challenged
to focus on developing the connection to and participation in the participants' community and story, rather than being in control (Heshusius, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). In this way research develops new story lines that articulate different understandings of the world, knowledge systems and people (Denzin, 2003 pp. 6-7). Rosaldo (1989 p. 45) noted the importance of shifting focus from centres to the ‘borderlands’ or ‘zones of difference and intersection (peripheries)’ where identities, societies and interests interconnect with others.

Within a participatory approach, there are two sets of information that need to be recognised. The first is the set of experiences of the participants as learners and participants in the formal and non-formal education sectors. The second is the set of researcher’s own self narrative understood in terms of a relational identification (Chappell et al p. 2003), a reflexive process where a life experience or history that is interpreted in relation to the social and cultural definitions of identities. It is important to maintain the clarity of participants’ voices throughout the process and to ensure that the content of their information is reflected honestly and within its contextual base. The researcher also needs to be able to move from their preconceptions to new knowledge as the data collection and analysis dictates, through the examination of new and unexpected concepts and experiences. Adler and Adler (1991) cautioned the participant researcher about identifying too closely with the community as ethnographic research focuses on developing rapport rather than friendship and identification with the group. The use of approaches that challenge the researcher to reassess their biases and level of identification are of value.

Critical theory as described in the earlier sections of Chapter Two, was used to inform the development of research procedures, techniques and tools that address issues of power and control not only in the data collection but also in the data analysis. The data collection methods are designed to ameliorate the
power differential between the researcher and participants by providing a process for explicitly negotiating the research process. The process recognises that disenfranchised learners and community members are wary of social institutions and develop approaches that encourage participants to have confidence in the process and are able to negotiate the level of control around their data and the analysis and research outcomes.

2.6.7 Narrative analysis

The most appropriate means of portraying accurately and holistically the lives and complexities of the participants is through relating their stories as narrative portraits in ways that maintain the integrity of the person in their context and experiences. Narrative is a unique form of discourse that orders a person’s actions, events, thoughts and interpretations from the narrator’s point of view, written or recorded through fieldwork; a short story of an event, an extended story of an important phase of a life story or a full biography of a life (Polkinghorne, 1995; Chase, 2005). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated that narrative was developed through the traditions in oral history, literary history, psychology, drama, folk lore and film philosophy developed around a holistic view of life. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) described narrative inquirers’ fieldwork as connecting to participants through living beside them, sharing experiences and understanding more than what is said and observable but also what is not visible or done that impact upon narrative structures related to observation and interviews. They described this as understanding of the narratives’ long-term landscapes as they operate in people’s lives.

Narrative analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to research analysis that seeks to understand and describe individuals’ experience (particularly those who are socially disenfranchised) through constructions of stories about their lives (Marshall et al., 1999). Narrative analysis approaches are underpinned by the assumption that everyone engages in construction of their narratives. As Marshall et al said, approaches to narrative analysis use the narrator’s sociolinguistic techniques, life events and the narrators’ making of meaning. A narrative approach treats interviews as the stories that people use to describe their world, these descriptions are a way to analyse the culturally rich
methods that produce plausible accounts of the world (Silverman, 2001). So one of the elements to be considered in the analysis is the way participants use the culturally available resources to develop their stories (Silverman, 2004; Miles and Glassner, 1997; Richardson, 1990). Cultural stories can be understood as examining the rhetoric used to make peoples’ own alternative stories explainable and justifiable. People bring a range of different meanings to an experience. The different understandings of activities are represented by the ways people behave towards each other (Silverman, 2004 pp. 345-7). Silverman (1997) cautioned the researcher that when using narrative not to confuse data with authentic accounts of the social world and being able to understand narrative as the stories that are generated from people’s understanding of the world: how and where they are produced.

Marshall et al. (1999 p. 122) noted that narrative inquiry ‘assumes that people’s realities are constructed through narrating their stories’ and is dependent on genuine collaboration, mutual openness and trust between the participant and the researcher. The participant has the opportunity to speak as they choose while the researcher performs active listening. Chase (2005) described narrative as a short or extended story about one’s own life, or whole life that may be recorded through an interview, or field work of a conversation. Narrative inquiry then is related to understanding the way a life is experienced, what is taken for granted, participation and what functions in different contexts. The narrative discourses and interactions are understood by interpreting the complex and entwined narrative threads. Chase outlined the inherent paradox in the relationship between the researcher and the narrator as follows:

a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other’s particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicated, or prepared for in advance’ (Chase, 2005 p. 662).

Analysis of narrative, Chase (2005) noted, differs from that of qualitative research that looks for themes across interviews, and
listen(s) first to the voices within each narrative...narrative researchers listen to the narrator's voices – the subject positions, interpretative practice, ambiguities, and complexities- within each narrator's story. (Chase, 2005 p. 663)

Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks, Schelgoff and Jefferson (1974) noted the difficulty in extracting the researcher from an interview, that the construction of meaning is shared through interaction where the researcher is implicated in making meaning.

Holstein and Gurbrium (2000 p. 108) described the narrative linkages that are identified within narrations between individuals' physical and other resources, those that operate and are shaped by social constructions of reality. Narrative inquirers need to have the sensitivity to question and understand narrative, through related events and stories (Clandinin et al., 1994). Connelly et al. (1994 p. 418) suggested that 'in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story'. Marshall et al. (1999) noted that narrative inquiry while critiqued for focusing on the individual rather than society, focuses on compartmentalised and selectively recalled experience and the accuracy of cause and effect connections in narratives. Both the researcher and participant's voices are accurately heard through the use of narrative inquiry approaches.

2.6.8 Portraits

Portraits provide a means of reporting the synthesised narratives of the participants in this study in order to render them comprehensible to the reader and in sufficient detail so as not to lose the depth and complexity of the interactions reported. Smyth et al (2004) drew on the concept of portraits to report and analyse data as used in the Bringing Them Home 1997 report conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in Australia. The use of portraits or narrative portraits is informed by narrative analysis and active approaches to interviewing and analysis (Silverman, 1997) in which the role of the researcher is recognised through the initiation of and participation in the interview process and the potential impact on the data gathered. In this model interview data is not necessarily treated as a purely
accurate account of past events, rather it is used to demonstrate through analysis the interrelatedness of how people experience and interpret events and how they occurred.

As Silverman (1997 p. 127) noted within an active approach to interviewing and the associated data analysis, interview data is analysed to uncover the practice related to constructing socially informed realities and the subjective meanings that are shared. The aim is to understand the interactions involved in an interview and retain an understanding of the meaning that is produced.

Portraits are designed to provide an alternative representation of the data in relation to the relevant contexts and maintain the cohesion of the participants’ voice and avoid separating transcripts to reducible sections and themes. The text is linked to its’ context in place, time, event and location. Transcripts of participants’ responses, discussions and comments are developed into a cohesive portrait that explains that person’s understanding of themselves, their story over time and the events in their life in a way ‘that captures the mood, style and essence of the (participants) discourse’ (Smyth et al., 2004 p. 30). Smyth et al noted some information is omitted in this process and the researchers’ voice is minimised as far as possible.

2.6.9 Synthesis of literature review

Exploring the nature of social processes, institutions and the ways they interact with individuals and groups is underpinned by understanding the socially mediated power relations that reproduce and entrench existing relationship-based networks and ways of being. Knowledge gathering, sharing and management are not conducted in neutral sites as people have differential access to resources. Learning contexts, and most visibly formal situations, involve power relationships which decide the version of knowledge or pedagogy to be accessed or rejected, within a learning context.

Understanding learning, identity and knowledge production as socially constructed and mediated, provides a framework to describe the multiple and changing, locally, socially and culturally situated qualities of the social world and the associated (as described by Gee, 1998) Discourses and discourses.

The two dimensions of learning interactions provide a further way of understanding the data that follows. These two dimensions are: ‘a
chronologically defined set of social practices’ and the contextual dimension which understands learning events ‘by drawing on the broad, sociocultural and political frame of reference’ (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000 p. 92).

Next, social capital theory provides a structure to describe the processes, networks, and resources that impact on individuals’ and communities’ engagement in knowledge production and learning. Social capital theory contributes an articulation of the resources (Portes, 1998; Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000; Burt, 2000) and the kinds of involvement in networks and relationships in a collective (Putnam, 1998). Of particular value are the concepts of interactivity that build social and knowledge resources through in learning events (Falk et al., 2000) and the bonding, bridging and linking ties and networks that describe the relationships of trust and reciprocity that contribute to learning engagement in different and opposing ways.

The purposes that learners attribute to the negotiation of learning experiences are described in terms of the social processes that connect learners, their practice and the networks within which their identities are constructed (Gee, 2003; Wenger, 1998) and the constructions of interactivity (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000). The social identities enacted in learning situations are affirmed through shared community values and practices (Wenger, 2002) and engaged through opportunities to trial a range of identities through learning experiences (Gee 2003) that engage different knowledge sets, contexts and purposes. The ways in which learners draw on and develop the resources that inform their decision making about learner engagement would appear to be complex and interconnected. Challenging perceptions of learners’ engagement in or rejection of learning experiences, is informed by examining the interactions between these elements and recognising the active roles of learning in making decisions about engagement and the associated risks to their futures. The reconciliation of individuals’ memberships of a range of informing communities, the nexus of membership, describes the challenge for learners, the potential for alignment of their identities.

Participation in learning is informed by an understanding of participants’ connections to understanding of themselves and their membership of different groups. Participation can be interpreted in relation to bonding, bridging and
linking ties as described by Woolcock (1998) which can operate in opposition to each other and place a person in conflict about their group membership and related community engagement. Networks and ties are not inherently good or otherwise, an imbalance can be detrimental to an individual’s or a group’s welfare through exclusion of members who do not conform or in securing preferential treatment of members of one group (see Woolcock, 1998; Portes, 1998; Grootaert et al., 2004).

The processes, ‘the interactive or ‘doing’ dimension of identity formation, reformation and co-construction’ (Falk et al., 2003 p.8), can be used to describe the work of identity as it relates to learning. The processes engaged are informed by the social and cultural contexts in which people function and the learning trajectories they are on. For marginalised learners, the processes of learning institutions have operated to negate the purported purpose of education, to empower learners and challenge learners’ social and individual identities. The empowerment of learners and the negotiation of learning contexts and connections influence the institutions and processes that affect participants’ well-being (Grootaert et al., 2004). The opportunity to undertake identity work might be linked to developing the related processes, networks and resources that impact on learning outcomes for disenfranchised learners.

In order to answer the research question, this thesis presents a set of encapsulations, or data-driven portraits, of the lives of the participants that show how their learning identities are formed and influenced. The participants live and work in social systems and in a specific geographic place, all of which influence their identities. Examinations of social systems and the ways they operate is supported by social science and qualitative theoretical approaches to research that recognise and have the tools to understand social processes and the embedded interactions and subjectivities that define practice. Qualitative approaches are challenged to incorporate best practice principles and so reduce the negative impacts of subjectivity and personal bias. Ethnographic techniques of interview and observation provide the research tools that collect the data, which in turn is viewed through a critical ethnographic lens in order to make the invisible visible. The understandings resulting from the data analyses provide the opportunity to reflect and be
inclusive of participants and researchers’ realities and perspectives. Processes that support internal and external review can then also make space for the new or unusual through the co-production of knowledge. Narrative approaches to reporting and analysing participants’ representations of their perspective are used to illuminate the underlying social processes. The data collection and analysis strategies utilised in this study’s methodology are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Methodology
3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study concerns the learning experiences of adults from social groups disenfranchised from post compulsory educational institutions and the possible role of identity in these experiences. Through the literature review in the previous chapter, it was established that, when considering education in terms of a critical and social perspective, the identity of learners is a factor in determining learner behaviours in relationship to informal learning experiences and formal educational structures and expectations. This was shown to be especially important for those learners whose history of engagement with formal education was characterised by disengagement in compulsory and non-compulsory educational systems, and whose social identities, resources and values diverge from those of the dominant educational and social systems.

Disenfranchisement and disengagement is understood here as the socially based dislocation of some groups and individuals from the social identity resources and norms of educational systems and institutions. The literature review focused on those areas of activity that impinge on learners who are engaged in a range of learning experience. These areas included social theories, learning, particularly adult learning, communities of practice, identity and its relationship to social capital, critical theory as a framework for learning, specifically interaction and relationships as an explanatory concept related to communicative practices and engagement. The literature review informed the development of an appropriate research methodology to explore social contexts and relationships, refined the research questions and developed the analysis framework.

The research described here examined the disparity in interpretations of life and knowledge as they relate to socially constructed learning identities in regional Australia. The disparities can occur between students and school institutions, curriculum and educators and their various constructions of learning identities and the disparities between them, and how these disparities can impact on adult learners’ engagement in learning over the lifespan. In
regional, rural and remote areas of northern Australia, when analysing engagement in education and training, students’ identities as learners are significant potential variables in terms of social, physical location, historical and cultural identities. Learners’ identities, their knowledge and the ways they are identified by others have the potential to determine the way they interact with educational institutions. The study focused on adults in a regional area who are proportionally underrepresented in post compulsory enrolments and include people from social groups historically disenfranchised from educational institutions. In order to explore the nature of this disparity the methodology adopts a broadly qualitative approach (Cresswell, 1998; Denzin et al., 2005) using in depth narrative (Marshall et al, 1999) to explore learner identity throughout the lifespan. Due to the limited amount of research on the relationship between identity and learner engagement in post compulsory education, this study took a theory building approach.

The research used a critical conceptual analysis (Agger, 1991) informed by empirical data gathered from 20 participants using critical ethnographic techniques (for example, Thomas, 1993; Carspecken, 1996). The data is analysed firstly using a critical theoretical lens informed by a framework developed from the literature review, while secondly synthesising the interview and observation data into a set of portraits consistent with the narrative inquiry literature. From these portraits, a third set of analyses, conceptual and empirical, are used to refine the interpretations and gain new insights.

The research methodology was developed and implemented in order to make explicit the influence on the participants of the experiences of formal education on lifelong engagement in learning while exploring the link between the participants’ identities and engagement in post-compulsory education and learning in regional communities. In particular, the research design sought to reveal issues that underpin the structures, relationship and patterns related to difference and disparities. The approach is underpinned by incorporating the researcher as participant in the community to improve the depth of commitment and involvement of disenfranchised community members and accurate analysis of the data’s nuances and locally understood references.
3.2 Research question

In order to enact the research study described above, it was necessary to take account of the socially mediated nature of knowledge, learning and identity and the frameworks that support the development of an understanding of opposing/contradictory perspectives. The research is interested in accounts of events, perceptions and interpretation of those events and how the participants negotiated complexities and their involvement in learning experiences. Re-stated, the research question and accompanying sub-questions are:

How does identity affect engagement with formal post compulsory education and training?

1. How do issues of identity relate to learning engagement?
2. What are the barriers related to identity that hinder active engagement in formal education and training?
3. How do some adults learn from their experiences to effect change in their lives and on the institutions they engage with?
4. What are the ways the adults develop the skills, knowledge and identity resources to effectively engage with and affect change in educational institutions?
5. What are the constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training?
6. What are the implications of answers to these sub questions for post compulsory learning providers?

The findings have implications for understanding the ways learner identity is related to social learning and identity theories and developing pedagogies that recognise learners’ identities as members of complex and often conflicting learning communities. Implicit in the cross disciplinary methodology and tools utilised, is the value of developing an understanding of the ways social systems relate to and inform the behaviour of individuals, groups, systems and institutions.
3.3 Research procedure

3.3.1 Overview

The research utilised a critical approach to social research that draws on a series of complementary social research theoretical frameworks and techniques. As noted earlier, critical ethnography methodologies (Thomas, 1993) use knowledge to speak to an audience on behalf of the subjects as a means of empowering them rather than speaking for the subjects. To ensure this research study spoke on behalf of participants accurately, the data collection techniques involved interviewing socially diverse and disenfranchised participants. The structure of the interviews was flexible and encouraged value diversity and views that challenged the researchers’ preconceptions, social institutions and theories. That is, in accordance with the tenets of the critical narrative inquiry approach (Cortazzi, 1993), the methodology utilised techniques designed to best capture the richness and depth of disenfranchised learners’ relevant experiences. The research approach is therefore designed to examine and understand frameworks that focus on the situated, constructed and negotiated nature of meaning in the social order.

The in-depth interviews were used to examine the complexities of participants’ engagement in social constructions of knowledge, learning and identity and associated processes. The techniques allowed for the inclusion of a critical perspective that could make visible the taken-for-granted and invisible but influential, social processes and institutions. The research design assumed that the examination of cultural and social perspectives requires in-depth analysis of behaviour, perceptions and experiences.

The research process followed these interrelated stages, each of which provided opportunities for the researcher and participant to reflect on each stage while refining and undertaking the next.
Stage One focuses on the data collection through narrative interviews and reflections on data collected. The research context identified was the researchers’ own regional area and through purposeful sampling twenty participants were identified who reflect the demographics of people who live and interact with others in northern Australia and includes adults who are employed or unemployed, experienced in professional and manual work and live in a regional area of northern Australia. An in-depth series of up to three interviews were conducted with each participant, utilising narrative inquiry techniques, some interviews lasted over three hours. The interviews explored the learning experiences of participants over their lifespans and their various interactions with formal and non-formal learning systems. The series of interviews allowed time for recalling relevant incidents and reflection on the central ideas to refine the participants’ narrative. Participants reflected on their experiences and behaviour in relation to learning systems as they had changed over time and experience. The narrators reflected on the elements that had supported or limited their engagement and outcomes. Participants were able to check their data when transcribed as portraits and the findings drawn from each stage of the analysis.

Stage Two centred on the data analysis. Data was analysed through three distinct phases conducted in the following order:
Methodology

1. Phase 1 thematic analysis of the data transcripts to identity key themes and outliers across the broad groupings of participants by their engagement in post compulsory studies,

2. Phase 2 refined the data to identify the landscape of individual’s stories and common/diverse stages of themes and relationships,

3. Phase 3 utilised an extended thematic analysis to bring together the individual and social perspectives and describe the key features of learner identity developed through the literature review, this stage also tested the previous findings.

Stage Three undertook the discussion, reflection and confirmation of the findings with participants at each stage of their development. The analysis was discussed in terms of gaps in the identity framework, theorised about the nature of a learner identity and the potential implications for policy, practice and future research. The collaborative nature of the methodology provided the opportunity for participants to comment on the findings and enact their role as a participant or research informant as they define it at each stage of social research contract to guide the project. Each of these stages is discussed in detail in the following sections, commencing with a discussion of the data collection, including participant sampling, negotiating the roles of the researcher and participants, preparing for, and undertaking the narrative analysis. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the three phases of the data analysis.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Introduction

The data was collected in a way that protected the participants and enabled them to share personal data. The flexible and friendly approach to interviewing with the return sessions resembled conversations held intermittently over a period of several months. This approach provides a framework to ameliorate the potential bias of the researcher who is a member of the study and whose engagement in the community and relationship with participants is not limited to the research data collection period. The researcher’s experience of learning informed the construction of the study and
thus needed to have an explicit place in the data collection and analysis process to ensure alternative views are not subsumed or reinterpreted through this lens.

Developing the narrator’s voice (Stake, 1995) in relation to research undertaken in the researcher’s community has had implications for the researcher and participants, not only during the implementation phase but after the research has been completed. The roles of researcher and participant were defined in terms of their responsibilities throughout the research process by an explicit contract; defining and describing the methodological issues has developed an understanding of the ways the reflexive process operates in a research project. Stake (2006) observed that there needs to be limits to the information that is sought, that risks must be inventoried and participants have opportunities to comment on the drafts of the ways their information will be presented and interpreted. Triangulation was used through the analysis to ensure data reliability and high quality outcomes. The negotiated nature of meaning was recognised in the research content and approach as it supports the recognition of knowledge and learning as a social construct that is embedded within a particular context. Within this approach knowledge is generated from observation to evidence based understanding that can influence practice, that is, have a transformative nature.

In this way, the nature of critical theory was implemented in the methodology as well as the theory building. Potentially, this led to engaged responses to the complexity inherent in the participants’ social systems and a shared commitment to focus on achieving positive impacts. As the researcher is a member of the community participating in the research, the notion of reflexivity (Adler and Adler, 1987) has been incorporated into the ethnographic methodologies. Through this study, the researcher acted as an insider researcher and spent considerable time discussing the research project and its aims before inviting commitment to any research activity as a participant.
3.4.2 Sampling

The site selected is a rural region on the outer fringe of a large northern Australian regional centre. The community contains agricultural and pastoral properties, is bounded by its physical regional location. The participants reflect the demography of the people who live and operate in the particular region of northern Australia concerned, and include adults who are employed or unemployed in professional and manual work and who live in a regional area of northern Australia. The demographic profile of the site is outlined in Appendix Five. The full results are presented as percentages to maintain anonymity and describe the community’s:

- Regional profile
- Gender spread
- Age spread
- Ethnic diversity
- Income
- Educational attainment

However, the summary of the demographic analysis now follows. The region includes rural areas with pastoral, agricultural and horticultural activities, peri-urban areas with acreage allotments ranging from one to twenty acres, a village centre, council reserve and two roadhouses. The region has a higher male population than the larger northern region and the national level. The representation of Indigenous people is considerably less in the research region (5.5%) compared to the region as a whole (27.82%) and more than double the national average (2.05%). The largest proportion of the population over 15 years is aged between 35 and 54. The unemployment level (3.07%) is less than that of the northern region (4.39%) and the national level (5.2%). The male workforce has a higher labour force participation rate (66.87%) than women (59.80%), a greater degree than that of the northern region (66.20% to 59.11%) or national level (66.60% to 54.4%). The percentage of people 15 years old and older who have completed a non-school qualification in the local region (38%) is higher than the other region (35%) and lower than the national level (39%). People over 15 who have non-school qualifications in the local
Methodology

region is predominately at certificate level (22.64%), compared to the northern region (17.22%) and national level (16.73%). The corollary is that the percentage of people with diploma or graduate qualifications is less in the localised study area (15.48%) to the northern region (18.21%) or the national level (22.7%). Men over 15 who have non-school qualifications in the local region at certificate level (44.07%) are significantly higher than women (11.81%).

The site was also chosen as the researcher is a local resident in that region. The researcher has strong local ties through personal and professional association and can bring specific insights to the analysis and engage people who are usually disenfranchised from social processes and institutions.

Twenty participants were identified whose demographics approximated the demographic profile of the region. Because of the small sample size it was not possible to precisely reflect the demographic profile. Participants originated from a range of cultural backgrounds, including Indigenous people, and encompassed distinct generations, regions, employment and educational backgrounds. While the participants are all part of a regionally defined community, they do not necessarily know or relate with each other. They each work in their networks within that community.

The sampling technique utilised what Miles et al. (1994) described as a subset of purposeful sampling. In addition, theoretical sampling in concert with a stratified purposeful typology and a modified snowball sampling strategy was used to identify participants who can best contribute to building theory. The sample size balances the issues of depth versus breadth by representing the types of learner engagement and using in-depth interviews that ensured rigour and quality in the data collection process that collected personal and sensitive information about people’s experience of education. Participants were also chosen for their potential for revealing insight into relevant experience, namely people with long term engagement in regional learning systems and who are familiar with the diversity that exists within the community. All participants live in the identified region and some also work in that region. That is, there was a
balanced representation of the community that included key community members as informants who provided diverse accounts of learning, and avoided the over representation of one socially related group in the community.

The sample group was identified from three representative groups from the region. The participants have varying degrees of formal education engagement across their lives and engagement in post compulsory education or training. The groups were identified according to the following criteria where learning goals may include qualifications, skills sets, recognition of knowledge, personal or professional development and defined as follows:

- **Group A** are non participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- **Group B** are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- **Group C** are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.
The purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990; Freebody, 2003) addressed the key issues for ensuring quality data and contributions. As represented in Table 1 shows the participant sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Highest education completed</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Participant sample

**Figure 5 Research participant demography matrix**

3.4.3 Negotiating researcher and participant roles

The value of the data collected through in-depth narrative interviews was dependent on establishing relationships between participants and the researcher that promoted confidence in the research process, commitment to involvement in the research process and a clear articulation of the researcher’s and participants’ roles within that research. This has been managed through the development of explicitly negotiated and understood agreements between the actors. An important aspect of the ethical considerations of research, the contract between the researcher and researched, has been described by Stake (2003). The research process was explicit and inclusive in order to recognise the intention of the researcher but also the participants in the project. The negotiation or contract has two parts, the formal ethics process and the informal elements negotiated between participants and the researcher on a case by case basis.

Ethics clearance was granted by the Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Committee based on a detailed description of the research’s significance, processes for undertaking the research, gaining approval to participate and
reporting the findings. Attached to the application was the plain language statement outlining the project and issues related to participation and the consent form for each participant to sign (see Appendices 2 and 3). The informal contract with participants relates to the way the ethics agreement is implemented, that is, the basis on which the participant decides to be involved, their degree of, and stages at which they choose to be involved, their expectations of the research’s outcomes and the researcher. These were discussed prior to commencing any involvement in the research and were revisited throughout the study to renegotiate and affirm the research relationship. Examples of this included participants who expected an ongoing commitment of the researcher and the expectation that the researcher would seek to address the findings through local action on completion of the study, participants whose interest in contributing to the study and contributing reflections on the analysis increased over the life over the project and those who were clear that their contribution was completed upon checking the transcript and initial analysis of their own data and expecting the researcher will acting responsibly with the data analysis and reporting.

There are significant implications for the roles of participants and contracts between researchers and the researched. The negotiation of the participants’ and researcher’s roles, as well as the implementation of an agreement about and between researchers and ‘the researched’, was used to ensure that the shared understanding of the research process was explicit. To be inclusive the process recognised the intention of the researcher to understand learner identity but also the interests of participants to address issues around learner engagement in their community. The contract articulated that the researcher would be involved in the implementation of some of the outcomes at a local level to reciprocate their involvement in the research. The informal, socially constructed contract was negotiated over time and in informal settings as chosen by the participants where there was no formal recording of data. Of the participants, 65% chose to rehearse their interview prior to formal recording of the data and then requested a formal interview as a later date to commit their information into the formal dataset. This process tested the veracity of the researcher and established informed consent. It also
developed the trust relationship between the participants which facilitated discussion of personal and sometimes difficult subject matter and a basis for not only what happened, the attitudes to those experiences, the perceptions of a particular incident and why people felt that way.

The researcher has considerable insider knowledge about the community and its members. Of value is a process that ensures additional information, after participants have reflected on their interview or the research project can be included if permitted by the participant. This can occur in informal and social situations. The researcher negotiated a process to affirm when this sharing can be considered data or when it is considered separate to the research through the review of data and analysis with the relevant participants. If there was any dissention that could not be resolved by discussion, the researcher erred on the side of caution and removed the information.

The negotiation of data and its interpretation occurred in a cycle, where participants had developed confidence their ideas are presented accurately and the researcher has undertaken their part of the contract. The researcher’s role within the contract with participants was to link and develop understandings that can be communicated clearly to an outside audience. This was particularly important when undertaking negotiations with people who are disenfranchised from social institutions and distrustful of participation. This reflective cycle allowed time and space for researchers and participants to collaborate and consider their perspectives and reflections. There was a clear role for involving participants as active agents who are involved in analysis and representation of their knowledge, rather than using participants solely as subjects of a process.

Undertaking research in a researchers’ own community brought to the fore many of the issues that are implicit in educational research as the researcher continues to participate in that community long after the research has been completed. Using the reflexive voice has assisted the researcher to examine and understand the issues in undertaking research in their community on a topic on which there are strong personal views. The model incorporated these perspectives into the methodological approach with a focus on the data
interpretation and representations of participants’ voices. The research included their own portrait in the dataset as a member of the community under investigation and to provide a point of discussion when considering the analysis of data, in essence the researcher places themselves as part of the project process. The validity and ownership of the stages and final outcomes of the project are therefore important. Clearly individuals have ownership of their story and the researcher shares ownership of the portraits, analysis and outcomes to a degree with the community that contributed to the study. There is an explicit contract with the researcher that they will ultimately draw the competing ideas into an accurate representation that reflects this diversity. This involves a responsibility to demonstrate to participants that their ideas are being included with many others and that this is valid. This is an important test and change of emphasis in a community based research methodology.

3.4.4 Interview schedule and process using narrative inquiry

Through the empirical data collection, ethnographic techniques of interview and observation were employed to conduct interviews with twenty adults in a regional community in the northern Australian region. The interviews used narrative inquiry techniques to elicit in-depth narrative about learning engagement and to analyse using narrative analysis techniques. As with other studies that rely solely on data from in-depth interviews to reveal participants’ views on events, the subjective view matters (Marshall et al., 1999 p. 110). Initially the interview process commenced with participants who had been disenfranchised by educational institutions and then interviewing people from similar backgrounds who had experienced varying apparent levels of success in their learning engagement that is, through engagement and then those completing qualifications, skills sets or gained employment as a result of formal learning. This established and refined the research approach, tested the underlying assumptions and tools and through a snowball technique identified other people who would add depth and richness to the data set (see Cresswell, 1998 for further information on this approach).

The initial approach to potential participants was managed sensitively and to establish the basis for a relationships of trust. The initial discussion was on average held over one hour where the researcher and participant discussed
the study, ethics procedures, participants discussed the types of information they could share and rehearsed their contributions. The interview structure did not emphasise the concept of identity to test if it would be a key theme in the data independent of any interjection by the researcher. The researcher actively avoided using the term identity in the interviews and only used the term in the analysis to test the validity of the analysis, that is, did the students identify that concept as valid and evident. The interview followed a semi-structured interview schedule to elicit the participants’ narrative about their experiences of learning. The probe questions were used to pursue areas of interest or omission in the narrative where appropriate. The interview structure is listed as a set of talking points rather than direct questions that can be confronting for some people. The interview schedule follows;
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main questions</th>
<th>Probe Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tell me about school and your schooling experiences | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education? |
| Tell me about any training experiences that you've had | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education?  
• Why were you involved?  
• Did you complete your study?  
• Why did you keep going or what made you leave?  
• Did the training help you? |
| Tell me about the learning that you do in your work | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education?  
• Why were you involved?  
• Did you complete your study?  
• Why did you keep going or what made you leave?  
• Did the training help you? |
| How would you like learning experiences to be?    | • What are the barriers for accessing formal post compulsory education and training?  
• What helps you accessing formal post compulsory education and training?  
• What strategies have you used to survive and manage institutions (For example, Centrelink, school, TAFE training employment)?  
• Describe the values and attitudes that affect your participation in education and training.  
• What aspects of your personal identity affect your learning?  
• Describe your preferred ways of learning. |

*Figure 6 Semi structured interview schedule*
As can be seen from the interview schedule, the participants were interviewed about their experiences of learning, learning practices and their relationship to identity resources; both those that are brought to learning and their interpretation through involvement in formal and informal learning. Data was collected through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews each are described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (Kahn and Cannell, 1957 p. 149) and ensured the research provided the most accurate interview collection and interpretation approaches. The interpretations of narratives on behalf of participants accurately relied on interview techniques and non-confronting approaches based on relationships of trust and reciprocity that are inclusive, flexible and value were adopted to ensure the involvement of a range of participants including Indigenous and non Indigenous participants, engaged and disenfranchised people. The in-depth narrative interviews sought to understand relationships and connections between individuals, groups, social processes and institutions. In-depth interviews were typically like conversations that ‘explore(d) a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses’ unfolding what the participants see as valid (Marshall et al., 1999 p. 109).

In-depth interviews took considerable time to conduct and were underpinned by relationships built on trust and commitment to involvement in the project. As the research focus is to understand issues of importance for people who are disenfranchised and disengaged from social processes, the relationships or trust are of particular importance. As far as possible, the researcher demonstrated the attributes of a qualitative researcher as described by Marshall et al (1999) where relationships built through strong interpersonal skills are fundamental; this is evident through being patient, an active listener, respecting others’ perspectives, willingness to engage in reflection about the community, its settings and their role within it. These issues were addressed by working with the researchers’ own community and use of extensive confirmation processes, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation or misrepresentation. The participation in the interviews of people from a range of social groups at various levels of disenfranchisement, supported the
Methodology

triangulation of findings across sources at different levels of engagement and community based social groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of initial discussion</th>
<th>0-30 minutes</th>
<th>30 minutes-1 hour</th>
<th>More than 1 hour</th>
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<tr>
<td>No of participants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of aggregated interviews</th>
<th>0-1 hour</th>
<th>1-2 hours</th>
<th>More than 2 hours</th>
<th>Total number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of participants</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 Tabulated interview times

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Introduction

The development of an effective model for understanding the data and ensuring the participants’ voices remain at the forefront of the study, in not only the data and the way it was collected but also through the analysis. As Stake (1995) described the boundedness of a system may be irrational. It may not have to be about a community that is working well. In this case the community consists of different groups and sub groups, who define themselves as different to subgroups in the region while sharing a regional identity. As such the data and resultant analysis reflects the conflicting continuities and diversities that exist in the ways people define themselves in terms of one area or group and against another.

This four-phased analysis model has been developed by reflecting on the processes that occurred throughout research largely negotiated with participants and community members and working to address the issues of disenfranchised people’s participation and the exploration of complex and invisible interactions. These interactions and decisions are not necessarily overt and at the forefront of people’s minds. The analysis model provides a series of cycles of reflection and assessment through triangulation and employing Kemmis and McTaggart's (2003) framework for critical participatory action research and Higgs et al’s (2004) model for appreciating practice knowledge, moving from personal observations to evidence based knowledge. Triangulation is achieved through multilevel analysis, comparing groups
around a common variable, engagement in learning and following up on outliers to explore the characteristics of the case (Caracelli and Greene, 1993; Creswell et al., 2003). The high degree of time and negotiation involved with each in-depth interview and confirmation of the data and analysis improved the quality of the outcomes, by providing a process that focused on the depth of the reflections by participants and addressed the issues related to a small sample group and the degree of subsequent generalisability. The results were analysed and presented in accordance with four Phases of analysis described in detail here.

3.5.2 Phase One: Thematic analysis of the interviews

Each interview was transcribed, noting the context, observations made through the interview about context and behaviour. The annotated transcripts were analysed using narrative analysis (for example, Connelly et al., 1990; Marshall et al., 1999 p. 122-3) to test the value of investigating the research’s initial premise and the broad themes and identify outliers. The analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by coding the data using manual techniques to identify ‘salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting’ (Marshall et al., 1999 p. 154). Each stage of the analysis utilised analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990 p. 306) to ‘reflect the understandings expressed by the participants’, these typologies are ‘created by the researcher…are grounded in the data but not necessarily used by the participants…(and) the researcher applies a typology to the data’ (Marshall et al, 1999 p. 154).

The approach focuses on uncovering patterns and themes. Patton (1990) cautions the researcher to be aware of the potential impact of interpreting the participants' world through the researcher's interpretation of meaning and to ensure that any data analysis or matrices developed do not lead the analysis. Matrices and cross classification analysis need to be used in ways that assist finding ‘holes in the already-analyzed data, suggesting areas where data might be logically uncovered’ (Marshall et al., 2006 p. 159). The themes were tested through discussion with the participants and reflection on the key themes identified in the literature review. As Gee (1996) notes the analysis of one Discourse with another is dependent on being expert in both Discourses.
The insider researcher approach supports the data analysis as the researcher is an active member of both the participating regional community and the academic research community.

Major themes that emerged through the analysis were identified and explored through the participants’ different ways of expressing their perspectives: their voices and contexts. An important focus of the analysis was the maintenance of participants’ voices within their contexts and understanding of identity. Through the analysis outlying themes became evident and these were marked for later analytic attention. The understandings developed through the analysis were used to discuss and develop an understanding of the main contexts and critical incidents that relate to effective learning for people in regional areas. This stage of the analysis identified the uniform titles to analyse all of the narratives and provides an overarching structure to consider learners’ engagement across the lifespan.

### 3.5.3 Phase Two: Constructing narrative portraits

The analysis further refined the themes identified in Phase 1 in order to structure and present the detailed richness and insights of the participants’ profiles. The interview data was analysed to provide a portrait of their experience, key events and attitudes to education and learning. This Phase used Smyth and Hatton’s descriptive portraits to organise individuals’ profiles in relation to the major themes and relationships identified in Stage One. The major themes identified through the first Phase of the interview transcripts’ analysis were used to inform the construction of a portrait structure to profile each participant’s trajectory through formal and informal engagement in learning. The framework developed through Phase One of the data analysis described the learners in terms of:

1. **Contexts**
   a. Individual context
   b. Community context
   c. Educational context
   d. Formal and informal educational history inc professional learning
2. Critical incidents that inform practice

   a. Milestones in learning
   b. Attitudes to learning
   c. Attitudes to self as a learner
   d. Preferred ways of learning
   e. Relationship to milestones and community
   f. Ages, stages and purpose of learning events
   g. Personal reflection

The presentation of the data through portraits maintained the integrity of participants’ experiences, the relevant relationships and contexts. This concept was informed by Smyth et al’s (2004) use of descriptive portraits regarding the experiences of education of secondary school aged students. These portraits were not formulaic as they describe the different ways people experience learning throughout their lifetime and need to be sufficiently flexible to reflect their perceptions, priorities and realities.

The presentation of individuals’ journeys through learning as portraits does not intend to reduce the complexity of people’s lives to a specific factor but rather a way to explore interactions and reflections on experiences. As a participant-researcher, the researcher also developed their own portrait thereby declaring their influences, biases and priorities. These portraits were not based on a single discussion or interaction, but are developed over time and the content negotiated with the participants. In this way, participants deepened their thinking through discussion or other influences and choose to edit their portrait to clarify or reinforce their key points. The cycle of building and testing portraits together and sharing the analysis process, while time consuming, worked to support the development of an accurate representation that reduces the influence of any researcher bias. The time for reflection through the development cycles and levels of analysis allowed time to deepen thinking about the data and develop the links between the concepts. These factors were considered and reflected on through the research timeline plan and discussion with participants at the start of the project. Building mud maps can be problematic as the researcher blended a number of possibly
competing and differentiated preferences. These discussions acted to deepen the researcher's understanding of the complexity of the relationships and can lead to new areas of exploration. The portraits were confirmed with the participants as approved and ready for publication.

3.5.4 Phase Three: Analysis of the narrative portraits

The completed portraits were used to draw out the common themes and relationships. Major themes were identified and explored through the different voices and contexts described by participants. An important focus of the analysis is the maintenance of participants' voices within their contexts and understanding of identity. Subthemes were developed through the same process to develop a clear understanding of the relationship between identity and engagement learning. These understandings were used to discuss and develop pedagogical concepts that relate to effective learning for people in regional areas. As thematic analysis develops with time and reflection, this process took a considerable length of time. While not overtly directed by the researcher, this stage reflected the general trends of the model of Higgs et al. (2004) that develop through stages of personal experience, to testing ideas and through critical reflection with a wider audience to theory building. This process focuses on the conceptual understandings that underlie experience and practice. Higgs et al. (2004, p. 98) described the critical analysis process that is used to understand the observations and ideas through a 'number of interactive, spiraling, reflexive, cognitive and communicative processes and actions (which) can usefully contribute to knowledge development'. These stages were developed from participants' personal experience to testing ideas with a wider audience and focusing on the conceptual understandings that underlie experience and practice.

The portraits were used to identify the common themes and relationships and are described in a mud map based on the notion of a mental map. Ryan and Bernard (Ryan and Bernard, 2003 p. 266) described a mental map as a visual display of items that have similarities, these may be organised to demonstrate their links or relationships. A mudmap provides a signposted map of a learners' lifelong learning experience or landscape; that describes and links the key drivers, activities and relationships in relation to context, place and
Methodology

time markers. The analysis with co-participants and researchers has worked through several layers of analysis, developed from personal experience to broader discussions about education, learning and identities in broader contexts. The cycle of building and testing portraits together and sharing the analysis process, while time consuming, works to support the development of an accurate representation that reduces the influence of any researcher bias. The time for reflection through the development cycles and levels of analysis allows time to deepen thinking about the data and develop the links between the concepts. The common usage of the term mudmap describes a hand drawn map with landmarks to travel in that area.

In this study, the term mudmap is used to organise consistent ideas, to map their logical groupings and relationships to understand the development and directions of concepts. An example is the development of identity as a learner and the impact of various events and people on an individuals or groups identity. This was a negotiable document, with participants who choose to operate as co- participants and researchers, the mudmap, its themes, constructions and relationships, the ideas included or omitted are open to be discussed together. As we share bonds in a social and regional sense, the relevant discussions and redrafting can happen formally through an interview or informally at a barbeque or afternoon tea. As such the negotiation may occur singly or in different groups and incorporate views from a range of sources. This voluntary process was open to all participants. Some chose not to participate and referred to the contract that the researcher will undertake the analysis faithfully, respectfully and accurately. The mudmap was then further refined and so on. The contract between research and participants was continually discussed, renegotiated to ensure everyone was comfortable and clear about their expectations and role within the process. The researcher’s responsibility was to indicate opportunities for participation and participants could choose whether to take advantage of those opportunities. There was a clear point by which all participants withdrew and expected the researcher would write up and reflect on the findings and analysis to report the outcomes accurately to formal institutions. This process continues until there is general agreement about the common themes,
relationships and descriptions. The process is outlined in the following diagram.

**Figure 8 Narrative portrait analysis framework**

The cycles of reflection are essential in developing an accurate representation of the data. These cycles are an important element of the research and were valued by the participants as such. In this process it is important that participants only comment on their own ideas and general concepts. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained and participants are discouraged from commenting about each other or having any such comments included in the data set. This is particularly important in a small community where people may know of each others’ involvement in the study despite the researcher maintaining complete confidentiality in all matters related to the interviews and data collection.
3.5.5 Phase Four: Theoretical Matrix: Enacted learner identity

The enacted learner identity theoretical matrix analysis was developed through as an extended thematic analysis that tests the findings of the previous three phases of the Stage Two analysis section of the research design and was informed by relevant perspectives of learners (Keeffe, 1992; Field, 2005), their identity (Gee, 2003; Falk et al., 2003; Wenger, 1998) and social capital (Woolcock, 2001; Grootaert et al., 2004; Gitell and Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Fukyama, 1995). The theoretical matrix proved an essential part of reconciling and synthesising multiple disciplinary perspectives about similar content areas. For example, psychology and sociology have quite different ways of discussing ‘identity’. This was of considerable assistance in clarifying and describing learning elements that impact on learner identity. This matrix draws on a number of theoretical frameworks to develop an understanding of learner identity and engagement.

This final analysis evaluated of the role of horizontal and vertical linkages as facilitators of learning engagement and is reported, along with the other phases of the research analyses, in the following Chapter Four.

3.6 Synthesis of research methodology

The integrated cross disciplinary approach underpinned by critical ethnographic approaches employed narrative data analysis techniques and was designed to elicit and understand people’s experiences in an environment that requires relationships of mutual trust and reciprocity. The qualitative research study was constructed through a critical perspective that assumes meaning, identity, learning and language are socially situated. Of importance, is understanding the impact of social perspectives of learning and identity, and their connections, on social processes and institutions. This approach intends to make visible the invisible structures, relationships and patterns that exist in learning engagement for individual communities and institutions. In particular the approach seeks to find the borders and differences between individuals experience and identities that are socially constructed. The approach worked to generate insights through explanations of experience that incorporate the nuances related to social based learning and identity enactment. A modified purposeful sampling design resulted in a sample group of twenty participants
Methodology

who had the potential for revealing insight into engaging and disenfranchising learning experiences and the diversity that exists within a community.

The research approach was designed to ensure participants involvement and information was managed sensitively and conducted on the basis of relationships of trust. The explicit contract between the researcher and participants negotiated through the formal ethics process and the informal elements provided a process to test the veracity of the researcher and establish informed consent. The series of in-depth interviews and reflections undertaken explored the connections between identity and the engagement of disenfranchised regional learners. The empirical data collected through the interviews and subsequent reflections provided a basis on which to appreciate complex personal and social identities, the ways they function in making decisions about learning engagement and the functions of learner identity that mediate learning engagement across the lifelong learning trajectory. The research approach employed standards to ensure the high quality of the data collection and analysis. The data was triangulated through a series of analyses and critical reflection with informants to confirm the findings and examination of outlying data. Each of the four phases of analysis and reflection with participants, including the researcher, provided new insights into the ways different types of learner identity can be described, characterised and profiled. The complex interactions analysed are context and location specific, providing a view of the explicit and implicit processes that operate within and across communities and institutions. It is the results of each of the stages and phases described in the preceding sections of this chapter that are now reported in detail in Chapter Four which follows.
Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion
4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, the research took place in three Stages, and the diagram outlining those stages for ease of reference follows.

In the chapter (Chapter Four), the results of the data collection and analysis undertaken in Stage two are discussed. In Stage Two, the interview transcripts were analysed in four phases. These phases were discussed in depth in Chapter Three preceding. The results in this chapter are therefore presented in accordance with the four phases of analysis: thematic analysis of the interviews, narrative portraits of the participants, analysis of the portraits and finally the development of the theoretical matrix of enacted learner identity theoretical framework.

Phase One reported the core themes and subthemes identified through the analysis. These themes and subthemes provided a framework with which to report the narrative data as they related to their context. This stage of the analysis identified the common milestones in people’s learning trajectories and considered the evidence of learner identity as it related to learning in the data. The Phase Two analysis process explored the landscape of individual’s learning trajectories and the inherent relationships between events, perceptions, practices and behaviours, presented as a set of narrative portraits. In Phase Three, the resultant portraits identified the layers of analysis that grew from the personal experience of formal and informal education,
the role of family and community in determining the attitudes to making decisions about learning engagement, the challenges that were faced in engaging in learning and the different ways learners managed those challenges.

Phase Four is a cross cutting analysis of the participants’ portraits. The purpose of the cross cutting analysis was to identify the complex and intersecting common and distinctive factors that impacted on learners’ experiences of success, their experiences of different learner identities and their attitudes to learning in the broader sense. A second cross cutting analysis occurred in Phase Four. In Phase Four’s cross cutting analysis, the learner identity theoretical framework was developed. The framework was developed by drawing on the literature review and refined through phases one, two and three of the data analysis. It was used in Phase Four to characterise the learner identity profiles that were identified across the participants’ lifespans. The results provide a framework to consider the nature and characteristics of different learner identities and the interaction between learner identities and engagement in formal and informal learning.

4.2 Phase One Analysis: Thematic analysis of the interviews.

The Phase One analysis outlines the major themes and subthemes identified through the analysis of the interview transcripts, and provide an overarching structure to consider the key factors and incidents to consider learners’ engagement across the lifespan. The interview data analysis does not treat information as informed by a realist approach that believes responses list true pictures of reality rather it uses a narrative approach that treats interviews as the stories that people use to describe their world. These descriptions are a way to analyse the culturally rich methods that produce plausible accounts of the world. The focus of this analysis is to understand how participants perceive learning engagement across their lifespans and the relationships. It also identifies the resources, strategies and experiences that have informed their engagement in or disengagement from post compulsory education and training. Successful engagement in educational institutions was defined by participants.

The narratives focuses on the nature of their learning and how this influences their decision making in relation to engagement in post compulsory education and training. The narratives include what may appear to be extraneous factors as it
reflects the learners’ priorities and the decisions which may influence the nature or quality of their learning. The disengaged learners’ narratives focus on their experiences of education, reasons for disengagement, the impact of positive and negative experiences and the ways participants manage learning in their lives to achieve their goals. For those who have engaged in post compulsory education to varying degrees, the narratives described their positive and negative experiences, reasons for engagement, the informing frameworks and relationships that supported their engagement, their interpretations of educational events and community expectations and the strategies they had developed to manage their engagement. Across all participant groups there were many elements of commonality in their background and different experiences and outcomes from education. Of interest, then, are the relationships, attitudes, strategies and experiences that enable participants to want to engage in, learn and manage institutionally based education systems that have excluded others.

The seven major themes and nine subthemes identified through Phase One’s thematic analysis are summarised as:

1. Individual and family contexts for learning
2. Community contexts for learning
3. Educational contexts experienced across the lifespan
4. Formal and informal educational experiences
5. Workplace contexts related to learning
6. Individual's insights into the nature of learning
7. Critical incidents that described experiences in learning and their impact on learners’ engagement and identities. These critical moments are described by participants in terms of:
   a. Attitudes by institutional authorities to the learners
   b. Attitudes to learning and educational institutions of the learner
   c. Perception of self as a learner
   d. Purposes for undertaking learning events
Findings and Discussion

e. Key resources influencing decisions about learning engagement

f. Responses to positive and negative experiences of learning

g. Reasons for completing or not completing learning events

h. Preferred ways of learning and learning provision of education for the community

i. Personal reflections about learning and learner identities

The data relating to each of the themes are examined in greater detail below. The results of the analysis is described and supported by examples from the interview transcripts. These themes were used in Phase Two to provide a structure for the learners’ portraits in order to identify and compare the different experiences and omissions in their descriptions of learning engagement and disengagement.

4.2.1 Individual and family contexts for learning

People described their individual educational contexts in many different ways; through their experiences as a child through to adulthood, in school and/or the workplace, negotiating their children’s learning and designing opportunities for their futures. Participants consistently described the role of their family as important in describing the contexts that have and continue to inform their learning engagement across their lives. Family was identified as informing the individual’s perceptions about themselves and their world in terms of engagement in learning. Family was not necessarily a positive or supportive influence but family members were consistently described as a part of the framework that helped to make decisions about educational engagement. One typical example was:

My father always said you can do anything you want to do, I had a very traditional mother who was home all the time, [he said] you don’t have to do that, you can do anything, … and he always said if you want to study I will back you to the hilt and I always did and he always did, but one of my other sisters didn’t study and he backed her too he said that’s fine if that’s your decision (Emily).

A lack of support or interest by family in education was experienced by others, for example:
Findings and Discussion

It was after a long weekend and I had taken a day off school and mum challenged me and said are you going back to school and I said no and that was the last day I went to school. No more was said about it, no one worried if I went or not (Peta).

The family context informed individuals' sense of purpose, efficacy and the development of appropriate strategies. Families provided a range of physical and socially defined resources that impacted on individuals' decisions about learning and engagement in learning experiences. As Michael noted:

…[My] father was an academic… [and] moulded me in the same vein. [It] taught me to question. My father would never give me a decision on a plate. If I was in a dilemma he would give me the wherewithal to work it [the problem] out for myself and he taught me to think (Michael).

Explicit support from the family reinforced learning engagement behaviours and strategies. The resources included establishing the importance of educational activities and supporting them through provision of space and time. An example was:

I always studied had at least one unit on the go all the time, [my husband] and I agreed that I withdraw and study, its been like a hobby to me to go into something and really think about it and see how it would change my life. So I used to go into this little room we had at 7.00 twice a week and that was our agreement and the house would burn down and we would have visitors and [my husband] would be up to his neck bathing children and the children banging on the door and that was my time and I would withdraw and I never came out and it was just what propels me is being in another world and like being in another world (Emily).

Participants reflected on the ways families described and defined success in relation to learning in life. These resources impacted on individuals' approaches and decisions related to their capacity to maintain or reject their engagement in learning. The approaches were not necessarily consistent or supported across their various family members and generations. Participants described the impact of family
members and their interpretations of education and individuals’ roles in relation to education on participants’ decisions about learning engagement. Consider the following example:

…[My attitude to learning] comes from my parents’ attitude that it doesn’t matter what anyone says you can do anything you want to, it doesn’t matter whether you’re a boy or whether you’re a girl, you can do whatever you want to [you’ve] just gotta make a decision to do it and follow through…we have always been told to follow things through, if you make a start on something keep going ‘til you’ve finished it; apprenticeship, degree, whatever (Rhonda).

Family members defined success and approved patterns of behaviour and attitudes to learning. It was not that participants were precisely compliant with that view but they provided a reference point and for some the resources that informed their decision making processes. For example:

…[My] family’s expectations were about being independent and being able to support myself it wasn't on going to university or having a professional career. … the skills my grandmother gave me helped me to survive in my own family structure and strive for higher levels whilst at the same time still be respectful aware and act appropriately in my own system (Tamara).

4.2.2 Community contexts for learning

The communities that provided informing contexts for learning engagement and rejection were local and globally based. The communities included the people known to participants and the social groups that participants identified with, at a broader scale. An example of positive community identity was:

I got a lot of support, a place to go and sit down to my assignment, working between the breaks, between lectures and tutes and just socialising with some of the other Aboriginal students. [It] was very useful so I don't think I actually went to the library to do my study because that's where the other kids went and I felt far better going to [the Indigenous unit]… to do my study and talk then I can also catch up with … people I knew from the community. The business school was a bit alienating, some of the units that were done there was also discriminating (Tamara).
An example of a negative experience was Jason who found that his teacher, the other students and his friends all gave him the message that he didn’t belong in formal education, he didn’t talk the right way, drew like other people or drive the right car. His friends were unhelpful, interrupting his study and teasing him about using the computer for study.

Community contexts provided a range of resources and opportunities to negotiate and engage in work related to learning engagement. The resources were social and physical and were drawn on, created and informed through participants’ attitudes and behaviour in relation to their community membership. These resources could be based within the educational institution but more often in their own community As Rhonda noted:

I couldn’t access the uni’s library etc so basically I have my own networks [in the community and I use them (Rhonda).

As with the family contexts the resources supported engagement and rejection of learning at different stages and at times in conflict with each other. Participants acted in relation to the comments from their communities and their perceptions of the communities’ priorities. For example:

…[my own and my husband’s] confidence and support was important when…people around us were saying it’s hopeless, you’ll never be able to do it (Emily).

Communities could also promote disengagement as a strategy for success within that community’s priorities. For Kalkadoon this meant skipping school and being with his peers:

…we got really clever we would go meet at the soccer oval over the road from the school and we would see the teachers and they would wave us over and we would wave and go down the valley or the beach for the day and go riding, fishing or riding horses.

4.2.3 Educational contexts experienced across the lifespan

The educational journey across the lifespan was complex for people and linked to a range of contexts. Participants described formal educational contexts including
Findings and Discussion

primary and secondary school, accredited vocational education, non accredited professional education, higher education through distance and on site courses. They described experiences where there were conflicts and agreement with the educational systems, practices and expectations, at school. Consider this example:

I remembered thinking I've done this before, I've done this before, I've done this before, and basically being told to sit down and shut up and do it, that was a bit boring I then went to …class which was meant to be for gifted and talented students, the teacher was really biased towards arts and drama and I'm very much a maths and science person and I can't write neatly I can't draw, and I'm not very good at colouring in [after the] last two years I left thinking I was stupid [then when I went to another school] in year 7, I thought you know I'm not that stupid (Gina).

And, as these conflicts and agreements between individuals, communities and educational institutions involved in adult education in this example shows:

I just want to help people so I approached the [relevant local business owner] I would like to do my levels and she goes yes and I just went off and did 'em. It was 3 weekends, did my exams passed with 97%, I had been a ‘d’ and’ f’ student in high school (Margaret),

The disconnections with educational institutions and systems that participants described included recognition of preferred ways of learning. As a participant said:

I loved studying that reading and thinking it through and working it out but I liked doing it on my own, I don’t like study groups (Emily).

and feeling misplaced in the formal education system, as participants noted when interested in an opportunity for an industry placement offered by the teacher:

I said I’d be quite interested in that. He looked me up and down and said oh you wouldn’t be able to wear things; you wouldn’t be able to do it. No I think they want someone with a different attitude to you…I can tidy myself up and look good and talk the part, no I wasn’t good enough (Jason).
Participants also described positive experiences where they felt a connection to the educational structures and approaches. Paul said:

I enjoyed all my schooling, learnt a lot, after I did one year of technical school I got involved, started my apprenticeship… if you're not part of it and going to school you get left behind society leaves you behind you become a drifter and get right off track. School was always an incentive…learning more and more education is so important (Paul).

Participants described informal learning experiences through engagement in learning from family members, peers and workmates and on their own. These experiences were evident throughout participants’ lives and the ways they shared norms about behaviours and attitudes in society:

In England where we lived, if you were sick you went to the doctor but you didn’t know anyone who was extremely educated, you come to Australia land of opportunity and all our children have done what we’ve instilled in them, education confidence and you can achieve and our grandchildren now are going to reap the rewards of their parents (James).

The resources identified in educational institutions were described in terms of their impact on learners, accessibility, appropriateness for the learners’ needs and the ways those resources contributed to the ways people engaged and understood themselves as learners:

I still had this idea that I would go back to uni to a bachelor of arts… probably going to look at doing social work and again you’re pushed by your olders saying how are you going to get a job doing that? (Margaret).

4.2.4 Formal and informal educational experiences

Participants described various attempts at engaging in different learning experiences. The learning experiences varied across the aggregated participants’ data and each participant’s lives. Participants discussed the positive and negative aspects of their learning experiences; both formal and informal. Participants reflected on the ways they felt while being involved in different learning experiences and the impact of peers, authority figures and community members on their
interpretations of those experiences. The role of family support and approval was significant in the ways of responding to learning experiences. This could be positive:

I learned a lot because my parents are very religious and I was sent along to Sunday School etc and I learnt a lot at Sunday school, that's an interesting one that was semi formalised and semi informalised not like school and if you are interested in it, you could talk to these people who knew a lot about these things so (Michael).

or negative:

…even in doing my last year in high school I didn't go overboard with study because there was no study area at home, I just did the best I could with the resources I had at home (Tamara).

Participants described the strategies they had utilised, the rationale behind those strategies and the impact on the outcomes. Participants defined success in many different ways that included surviving the learning experience, maintaining a strong community identity or completing a qualification. An example is:

Before the accident [when it came to learning new skills] I would sit back and watch and then move into it …now I still do that but I tend to stand back for half a day and really suss it out and make sure I know a way around it, because I know the body’s limitations now. I could take on any job now and work it out. …I work to a standard of high quality and doing the job safely while the boss isn't interested in quality (Luke).

Participants described the ways learning experiences informed engagement in subsequent learning activities. For example:

I've learnt to say to myself, well I don’t care what you think, I want to understand so I'm going to ask you the question 10 times and you can shake your head as much as you like but I really need to know the answer and I really need to understand, so I do [keep ask questions] (Rhonda).
Participants’ previous experiences in formal and informal educational experiences informed their confidence in and image of themselves as a learner. Consider this example:

I’ve got a lot of faith in my mental capacity not saying that am absolutely brilliant but I know that to be successful in study; its understanding what you’re doing, its organisation, its commitment and little chunks of steps and probably being able to see a real plan (Gina).

4.2.5 Workplace contexts related to learning

Individuals described workplaces as contexts in which they had undertaken a considerable amount of learning; formally and informally. Workplaces provided a context for individuals to describe the purpose and process of their learning. For many participants, workplaces were sites of successful engagement in learning, as Xavier noted in the following example:

At work it is different to school. At work you get taught because you have to do it properly or you get the sack and you won’t get paid. There’s a little bit of difference between work and school (Xavier).

Workplaces provided a framework for interpreting the need for learning:

…it wasn’t till I went to Canberra, I guess, that I started to make that assessment for myself it would be good to actually go back to it and get the pieces of paper to get the recognition …I thought now I can’t turn back. I was really apprehensive because I stuck my neck out now to get this scholarship in a public way so the whole department knew about me wanting to go back to Uni, so I had the fear of God put into me about now. I can’t fail now. I have to actually achieve and then I thought but I have to do the trade-off between the desire to not want to fail as well as needing to balance time and energy into family (Tamara).

The workplace was a context in which participants found a range of role models who had undertaken formal qualifications. The work place provided access to a range peers and content experts to learn from through meaningful practical work-based learning. Engagement in this learning had tangible consequences and outcomes. For example:
While at the [workplace name], learning was step-by-step... the role of work experience and mentors ...led me to [become who she is] ...I felt really valued I felt safe compared to being blasted from the mountain....my mentors challenged me, that really pushed me [which was] probably what I needed at that stage they were so willing to share about their chosen career...[which] rubs off on you (Gina).

Workplaces provided a place to understand the purpose for undertaking education, a different community with which to be connected that will inform practice and decision making about learning engagement and taking risks. One participant noted:

I did a lot of learning in my work because there wasn’t a course you could do or a qualification [that you] needed to have...learnt on the job, like an apprenticeship ... these days I am aware people need the qualification to get the job (Tamara).

Participants were involved in negotiated and targeted learning experiences through workplaces. Michael negotiated different ways to undertake all the practical components of his study outside the educational system. He felt confident in his ability to successfully undertake in informal learning experiences in his workplace where he was known and trusted for his knowledge:

I couldn’t do that [undertake practical sessions in an in unknown context with strangers] if I was in the middle of a national park, I couldn’t do my biological survey bits right there with supervision from all these doctors in the environmental research institute.

4.2.6 Individual’s insights into the nature of learning

Individual’s interview transcripts provided insights into participants own thinking, their interpretations and responses to educational experiences and the various players. They described not only the individual aspects of being a learner but also the impacts of social definitions of learning and identity. One example follows:

Identity is about going through those crises and working out where you fit. And then having a commitment to a certain pathway in respect to lots of
things and that is what you’ve done several times. Therefore you have an identity that you work with (Emily).

Participants described the processes that underpinned the development of their awareness about issues in engagement, strategies to mange that engagement. As one participant noted:

…because you have stepped out and you see things from another person’s point of view, you see other beliefs systems and other points of view, you can’t accept what other people throw at you (Emily).

Participants described the ways they would like to see educational experiences implemented and the ways they managed and responded to institutional constructions of formal education. One example is:

When I was a park ranger, I suffered a lot at the hands of my supervisors because I looked different to the other rangers and when I did external studies, I took great pains not to let anyone know what I looked like because I wanted them to judge me on what the output of my brain was and that was so ingrained in me that I doubt I would be able to shake that off (Michael).

Participants reflected on the ways they interpret interactions related to learning and the nature of learning from their perspective. These reflections had strong connections to the ways people saw themselves as learners, and they ways other perceived the participants:

This thing about who am I, how do I reconcile who I am, with who I was before. Our extended family groups has a certain set of morays and things they know and the way they understand the world and that's the way we understood the world… we were very comfortable so that we go somewhere where it's very uncomfortable and you see things that it is uncomfortable to know and you learn things that it is uncomfortable to learn, because you say well hang on a minute, I was quite comfortable with what I knew before and now I have to know this because I can see that it is true (Michael).
4.2.7 Critical learning incidents across the lifespan

Participants described a range of critical incidents that exemplified, informed or defined their engagement in learning experiences and the underpinning work undertaken. Critical incidents described experiences in learning and their impact on learners’ engagement and identities. These incidents were critical for participants for a range of reasons. These critical moments were analysed across the data and synthesised into the following nine categories. What follows is a list of each of the nine categories resulting from the analysis and a sample of data that typifies each category:

a. Attitudes by institutional authorities to the learners

This category shows how the identities and resultant actions of institutions impact on individuals, and in turn how individuals react to the critical incidents related to their own identity as a learner and a person. For example:

I was just left to my own devices from 8 years old; I had to cook and clean for the rest of my family and do everything so I didn’t see the point of going to school and sitting there. Maybe a different home life it might have been different …That’s where I feel the school needs to adapt to the child, not the child adapt to the school because every child is different (Sarah).

b. Learners’ attitudes to learning and educational institutions of the learner

This critical category concerned how individuals expressed a continuing wish across their lifespan to be a part of school or an institution but a large number finding it was difficult, resulting in conflicted feelings, an example is:

…[after feeling ridiculed and miserable at school] I was always going to go back and do matric [name for highest level of secondary schooling equivalent to Grade 12] you start earning an income and I was working … and I thought I had to go back and finish year 12 but they said no all you have to do is go and do a bridging course, tough it out at Uni, but I thought I didn’t finish matric. I meant to do that it’s the order it goes in … in America you’re a dropout… College is something there if your college educated (Sarah).

c. Perception of self as a learner
A cluster of responses in the analysed categories found that participants’ self-perception as a learner lay at the core of many of the critical issues and decisions that related to successful engagement with post compulsory education. For example:

He [the lecturer] had a more scientific background and I had a more practical background but we would be even [if both of these skills sets were recognised] and I can remember him [the lecturer] saying he can't understand genetics that you'll never get a degree and I remember feeling totally shattered and really down and I was like I'm not really a very bright person and you know what it's like (Rhonda).

d. Purposes for undertaking learning events

The context of the learning event resulted in particular purposes influencing individuals’ attitude and actions in relation to critical choices. Consider the following example:

I recognised then was that there were a lot of non-Indigenous people working at that level with me who actually had degrees or double degrees or at the Masters levels and through my work experience again I assessed for myself that my abilities if not equaling sometimes was higher than theirs and I didn't have a piece of paper … if I was to compete against the non-Indigenous person through job … then looking at it being essential you have relevant qualifications and I said why should I be any different … I actually need to go and get it (Tamara).

e. Key resources influencing decisions about learning engagement

Adequate supplies of the physical, as well as cultural resources, formed the next critical category of responses:

I don't get overanxious or worry too much about something if I'm not sure I don't know it properly I'm not getting anything out of it I just won't do it… if I'm not sure I don't know it properly I'm not getting anything out of it I just won't do it (Paul).
Note the overlap in terms of the family influence (Category 1 earlier in this section) in the following example:

I was hopeful certainly after I mentioned to my father that I want to do medicine he said what a waste of time you hate school you’re not smart enough …. you can study for 10 years at Uni – he comes from a working-class background so I suppose he was a bit… he had never been to Uni although he had to go to night school to do a trade I think…, he didn’t think I have the application or the brains (Margaret).

f. Responses to positive and negative experiences of learning

This category reflects the impact of consistent outcomes based on engagement with post compulsory education which is typified by this respondent reflecting on the impacts of a series of critical incidents:

I think once your educational spirit is broken you start thinking that you’re dumb because you can’t do it (Margaret).

g. Reasons for completing or not completing learning events

A significant number of responses created a critical category related to the reasons participants did or did not complete their learning event. In this instance, educational engagement decisions related to being able to see the application to which the learning can be put. As noted here:

I did my Masters in Distance Education because we were getting into external education [at work and I wanted to learn about] designing courses and …learnt how to write materials…There was always a point to it (Emily).

The decisions participants made to engage and disengage were active decisions according to their own purpose and strategies for responding to different learner experiences. For example:

…so I went and started a horticultural course and I did that for a little while but I didn't finish the actual course I just learnt enough to know enough about a got what I needed out of (Paul).
Findings and Discussion

h. Preferred ways of learning and learning provision of education for the community

Participants’ responses around the critical theme of ‘preferred ways of learning’ are typified by this example from the data:

Everything I’ve learnt for work and everything was self taught. Just watch and, if you don’t know ask questions, Dad used to always say, and now I don’t ask questions (Kalkadoon)

i. Personal reflections about learning and learner identities

In this category, the critical incident was related to a capacity to reflect and so make sense of interactions between the participants and the post compulsory institution involved:

…the education degree [was a] whole different world to me because it was higher ed and it’s a whole different ball game. Even though when I started the diploma a lot of it was higher ed with science, I knew what I was getting into because I had spent time in the science labs dissecting tomatoes and things like that (Rhonda).

The incidents are critical because they mark a turning point that in some way is influential in participants’ decision-making about their engagement in learning.

Those incidents exemplified an underlying process that was occurring, was evident on reflection about learning engagement that had previously been unknowable for a range of reasons. Critical moments were understood from an individual’s perspective but were influenced and informed by social interactions and outcomes. The impact of these critical moments was evident for most participants on reflection through the interviews and provided a point to identify a milestone, the key drivers and outcomes, relationships to other decisions and helped identify the patterns of behaviour: individual, social and institutional.

4.2.8 Synthesis of Phase One analysis

Phase One of the analysis described a wide range of experiences, perceptions and relationships to learning across the lifespan. The underlying influences were
Findings and Discussion

consistently underpinned by learner identity. The analysis provides a structure for understanding similarities across the groups consistent with typologies related to social capital, social perspectives of learning and identity, a sense of agency and the alignment of individual and institutional identities. While participants were impacted by the availability of physical resources and personal circumstances, the key common element of all the drivers in people’s decision making about engagement in learning is their identity as a learner. Identity as a learner emerges as the key that made the difference in people’s understanding themselves and their actions in relation to learning experiences and environments. For the majority of participants, their identity as a learner was a more consistent predictor of learning engagement than their personal circumstances, opportunities or social position or engagement. Learner identity elements were described as they relate to the institutional identities experienced and interpreted by the participants.

While holding in mind that identities formed the main underlying influence on learner decisions, the following section reports on Phase Two of the results of data analysis. In this Phase, narrative portraits represent each participant in terms of the critical themes, incidents and identities presented in the previous section.

4.3 Phase Two: Narrative Portraits

Phase Two of the analysis further refines the themes identified in Phase One in order to structure the portraits and present the detail of the participants’ profiles. This phase uses Smyth et al.’s (2004) descriptive portraits to draw out the major themes and relationships. The portraits maintain the integrity of participants’ experiences, the relevant relationships and contexts. The development of portraits in collaboration with participants provided an opportunity to deepen the understanding of learners’ identities and engagement. Specifically Phase Two entails thematic analysis of the learners’ contexts, how learner engagement and identities had changed over time and the major influences on that change.

In the first instance, the individual portraits were used to organise consistent ideas, to map their logical groupings and the underlying relationships that inform learner identity and engagement. Each portrait provides a representation of each participant’s view of their experiences in a way that is true to that individual and their contexts. The fundamental aim was to maintain the integrity of the individual’s voice,
the connections between place, contexts, concepts and the relationships that underpin and inform learner identity and educational experiences. In addition, the individual portraits serve to introduce each participant in terms of their distinctive individual personality and preferences, as well as their individual community and educational contexts or histories.

Secondly, the structure of the portraits identifies the key milestones in learning engagement and learner identity development and change across the lifespan. The portraits provide a synopsis of the data that draws on the transcript data and provides direct quotes for only those concepts that typify and exactly convey the participants’ meaning. The portraits do not repeat the data reported elsewhere. The data is not necessarily described, nor reported by participants, chronologically. Rather it is structured as the strands of identity that relate to learning engagement, developed throughout people’s experience, at multiple levels, through various significant moments of change, reinforcement and reflection.

The profiles are organised using the following strands: attitudes to learning, attitudes to self as a learner, preferred ways of learning, relationship to milestones and community, stages and purpose of learning events. These were developed through the thematic analysis of the participants’ interviews, from the synthesis of the preceding critical categories and in discussion with participants when confirming the content of their profiles. Finally each profile concludes with individual’s personal reflections as they relate to their data and the particular ideas or emphases that did not fit into the main thematic areas.

Each profile is therefore presented in order of the identified groups A, B and C. As discussed previously in section 3.4.2, the sample group was identified from three representative groups from the identified region; the participants have differing degrees of formal education engagement throughout their lives. The groups were identified accordingly to the following criteria:

- Group A are non participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- Group B are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.
Findings and Discussion

- Group C are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

The content and presentation has been confirmed with the participants as accurate and fairly representing their narrative of learning across their lifespan,

4.3.1 Portrait One

Kalkadoon has lived in regional areas for the majority of his life and describes himself as not being able to read or write much. Kalkadoon went to school in a regional area where he was one of six Aboriginal students (including his only siblings) during primary school. He found the compulsory years of school negative noting the impact of racist comments of other students, and teachers and difficulties with learning the material.

School sucked, it was very racist, the other students gave shit all the time…I hated going…I hated school before I got there,

Kalkadoon also found the behaviour of many teachers was also racist. For example when:

I would tell the teacher I am chasing him [another student] because he called me a coon and I would have to pick up papers and he wouldn’t and what’s that? I used to have to pick up papers a lot …the teachers were racialist, you could tell, they would pinch you real hard when they were talking to you

Kalkadoon said the material studied at school was always too hard and he didn’t understand it. He was kept down to repeat Grade one and undertook remedial reading throughout school but it didn’t make a difference, he believed he couldn’t do the work:

They should have had a different exam for you because they knew you didn’t know the stuff.

His parents were supportive of school, made him do his homework but ill-equipped to address the learning challenges he faced:

Mum made me do homework, Mum and Dad weren’t that clever, they’re probably smarter now
Kalkadoon described the only good experiences of teachers and school were his Grade 5 and 6 teacher who had gone to school in the region with his mother and a replacement teacher at the end of Year seven:

…apart from him the others weren’t that nice...but you had to go to school. The Grade five and six teacher knew you weren’t clever enough and couldn’t do the work. He would let me go out and work in the garden and work outside when I finished and I finished really quick.

At the end of Year seven, Kalkadoon had a teacher who had just come from teaching in Papua New Guinea. He was valued as he understood the situation for students in Kalkadoon's peer group. He had taught in classes where no student was white, he had a different way of getting things across and wasn’t like the other teachers, he knew how to get across to and engage with students:

…he was a teacher…he could teach and every Friday afternoon all the boys we would play football against him. We flogged him and punched him and he would punch back.

Kalkadoon then went to secondary school which was better because the teachers had less control of the students. He was put into classes with his mates after having been split up in different classes in school. The boys were in trouble and being sent to the principal’s offices and received corporal punishment repeatedly within the first months of high school:

At high school I changed the rules, I told mum there is no homework at high school and didn’t do that again. I would throw it away on the way home. My parents never knew about all the trouble at school.

The school also had students from other areas who were similar. He remembers in Year eight all of the students getting very drunk, he and his mates fighting with Year 11 students and cutting class:

It was ok cause you just run amok...we got really clever we would go meet at the soccer oval over the road from the school and we would see the teachers and they would wave us over and we would wave and go down the valley or the beach for the day and go riding, fishing or riding horses.
He liked being able to do manual arts and home economics which were not available at primary school:

…that’s where I got good marks, I was good at it, I knew I couldn’t do the reading and writing but I was good with my hands

The principal of secondary school was from the same area as Kalkadoon and his friends, they would see each other on the weekends. He was strict when they were being punished but when others left and they were alone:

…he would change his voice and say what are you going to do and we told him we could go when we were old enough and he was alright and he said ok. After that we said, that went well, we knew we had three months before we could leave school,…and he is just waiting for us to leave… we didn’t go any more, in the morning we would be on the bridge jumping off and people would drive by and say are you coming to school and we wouldn’t go.

Throughout school, Kalkadoon found the school work too hard, impossible to do, uninteresting and irrelevant. As soon as possible, when he was fifteen during Year nine, Kalkadoon left school. His parents required that had to have a job to be allowed to leave school so he moved ‘down south’ to participate in a jackaroo course on a sheep station. He did this for a while but left as the setup meant he had to eat with the owners’ family and there was no hot water in the accommodation. So he went and worked with the other student’s family picking vegetables for a short time and then returned home. When he returned he started working with family members, learning the skills that are important by family and peers’ standards. These skills relate to working in the same trade areas, work sites, participating in the family and peers’ social and workplace worlds:

Mum got me a job with a local company putting pipes under the roads and …in the end Dad started working there too.

These experiences established Kalkadoon with the appropriate knowledge, language and skills to participate in regional communities in various areas. These were recognised and rewarded by his local community in different ways:

My Dad used to sack blokes on Saturday morning because I could outwork them… they used to buy a bottle of milk in the morning and I would drink the
neck out and they would fill it up with rum. They were all big drinkers back then...when I started working Dad said, you work like a man, you can have a drink like a man’ [when taking him to the pub after work with workmates].

Kalkadoon has strong visual and memory skills and basic written literacy skills. His identity as a learner was connected to being a good worker, knowing what to do and working hard rather than being recognised a formally qualified person by an external authority. As an adult, Kalkadoon found the workforce had changed and he needed to go to vocational education programs to gain operating certificates that would recognise his existing skills, increase his employment opportunities and pay rates as a qualified worker. This was required to access many jobs that had previously been available to people without qualifications and now required a relevant qualification. He hasn’t got much respect for formal qualifications:

Cause I’ve had hands on experience and I’ve done it and that's why something on paper is bullshit. There’s too many different scenarios about how a thing can be done. Most of the workforce is filled with people with papers who can’t do the job –useless.

Kalkadoon had opportunities to undertake further study through programmes but has walked away from experiences where he could be humiliated or didn’t know and respect the teachers. In one VET course the lecturers adjusted the support for students with low literacy by reducing the written content to the first two days and then moving to the practical component. He did not participate in that program as Kalkadoon didn’t want to go the university or undertake the written components. When the training was offered in a formal educational institution, involved formal training and assessment and using written literature, Kalkadoon did not attend any session, even when Kalkadoon already could demonstrate all the knowledge and skills to be imparted in the classes and had special arrangements to reduce use of written texts. Another time he started a course but withdrew before the first session finished.

In prison, I started to do a course but when the bloke stood up to tell us about drugs and alcohol and what it done to ya, because he didn’t have any knowledge of doing it or experience of it. I got up and walked out and I
always said I can only speak for myself. I’m one of the two percenters the people who never nod their head [comply], follow the rules or dog on other people.

Kalkadoon demonstrated his identity as someone who rejects the compliance nature of formal learning. Kalkadoon described avoiding participating in a machinery license course, even though he had driven this kind of machinery for over 10 years. Recent occupational health and safety regulations in the participant’s workplace had changed and a license was required to continue working. He was offered negotiated assessment and low literacy based materials to support his participation. When Kalkadoon had to go to the urban institution site and be assessed by people with unknown credibility, Kalkadoon decided not to attend. As a result his employment opportunities were reduced. A loss of income was not worth the personal risk for him.

Everything I’ve learnt for work and everything was self taught. Just watch and, if you don’t know ask questions Dad used to always say, and now I don’t ask questions I taught myself to read by reading the paper. I don’t want a dickhead telling me what to do and assessing me, it should be done by someone on the job.

He has done well by reading the world and being observant. Kalkadoon has engaged in one day learning activities for work when his employer organised the sessions which were wholly practical, undertaken only in the workplace and for the most part with other respected peers. One course that was a success for Kalkadoon was when the lecturer negotiated the learning and responded to Kalkadoon and peers, to do the learning on site and assessed practically. As a result of this experience, Kalkadoon was interested to undertake more studies in this way. Kalkadoon has negotiated other prescribed learning by negotiating someone to be the scribe for the examination and being able to talk about the ideas for assessment in relation to visual material in a discrete place. It was important that this was not difficult to negotiate or required a high degree of formal organisation and the assessment team were flexible, demonstrated support for participation and the expectation it was achievable. Kalkadoon is interested in undertaking further training through this process and improve his employment options.
For Kalkadoon, having an official identity as having low literacy and numeracy has been an advantage in relation to managing relationships with bureaucracies as the paperwork is reduced. Poor literacy has not been a disadvantage in gaining employment, being part of the community or achieving goals. Kalkadoon has strong literacies in using physical landscapes, activities and items, managing change and interactions, as they relate to skills that are valued by Kalkadoon’s family, peer group and employers. Kalkadoon has recently taken on a job that requires some reading and writing. Initially this was frustrating and Kalkadoon considered leaving the job but with workplace and family support and encouragement, Kalkadoon has continued to undertake the literacy tasks and has noticed an improvement in spelling and vocabulary:

... just done a little bit at a time, I didn’t do it all at once

In the workplace, senior staff have shown the value of Kalkadoon as a staff member and Kalkadoon thinks people have been told to leave him alone while he does his paperwork. Kalkadoon is described by the foreman to other workers as someone who doesn’t talk much but knows what he is doing which reinforces Kalkadoon’s identity in the workplace.

On reflecting on the education system, Kalkadoon noted:

The teachers, that’s what it is, everybody thinks that the only way you learn is by reading and doing tests and then you know it and can do it and that’s bullshit. That’s why you’ve got all do all the courses, why you can go and do a three day course and be machinery operator but not do the job... see how to make things different and make things easier. I reckon a lot of is the way I learn is from Dad. He always said you always listen and learn, you don’t have to talk all the time, you can always make things better, there’s always different ways to do things, there’s no such word as can’t.

4.3.2 Portrait Two

Margaret has lived all her life in regional areas in Western and then northern Australia. When she started school she enjoyed learning, those memories are strong after more than a decade. She liked her teachers, was proud of her
relationships with them. She enjoyed lessons, particularly English language and grammar classes and felt a part of the school:

I think in Grade four there was one instance where I was slapped by a teacher and mum raced up to the school and sorted that one and I never saw her again.

Margaret enjoyed the social life and admired teachers with strong discipline. When she moved to northern Australia for Grade six, she felt she was a good learner; she liked and felt confident about being a school learner, although not in other areas of her life.

Margaret’s parents were encouraged to place their children in a Catholic school. Margaret found it a negative experience as she was ridiculed in front of the class and made to feel different, for having different writing and ways for doing mathematical equations:

I wonder what it is at that age that you accept that sort of crap, that’s the way it was and get over it. I’d be horrified if teachers did that to my children now.

Margaret was made to go to church regularly but as a non-Catholic child, was made to sit at the back of the church and not allowed to participate in any way. This reinforced the difference in identities. The things that helped were having mates in the class and a Year Seven teacher who showed her respect and encouragement, no ridicule, meanness or rudeness, discipline was implemented with respect.

When she started secondary school, it became more and more difficult to have an identity as a part of the school. She found the curriculum was irrelevant and uninteresting. Margaret did not feel encouraged and supported as a learner and struggled against the restrictions of school life. Margaret found going to a school with a new group of people was difficult as making friends is:

…never easy…I would have put up with Catholicism just to go to [a Catholic high school] to be with my mates.

The peer pressure in Grade five had been hard but was now intensified. Margaret didn’t like going to school with boys. Puberty meant physical and emotional changes
that impacted heavily on peer pressure and the pressure of constantly having their physical features being pointed out, good or bad. Margaret felt that without boys:

I probably would have concentrated more on my study … probably would have grown up with more self-confidence.

During high school Margaret enjoyed her subjects but objected to being told how and what to think. She found that responding to questions about what she thought, she was told, that’s not what the book says is the answer. It was difficult as she felt that there couldn’t be part of her identity to suggest her ideas and the teacher was also learning from a different book at the same time.

One year, Margaret’s Indonesian teacher was:

…brilliant and a surprise… surprise I aced Indonesian, you know we all used to like going to Indonesian, even if the subject wasn’t very interesting. She smiled, shared a joke and disciplined the class consistently; students knew the consequences of their actions. She felt we were real people not just a number of heads to be taught and processed she wanted us to get through she wanted to help.

Margaret did well in English without studying which she attributed to:

…knowing it and I didn’t fit into their way of study the way they wanted me learn. [Because of this] I didn’t think I was very clever I didn’t think I was very clever at all. I was graded into the ‘smarter’ maths class but didn’t feel too smart when they were getting things and I wasn’t.

As a result of the disjunctures in identity exemplified by her narrative, Margaret wasn’t confident in her own thinking, which she thinks came from home. She struggled with homework, particularly mathematics. By asking for help:

…my Dad thought I was a dunce and that’s not what we do

so study time at home resulted in tears and Margaret agreeing with her father so he’d stop yelling and leave the room. She feels because of this:

…there is a thin membrane between what I do know with maths and complete understanding… I still feel that penny is waiting to drop even now at 36.
Margaret’s father had a working-class background. He had gone to night school for trade studies so he was considered the smart parent, while her mother didn't think much about education. They wouldn’t let Margaret take the units of her choice or prepare to study medicine as it would be a:

…waste of time, you hate school you’re not smart how can you study for 10 years at Uni?

Margaret’s father thought she lacked the intelligence and application required for university. He said the world will always need secretaries and encouraged me to do bookkeeping. Margaret finished year 10, struggled through pre matric doing subjects she wasn’t interested in and that were chosen by her parents, if she had been doing something of interest, she wasn’t sure what they would have helped her with but she thinks would have been happy to go to school and probably would have done her homework.

Margaret says of her identity as a learner:

I think once your educational spirit is broken you start thinking that you’re dumb because you can’t do it, it was never said some people are good at this and some people are good at that …we learn differently…we all learn differently, some people are visual learners, some people can read something and remember it.

She tells her daughters to rely on their friends in difficult situations at school:

…they can put up with anything because they’ve got their mates around them … if their mates are there they can get through it.

At the end of Year eleven, the careers guidance officer told some of the girls there were jobs if they wanted to apply, Margaret had already applied to the police force:

I couldn’t wait to get out of school, being told what to do…was bad enough at home, being told what to say and think and do [at school where] you are expected to behave like a young adult […while students felt they were] being treated like little kids being told what to say and think.
Margaret left school and got a job, she felt she hadn’t completed school and always thought she would go back to complete matric and go on to university to study business or social work but the older people around her discouraged her asking her what use the degree would be. Margaret felt that, by not completing matric, it was reinforcing her identity as a drop out.

Margaret started work in an office, had her first children and found herself a young single mother who needed to do some retraining to try to get a job. This was difficult as one child liked crèche while the other didn’t adjust well. As part of a youth community development program, Margaret studied sign writing as it was available and free, she learnt some computer skills, enjoyed socialising with others and working with teachers who were supportive, approachable and cool. Margaret felt accepted, she:

…was going there … to meet people who would approve of me … after so many years of being told I was dumb, and all these sort of negative things and teachers and parents … tell you.

As an adult, Margaret has tried to undertake post compulsory education by correspondence as she had lived in a rural area. She tried the Bachelor of Business, the first unit was in bookkeeping and she told herself:

…you have to get through this now, and passed.

Residual identity issues meant that she felt she shouldn’t have passed but didn’t feel she could tell the instructor she didn’t understand or her employer who had paid for the course. She didn’t like putting her children into childcare. She said having a sympathetic lecturer helped, one who understood when she couldn’t attend a lecture, but even so she failed the first examination. It was also difficult as she studied in the morning and friends would drop around to say:

Come on, just have a cup of tea and a bong.

She’d tell them to leave but they couldn’t understand why she’d choose study over other community activities. Managing a household, being a mother and managing these social relationships impacted on her study. People asked her, what about the kids:
Findings and Discussion

What do you expect? Having six kids, you don’t need that, you already know it yourself.

Margaret could study in short bursts between household chores and interruptions and has had to accept that some things may not get done as she’d like in the house while studying.

Margaret is currently undertaking vocational education in the fitness industry as it will lead to improved opportunities for satisfying work and a future for Margaret’s family. Her study is being undertaken with a group of local peers’ support and in flexible delivery mode. A group of people with a similar interest was organised by a local community based enterprise who offered to provide a workplace for mentoring, provide a shared study place and undertake practical activities related to and required by the study. The mentors from the community enterprise negotiated the study program and approach with the educational institution on the students’ behalf and provide a place to practice skills with supervision.

Margaret was able to articulate and advocate for an approach that would meet industry standards, support students’ learning and encourage students to participate. The study group hasn’t continued through the study program. The main problems have been the difficulty of getting people together and the mentor who initiated the program has left the district. She is no longer there to motivate them:

Someone there you can call [if you need a hand] …It’s a bit unrealistic to think that teachers could do that.

The local community knows that she is studying and support her workplace activities. The workplace mentors are local community members and very supportive, they help explain how to work through difficulties in her study and practice. The mentors help her move beyond mistakes and keep going. She is determined to get though the program as everyone knows she is doing it. This puts a lot of focus on her progress in the present and in the future, and also challenges the negative ways people have seen her identity and treated her in the past. Also, she has invested a considerable amount of her family’s money in the course. This helps when faced with balancing study, working, managing her family and household duties. It helps when explaining to other people why she can’t go out or join in other local activities.
Findings and Discussion

She can say I have to work on preparing for Sunday morning’s presentation which will be seen by local people. It also challenges poor perceptions of single mothers.

She would love a study program where someone visits once a week for a tutorial session at home. She would appreciate the opportunity to have some back up, someone to work through the materials and assignments without leaving the children. She sees this course as a springboard to future studies and in the future would still like to study medicine or natural therapies:

I want to better myself I never want to stop learning, I want to educate myself in different ways.

Margaret has six children. She is committed to improving the educational experiences of her children, unlike her own parents and has committed a large amount of time to being involved in the children’s schooling and supporting them at the school. She was unhappy with the schooling her children received at the local school, particularly the bullying her son experienced, the school’s response and their lack of involvement of her as a parent. Her attempts to be involved in her children’s schooling resulted in conflict as Margaret felt unwelcome and that teachers saw Margaret as challenging the education of the children.

Margaret decided to home-school her children and had a long battle with the Department of Education about being able to provide education at home. As a result, Margaret returned her children to school and has reduced her involvement in school activities and is unhappy about their children’s education. She would like to see lower ratios of students to teachers, recognition that teachers and students learn and work differently and need to be better matched, preparedness of teachers to share their lives, as parents are expected to, and supporting home schooling parents’ efforts to provide quality educational experiences for their children. She has seen her children respond well to teachers they get along with.

4.3.3 Portrait Three

Jason grew up in a southern Australian city and didn’t like school at all. He didn’t like primary or secondary school:

They made me go there and I didn’t go.
Findings and Discussion

He didn’t go to primary school because:

...they tried to tell me what to do and give me homework.

Jason completed Year 10 and was expelled in the first half of Year 11 for not attending school. He didn’t have stories to tell about school.

He thinks it’s important that people have access to school based apprenticeships, this was not available when he went to school. The only similar opportunity was half a day a week at the TAFE which he has described as boring. Technical colleges were boring,

I was doing automotive training. They were trying to show me the most basic of basic things, and I was like I know all this stuff, show me something hard.

The programme was dominated by theory and he would only get his hands on a spanner for 10 minutes of the class.

Sitting in a classroom, they would show you a picture of a motor and I’d be like, I know what a motor looks like, I want to go and play with it.

Jason left school and started working as a trolley collector for three months and then went on unemployment benefits for four years. He did some fruit picking for cash and about 10 years ago moved to northern Australia for the weather. After doing a lot of different manual types of work, Jason decided:

...to go back and do a tour guiding course...thought it would be fun, but then found out there was no money in it and quit.

The course was not an enjoyable experience:

I had a very annoying teacher, every time you asked him a question, he’d tell you to go and grab a textbook and look up your own answer, I just want to know what that plant is in front of me, by the time I grab a book I’m going to forget what it looked like

Jason was frustrated as the teacher often wasn’t able to answer Jason’s questions and Jason felt he knew more than the teacher about the country they were visiting.

All he cared about was his trees and his fancy names for them...anytime you tried to explain something to him he wouldn’t listen, he knew more then you,
so he thought…He was more interested in the smartest kid in the class and people more his own age. I’m more down to earth and don’t know the things he does so he just treated me like I was dumb.

There was no assessment of prior knowledge prior to commencing the course. All activities had to be undertaken in front of the teacher and in writing. The teacher was meant to have assisted in sourcing the voluntary work, which did not occur. While the group was out working in the field, the teacher told the students he had been approached to find a step-on tour guide for a tour company. Jason said to the teacher:

I said I’d be quite interested in that. He looked me up and down and said oh you wouldn’t be able to wear things; you wouldn’t be able to do it. No I think they want someone with a different attitude to you…I can tidy myself up and look good and talk the part, no I wasn’t good enough.

This happened in front of the class because Jason wanted to wear thongs when they were travelling with the class and the position was offered to his favourites. While studying, Jason bought a computer to support his studies. He:

…couldn’t work out how to drive it.

There was no support and his friends were unhelpful, interrupting his study and teasing him about using the computer. Studying on campus was difficult, Jason would feel out of place:

You’d go out for a lunch break and all the full time students would look at you…because I never dressed up to go to uni, they look at you funny, like you are driving a snot box car, bring your own lunch every day because you can’t afford to buy it, get all the little rich students looking at you…when you say you live out here, people would look at you weird like you are one of the ferals.

Jason:

…finished the course, just couldn’t do the 100 hours volunteer work.
As a result, Jason didn’t get his certificate; he had to get paid work which precluded doing voluntary work. This was a disappointing result after six months study and a considerable investment in the cost of the course and not working over that time.

Jason has been working in the mines. This has required completion of a number of courses. These were not successful as they required Jason to sit still in an air-conditioned building where he went to sleep:

I learn with my hands, not out of a book.

He would have preferred to learn out in the field, with an expert who was training them. Instead the mines’ courses were all theory, done with videos and written work. Jason describes himself as a person with a good level of literacy but doesn’t like reading and writing. He needs to do this to pass the courses. The courses focus on topics like first aid, occupational health and safety, working in confined spaces, fire training, introduction to pumps, working at heights, working on elevated work platforms, loader training. He has done some through the mines’ work by filling in the safety book. He is now learning through participation in the workplace.

Jason undertook these courses for three months while the mine was being built. He was under contract and paid for his time and says he survives the courses through:

The smoke breaks, getting up and going outside and having a cigarette wakes me up. Sitting there, someone talking to me doesn’t work.

He wouldn’t do any more study voluntarily:

I don’t like studying. It’s good for people who want to do it but I’m not into sitting there and trying to read and book and study.

He’d study if he had to for work and he was paid for his time. Jason would like to see education focus on:

…hands on training, if people want to learn something, go out and do instead of doing it in a classroom.

To learn something when he’s on the job, Jason:

…asks someone who knows how to do it. When I’m working as TA [Trades’ Assistant] with the fitters and stuff, I ask them what they are doing and why
they doing it...a lot of them are happy to teach you because they don’t have to do it next time.

Jason also has had to:

…train up new people, wasn’t much fun, I don’t like training other people. I know it in my head but I don’t know how to explain it properly. I can show someone but then they ask me silly questions and I can’t answer those questions, I can show ya.

To improve educational opportunities he’d like access to computer training, more hands on training, access to things like a local library and training. It’s a long way to the library and when you get there people are making too much noise to study. It would be good to study locally, rather than in the regional centre with a lot of people:

I’m not a big fan of people. That’s why I live out here.

4.3.4 Portrait Four

Paul grew up in country Victoria where he completed primary school, secondary school for Years 7-10, undertook year 11 at technical college and then started his apprenticeship. He enjoyed school and ‘learnt a lot’. He did well in his subjects; he enjoyed the academic subjects like mathematics, English and science:

I enjoyed them while I was doing them, I didn't take an over liking to them but I did them and passed no worries.

He was more interested in the trade subjects and realised that this was his chosen career path. He found one of the positives in secondary schooling, across the years was the range of subjects and teachers he was exposed to:

…all those different learning experiences it is like going through life we never stop learning so the more teachers you have access to, the better I guess.

The trade subjects were what he really wanted to do. He was achieving successful results and:

I just took more interest in trade subjects and realised that is what I really wanted to do as I was doing them and was getting successful marks in them so I pursued them and learnt an apprenticeship is always good to fall back on.
Paul enjoyed being part of the school community. He saw school as a real incentive, as education is:

...so important. If you're not part of it and going to school, you get left behind, society leaves you behind, you become a drifter and get right off track.

After Year 11, Paul started his apprenticeship and was playing Australian Rules Football to a high standard. He was achieving his goals as he was doing well in his apprenticeship and had won the football grand final. Paul was undertaking the third year of his apprenticeship, getting good results. He describes his life as:

...going really, really well and then I had a major stop in my life, I had a car accident and threw a big spanner in the works.

Paul went through an extensive rehabilitation process that was difficult and traumatic at different stages. He noted that:

...from my schooling through to the start of my career in work and my apprenticeship it all evolved very successfully and then to have it all just stop and have to pick up again was hard but is one of life's experiences.

Paul's youth and high level of fitness were an important part of his healing and accelerated recovery after this serious accident which included physical and psychological trauma. This was undertaken over an extended period and Paul took a break from his apprenticeship. He contends that having a fit body and fit mind is important for learning, work and for life. An important part of that healing and relearning through his recovery from the accident, was his family, as:

...family support is very important, ...[it] is what gets you over the hill so to speak.

On returning to his apprenticeship, Paul had to revise the third year of his apprenticeship in order to refresh the contents and ‘get back into the groove’ and then successfully studied and completed the fourth and final year of his apprenticeship. He did quite well in the final theory based examination and:

...50/50 on the practical section which was experience based and as I had been away my practical skills were impacted after being out of the workforce for a considerable time.
After completing his apprenticeship, Paul learnt mainly ‘on-the-job’ He moved to northern Australia and started a horticulture course at university. He was:

...keen to learn about plants and that sort of thing...I did that for a little while but I didn't finish the actual course I just learnt enough to know enough about and got what I needed out of it.

Paul returned to his trade for employment and decided to get his welding ticket as he had significant expertise over a long time but didn't have the formal licence requirement to be employed as a welder. He went to the university and retrained. The institution and teachers recognised his prior learning, provided a good learning experience and updated his knowledge. Paul successfully completed his welding ticket and was able to gain employment in this area. Being a welder with a welding ticket has provided a productive career option for Paul and to support family that includes two teenage children.

One of the strategies Paul uses to successfully engage in formal post compulsory education has been to not:

...let it stress me out to the max if a problem arose...I don't get overanxious or worry too much about something.

He notes that if there is a big problem he wouldn't approach the teacher of the institution, he would leave the program, if he's:

...not enjoying it [he] won't continue on...if I'm not sure, I don't know [how to do something] properly, I'm not getting anything out of it, I just won't do it.

Paul describes his identity now as ‘drifting along’, fortunate to be in a situation to take advantage of different opportunities. He acts as a mentor in the workplace now, helping new staff to ‘gather experience’ and doesn’t want to change the education system:

I quite enjoyed the whole trip through schooling, we are all different and we all do things differently and if I had it over again I wouldn't change anything really.
4.3.5 Portrait Five

Gillian has enjoyed learning in her life. She is married with one child and works in the rural area near her home. Her daughter has started school recently:

I love learning, I don’t mind it all, I think it’s a great experience. The more you learn the better in life.

She grew up on a dairy farm in a regional area of Victoria, and was one of six children in her family and describes herself as liking school. She started school at the age of five, dropped off by her father, or riding her pushbike to school. With her brothers and sisters around it and knowing most of the people, being a small town but wasn’t scary. Gillian remembers crying by the tank stand, she was rescued by the teacher but after that she had no problems at school. Gillian completed Grade six and then went on to high school. She didn’t know anyone at the school although it turned she knew one other person from her area at the college. So she:

…made new friends and got on with her life.

Gillian was bullied at school and didn’t enjoy it for this reason:

High school wasn’t the best

She survived by hiding out and staying away from them:

I still do that now, if there’s trouble, I just stay away from it… but now being older, because that stuff happened… you get your own back, yeah I got over that too.

Gillian went to TAFE to do a secretarial/bookkeeping course at the age of 16 and working as cashier at the checkout. After two years of TAFE Gillian did work experience at the newspaper and was offered a job, which she accepted. She moved from job to job, working in a range of roles. While working at a Veterinary Clinic as a receptionist, Gillian enjoyed the range of duties of the job, being hands on and decided to do the Veterinary Nurse Course. This involved one day a week of schooling and in a small organisation, they were unable to release her for study so this didn’t happen. She moved on as:

I couldn’t get any better; I couldn’t end up doing any more.
Gillian then undertook a Certificate IV in Hospitality, doing cooking and working behind the bar and ended up travelling around Australia working in hospitality:

Some jobs …put you through different courses… I just enjoyed everything at that time, whatever you could throw at me it was fine,

Gillian feels that a missing part of her education was using computers as this was not available at the time:

…now my only ambition is to learn the computer, trying to keep up with technology. I used to give Mum a hard time about not being able to use the microwave and now I know how she feels.

Gillian is currently learning a new job and describes herself as being:

…pretty slow at catching up with things…sometimes I need to see, to physically see and not necessarily be spoken to, given direction because it doesn’t all sink in. At school, I had to study hard because it took ages to just sink in your head and stay in there. So I’m a slow learner but once I get it, the more times I do it’s ok. And then you wonder, why was that so hard? But when it’s hard, when you are not getting it, it’s frustrating, makes you cry but when it’s good, it’s good.

Gillian feels that her ability to persist through difficult times is in the genes, working on the farm, through a drought, the children were expected to do their share, learn from the world around them and get on with the jobs. Her family’s attitude is:

…what’s the point of complaining, just get on and do it.

When reflecting on her learning strategies, Gillian says she has tunnel vision, she concentrates on one thing at a time so she needs to prioritise things. If the normal routine things aren’t organised, she can’t concentrate on something else.

I can’t just drop something and start something else. I like to finish what I’m doing before I start another project otherwise they just sit there.

Gillian isn’t sure when she worked out the strategies that do work to improve her learning,
I hear differently, I pick up different things, I’m not sure if it’s because I’m partly deaf, it that makes it worse, I always knew I had to try harder. It was the same thing at school, I always had to try harder for marks, so I just do it…Its just deciding what to do.

Her daughter is developing with the school programme but has difficulty with writing although she can approximate the sound of the words and the result can be read and understood by her parents:

   I don’t push her anywhere, when she wants to do something I give her a hand then, or you just put something out to encourage her, something fun in front of her and see if it keeps her interest or not. If it doesn’t you, don’t and if it does then good but I don’t push her…I hope her teachers do the same.

Her daughter learns from the experiences living in a regional area, riding on the quad and learning academically related concepts. Like Gillian, her daughter is shy so Gillian’s main aim is to build up her confidence and share with others. She is following up on the issues identified in the classroom with additional work:

   The more she does it the better she gets…so far I take it as it comes.

Gillian would like to see adult learning courses in the area. The distance to town makes those courses prohibitive. She would like to see the courses offered in town condensed and offered locally. She finds it frustrating that she cannot access courses locally and feels it’s important to be able to learn near where you live.

   It’s frustrating not being able to get the help.

4.3.6 Portrait Six

Xavier is married with 4 children and went to primary school in a northern Australian regional centre. The school:

   …was good for sports but educational, it wasn’t too bad, but I found a lack where they were weak, was when you get a lazy student, the teachers would allow you to be…you could sit in a corner or go out and plant a tree or go for a jog around the oval, give the janitor a hand. I feel you need to be pushed, push the kids a bit more in that department.
Xavier felt his education allowed him to drift through school and he finished school without being ready for the next stage. Xavier notes that students like him are passed on to the next level at the end of every year, regardless of their results,

I believe you can do that in primary school, but when you get up to like Year five, six, seven, I feel you need to be pushed a lot more to pass, to get you ready for high school, otherwise you pass, you pass, you are not ready, you aren’t ready.

At the end of each year he was passed without doing well:

I didn’t do too bad, because I can read and write.

No-one was following up on individual’s education:

Some kids’ didn’t even have a school bag. No-one said anything to me [to encourage him to do better]. I don’t know if they had a system back in them days.

In identifying areas that would be good to learn, Xavier missed out on learning about computers at school as he was in a year ahead of their introduction in Year 11.

Xavier finished secondary school and then went to work. He has learnt a lot from work. His strategies are to be brave and ask questions:

If you don’t know how to spell a word, you need to ask. At work it is different to school. At work you get taught because you have to do it properly or you get the sack and you won’t get paid. There’s a little bit of difference between work and school. I’ve learnt a lot from working and life experience, documentaries on TV.

Xavier has completed courses like occupational health and safety through work successfully:

I’m still lacking a bit, like when you go to the mines, sometimes I have to sit next to other fellas and say what was that again? What do they mean by that? They have to tell me in our language bring this number, go down there and stuff like that. I find it a bit hard with reading and understanding like that.
Xavier’s experiences have meant that he has drawn on his experience to support his children’s learning. Xavier sent his son to a school in a major southern city that had a comprehensive assessment and remedial programme. They used psychological and educational assessment to identify the children’s needs and immediately supply a large amount of support and remedial work for those children. This support includes a tutor, if that doesn’t work, they incorporate a psychiatrist into the remedial programme to identify the cause of any problems. There is also attention paid to the home situation, diet, and sleep patterns to identify any issues:

They’ll pick all that and then they target where the weak spot is…he was six months behind and they got him back up in one year.

Since moving to the north, Xavier’s son has moved to a local private school:

…he has fallen in his…now he is bored at school because he is repeating work done the last year. He’s done it all; he’s doing Grade four work in Grade five.

Xavier and his wife have made school a priority and his mother is doing additional work after school using the materials from the previous school. He expects the school to address his children’s learning:

We pay good money for him to go to school here…he comes home with no homework… Perhaps it’s not the teachers, it’s the system.

4.3.7 Portrait Seven

Helen went to primary school and high school in a large southern Australian city:

    I really did enjoy some of the classes like home economics, art drama and that sort of thing

She liked learning but experienced a bullying from other students at primary school and had a lot of pressure from her family life which interfered with her studies:

    …that was pretty harsh and I couldn’t go to school and concentrate. The teachers’ didn’t recognise it.

In high school, Helen continued to face the pressures of managing home and school life in a school environment that didn’t recognise the conflict she faced:
But in high school it was a little bit different, I started making more friends...my personal family life was a bit horrid because my parents were going through a divorce and I couldn't do my homework.

Helen finished school at the end of Year 10, when she was 15 and went out to work:

…basically because of the chaos [at home], I really wanted to get out and do my own thing.

Helen joined the workforce for a few years, travelled and ended up in a southern city working in a bar at the age of 18. After this time, Helen moved to northern Australia with her partner and when and she was 21, studied an early childhood vocational level qualification. Helen studied through a private registered organisation.

… because we were going through a rough patch with the living conditions I thought I can’t do this, I just can’t. So I gave up instantly and I thought no.

After this Helen decided to study tour guiding, which, despite having a teacher who favoured some students over others' :

…was a good course, you did learn a hell of a lot. …it had its ups and downs… about the place you living to actually learn about the Bush that was good.

Helen has not pursued this line of work as she experiences significant heatstroke which means it’s difficult to manage tours in northern Australian national parks.

Helen returned to formal education when she was about 24 or 25 through mature age entry:

By the time I reached university, I tended to do a hell of a lot better, actually because I didn’t have that interaction at home.

Helen successfully undertook the Tertiary Preparation Programme and then decided to be a teacher:

I studied that for perhaps six months and then I decided maybe teaching wasn't for me I didn't feel any passion for it, so I pulled out of that …I decided, well, what could I do to make a difference in the world?

Helen talked to the careers' counselor, who advised her to go into the Bachelor of Nursing as she was committed to helping people. Initially, Helen:
went back home thinking, well I don't know, it's a pretty hard profession… my older sister's a nurse, giving me the lowdown on that sort of thing.

Helen challenged her fears and concerns about undertaking the course. She said to herself:

Look… you love challenges, you get bored too easy, so why the hell not?

Helen then transferred to the Bachelor of Nursing on the advice of a careers counselor because she wants to:

…make a difference and help people.

Helen is currently in her third year of theory and has 2 practicum left to complete. She prefers to learn on the job, such as physiology, while she recognises that some things can only be learnt through the theory initially, such as medications. As a learner, Helen feels people experience ups and downs over the life of any study:

…people do get the ups and downs in any course they do…I have asked other people because I thought is it just me who feels like this. I have noticed other students particularly nursing students do feel the ups and downs of the course.

In the nursing course Helen is studying, there may be around 300 students who are organised into tutorial groups with different teachers. For Helen, the challenges in study are centered around the relationship with the teacher in that:

Basically it's the teacher, not showing that emotional support,… if you're really stuck on particular subject… a unit you are studying out of your nursing course...(the teachers) aren’t very supportive, I mean they just don’t get back to you from your emails as much as you what you would really like to happen.

Helen noted that the result of responses to emails about extensions and questions on the assignments taking over a week, is that the student is still unsure about that question and also has to work and travel. The delay in the teacher’s response doesn’t take into account that the student also has many commitments and will find it difficult to fit writing the assignment into their life. Helen’s example was:
You might want to change something, structuring that essay or Harvard referencing style, you may want to change some things, or may not be sure, that’s just an example, the teacher doesn’t get back to you in time.

This doesn’t leave space for students to learn not only what is in the course, but the implicit elements, the things students don’t know about that work or industry. The language of that discipline is difficult to understand when first starting and works as a code to exclude learners who are not experienced in that area:

…they talk to you like you are already meant to know…there should be more support for people without experience in the industry…that support is just not there at all

This was particularly noticed by Helen who was in a class where only two of the students were not already working in the health industry:

…that's one of the main problems, people may not have a background in that discipline, but the teacher talks to you like you do have that experience,

This means that the knowledge Helen and other students have gained over their lives is not referenced or accessed throughout the course. Helen noticed the exclusionary effect on students who did not have the same experience as the teachers:

It's all inside information

Throughout the practicum, Helen has a work experience book to complete describing the tasks undertaken over the practicum. Helen noted, as a student, she is also expected to introduce themselves to the senior nurse or the Director of Nursing to discuss the expectations of the course and:

The pros and cons of what you have to do. Well it didn't turn out like that… there were no introductions,… the registered nurse didn’t really find enough time to actually come up and help us with the things we needed to do… I confronted the registered nurse myself, I said I'm really sorry to interrupt you but we have to some of the stuff… She bit my head off… she said I'm too busy, this is absolutely impossible… I said I'm really sorry to interrupt you
Findings and Discussion

this is something that needs to be done. [in the end], I went up and explained my concerns to the director and she was very helpful.

Helen noted that this issue was not being resolved satisfactorily and she was not getting anywhere. Another student who consistently received good grades was ready to leave the course due to this experience. Helen encouraged her to stay:

I said you can't give up, you can't piss this all the way… just because of one person ruining your life, what he going to be like in your second and third year prac…you've got to be persistent.

Helen spoke to the practicum supervisor about the issues and was spoken to as if she did not:

…ask enough questions. I said to her, I have asked and asked and asked and I am not getting anywhere.

Helen was sympathetic to the other nurses’ position and their lack of time to work with students. She feels this should have been explained before she went out on her first year placement;

There should have been somebody saying this is what you are going to experience, than just go and do it…it’s a hard discipline but I feel there should be more support.

During the practical components of the course, nurses have to demonstrate their skills. Helen was doing a wound dressing on a dummy. She noticed that different tutors assessed to a different standard and two students did the same mistake and one passed and another failed and had to repeat. She agrees with them being very strict but feels that they should be fair and assess equally.

Helen has learnt to maintain her engagement in learning by being persistent in the face of adversity:

I am very determined because this is something that I really want and I believe that if you really want something, you go for it. You don’t give up. And if any people stand in the way, then, yes, they are going to yell and scream at you and get frustrated at you but why not try to understand that, than just walk out the door offended.
Helen has developed this strength in the face of adversity through her life experience and by having a strong purpose; to become a nurse:

…such as the bullying, you take it for a while and then all of a sudden you start to toughen up from it, just keep taking it and taking it and one day you wake up and realise, you know, well I’m not taking it any more.

For Helen,

It’s just a way of surviving the course, it’s a very hard course and a lot of people have left it.

Helen has succeeded in her course by getting:

…better at managing them, they haven’t improved.

Overall Helen would like to see education programmes improved through the following strategies:

Don’t doubt the students’ feelings, that’s number one, because quite frankly, people are quite different in their learning, the way they learn, they’re different and obviously this is something they [the teachers] already know but that just doesn’t come out. Another thing is make time for students; I know that’s very hard for the teacher. I understand their commitments…a lot of other students, but if you are asking for help, there’s got to be a way they can try and get back to you sooner. If you are on clinical teaching block don’t be unfair to the student, if you know that they are making a mistake don’t pass them, fail them. Brown nosing is another thing I have noticed with students…If you know a student is living in a rural area and you want to meet up with them, it would be beneficial for you to understand their position [that coming to the university is a major time and resource commitment]…Being a student you are obviously broke quite a lot…it costs quite a lot…time consuming as well.

Helen would also like to see access to the course at rural campuses to improve connection to people in the rural area.

4.3.8 Portrait Eight

Luke was originally from the outer suburbs of a major southern Australian centre. He remembers his first day of school as quite intimidating, which Luke thinks may have
been related to his disciplinary father. He tried in school, enjoying the first years of school, to make friends and being part of the school social world. His upbringing had a big impact on Luke and he believes he could have done better if he hadn’t been brought up in a home with high levels of discipline which meant he was wary of everything:

Instead of figuring out how to do the learning real good, I was figuring out how to get by and stay out of trouble. That was my main focus of school, staying out of trouble.

In school it was important to fit in the playground with his mates, as Luke could manage well enough in class, he just needed to fit in socially. A teacher that made an impact was someone that most of the class played up on. Luke followed the same football team and that started a rapport with him. He saw him as a mate not a disciplinary person, you didn’t get in trouble for running amok in the class. In this class Luke wanted to learn and his teacher wanted him to succeed:

He pulled things out of me that I hadn’t,… I wrote some stories that I got awards for at the school…because of him I passed English, just above the pass marks, because I had him.

He left school after Year 10:

I would have liked more time in the education system but financial pressures meant that I left.

Luke liked learning but didn’t want to spend any more time on the education system than he had already. He had a job the following working day working in a bank, which provided the money to give him his freedom from his parents. After two years in the bank, Luke had moved from the teller position to undertaking the officer in charge duties. He left the bank as he could earn the same in a manual labourer’s position on the railways which much less responsibility:

You learnt what you had to on the job, there wasn’t much to learn, I was just there for as much money as I could earn

After a couple of years, he moved into the glass factory with his friends and stepfather. This was a very interesting job and he’d still like to work in glass. At this
time, Luke met people who were travelling around Australia and taking their time, it was a lifestyle. He decided that he wanted to do the same and that’s how he started travelling and ended up living in northern Australia with his dog:

Then it was gaining life experience… I can’t say I learned too much until I went back [to roofing] which was a life experience.

Luke hasn’t undertaken any further formal qualifications. He has learnt on the job. Luke describes his learning style as:

I stand back and I watch, I learn by watching, and then after that I find the best way of learning is to make a mistake.

Luke believes it is important for people, especially children, to have the space to make mistakes and to learn from them rather than ensuring there is no danger. This is the best way to learn. This was very important when Luke started working as an industrial roofer as he is older than the average roofer and had started this job later in life. He notes:

If I wasn’t so alert and switched on, the danger aspect kept me so switched on.

Luke has a high level of determination to complete a chosen goal:

That’s stubbornness, if I say I’m going to do it…I just don’t give up…and I don’t know where that comes from

He is also resilient in the face of others’ laughing or saying he can’t do something. Luke thinks that actually spurs him on to show them they are wrong. When told, after an accident, he would spend the rest of his life in an office; Luke spent two weeks in hospital and then left. He had to do a lot of work to relearn how to work his body. While his mind will say he can do something, he has to stick with it as his body needs to relearn its balance and that takes time:

This redefines you and the stubbornness comes out…not asking family or anyone for help.

The impact on Luke’s learning style has been that:
Before the accident for learning, I would sit back and watch and then move into it …now I still do that but I tend to stand back for half a day and really suss it out and make sure I know a way around it, because I know the body’s limitations now.

Luke feels he could take on any job now and work it out. Luke assesses his success to his own standard, doing the job well and safely, rather than pleasing his employer. Luke has a role as mentor in his workplace and is regarded locally as someone with strong skills to work things out and fix things:

The lads all reckon they know best, especially with other work crews, if you need a favour off another work crew, the lads go into a big shell, find themselves a hole and dig it. They rely on me to go and sort that sort of stuff out… I let them go until they make a mistake and then I say this how to do it.

In the future, Luke would like to learn trade skills, something that can move with him:

…once I get the gist of things I want to move on...I like learning with others and picking up on what other people are thinking…I like the space to think about what happens and what I’ve learnt...time to sit back and analyse.

His next challenge is to travel and learn about different countries, ways of living and seeing the world, which is new for him. Luke said that overall:

…education is so important,, it’s important to be educated in such a way that you can’t be narrow [in your view of the world]…and not be aiming to avoid the getting in trouble.

4.3.9 Portrait Nine

Anne is an Aboriginal woman and mother of six children of who started school in northern regional centre. She went to a number of schools in the regional centre and a remote Aboriginal community. Anne remembers having a hard time in Grade Five:

…probably because my early years of primary school, I probably hardly ever went so I didn’t really get the tools at the start. So by the time I was at Grade five…I found it very hard… Grade five, Grade six, Grade seven, they just kept
putting me up, every year putting me through the system and every year it got harder and harder.

Anne’s Year seven teacher tried to prepare her for Year eight through additional classes in spelling and times tables in lunch breaks. This wasn’t enough to make up the lost years of schooling. Anne recalls that no one picked up that she was falling behind and this was the only teacher that cared, which is why she is remembered.

In Year eight, Anne pretended she could do the work and no-one picked that she couldn’t, so she progressed to Year nine:

> Halfway through Year nine I gave up and didn’t bother going. I couldn’t read or write, I could spell my name no worries... no one had bothered just let me sit there. All the smart kids got help. I didn’t want anyone to know that I couldn’t cope. So I left.

Anne went to university after she had her first child. Anne was 20, there was no one in her home or university life to support or push her to pursue her education. She wasn’t sure which degree she wanted but she wanted an education so she could make that decision and have that choice for her life:

> I was on my own. If I wanted to be educated I had to go out there and get it for myself, to really want it.

She had to organise family to babysit and catch the bus. She was involved in the Aboriginal Support programme. Anne sat a test to identify her level and found out she was at the bottom level and at this stage she still needed more one on one help. She didn’t have the background to engage in and manage this formal education system effectively. She wanted to get out and change her life through education. The teachers tried to help but the support was insufficient for people who couldn’t read and write as they constantly needed help. The programme was more suited to students at a higher level who could read and write. Anne decided:

> Why am I coming here? I’m not getting what I need, we’re not getting the help we need.

Anne gave up on the course, she still wanted to be educated but there were things getting in the way of that goal:
I gave up again, which I shouldn’t have, I should’ve kept going.

Later on she returned to TAFE and participated in a Certificate II in Business in a programme using a practice firm model for one or two terms. Anne did not complete her Certificate II in Business qualification because she felt she had children, a family, so she needed to work. There was no support or tutoring for students who were struggling with the writing like Anne. The teacher didn’t care; they didn’t actively teach the skills or tell Anne about the freely available tutoring service for Aboriginal students:

Why would I muck around doing this, so I jumped straight into work with a pocket dictionary with me, and that’s how I learnt.

Anne started to learn by using the pocket dictionary and copying words, writing every day in tasks relevant to her administrative positions. She was teaching herself and as a consequence the words she could write increased her skills for attempting new words. She has always been interested in science related careers, she realises this is too late to start to learn now but she is working on improving her literacy skills for other careers.

Anne is now more proactive in her learning and plans to return to formal education in the future. She is more prepared to demand what she needs:

…if they don’t I will demand it…I’m older now and can demand the help. It’s shame…I’m not shame now. My daughter already feels the pressure, shame – at her age and she’s in Grade two.

Anne has made education a central part of her children’s upbringing and is highly involved in their education. Anne tells the children about the importance of education in their future lives and careers, she sits with them every day to do their homework. This is in part related to her own experiences of education:

That’s why it’s so important for me for my children to go to school every day and get well educated. Go through right through to year 11 and 12, I didn’t get that, go right through and get a degree. It’s a lot more easier when you are educated…if you can’t read you are cut right out of the system.
Her brother can’t read or write and was identified as special needs because he wasn’t given the tools to get through education in schooling. As a consequence he is illiterate and needs his sisters to complete his dole form.

Anne would like the education system to have better ways to identify learners’ knowledge and gaps, address the problems related with lazy teachers, taking on the responsibility of educating Indigenous students properly and the additional assistance they need, one on one tutoring for adults, so they can concentrate and progress. The national testing doesn’t pick up the gaps until Grade three when it was too late.

4.3.10 Portrait Ten

Damon grew up, lived his life and went to school in northern Australia:

…overall I thought it was pretty good. Secondary school got interrupted a bit by the cyclone, had to relocate to another school

School was fairly uneventful and after completing Year 12, Damon went bush with a professor of nuclear physics and he learnt a lot from him:

He took me under his wing…he taught me a lot of stuff.

He liked learning from the professor:

It was one on one and stuff, whereas in school you had your class favourites. He was taking me out and showing me stuff all the time, taught me navigation, map reading and all that, which he didn’t have to do.

One time they got bogged, a call would have help in two hours but the professor said no, we have to do this ourselves. It took three days to get themselves out of the bog, sleeping with the mosquitoes in a black soil swamp.

Learning for the rest of his life was undertaken on the job. Damon likes learning where you are:

…getting in and doing it. Having someone who knows what they are doing, to show you, instead of trying to drum things into you. You’ve got to have an interest anyway. If you haven’t got any interest you aren’t going to get taught much.
Damon found it easy to get work, he could read, write and add up. Today it’s different:

…you need a certificate for everything…you’ve got to go to all the courses and do all that. Most of the people I know who’ve gone through all that are useless cause they’ve only just got the ticket and they’re there because they’ve got the ticket. They don’t know how to do the job…

The workplace has changed which requires more education before going out to work:

It’s not very easy to learn on the job because you’ve got to have all that to go out there and do it. You’re not given a go. You’ve got to have the paperwork to say I’m allowed to go and do this whether you know how to or not. If they’ve got a piece of paperwork to say they can but that’s all wrong.

Damon is a mentor in the workplace, he is valued as a person who knows how to get the job done well. To help others learn. He gets them interested in the task to begin with. Damon shows others the best way to undertake the job in his opinion. If he has a team, he builds up that team, so that everyone has the same goal.

For Damon’s daughter education has changed considerably from his experiences. Particularly in relation to the introduction of technology, computers were not available when he went to school:

You can see it in her, compare what she is doing to what I was doing as a five year old, it’s amazing and that’s technology.

Damon would like to see better access to school, secondary school and higher education in the rural area where he lives. He’s happy with the schooling offered to date to his daughter, although other classes have reported some problems with teachers:

…but it would be nice to have higher education brought closer for later when she leaves school… I just want the education system to be as good as it possibly can
4.3.11 Portrait Eleven

Harry is a boilermaker and welder by trade and has lived and worked across regional Australia. He went to state school in a small country town in Victoria for the first six years:

…that wasn’t too bad …no problems when I went there

After primary school, Harry had the choice of going to secondary school through an academic school or a trade based school. It was also in the country area in a local regional town. He chose the trade based secondary school, which he describes as:

Not too bad

Harry thinks it was one of the first trade secondary schools in Victoria, years seven to ten were all centred around the trade school. It was technically based and many of the teachers came from a tradesman’s (sic) background:

It doesn’t make sense not to have ex-tradies, they were pretty good, I learnt a lot from them.

He describes himself as an average student, not excellent, the only problem was when he was put in the wrong class in Year 10 but when he was changed back to the trades’ stream, things at school were fine. The teachers were fair although Harry admits the students did give them some trouble:

…that was alright back then…I got average grades … I only done four years because I then I scored myself an apprenticeship.

Throughout his structural metal and fabrication [or boiler maker and welder] apprenticeship, Harry went to the structural metal and fabrication trade school one day a week in the local regional centre:

I quite enjoyed it…I got away from work…learnt a hell of a lot, working with drawings and marking out.

The classes were practical and theoretical:

Some of the stuff you learnt, you don’t use for years and years later but it sticks in your subconscious.
Harry won apprentice of the year for his trade in the school in his first and second year and came second [by one point] in the third year. He said that he didn’t study, he could read something once and remember it. He thinks he did this well because he was interested and he enjoyed learning it.

Harry is a successful tradesman and is happy with his choices in education and work.:

Well, I’m still doing the same thing. I’ve always got work, the only times I am out of work is when I want to be out of work. I have changed my jobs in my life but I have always gone back [to the trade] because of the travel.

He has worked across Australia in his trade in different contexts. This has been an opportunity to work in different aspects of the trade:

You never stop learning…you become multiskilled.

The trade has many different parts that he has learnt in different places, sites and through working in collaboration with others when the trade overlaps with other areas. Some examples include working on building a shed means learning about roof plumbing and cladding or working in cool rooms means learning about the related pipe work. For Harry, working out problems and ways of solving them, such as working out different fittings, comes naturally.

A lot of the learning involved was self taught:

Everyone learns differently, you’ve got to do different things.

Harry has not undertaken any formal education courses as an adult. His skills, knowledge and additional learning have been developed in relation to his work. Harry has developed specialist skills and knowledge that are valued in his industry. These additional welding tickets can be learnt in a course but Harry earned his extra welding tickets through recognition of his work on site. This was achieved through work in mines and on power stations:

It is very hard to get site tickets these days [through recognition of skills onsite]

Harry notes the importance of being able to demonstrate competence in the workplace. He said some qualifications:
…are not worth the paper they are written on…some people may be able to do a written exam but are useless on site

As part of his role, Harry has shown newer workers how to do the work. He is respected locally as someone who really knows about his trade and working things out. He comments on the lack of tradespeople and that they are often not paid correctly.

Harry says he would only engage in formal education courses if he really had to. He would like to learn about using computers as they used universally in different areas of life and work. He does warn that:

…you should learn how to use your brain first…if a computer breaks down in the workplace, they just shut down. They don’t know other ways of working.

He used the example of making calculations, that most people cannot do that without a calculator. He has learnt to estimate, work things out and to know when the answer looks right. He would like people to go back to basics.

Harry suggests that computers should be banned from the first 6 years of schooling as:

…in the younger years, you are more susceptible to learn.

He would like to see the basics reinforced in the first six years of schooling and then the curriculum needs to offer different options as, by then, people are starting to work out who they are and what they want to do.

4.3.12 Portrait Twelve

Catherine grew up in England and now lives in northern Australia. Her 4 children are now adults, with their own children. She works for a national retailing company, supplying stock to local shops. She started at a Catholic school when she was 3 years old which was normal at the time. She absolutely loved school. In her words: ‘it was absolutely beautiful’. To the age of five or six, there were no school books, students worked on a slate boards with chalk and had a school reader. The students used plasticine to learn their alphabet. The teachers brought her up. The teachers even played with the children as they were so young. The teachers were allowed to
cuddle a student if they were upset. There was little support for families and nothing was guaranteed for families:

Things were very, very hard and you had to struggle to get where you wanted. …the only thing you could guarantee at school you’d always get a little bottle of milk.

As the oldest child of parents who worked day and night shifts at the cotton mill, Catherine was responsible for her two younger brothers and sister. She would get up at 5am, get the children washed, fed and ready for the day, take one to the child-care centre, come back and then take one brother to a grandmother and the other to school:

There was no play time; children were born as adults who had responsibilities you were expected to meet.

If she couldn’t come up to those responsibilities, her parents couldn’t work and her parents needed to work to bring the money in. This was normal in the society she lived in. It was a place where you had no choice: you had to go to school, even if you were sick or the truant officer would come to the house and send you to school.

Catherine was meant to finish school at 15, but actually finished at 16. Catherine undertook a year 11 equivalent but failed the final exams due to nerves. She valued education highly and saw it as critical. She got special permission from her parents and the Education Department to stay on at school an extra 12 months and complete the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) program, which means she would have RSA after her name and would be able to gain entry to a teacher training college in London. Catherine successfully passed the RSA and was accepted to the teacher education program. After 12 months she intended to go to university full time but her parents couldn’t afford to send her to the school and needed her income in the family. Then Catherine worked in a cotton mill laboratory, which she loved.

Education was very important to Catherine’s parents but they couldn’t afford to continue Catherine’s education to university level. When she came to Australia, she blossomed as she found she had the ‘gift of the gab’ and people liked her for ‘who she was’, even though they didn’t know her and she has worked in retail ever since. She has not undertaken any more formal education because of her responsibilities to
her husband and children. They wanted to make sure their children had everything that they didn’t have as children. Her subsequent training has been undertaken on-the-job:

That’s worked well it hasn’t been a drawback. It would have been a drawback in England but in Australia you can be accepted for what you can do.

Catherine values education highly, including the opportunities to go to night school in Australia. She believes that people have a responsibility to participate in education and pay back that investment by working hard, giving back to the country, showing respect. Possible suggestions she made for this might include people who have no employment by the age of 21 or 22 who have been unable to gain employment could join the defence forces and learn how to care for themselves, participate actively in society, develop the skills to pursue their goals and earn the things they want. Catherine feels that people need an education, since, as she says, without an education:

…you’re not going to go anywhere you need to get an education and doesn’t matter what part of the world you are in… [it] is the most wonderful place to teach about your wellbeing and your nous, you have to know what you are talking about.

A recent three months period of incapacitation has helped her to understand how not having a job can be debilitating for people and that there is a need to help people move their lives on rather than looking for a label to excuse why things can’t be done.

Catherine was married in England at 19 before she moved to Australia. She notes that her difficult upbringing, some depression and lack of self esteem didn’t stop her achieving her life goals. She has managed things that would not have been possible in England as she would have been required to follow her parents’ directions, and there was no way to question that authority. She left England at two weeks’ notice as her husband had accepted a job in Australia. They arrived with no friends, relatives, or knowledge of Australia and 17 pounds (approximately $200 Australian currency by current standards) for herself, her husband and, at that stage, three children.
It was difficult at first in Australia. Catherine worked in shops, bought a rural block and aimed to bring up her children in a place that offered safety and security. They instilled the idea that they only had their parents and each other, in the same way that their parents had only had the children and each other. They built a strong network of friends in the community who are like an extended family to their family. Their children treat the extended network like family. Their oldest son experienced a lot of bullying for his English accent. As an example of the way his parents taught their children to believe in themselves, he was encouraged to stand up for himself, and his father wouldn’t fight his battles for him.

Catherine believed it was important to instill a feeling of self efficacy and responsibility in their children. They had dinner together every night and on Friday there were no other activities and the family would sort out any issues they might have been experiencing. The family talked things through together to resolve such issues. If there were no issues they looked at slides since, as she put it,

Children have got to have memories. When we were growing up we didn’t have happy memories, so we tried to instill family memories... you have to have a family background.

Each of the children has been successful, completing their education to post compulsory level, successful in their jobs and families. The legacy is now being handed on to their children who are actively encouraged in their educational goals and to be responsible for each other. In a summary statement, Catherine describes learning as a lifelong event, she noted that:

…you learn till the day that you die - you learn till the day they put that last nail in the coffin.

4.3.13 Portrait Thirteen

Rhonda describes herself as a learner, ‘Learning comes relatively easily to me, I have to work to get good marks but I enjoyed that...I want to learn, I like learning, I like learning about different things’. Rhonda grew up in a family that valued and supported her involvement in education. She is Catherine’s daughter. Rhonda completed year 12 and felt that any issues with the schooling system were adequately managed through Rhonda’s parents’ intervention. Rhonda’s parents instilled the value that you can do anything, you just have make a decision and follow
Findings and Discussion

through until it is finished which Rhonda felt was a good preparation for engaging in educational experiences. After completing year 12, Rhonda undertook a trade apprenticeship, then completed a VET qualification. The diploma was completed over seven years as there were interruptions and extensions due to child bearing and rearing and reorganisation of the course at the educational institution. This was frustrating as Rhonda noted the diploma’s format changed three times and repeatedly Rhonda did not receive any recognition for completing difficult and involved units in the new format. Rhonda worked in a trade for 14 years, running a small horticulture business and caring for a young growing family.

Then, Rhonda decided to undertake further studies in teacher training to prepare for the next phase of her working life, as continuing horticulture work is dependent on physical labour and Rhonda wanted to be ready for the future. Rhonda chose an education degree as it was an area where she could learn about different concepts, related to Rhonda’s areas of interest, namely children’s development where she could make a positive contribution to the community. This was been supported by Rhonda’s extended family who have encouraged the activity and participated by offering assistance with children and managing household activities.

Rhonda described the challenging aspects of her involvement in formal adult education experiences. Rhonda’s previous experience of education was in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector:

When you are doing an apprenticeship you’re a tradie and there’s always this thing that the tradies don’t associate with the higher ed lot’, as the perception is that higher education is better….why can’t I be that good, I can be that good!

Rhonda felt that although engagement with higher education was ‘a whole different ball game’ it was sufficiently familiar from studying the diploma on the same campus and laboratories, involving similar activities:

I knew what I was getting into because I had spent time in the science labs dissecting tomatoes and things like that.

Rhonda has not felt connected to the university campus itself, describing it as irrelevant in her studies. Rhonda replicated the support and information resource
services and she accessed her local networks. In those networks, Rhonda possesses high social stocks and capital. Replicating this system for her studies, Rhonda developed all the aspects of support that the university offered. These supports included professional mentors, library, tutorial support, practical experiences and study groups. Any time spent on the university campus was described in negative terms and Rhonda notes the problems have been related to the implicit rather than explicit nature of much university systemic knowledge. As she puts it:

You don’t know what you don’t know,

Rhonda found university staff assumed a level of knowledge and access to resources for all students that was not realistic and the negative comments by lecturers undermined Rhonda’s confidence. Rhonda wanted to be an external student, wanted to succeed, tried to access information on the internet as instructed, but unsuccessfully:

I didn’t ask for much. I go in there twice a year. I don’t harass lecturers on my way through things, I just ask people that I know.

She felt it was her downfall that she didn’t know what was available through the university website, where it is and how to find it. Rhonda felt :

Why waste an hour and half of my time because someone can’t spend 10 minutes with me?

An encounter that made Rhonda determined to undertake a degree occurred during her diploma studies working in the science laboratories. A lecturer who was respected as a good and smart person by Rhonda was also intimidating. As he had a formal qualification, Rhonda felt he must be more intelligent. The lecturer had trouble communicating concepts clearly. His communication style was confusing, particularly in relation to complex content. His background was scientific while Rhonda’s background is practical. Rhonda noted that in relation to expert context knowledge:

…they would be even, like colleagues. I can remember him saying if you can’t understand genetics then you’ll never get a degree and I remember feeling totally shattered and really down and I was like I’m not really a very
bright person … the problem was he didn't know what he was saying by playing on my insecurities …[about]why couldn't I get a degree, [and] not every degree is about genetics.

Rhonda challenged her feelings of negativity about her capabilities by referring to previous success in a state based learning award called ‘trainee of the year’. Here, her previous confidence in her abilities had helped her to achieve set goals:

I had confidence if I wanted to achieve something I could do it

Rhonda felt that if the topic had been in an area of her expertise that she could hold her own in that conversation. Even though the lecturer might be older than Rhonda, she knew things could be different. Rhonda was able to articulate the impact and her response, which was to manage this challenge to her learner identity. Rhonda described the comment as shattering and wondered that one person could do that to another, that it is unfair to assume that a person can’t do one thing, they can’t achieve in education and whether the lecturer ever knew the impact of their words.

Following the examination, Rhonda was talking with the lecturer about the holiday. Rhonda explained she would be reading a book by Anne McCaffrey. The lecturer:

…looked at me with a surprised expression, because he obviously didn't think I was very bright

The lecturer then commented that they too had read that author’s books, which gave Rhonda a new outlook, that she was as smart as the lecturer - of the same ‘calibre’. Experiences like this provided Rhonda with a framework to ‘override’ bad experiences and reinterpret the lecturer’s behaviour as not thinking about what he was saying and that he really didn’t mean to attack Rhonda's confidence and identity as a learner.

At various stages in each course enrolment there were setbacks related to meeting the administrative requirements as courses changed, units changed and the associated qualifications changed. This happened out of the blue for Rhonda who was told twice that she would not be able to complete and had completed units that would not be counted in the qualification. This happened at times when the pressure at home was considerable with a young baby and a young family. Rhonda notes that as a rural student the university does not offer targeted support that is available to students in more remote locations. Rhonda is included in the university’s city
campus although Rhonda feels quite separate, physically and socially from that campus. While studying the Bachelor of Education, Rhonda was provided with information about the course, specifically the subjects for which she would get credit and those to be completed. Rhonda followed the order of the course in the paperwork provided, obtaining further information about the course and enrolment was complicated by 1) living a long way from the campus and the time restrictions related to family and work commitments and 2) access to the appropriate lecturer. Rhonda lives 15 kilometres from the cutoff line for being counted as a remote student and does not qualify for the associated resources. Rhonda notes that the campus is a long way away and with family and work responsibilities, it is very difficult to attend and utilise the campus facilities such as 24 hour loan of library materials. This is not taken into consideration by lecturers through the pedagogy they utilise:

I basically have got my network of people happening in the rural area who have books and knowledge and other external students and school teachers they have been fantastic

Towards the very end of the course, Rhonda was informed she had enrolled incorrectly and completion of the final subjects would extend her enrolment time by 12 months. Rhonda found it difficult to access information on the internet as suggested by the institutional representative due to slow download times and the links on the webpage to information not being clear:

When I found out that I done it all wrong and that was going to add another 12 months to my degree I was devastated and I was cryin, God I've had enough of this. That lasted 10 minutes and I talked myself around and said you are made of sterner stuff than that.

Rhonda persevered with her studies after each setback drawing on her belief that she:

…wouldn’t let the bastards beat me – because I started it and I wanted it, you only get places in the world if you try and better yourself, be that in any way, shape or form, physically, mentally, emotionally, you are only going to grow if you keep trying to better yourself.
Rhonda’s local network assisted in identifying an alternative and assisting in implementing the strategy. Rhonda noted that she felt unsure about her position in the educational institution and the processes within the course and institutions. Rhonda noted that:

Confusion knocks your confidence
It made her ask herself ‘Should I really be here?’ and question her ability to work as a teacher. She also questions what are the most important aspects of teaching, details such as specific examples of grammar or being able to give children the skills for life. Rhonda noted that she had undertaken many strategies and followed approaches that had been unsuccessful and a waste of time over the life the project. She noted that with a short investment of time at the start and at appropriate times from a lecturer (Rhonda attends the campus twice a year), she would have had the information needed to be appropriately prepared and would go and undertake the work, collect the information and do what needed to be done:

How can I develop strategies to work through something I don’t even know it exists and I don’t get told it exists and it has to be done?

During the very short orientation, Rhonda found it was hard to organise a set of questions to ask the lecturer when the student doesn’t have the background knowledge or confidence to know what questions to ask. This resulted in Rhonda feeling unprepared for the course after the orientation designed to facilitate learners’ engagement.

As a 20 year old who had completed her apprenticeship, Rhonda was not confident in her own ability as a horticulturalist. If questioned, her ability was in question. Now she has the confidence in her knowledge of the key ideas and the appropriate approach. It took experience and emotional stamina to manage the hurdles. As a mature age student, Rhonda noticed that younger students are reluctant to question lecturers in class, that the expressions on their faces show they have gaps in their knowledge, don’t understand and are fumbling through, and that they do this rather than draw attention to themselves. On the other hand, more mature age students are more confident to question the lecturers and put forward their own views, as they have had experience in life and ‘the hard knocks’. Rhonda has learned to say to herself:
I really don’t care if you’re going to make me feel bad because I don’t understand, cause I just want to understand it… I don’t care what you think. I want to understand so I’m going to ask you the question 10 times and you can shake your head as much as you like but I really need to know the answer and I really need to understand.

Rhonda’s experiences of adult education have led her to identify the things she would not do as a lecturer. These include ensuring that people would feel that they understand, that any idea has to be explained in a way that everyone understands, that people don’t feel intimidated or inferior, and that people feel confident to ask questions. When she did work as a lecturer she did not assume students’ knowledge of terms and complicated processes:

You’re there to tell them what it is and get them to explore the ideas.

She notes that lecturers need to keep explanations simple and recognise that they may be comfortable using technical language in their own comfort zone. Rhonda used the example that she could ‘rabbit on’ using Latin for hours but it would make others uncomfortable if they didn’t understand what she was talking about.

Rhonda’s strategies to persist and complete both qualifications drew on the strength of her purpose, to work in a chosen profession ‘because I started it and I wanted it’, echoing the positive attitudes instilled by her parents:

I wouldn’t let the bastards beat me and her commitment to it:

I wanted to see it through – I don’t care what you’ve done, I’m going to finish it.

Finally, it is her belief in her own ability to complete something once begun that sees her through learning crises:

You only get places in the world if you try and better yourself, be that in any way, shape or form, physically, mentally, emotionally, you are only going to grow if you keep trying to better yourself.
4.3.14 Portrait Fourteen

Michael grew up in a large southern Australian city. When he started his work, the workplace valued the knowledge people had and what they could do, rather than any qualifications. His father was an academic, and both his father and grandfather taught him to be critical and to ask questions. His parents:

...moulded me in the same vein, taught me to question. My father would never give me a decision on a plate - if I was in a dilemma he would give me the wherewithal to work it for myself and [he] taught me to think.

His family was religious, and he was encouraged to accept religious doctrine about what was good. University attendance was not supported as people didn’t learn material approved by the Church. Michael attended Sunday school. In this semi-formal environment he learnt a great deal from talking to people who knew much about their areas of expertise. He left the urban environment as a young man, as soon as he was married, and hasn’t looked back. Michael has little in common with his siblings who stayed in that environment. As he grew and learned about the wider world he challenged the morays of the extended family and his Church which he found uncomfortable as he started to see the world in different ways:

You learn things that it is uncomfortable to learn.

In other words, his learner identity was reconciling the person he was with the person he was becoming - the things he knew to be true and things he was learning.

Michael learnt about his role on the job and through involvement in a number of projects conducted by external consultants and researchers. His first engagements in post compulsory education were based on full and part time internal studies. He found internal studies a negative experience. He was an:

...internal student, a full-timer, which I did for two years. I was completely hopeless, failed everything, got nowhere.

Studying as a part time student was better but still hopeless. Michael had a lot of negative memories of on-campus education, negative experiences, bad lecturers, people who didn't know what they were doing.
There were confusing institutional processes such as not having any rights, marks not being submitted, having to repeat units with insufficient explanation for reasons. Michael was not a very assertive internal student; he doesn’t tend to defend himself in the face of difficulties.

Despite having such a difficult time, Michael only went to see the lecturer once when he was desperate. He noted these are common experiences for students. He notes too that one lecturer marked him as absent for a semester and failed him as he simply didn’t recognise him. This was an art class which he loved. When the marks were posted and everyone saw the fail result, the other students laughed:

I said I can’t see the joke and they all packed up laughing… [and said]… the joke is you are the only person in the whole class, including the lecturer, who is actually selling paintings.

He reflected that, at that time, students were not able to negotiate their learning as they do now, although he noted that he wasn’t sure:

…if students didn’t do that or if I just didn’t do it.

He found the education very formal. His first lecturer was a famous person in that field. Having an expert who had that credibility that people value, who could share the stories and practice experience in his teaching had a big impact. He can still remember important parts of that learning and teaching today. When Michael left, he moved to a country area and commenced external study. He found he was much better as an external student. Not only did his marks improve but he got:

…really high marks and [I] shocked myself. I got marks I had never seen before - not since primary school.

Being external is better as he doesn’t have to work in with what the lecturer says or does. He thought that this might have been due to being older, more organised. He took it as an opportunity to be involved. As an external student he organised his studies to avoid residential programs as he didn’t want to leave the regional area to go to a southern city for the residential, as it was very difficult when you don’t know anyone

After living in regional areas for 28 years, this was confronting:
I couldn’t see that, if I was in the middle of a national park, I couldn’t do my biological survey bits right there with supervision from all these doctors in Environmental Research Institute.

Michael approached all of his lecturers and only one insisted on him attending a residential. That one residential was a significant challenge for Michael. Michael is agoraphobic and so he had to make sure everything, the travel, accommodation was planned and confirmed at every stage. When he was there, he:

…felt out of it …I had come a long way and I didn’t know what it was about, and they didn’t make any difference in how they treated the internal students and those coming to the residential, they didn’t make the external students who were coming from all different states welcome in any way, they didn’t give them any social things or even any guidance. They just assumed everyone would be fine.

Michael coped as he had previous experience of tertiary studies and said he learnt a lot and managed because he ‘had to get the thing done’. He recognised the impact of these experiences on people from an Aboriginal community who might find this experience very difficult:

I did once pull out of a whole course because I had to go to residential

The residential coincided with major events in the region which meant he could not book accommodation. Michael was not prepared to arrive in a major city centre without everything planned and wasn’t going to leave the regional home in which he lived under those circumstances:

That seemed quite strange to me because when … I had a chance to meet someone who had come up north… he gave me a call to come and meet me in some spot there. I didn’t go, partly, because I didn’t know where the Cool Spot was but I couldn’t imagine wandering around in a restaurant and looking for someone I had never met.

Later, Michael did undertake external studies as a ranger, he did this all as an external student because:
I suffered a lot at the hands of [the] supervisors because I looked different to the other rangers...[I] took great pains not to let anyone know what I looked like I wanted them to judge me on the output of my brain.

This was a hard attitude to break. Now he is older he knows that it’i ok to look different but not when he:

…was younger it wasn’t ok. For instance I wouldn’t have sent them a photo of me and I didn’t want to go and meet those people in the Cool Spot because if they take a look at me that will be the end of me.

He had a range of tactics to manage this issue. He went to one residential block:

The one dreaded residential. I didn’t have a problem…the lecturers didn’t have a problem with what I looked like but I think it was 15 years of parks fixing that, and always feeling different in the church group when I was young.

Michael started work in regional areas when the institutional policy focused on employing people who knew the work rather than simply possessing qualifications. People with qualifications were seen to be overqualified, would move on soon and treat the job as an opportunity to progress. He undertook learning in the workplace in a similar way as he would an apprenticeship. There were no qualifications available at that time for his chosen field. Michael values that knowledge and handing it on, particularly as he now teaches in that field. He notes that qualifications are now needed to get that job in an environment that promotes the view that ‘everyone must have a piece of paper’. Michael focuses on ensuring those people in his class get the piece of paper and learn from his practical experience. Michael learnt from the scientist and museum curators who came to the workplace to conduct projects and taught staff how to do things and still draws on this knowledge. This was a valuable approach to learning, particularly the hands on approach, which he reflects in his teaching today. Now students come in and he negotiates their learning and assessment. He follows the formulae of the successful teaching he has experienced in his life; a mixture of hands on, theory and real experiences.

Michael feels that he and other regional people want learning to be negotiated rather than formal and prescriptive, there is value in conducting the course to value learning based on practically based and hands on learning. Michael has taught an external
course and taught an internal course. He found that some people don’t like external studies and prefer the social environment of an internal course. He found regional people prefer to be able to learn from their homes in regional areas, can only study externally, don’t want to have to talk to or deal with the lecturer. Michael tutored a class of Aboriginal students undertaking an external course in a regional area. These students wanted to interact with the lecturer: knowing about their family was important to them and:

    You can't know [how to behave] towards them unless they have a family position.

Those students appreciated the lecturers coming to visit. He reflected that Australian students usually preferred learning to be informal while students from other cultures preferred a formal relationship around learning and assessment. He argued with other rangers about the best way to offer training but couldn’t get any support. Ultimately he studied the Graduate Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language as he had been asked to teach and wanted to make sure he did it properly. He found he was working in innovative ways and was asked to publish some of his assignments to share that knowledge. It was not enough to study for external recognition, and:

    …wanted to know I was doing the best for these people - teach them better - because I had some experience in my secondary schooling where I had some really awful teachers.

This meant he was recognised for what he was doing as a teacher, but not as a naturalist, in the use, for example, of scientific jargon. There was a pressing need then for engaging this learning, although at present he is not currently studying as there isn’t a pressing issue he wants to address.

One of the biggest learning experiences was studying to teach a new course. He studied, brought in experts and was careful about what he taught. This was appreciated by students, particularly those with expertise in that area. It is not enough to study to get credibility from the educational institution and have letters after his name. Michael is more interested in working with students on their research.
Working in education with Aboriginal people has helped him to understand that people understand knowledge in different ways, that understanding knowledge from different perspectives is power and that no one naturally possesses all of the things they need to know. It was important to be able to understand concepts from different perspectives to understanding why things are done in certain ways at work. It also means that people learn from each other in education, including across the teacher/student border. He enjoys working with students who find that going through the process of education over a few years means changing as a person, being able to grasp different concepts and see things in different ways. Michael noted that ‘stepping out of the mould’, thinking, learning and working differently, causes conflict. The change that occurs though learning and experience:

...means you have stepped out and you see things from another person’s point of view. You see other belief systems and other points of view. You can’t accept what other people throw at you.

The barriers to learning that Michael has experienced as a teacher have been around the use of an online learning management system. He recognises he wouldn’t have participated in an online course as he couldn’t talk to the lecturers, just wouldn’t have done things like follow and participate in the discussion threads. He pulled out of an environmental unit once because it was ‘too touchy feely’. He answers students’ questions all the time by email and in person. He thinks students’ complaints about online e-learning usually occur because it is used as a substitute to interacting with students. Michael was interested in online learning when it was first released. There were lots of things that were possible with e-learning, but his students have poor internet access so he uses DVD and hard copy back-ups. His concern is that online learning has become a replacement for good teaching and a way to save money.

Throughout his learning journey, Michael has been the one who was different. As a child he played with the children from other religions, argued with the religious instructor, also the pastor, not fitting the ranger template in the job, travelling with Indigenous people and being treated by some people for how he ‘fitted’ (or not) and by others for what he did. He says, those:
earning experiences, something you learn in primary school like that you carry with you your whole life. It should have been a really negative thing but all through my life it’s been a positive thing.

4.3.15 Portrait Fifteen

James grew up in England and migrated to Australia to improve his life and future. He works as a technician with a specialised trade and is married with four children. He has several very technical high level, and specialised, qualifications. He is the husband of Catherine and father of Rhonda. James had a difficult family life and went to school around the age of five years old. His school life was unhappy. He was bullied, which he stood up to well but he didn’t want to go to school and deal with its culture. He received a lot of punishment. For example, he was left handed, which was seen as deviant and not permitted because they wrote with pen and ink which was thought to be ‘messy’ if you are left handed:

I was a runner…I used to run away from school. They had prefects to try and run me down and catch me. I just didn’t like it there then

Until the age of eight, everything was rationed because of the Second World War, so the school books were the moth eaten, old hand me downs. Before being allowed to use pen and ink he used a slate to learn to write.

James left school at 15 and entered a trade through an indentured apprenticeship. At that time, he was supporting his mother and sister. He could have got a job as a labourer but he wanted a trade. He knew he had skills. He went to trade school and was bonded to a workplace. This meant he was meant to ask permission to change jobs. He slept in the workshop and did what he was told for five years, although the rules weren’t strictly enforced. His apprenticeship included a full day and night of school every week, for which he received no payment and it wasn’t compulsory. He was married over this time and was supporting his wife. The laws changed after a time and he was paid for half a day of technical college:

You did 44 hours per week, no overtime, were not paid for night school and earned £7.19/ per week (approximately $30 Australian dollars in current value).
James learnt to do mathematical equations without calculators or computers: he used slide rules and square rules. He had missed a lot of school and made up the gaps by studying hard:

You just did it…I just put the time in [to his study and relationships]…there was no way out of it.

There was no recognition of prior learning. The only way was to put the time in and talk to the lecturer until you learnt each part. In practical terms, he worked quickly through the things he was familiar with, so he could take the time to work on the things that were difficult. In many ways for James, there was no choice. He just had to do it.

James decided he had to leave England. He and his wife were going nowhere there. It was depressing and they were facing a limited future where he lived. An education was unaffordable and the options were limited. He wanted to move his family to a place where it was possible to make a change. This took a change in attitude, a belief that it was possible to anticipate the future to move or make a change. He knew that he lacked the confidence to take the risk to make that change as he didn’t have drive. He also felt his wife could have done brilliantly.

The only person with an education he knew was the doctor and people only saw him when they were sick. He looked at a number of countries and found that, if he had the skills, he could join the Australian defence force and move. He went to London and undertook the trade test. A few weeks later a family of five cancelled their move to Australia so with two weeks’ notice, James and his wife sold, gave away or packed everything, and left for Australia. They had no family in Australia. His wife was very homesick, but James had signed a six year contract and they were committed. In the final analysis:

The kids have profited from what we’ve done.

James has completed a high number of technical qualifications which makes him one of the few people in the world with these specialised qualifications. This means his expertise is well recognised and valued in his field. In Australia, James and his wife had a strong commitment to supporting their children’s education. As a child he did not get parental support. James and his wife were able to go to school, play
sports with the children and supported the children to achieve their educational goals. The children all learnt by helping James work to build the house and develop the property. They now have the knowledge to understand how things work and the confidence to do it for themselves. All of the children have finished a trade qualification and one has gone onto higher education to become a teacher. This meant a real commitment, driving for miles to take children to school and activities:

All the kids have been lucky - not lucky - they have persevered…they’re cared for like we weren’t.

Since moving to Australia, James has undertaken more courses through the defence forces, university, trade based qualifications and occupational health and safety. He saw himself as a good learner until he needed to start working on computers. He is struggling with them. He needs to do courses on computers as they are integrated into the workplace and a required skill. James knows that he can work it out. He will get some help if he needs it, but he is confident he can sort it out.

For him and his family, Australia has been the ‘land of opportunity’. He worked hard, built his house, followed the opportunities. His children have learned from the ethic instilled in them by their parents, to get an education, to have confidence in themselves. Now James’ grandchildren are being inspired and he plays a part in supporting that. For James it is worth it as the next generation is going to reap the rewards of that achievement.

4.3.16 Portrait Sixteen

Sarah lives and work in a regional centre. She grew up on a farm and a boat where:

…if you didn’t have skills, you had to go and get them.

She went to Catholic primary schools where it was very strict. Children were caned if they were naughty but she enjoyed school as she didn’t get in trouble. The teachers were all nuns and priests and did not treat the children by today’s expectations. For example, Sarah did a lot of gymnastics, and would:

…come to school bruised, with black eyes, looking like she was beaten up, but none of the teachers asked what happened or followed up on my welfare. It wasn’t the standard then.
School was regimented and formal, Sarah and the other students lined up, sat in rows, sat quietly, spoke when spoken to and did their work. If students were not compliant there would be consequences. The Grade five teacher, a priest, used to throw blackboard dusters at students:

…it would go whistling past your head and you’d shit yourself…School was all about sit down, do your work, pass your exams.

For sex education in year eight the nuns locked me in a closed room with a video.

Sarah didn’t think much about school work for most of this time. She did four years of correspondence while living on a boat, they were able to get through school in a short time and get out and experience life, When she returned to school, she was always ahead in her schoolwork. Year seven was the last report card Sarah received and to this point she was receiving straight A’s:

It wasn’t until high school that I thought I hate this I couldn’t cope with it.

High school was difficult:

…horrible because there were 20 different teachers a day, 20 different subjects. The teacher didn’t even ‘teach’ the class. For each lesson, the teacher walked in, wrote on the board from the beginning to the end of the lesson, the students copied it down and every night homework was to go over and read the notes from seven subjects, each 45 minutes in length.

Sarah didn’t like sitting there for 45 minutes and writing. The only part she liked was the five minutes of freedom between classes where she could talk and hang out.

Sarah lasted eight months of year eight and left school:

I couldn’t do it anymore and walked out and cracked the poops and never went to school any more. I just didn’t like the sense that you’ve got to sit there for 45 minutes. There was no talking, or no interaction … and I just couldn’t sit still for 45 minutes anyway, even if you could get up and do something.

By then, Sarah’s father had left the family and she was on her own. She worked in a hotel kitchen and went to school a couple of days a week in year nine to ensure the welfare officers didn’t find her, sleeping wherever she could. At this stage she had been kicked out of home and didn’t have access to the required uniform. She didn’t
have any trouble getting work as employment relied on what a person could do and actually doing it and she has never submitted a resume. She has regretted leaving school as she got a bit older. She has learnt a lot since leaving school through work and her own efforts.

Since leaving schools, Sarah wanted to learn to please herself, as opposed to school, where learning is assessed as an A, B, C, D or an E and students can be kept back a year. She didn’t want to please her teacher:

I wanted to please myself, I was never one to, that’s obviously got a lot to do with the childhood…I was just left to my own devices from eight years old. I had to cook and clean for the rest of my family and do everything so I didn’t see the point of going to school and sitting there. Maybe a different home life it might have been different. My brother and sister went right through - they, yeah, had a different life to me…School when we were children was not fun, now children want to go because they do different things.

At about the age of 23 Sarah started going to gym as she was 40 kilograms overweight. At the time of meeting her, she hadn’t spoken to anyone in the gym group and would run out before people could talk to her. After a month of exercising she thought she would like to help people like herself and approached the manager. The manager recommended she take the fitness instructor level tests. Over 3 weekends, Sarah took the training; she undertook the assessment being given the hardest test possible and passed the exam with 97%. This was affirming as she had received D’s and F’s at high school. Sarah wasn’t worried about studying because she wanted to do it for herself. She wanted to help similar people who had had a bad experience in the last gym, and she felt she could:

…relate to the way most women feel, they don’t ever want to walk in there but they know they have to…do the hardest thing and take control of their life.

Sarah felt she had no self confidence but wanted to get that self confidence to help other women. To maintain her registration, Sarah must undertake 18 points worth of training every two years, usually 6-14 hours of accredited study is equivalent to one point. It must be in the form of an examination so the learning can be proven. She chose to work with the aged and disabled, people who need her help. She has worked with people who face considerable physical and emotional challenges
including people with severe physical disabilities and Vietnam veterans who find it difficult to be in a crowd of unknown people or be ordered what to do. To prepare to work with each person, Sarah undertakes considerable research:

I put very little into what’s written about anything. I need to learn for myself - the only way I can absorb things is if I do it myself.

Sarah then went on to study massage: sports relief and deep tissue, diet and nutrition, as it helps her work along with her ability to help people. Sarah has done everything she could to access learning and plans to go on to upgrade to the Certificate IV. She is always borrowing books to find new approaches, and can tell people what she has read, done and experienced. The newest client has had a stroke and is on a steep learning curve.

Sarah has found that her own children prefer being able to move around and are allowed to do so if they are working happily and get all their work done. They have been told they have to hang in until year 10 although they are able to pick up VET or trade units at that point. They are quite different from their parents in many respects. One of them likes structures and studying, the other likes to move around and do different things.

She would like to see some preparation for high school being integrated into the last years of primary school. At the moment they do a mathematics rotation where they go to a different teacher for mathematics. Teachers are expected to be experts in every other subject, from Indonesian to playing the recorder, the children would benefit from having a different music or language teacher. She would like to see a break between primary and high school. She feels that as every child is different, and the school needs to adapt to the child, not the child adapt to the school. Even a group of the students with the same results are different. She feels that using learning contracts is a good idea as children can make decisions about their work and when it needs to be written and followed up:

I learn through trial and error. If something doesn’t work, do it differently next time. Everybody’s different so what works with one person may not work with another person who looks the same. It’s important to be broadminded.
Findings and Discussion

Sarah says she is still hopeless with numbers and particularly algebra. She uses formulae all the time for work, to work out ratios for people but she can’t see the point of having numbers and letters together. She was able to learn as long as it was something she wanted to learn. If she doesn’t know something she will go and look it up and find out.

Sarah says she wouldn’t have worked well in the university situation as she has problems with authority. When she undertook previous qualifications it was done through recognition of prior learning by the business manager, who was known and trusted. Sarah feels that in the class situation, she would have given up and walked out. When asked how she would change educational systems, Sarah says, now she can do anything if it’s needed for work:

…[She ] can do anything now.

4.3.17 Portrait Seventeen

Peta enjoyed learning, being able to learn and do well at school. Peta was expected to do very well at school by the family. From an early age, she had considerable family responsibilities. She was expected to balance those with meeting homework and learning related responsibilities. There was minimal family support to assist in the difficulties she faced in managing the expectations of school and school social life. During her school years, Peta felt she didn’t fit in and that her skills, knowledge and commitment to learning were not recognised:

The teachers didn’t like it when I would try and do something different and interpret the assignments in different ways, they really like work that was pretty and neat, which I was terrible at, and weren’t interested in what I was trying to show them I could do. I got really sick of trying to meet my own, family’s and teachers’ expectations and I guess I just gave up after a while… The teachers liked to humiliate me when I made any mistake in my work or socially and would use public humiliation to try and control me.

She felt different and she couldn’t meet the social expectations of school:

I was bullied a lot and didn’t have any friends, I was picked on for being and looking different, I was called lots of nasty names and hated being at school and really hated being in the playground. I found it hard to get along with
other kids most of the time and there was no-one to help me sort that out. That really meant that I was worried, looking out for trouble or miserable most of the time.

Peta was unable to do subjects of interest due to the directed teaching and assessment approaches and gender based family restrictions. She wanted to take manual arts and avoid English and typing which was ‘boring’. This was supported by her family who wanted her to focus on subjects identified for girls. Her family expected her to go to school and do well, the authority of the school was not to be challenged. At home you were expected to be able to defend your ideas and compete with others to explain your thinking:

It was always very combative, no one just accepts what another person says, and will always be challenged so you have to be on your toes.

Peta’s extended family encouraged her to keep challenging the education system and go beyond the role models of education and career offered. This challenged the expectations of people’s roles in her world beyond that which she could imagine. The encouraged her to think big and told her the family’s way was to be self reliant and work to a high standard. Peta was unhappy at school and gradually spent less and less time at school:

After Grade three I didn’t really go to school, Mum and Dad needed help at home and I hated school.

There was no pressure at home for her to go to school or support to build effective strategies:

The only time I liked learning really was when we went on a long holiday and took our school work, I could do it in the morning in about an hour and help my brother and sister and still have lots of time to do other things. I liked new ideas and loved it when my Dad would take me for a walk down the beach or whatever and teach me stuff. He was always interested in ideas and knew lots of stuff and liked sharing it with me.

Peta found learning at school restrictive, directed and unchallenging and was expelled from school in Year 10:
Findings and Discussion

I wanted to leave and work as a jillaroo but I wasn’t allowed to do that I was meant to be doing work to be a secretary or a nurse.

Peta tried to return to secondary school but felt further isolated and found conforming to agendas that were foreign and illogical: where

We never learnt anything useful and I was really unprepared for my world then and now.

She was not supported at home or school to develop the strategies to manage at school and, on return, did not complete one semester before leaving school again:

There was no way to be me and be accepted at school, I would try hard but either get told off by teachers or cop it from other kids. I really wanted to learn but couldn’t find a way through to do well and be me. I used to get the book for the year and work really hard on the subjects I liked, like maths, and finish the years work in the first few months and then end up in trouble for the rest of the year as I was meant to be quiet and do nothing…it was easier to get into trouble and fit in with other kids in the end…the teachers were pretty happy I decided to leave in the end I think. No-one tried to stop me anyway.

Peta worked in a range of manual labour occupations until she had a baby and could not maintain that lifestyle. She also worked in a school for while as a teacher aide helping children with disabilities, teaching an art programme and helping in the office. The teachers had invited her to do the work and even paid her from their own money for a while. They also encouraged and supported her to go and do a vocational level course to support her work as a teacher aide. She was rewarded by acceptance in the staff room and students who actively participated in her class. This was a chance for Peta to have some freedom to learn and show what she could do.

As a young adult, Peta decided she needed to return to formal education in order to be qualified in a career that would provide for her own family in the future. She chose education because:

…it provided a passport to being able to live in regional areas…I wanted to make sure that people would never have as bad experiences as I had at school ever again.
Peta gained mature age entry through an examination into university. She struggled with higher education as the:

...codes for negotiating learning were not made explicit and were based on significant cultural knowledge of participating in tertiary education that was not actively taught.

There was no attempt on the part of the institution to identify or manage the needs of students and when Peta questioned their approach to working with students she was told she could leave, and was encouraged to enrol elsewhere and stop questioning the status quo of the institution. The course was chosen based on undertaking a job that would provide for her family:

I would have liked to do a completely different course but no one ever told me I could turn that passion into a job...It took three goes at different institutions to complete my degree. In the end I had to focus on finishing through compliance rather than learning and questioning.

Peta found that when she was working in education and could see ways to make a difference across systems that she needed to undertake vocational and postgraduate studies. Peta struggled with adult education as it was not challenging, did not allow flexibility in approach to learning and assessment and emphasised passive involvement in education. She was frustrated by the focus of lecturers and the unit material on the institution’s agenda rather than students' reasons for studying. She felt they were only interested in her compliance not her ideas and particularly not her questions about the information they were being given. This was another opportunity to copy and repeat what others said was the accepted knowledge rather than a chance to challenge and grow. Peta was very disappointed as she had held higher education as a goal for a long time and had seen this as a place of great learning and study. By now, learning has included several unsuccessful attempts at formal qualification due to conflict with trainers and institutions. Peta has now successfully completed a post graduate degree. Ultimately success in formal education in relevant areas depended on developing an approach to learning that includes negotiating study as much as possible and complying enough to survive the remainder.
Peta’s family and peers in the regional community do not relate well to Peta’s choices about study which has resulted in needing to maintain currency in the literacies in both formal education settings and the local community:

I call my study my forklift license, it’s just a very long one.

This caused stress for Peta who uses different language to describe her activities related to learning in different contexts and is conflicted about how to operate in both spheres and the implications for Peta’s futures. At every stage, Peta felt that the language, way of talking and cultural references ‘were a mystery’ that meant she was obviously different and she felt that she could not assert herself. She drew heavily on the learning opportunities, formal and informal, to try and cope in these environments and ‘better herself’.

When attempting each stage of formal and professional learning Peta felt challenged by the identities that she has as part of her home life, work life and the goal that she is working towards:

I swing between wanting the new challenge and being unsure I should be involved in that level and getting above myself.

This challenge was all consuming and interfered with being able to participate fully in learning experiences. Being able to manage this conflict is an ongoing task and the better she gets at being able to identify the feelings of insecurity about studying, understanding others’ action and their impact on how she feels, is crucial in sustaining her efforts to study and be herself.

Education systems need to learn how to celebrate difference and bring in all the knowledge that people have and encourage people to challenge and be themselves. It would be better if people were encouraged and the teacher should be standing up for that student helping them find their own way, showing them the things they don’t know and might need in the future. That’s the information in school and how to talk to other people about what they are doing.
4.3.18 Portrait Eighteen

Emily described herself as a confident learner who has positive experiences of education, who always achieved her goals. She grew up in large southern capital city. Her father was a university lecturer and inventor a man who was always thinking about things:

I've always seen myself as a learner and I'm not sure why

On the weekends, Emily's father would go to work and she would go with him. She would spend hours in the lecture theatres with a podium and the pull down blackboards while her father was in his laboratory. Emily would give lectures and write on the boards. Eight years later she enjoyed mathematics, so she would write mathematics information on the board, talk as if she was giving a lecture, ask the 'audience' what they thought of it and then rub it all off. At the end of the day, her:

…father would come in, say time to go home now, I would rub it all off… I'm not sure if this had an impact on me or not…it was … just fantastic and I don’t… think it was an isolating thing and I get the same feeling when I am studying. It’s almost like I made a little world that I went into and it never left me, that feeling of going into a learning environment.

Her father said she could do anything she wanted to; she didn’t have to stay at home like her very traditional mother. He said that if:

… if you want to study I will back you to the hilt…he always did, but one of my other sisters didn’t study and he backed her too he said that’s fine if that’s your decision.

Her husband was supportive and said it was his job to get her where she wanted to be. Her father was concerned that marriage would mean she wouldn't continue study and took time to accept that she would keep studying. She moved to the rural and remote areas after five years of marriage and never turned back. This decision was something her family did not accept or understand her experiences as they now have so little in common.

She undertook first undergraduate degree at 18. Upon finishing the first degree Emily had the first of five children, who were born over the following eight years,
Emily studied a non-accredited course as part of the nursing mothers’ association to be a counselor. She was an external student for all postgraduate studies after her first degree. Emily was a successful student but described internal studies as terrible, waiting in between classes for up to seven hours as a waste of time and wasn’t interested in the socialising experiences of university life. Emily preferred to be involved in external studies as she intensely dislikes:

…being spoon-fed stuff, having to sit in a class and being forced to talk about a topic, having to conform to times and days of the week, being told what to do, having to wait seven hours between classes on campus, preferring to manage my own learning.

She likes having time to think things through and work things out in her own time, believes she doesn’t think well on her feet and prefers being able to consider to ideas thoroughly, study into the early hours of the morning which she continues to prefer. To participate in postgraduate studies, Emily waited for external studies to be available as she lived in a regional area and preferred external studies and completed a graduate diploma.

She has been involved in study groups in the local regional centre, with other people doing their Masters degree. It was a chore having to communicate with people, having to talk to someone about the study. Emily likes to withdraw inside herself. Emily’s first priority was bringing up the children. In a small town, this meant mixing with people who fitted into a lifestyle that revolved around children; and spending time with people who may not have been her chosen friends. Emily has always studied at least one unit all the time. Her husband agreed that twice a week at 7pm she would withdraw into her own little room and study. No matter what happened in the house, that was her husband’s responsibility for that time, and Emily would focus on her study:

….that was my time and I would withdraw and I never came out and it was just what propels me is being in another world and like being in another world.

Over this time, she has not attended a residential block. Emily chose to stay with her family while studying and lived into regional and isolated areas where her partner worked in a role that involved being on call for emergencies over a large regional area:
...there is no way you can dump five children and go away for a period of time

This was not an issue for Emily. Emily emphasised the importance of being able to manage her learning and would continue to work in this way. Through all of her studies, Emily needed all the classes to relate back to the context, it is important to know the theory but it needs to connect to her reason for studying.

Emily was working as a teacher and undertook her masters in distance education as she was designing and implementing new courses to be offered nationally, this was an opportunity to learn how to write materials. All studies have had a point to them. She has used the materials from the Masters of Distance Education many times:

... it's been really useful in this and future work,

As part of the degree, she also did a thesis as preparation for undertaking a PhD. Emily has undertaken a PhD to participate in research and the qualification is required to be given credit as a researcher. This is the only qualification she has undertaken basically in order to complete the qualification.

As a teacher, informal learning had a big impact on her thinking about learning:

...there was a number of women doing the driving test through the course and I went along and got my driving instructor's licenses so I could take people through their test and teach ...[as] the instructor [I was] fairly formal... [the students] always wanted their lesson to finish at lunchtime so we would go to someone's house. We had a reciprocal learning relationship where I gave them something in the morning and they gave me something in the afternoon. The women just kept coming and I thoroughly enjoyed it. My world was completely turned around by food. It was completely informal but I got so much out of it. That it really kept me going with the driving which I hated because it was so scary and nervy and dreadful but you got so much out of it and so did they, which changed the way my family eats.

After moving to the major regional centre, Emily has been updating her psychological qualifications, Emily enrolled into the psychology of crime unit in an internal class:
I thought this will be interesting as I haven’t done an internal class for a long time so that’s ok it will be interesting to listen to the lecturer after 30 years I actually attended

The coordinator of the unit introduced the topic for about half an hour, said the rest of the material was available on the online learning system and to come and see her if there were any issues:

I could not cope with it. I didn’t want to do it on Learnline there are other ways I could have done it, I could have printed the notes up but it annoyed me too much I thought I am not going to do it. I wasn’t prepared to sit there and chat about what I had read or anything it wasn’t what I wanted to do.

As a teacher, Emily has put materials onto online systems but give hard copies to the students as they don’t like online learning. She sees that online education is used to pass the cost of training onto students rather than as an effective learning tool:

That’s what worries me this could be a barrier while its meant to be new and innovative and I think it will be a barrier to their way of working

The success of external studies for Emily, and her partner, resulted in encouraging their children to engage in external education for Years 11 and 12, which the first three did prior to moving an urban centre. Emily and her partner really believed in learning through correspondence and needed to work hard to support their children in their distance education program, by getting involved to help them cope, managing their involvement and associated serious issues. Their children’s success was related to their positive attitude to and confidence in education by correspondence. The regional area they lived in was changing and many people were moving away, Emily’ and her partner’s confidence and support were important in supporting their children to cope when people around them were:

…saying it’s hopeless you’ll never be able to do it

Being able to study by correspondence meant they could continue to live in a regional area as long as they did. Some of the issues included:
…being marked down because you don't have access to a lab and things like that,

They needed to support their children to engage in the educational system, and these areas are of importance for people who want to get into careers such as occupational therapy or veterinary science. Emily and her husband’s children have then gone on to undertake an undergraduate degree internally and subsequently postgraduate and professional learning externally in a range of fields. They have developed the skills to study this way and once you feel confident, you can go on and do more. Their children have gone on into science, teaching, graphic design and engineering. They were the only students in the region undertaking education by correspondence at this stage. Through the programme they became very independent learners.

For Emily:

…identity is about going through those crises and working out where you fit and then having a commitment to a certain pathway in respect to lots of things and that is what you’ve done several times. Therefore you have an identity that you work with.

4.3.19 Portrait Nineteen

Tamara grew up and now lives in a regional area all her life with her extended family, including five siblings, her own children and grandson. As a young person, Tamara socialised with her grandmother and other community people who visited. Her grandmother was a reference point for education throughout her life and encouraged Tamara to engage in education in order to effectively engage with the non-Indigenous people and institutions that were increasing their power in Aboriginal people’s lives. He grandmother had good handwriting, spelling and memory for words. She knew that speaking a language meant she knew she could pass on certain stories, as a way of passing on knowledge. She also taught Tamara that:

…you never allow a white person to assess your worth, that you internalise and you have your own assessment mechanism to judge how well you are going, and you never allow yourself to do a bad job… you need to set your benchmark higher because they'll set it low.
Tamara didn’t get a lot of interaction with her mother who was the main caregiver and had completed two years primary schooling. Her father worked and communicated in Aboriginal English. Tamara didn’t attend kindergarten or preschool as she had responsibilities, to care for the younger four children in the family. Tamara cared for the younger children, and getting them ready to school because both their parents worked and lived in town at that time. Tamara thinks she started off in Grade one, a year younger than other students, so she felt she always seemed to be one year behind everybody else in the class. She doesn’t have strong recollections of Grades one and two.

Tamara first felt racialised in Grade three. She recognised that other people had a different view of the way her family lived and thought about things from an Indigenous perspective. She experienced racist taunts as she became more sensitive to racism. Then, people in the playground openly spoke about racist perspectives of the world. She brought elements of her home language, Aboriginal English, to school, in both vocabulary and her accent. Tamara was teased for this at school. This was embarrassing, so she was reluctant to speak up in class. She felt the primary school was pretty good, because her father had a connection with the deputy principal. In Grade seven, Tamara:

…started coming out of my shell... I thought I'm really going to listen very well now and then I'm going to go home practice how to speak at school this way and [another way] at home. I can relax, I can be myself when I go into these other learning situations.

In primary school, Tamara remembers undertaking intelligence assessment, the Western cultural references were alien as Tamara had not owned or seen those books about *The Faraway Tree*. Tamara reflected on the stories of her childhood from her grandmother about the poinciana tree lady who haunts the banyan tree. Tamara didn’t go to the library as a child as they were foreign and didn’t have books at home. She was more interested in her grandmother's stories. Things were not too bad until high school which was totally different. Her parents never went to the school, to a parent teacher night which on reflection was more to do with not knowing the system or feeling sufficiently comfortable to go to school. Their view...
was everything was okay as they were not receiving notes about poor behaviour or anything and they did not need to talk with the teacher.

At school, students were streamed into academic classes which meant increased homework. There was not a place to do homework at home, so Tamara did it on her bed. She has a hearing deficiency in one ear so she could understand better through re-reading work on the back step than she could hear it at school, she was teased for this. There was not much attention paid to study, so everyone was told to leave her alone. There wasn’t a lot of ceremony about this, the word study probably wasn’t even mentioned, it was pretty crazy on reflection. Due to a natural disaster in the region, Tamara was sent to Adelaide to study for a year in high school after which she wanted to return home. When it came time to leave, the school wanted to keep her to complete her schooling and her uncle wanted her to come and study in Melbourne. He said that Adelaide schools were less racist so she was better staying there, he was the first person in the family to achieve high levels of education, and has since gone on to gain quite a few degrees.

Tamara thought she had already faced a lot of racism and felt it couldn’t be worse. Her uncle had gone away to teachers college and later studied speech pathology in Adelaide and Melbourne respectively. He checked the units Tamara was studying in the final years of high school; physics, chemistry, mathematics one and two and English. He discussed her career aims, Tamara was thinking about sport and he suggested she come to Melbourne to undertake relevant studies. Tamara had been very successful in sport at state, national and international level, umpiring and organising competitions. He was confident that she could achieve her goals if she continued to study and get good grades:

…but I wasn't overly confident, still very young I guess, he was the first person who had mentioned to me considering doing further study

Tamara’s parents wanted her to come home and help with the three younger children. It was hard to get used to the school:

….it was very cold and I was the only black kid in school there were only two male teachers in the whole school, it was very prim and proper …I mixed in with all of the migrants, the Yugoslavians, the Greeks and the Italians, in the
end people were looking at me and calling me a wog but when I was walking with my cousins down the street I was called a boong

There was a lot more racism in high school, Tamara started to developed strategies to manage that racism. Tamara experienced:

…an instance of bad discrimination by a white male teacher in chemistry that was rather unfortunate that was in my final year of high school, that sort of changed the course of what I did because I reported the incident and he was reprimanded and he had to apologise to my father. That meant I didn't feel inclined to stay on in the chemistry department and mid-term I had to change to American history, [I] still passed but I wanted to pass in chemistry and I think [the experience] changed what I thought I could do when I left school.

Her family expected Tamara to be independent and support myself. It was not about going to university or having a professional career. There were not many Aboriginal professional role models to follow. The seed planted by her uncle encouraged Tamara to apply for high school. This was really going out on a limb:

…but then when it came up I think I had a strong fear that if I did that I had to pass, I had a very strong fear of failure and that wasn't put there by my family, but it was very strong in my mind

On finishing high school, Tamara was accepted into two universities but growing up in an extended family meant there wasn't always a lot of money. Tamara undertook the public service exam while waiting from the results from the final examinations and also applied to go to a university. Tamara was accepted into the public service first and then by university, so she took the public service position and deferred her studies for 12 months. Within a couple of months of work, Tamara was promoted and was being paid:

…phenomenal money which I hadn't seen before so I eventually decided to stay on in the public service department instead of attending university.

Tamara continued her professional development through the law department and undertaking local course. She had a good understanding of current legislation and policy processes, so she moved onto another area to develop her experience and knowledge. No one was encouraging her to pursue her education. In 1985, Tamara
resigned from the local department, joined the federal public service and moved to Canberra for work and progressed through the public service ranks to senior management level within two years. She worked in Indigenous education policy, for policy across two states:

I recognised that was that there were a lot of non-Indigenous people working at that level with me who actually had degrees or double degrees or at the Masters levels… through my work experience… I saw my abilities equaled or [were]…higher than theirs…I didn't have a piece of paper.

Tamara recognised she needed to go back and get the relevant qualifications, although the first secretary said she did not need it. If she was to avoid being disadvantaged when competing against a non-Indigenous person in an interview at executive level, it was essential to have relevant qualifications. Tamara knew she not only had to compete but be better than a non-Indigenous person in an interview. Tamara did not see that it was any different for Indigenous people and that she needed to get those qualifications. There was also a gender issue, this:

…was very prevalent among my sense of identity, being a short black female with a hearing impediment and a small child at that point in time, I was determined to be better.

Tamara developed confidence as she recognised her competence was on par with those who had gone to university. University is not part of Indigenous culture. Her father had gone to tertiary education as an adult after foregoing education as a young man. Tamara had applied to get back into university but she was not confident she was good enough to be accepted. Even in her final year of school, she hadn't gone:

…overboard with study because there was no study area at home. I just did the best I could with the resources I had at home. I had no extra tuition at all. I think my own sense of who I was and where I could go was confined by not having education in my family background

Tamara knew she was as good if not better that many people at university. She realised that university was not as daunting as she had thought and returned to study in her mid-20s. Tamara started university when she was in the top levels of
the public service and had responsibility for her own daughter and two step children and her extended family to care for. She could only put in the amount of time that the family agreed to through the degree program and then as a researcher. She worked full time during the day and studied her Masters’ degree at night and on the weekend. She needed to make relevant changes to the way she managed work and education for her Indigenous practices and tried to support others. Tamara applied for a scholarship as she needed to money to pay her own wage. Winning the scholarship meant:

I thought now I can’t turn back, I was really apprehensive because I stuck my neck out now to get this scholarship in a public way, so the whole department knew about me wanting to go back to Uni. So I had the fear of God put into me...I can’t fail now, I have to actually achieve.

This meant there was a trade-off to avoid failing and put in the time and energy required to manage the family and being a student This means compromising on the standard of assignments at times as she had to maintain a strict timetable and finish assignments on time. When a couple of non-Indigenous people asked about if she was looking forward to study, Tamara noted she was scared, and lacking confidence. Her confidence grew when she saw they believed she would succeed.

Tamara experienced discrimination in the tertiary sector, it was blatant and embarrassing, recognised by classmates who encouraged her to pursue it. Tamara spoke to the lecturer who was dismissive; the dean asked if she really understood the issues in pursuing the accusation. Tamara had a good understanding through the public service but chose not to pursue it as universities are small places and it could follow her in the long term and she accepted a lower grade.

Between lecturers and tutorials, Tamara accessed the on campus Indigenous education support unit. This was place to be with other Aboriginal people, study, to do assessments, to socialise and get some support. Tamara studied in the Indigenous education unit rather than the library. The business school in which she was studying was alienating and has discriminatory content. Tamara studied human resource management, corporate strategy and other business units:

...by that stage, I was able to cope well with those types of comments because of my age, my work experience
This is confronting for young people, during this study time there was only one lecturer of colour. Tamara changed universities to one that employed people who had worked with Aboriginal people in northern Australia, could understand the issues and communicate well. This was a happier study time for her. Practical experience has helped Tamara gain the confidence to continue postgraduate education. Through the Masters programme, Tamara wanted to listen and talk to other Aboriginal people about what is the best way for them. She has made a conscious effort over the past five years not to be intimidated by mainstream way of doing things:

I also felt a lot stronger in my sense of identity and where I come from that … I've always valued that and my family… this is the time … to write about those things more and investigate them so that people can… understand and value it too.

Tamara realised that she had done education the hard way and that it is easy for some privileged Western children who by the age of 22 have got their doctorate and are employed due to who they are, their connections. Indigenous people also need to develop these networks and connections and improve engagement of Indigenous people in education. This means recognising the barriers such as starting later in life, having families and financial responsibilities. Many Indigenous people have skills through their work experience, skilled in their ways of understanding and working with their own community and across communities.

Tamara has recognised the value of the appropriate qualifications; she is now undertaking her PhD:

…so I'm prepared to jump through the hoops now because my level of confidence has grown and my experience in the area of research has certainly grown now. I am sort of really wanting to document that more and try to help create structures around making them safer for people to want to come in [to educational and research institutions] and that is my one small thing that I want to be able to do.

Working at the university has provided an opportunity to enact the direction of her grandmother using western words. This does not capture everything but it tries to talk about important concepts as a process to explain these ideas to non-Indigenous
people in a logical way. It is not how it is taught but helping people get an idea of why people operate in different ways, that you may not be clear if one has lived a different life. This is part of following the matrilineal line in her family and her grandmother’s expectation:

…the hard thing about doing a PhD it's hard focusing on one small issue…you've got to be selfish and be focused … so I'm still trying to come to terms with how to focus the positive thinking …it is not to me it for me to get a piece of paper …[and being focused on] the main purpose... to allow me to…do more things, have more influence…the bottom line for me is my identity has driven who I am…my whole approach [to learning] comes from who I am.

4.3.20 Portrait Twenty

For the first five years of school, Gina went to an expensive Ladies College. This was a pretty good start off because there were only 14 or 15 kids in class. Many of the teachers had taught her mother, and her mother had a reputation for being a bit naughty. She didn’t realise the advantage she received until she went to a state school for a year where the class size almost doubled, with boys in the class and uniform rules were considerably relaxed. She doesn’t remember much of that time except feeling that she had done this before and the work was boring. She remembers being told to sit down, shut up and do what she was told. She joined a gifted and talented class which was biased towards the arts and drama, while Gina is more interested in mathematics and science:

I can't write neatly I can't draw, and I'm not very good at colouring in, the last two years I left thinking I was stupid… she had such set favorites, they were the pretty and the talented kids, the ones who were quite bright in other areas that she wasn't interested in…I wasn't even allowed to work on the class mural because I'd ruin it, not nice at all. .

Then Gina went to a semi-selective government, all girls’ school in Sydney. About halfway through Year seven she got a good report and thought:

I’m not that stupid and I can get this done.
Her report included A and B grades and positive teacher comments. One teacher had a passion for natural history and used to take the students to the Museum.

In her early teens, Gina was living with her mother, who she now sees had a mental illness. She was proud of her daughter’s achievements and boasted to the point that Gina reacted negatively and her education went off the rails. In Year 10 Gina felt herself fortunate to do work experience at the Australian Museum because she wanted to be a herpetologist. Gina told her teacher she was going to be a herpetologist, her teacher was negative about this as she thought I had said something rude. Gina explained she would do things like take care of marine animals and turtles. Gina walked out of the school, caught a bus to the museum and asked if she could do work experience. They didn’t know what work experience meant. Gina explained she was insured for two weeks and will do whatever they wanted. At age 15, this was the beginning of working with wildlife. Those people were and continue to be incredible mentors. Gina explains she was:

…confident, a bit bomb proof, feeling I can do anything I want.

The things she chose not to do were related to defying her mother.

She thinks she is genetically like this, confident and bomb proof. Some of the children she teaches now have the feeling that they can do anything while others are less confident and feel there are limits to what they can do. Gina draws on another strategy; she plans her goal, what she needs to do and the steps to achieve that goal. There are things she won’t choose to do, and might not achieve every goal to an international standard.

I’ve got a lot of faith in my mental capacity, not saying that am absolutely brilliant, but I know that to be successful in study; its understanding what you’re doing, it’s organisation, it’s commitment, the little chunks of steps and probably being able to see a real plan and people.

Working with other people has meant that she has seen the value of her ability to develop a roadmap and break down all of the tasks, identify the blocks, recast them as challenges and manage them.

Gina’s actions had embarrassed her mother who was comparing children’s achievements with her friends. While others were talking about their children going
to school, Gina was living in a squat and had the freedom to study whatever she wanted and work in wildlife. Gina started a 12 week traineeship at Sydney University in the animal house. She studied the animal attendant’s certificate at the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) centre. She enjoyed this, it was interesting, practical and hands-on and the work she wanted to do. The next certificate required the student to be in active employment for a set number of hours per week. Gina worked out all of the relevant employers that were based within an hour’s bicycle ride from her home and rang them all requesting a job, she even offered to work for free. This was very difficult as no-one would take her on. She was talking to the manager of her weekend employment; he asked about her study and on finding out the issue, offered her three months work in a more relevant business he owned. She worked there for two years doing relevant and challenging work. She studied at TAFE during this time. This helped in gaining better employment before Gina left Sydney for northern Australia.

Gina was working in a wildlife park, when she decided she needed to upgrade to a higher education degree. She called a university and discussed her ideas with the Dean of Science. The Dean came out to the area she lived in and met her in a social context, with other staff from the wildlife park. He discussed the grades she had received and her evident commitment to study. She was advised to undertake a bridging program including a subject, which she hated, and gained access into the degree in a fair process. She did her degree part time. This was a good experience:

I was lucky I worked at the wildlife park for the first two years and what I was learning was really relevant to what I was doing I was really learning about the ecology of northern Australia.

The lecturers could be scary in first year but they taught the relevant material. When she needed to know something at work, it would be in the next week’s lecture. It was dynamic and useful. During this time Gina started working in the local museum. She worked:

…with a phenomenal curator who had such a passion for natural history, was an professional entomologist and pushed me really hard in several areas of taxonomy, proper scientific writing and was just so much fun to work with. I
suppose working with lots of academics around technical support was great it really inspired me to be like them...I felt really valued, I felt safe compared to being blasted from the mount [that is, in school] many of my mentors challenged me, that really pushed me, it was probably what I needed at that stage, they were so willing to share about their chosen career, that rubs off on you

This experience was like an apprenticeship, which Gina describes as the way many successful people in Australia gained valuable experience and exposure to mentors. These mentors were some of Australia’s leading scientist, historians and anthropologists. The relationships with senior and talented mentors with international profiles, throughout her life helped Gina to learn, think and understand her area of expertise. She got to work with the most relevant and difficult to access materials, the same materials that experts used.

Gina passed all of her units until she developed carpal tunnel syndrome and could not write with her right hand. She was really distressed at that time and turned up for exams. These were later removed from her record or assessed as a pass conceded as she had not understood the university process in the first year. She was successful by being very organised, developing coping strategies to work with examinations and other areas of study. Her workplace was supportive and gave her and other students time to study and prepare for examinations together. She likes working in teams and to a series of deadlines.

After completing her science degree, Gina took some business units. She completed this while also having her first child. At this time she learnt how to type and breastfeed at the same time. She then went onto an education degree as she had worked as an education officer and wanted to again but the qualification was now a requirement. This job was important as there was job instability in the family and she could have become the major breadwinner at any time, this was a stable position. The course was:

...a huge disappointment I thought I would be learning how to be a teacher and I learnt about dealing with people's the inadequacies and egos in the faculty ... a bunch of graduates ... thought we are getting distinctions for handing in crap work and ... some lecturers you just couldn't question, you
basically just had to tell them what they wanted to do. So we all thought we just have to get through this and get our piece of paper so we can teach.

On completion she felt ill-equipped to teach, she saw completing the qualification as being compliant but you are able to do the work afterwards. As teaching earns good money and she needed the money, she got a job working as an education officer, she had the opportunity to teach about her passion and content. She enjoyed her work, was confident in her content but was concerned about the culture the in the department of education. On reflection she has used some of the knowledge gained in the course.

Gina is now a primary school teacher and has to learn the value of informal learning:

I am a Tribes trainer, the feedback shows that impact on teachers. They are starting to think about the touchy, feely areas and it’s really good to be able to support them to build the relationships that are so important for teaching.

The impact of Gina’s negative experience in school has continued, after so many achievements, Gina still felt stupid and like an idiot. When she met with other students at a reunion, they also felt the pain and embarrassment about what had happened to them at that time. Gina says as a teacher:

I am never going to do that to someone, that is really important learning journey for me… what happened to me, I was frail, I was absolutely disgusting and I probably blame a lot of it on my home life which is understandable looking back.

Now Gina is trying to influence the class so that she can develop an approach that helps the children who are not being supported or have their needs met within the school system. She was trying to introduce change into the school, which is difficult as teachers are concerned about one group getting more than others. She says:

it’s important to develop a relationship with those students, ask them what’s going on, what they been up, how was their weekend. This is about establishing a basis for a different relationship which is usually based around being disciplined.
Gina believes it is important to help children to make a better choice. She would like to do that in her work.

She is now working with a class of children who have not fitted well into the school system:

…we talk about behaviours … the boys are starting to use strategies to take a breath…think about their behaviour…participate better.

Gina believes that she follows Gandhi’s philosophy, to be the change you want to see. Gina lives and works in the local community, she said understands the people who are living in her home and school area, she cares about similar things to the families in the region. Gina described working on all sorts of sneaky ways to make changes to the environment and community. She is designing hands-on programmes that engage local families with what is happening on their land and the school curriculum. She bases the curriculum in part of getting children to look at their rural home blocks, to collect and watch things in their world and use that as a basis for their work in class, making connections between home and school and life. Gina believes:

…learning needs to be contextual real rich and relevant to the community and families need to be involved in that learning process …we need to focus on behaviour [and have] diversity in class structures so there's learning for every student…teacher directed classrooms don't work at improving community inclusion in the classroom.

As Gina continues her learning journey, she says she is getting more confident to try these are the strategies that are working in the classroom.

**4.4 Phase 3 Portraits’ thematic analysis**

The Phase One analysis outlined the major themes from the interview transcripts and provided an overarching structure to consider learners’ engagement across the lifespan. This emerged from an analysis of Phase Two of the participants’ interview. In this second phase, participants reflected on Phase One of their interviews reported in Phase One where they discussed their experiences of learning across the lifespan. Each portrait was examined to confirm the key elements that impacted
on learner engagement and establish the enacted learner identity thematic analysis framework reported in the next section.

The cross-cutting analysis of the Portraits with co-participants and researchers worked through several layers of analysis as reported in Chapter Three, Methodology. The prominence of participants’ identity as a learner in understanding, informing and mediating engagement across all stages of discussion and making decisions is evident and uniform across each of the layers of analysis of the portraits. The reflections on engagement and identity were analysed across the twenty Portraits to establish the key themes that organise a description of their educational experiences. The six key themes emerging from that cross-cutting analysis of the Portraits are:

Layers of analysis:
1. (Dis) Engagement in formal education and learning identities
2. Role of family and community learning identities
3. Strategies for managing learning identities and learning challenges
4. Identifying successes
5. Identity as a learner
6. Attitude to education and learning identities

This analysis was complemented by supporting data from the original interview transcripts to clarify or validate emerging suppositions about the themes and has provided further information for mapping the milestones across the lifespan which is detailed below. These stages encompassed learning experiences across the lifespan, as they applied to the individual, their family, workplace and community. Each of these is described in further detail below with reference to participants’ insights.

4.4.1 (Dis)Engagement in formal education and learning identities
Participants described their experiences of formal education across the lifespan starting with early childhood and primary school, secondary school. Participants commented on a range of post compulsory education experiences both accredited and non-accredited related to vocational and personal development. The ways
participants commented on learning, learning engagement and the roles people have in learning situations. This was informed by their understandings of participants’ cultural and social experiences, individual and social realities and identities.

Participants described their children’s involvement in education, they noted the decisions they made about mediating their children’s engagement in education as result of their own experiences. The descriptions of educational experiences were detailed, referring to curriculum, assessment, individual teachers, classroom, work based and social activities.

The participants described their experiences of education over the lifespan in terms of their community identities which have significant impact on their engagement in learning. In contexts where the Discourse (Gee 1996) reflected the students’ own identities and their influences, students’ learning practices appeared to be affirmed. Those learners were able to enact their identity as a learner; they had the resources needed to manage participation in the educational situation. This might include ways to understand what a teacher means when commenting on a students’ capacity (see Rhonda’s portrait), or the language to use when explaining certain ideas or strategies to negotiate engagement in formal learning. Tamara’s portrait has a good example of both of these concepts:

...so I’m prepared to jump through the hoops now because my level of confidence has grown and my experience in the area of research has certainly grown now. I am sort of really wanting to document that more and try to help create structures around making them safer for people to want to come in [to educational and research institutions] and that is my one small thing that I want to be able to do.

Participants struggled with their engagement at different stages, they described the ways they didn’t fit into the educational context. Those learners described the resources to resolve the conflicts they felt about engagement. The strategies were based around negotiation, avoidance or confrontation. These conflicts related to their identity as a learner as a person who belongs in a specific formal educational context. The conflicts related to many issues including the lack of relevance of the related information and teachers’ expectation of uncritical compliance. Participants described feeling they didn’t belong, were targeted, culturally unsafe, subject to
negative representations of people. There was a lack of opportunities to engage in learning activities where participants’ peers would reject them for becoming too much like members of the educational institution or system. When the learning practices, used in the educational experience, opposed or negated learners’ and communities’ identities, participants felt they were faced with the choice of being forced to change their identity, or to reject the experience or activity. The identity that participants felt they were expected to adopt was one of compliance with the educational systems or people who mediate educational engagement. An example is:

Instead of figuring out how to do the learning real good, I was figuring out how to get by and stay out of trouble. That was my main focus of school, staying out of trouble (Luke).

Participants, who had empowered learner identities, were able to work out how to be themselves, while working in a sometimes alienating environments. They had worked out how to take the elements they wanted from formal education and remain a part of their communities as they made the decision to remain engaged in a range of communities. Participants trialed a range of different learning, and community identities, over different periods of their lives. The use of different learner identities was evident, particularly in times of change, when participants’ learner identities were challenged in some way. This was evident in the participants’ repeated attempts to study at a vocational level. This was not always successful as this example shows:

Why am I coming her? I’m not getting what I need, we’re not getting the help we need…I gave up again, which I shouldn’t have, I should’ve kept going (Anne).

When this was successful, participants went on to other levels or areas of study as they required. When cycles of attempted engagement continued without success, that is, non-completion of the qualification, skill set or goal, and the learner chose to reject formal education, they developed ways to explain the issues in different ways for different audiences.

To explain their lack of achievement, some participants described their own shortcomings as learners while others described their decision to reject the
Findings and Discussion

education system and participate fully in another social group. Participants described their engagement in learning as part of the engagement with a range of discussions. Successful learners from poor backgrounds who had developed an identity as a learner that supported successful engagement in learning, were able to draw on this knowledge to resolve physical resource issues. While a number of participants commented on the restriction of physical resources, only Catherine was unable to resolve this. The financial pressures in her childhood were insurmountable which was not changed later in life. She drew on this experience to prioritise education for her children and grandchildren and actively support them through teaching the skills associated with enacted learner identities.

The impact of learner identity was consistently of greater impact on the learners’ engagement than any other influence, including their access to physical resources. When people made their decisions about learning engagement, their identification with the education system and their ability to manage it was the deciding factor. Participants’ results from educational engagement had internal conflicts, they demonstrated that they had different identities in different contexts and at different times. A small number of participants had developed learner identities that enabled them to access any learning system or contexts. Participants described themselves and their identity as a learner in terms of relevant individuals, groups and institutions. For this learner, rejection of formal education affirmed their identity as a person who could learn and perform socially valued tasks:

It was ok cause you just run amok…we got really clever we would go meet at the soccer oval over the road from the school and we would see the teachers and they would wave us over and we would wave and go down the valley or the beach for the day and go riding, fishing or riding horses (Kalkadoon).

An important part of engagement was the participants’ purpose, many participants who rejected education, did not respond well to performing in order to please a teacher. Their engagement improved when the purpose of the study was related to their goals for studying and they had a belief that it would contribute to their goals and perception of their ability to undertake a valued role. Continued engagement was supported for some participants by the awareness of peers, employers or community members that they were undertaking study and support for that activity.
This external accountability impacted on their identity in the relevant group or context. Consider the experiences of Tamara and Margaret whose decisions to continue their studies and manage adversity were in part driven by accountability to their communities, workplace and families.

There were conflicts in the descriptions as participants wanted the recognition associated with receiving a formally accredited qualification but decided not to engage in negotiation of educational engagement when those experiences was negative and attacked their learner identity. As both learning and identity are socially located, the impact of schooling and community processes that legitimate certain types of learning and social practices can affirm or challenge the identities of learners across the lifespan and their communities.

4.4.2 Role of family and community identities

Participants discussed the role of family and communities in their engagement in and attitude to educational and learning experiences. These continued across the lifespan as participants moved between formal and informal learning experiences. They were an important source of affirmation, conversation and reference for decisions made about learning engagement.

Rhonda said her attitude comes from her parents’ attitude that:

…it doesn’t matter what anyone else says you can do anything you want to …And we have always been told to follow things through – if you make a start on something keep going till you’ve finished it - apprenticeship, degree whatever.

Participants described family members having an important impact on their decisions, family members taught many of the strategies described that informed their engagement strategies in later life. Participants whose family or community based learner identity aligned closely with that of the school system experienced less conflict in the schooling system.

Emily, for example, said that:

I’ve always seen myself as a learner and I’m not sure why.
On the weekends, Emily’s father would go to work and she would go with him. She would spend hours in the lecture theatres with a podium and the pull down blackboards while her father was in his laboratory. Emily would give lectures and write on the boards. Eight years later she enjoyed mathematics, so she would write mathematics information on the board, talk as if she was giving a lecture, ask the ‘audience’ what they thought of it and then rub it all off. Later in life her belief in herself as a learner supported her through the challenges in studying.

Of interest was that all participants experienced some conflict but it was significantly reduced and they had the identity resources to manage that conflict. Participants who had achieved their goals had explicitly learnt the role and strategies of empowered learners later in life. Participants who had experienced success through formal educational engagement either had parents or mentors who were supportive and articulated ways for learners to maintain their identity as learners despite negative experiences. Learners, who did not have this network in their family, had developed these skills through participation in a support network over their professional or personal life.

Emily and her partners’ confidence and support was important in supporting their children to cope when people around them were:

…saying it’s hopeless you’ll never be able to do it.

Where people had one or more family members who were not interested or engaged in supporting their education, they had another family member or community mentor who encouraged them. Several participants who had succeeded had little family support to engage in learning and saw learning as the way to change their lives.

Gina is an example, she was working in a wildlife park, when she decided she needed to upgrade to a higher education degree. She called a university and discussed her ideas with the Dean of Science. She was advised to undertake a bridging program including a subject, which she hated, and gained access into the degree through a fair process. She did her degree part time. This was a good experience:
Findings and Discussion

I was lucky I worked at the wildlife park for the first two years and what I was learning was really relevant to what I was doing. I was really learning about the ecology of northern Australia.

These people persisted in their engagement despite negative experiences to achieve their goals as a way out of the family contexts. They all mentioned the impact of industry based mentors in changing their lives through educational engagement.

For all participants, their experiences and attitudes about learning were essentially informed by the attitudes and constructs of their families and communities. Participants explored the connection between identity and community membership as a central driver of learners’ behaviour and beliefs about their own place within formal learning contexts.

For example, Gillian felt that her ability to persist through difficult times is in the genes. Working on the farm, through a drought, the children were expected to do their share, learn from the world around them and get on with the jobs. Her family’s attitude is

…what’s the point of complaining, just get on and do it.

The majority of participants described the impact of the opposing constructions of identities about learning and identity as causing personal conflict about their education and role as a member of the peer and family group. The greater the congruence between the knowledge valued and used in the home and school, the longer participants enjoyed school and learning and saw themselves as successful learners.

For example, Harry chose to go to a trade based secondary schools in Victoria, where Years seven to ten were all centred around the trade school. It was technically based and many of the teachers came from a tradesman’s (sic) background:

It doesn’t make sense not to have ex-tradies, they were pretty good, I learnt a lot from them.

Conversely when the ways knowledge are used, represented and valued were quite different to those in the home, and as participants grew up and their world...
broadened, as did their group of their peers and imagined futures, participants experienced greater conflict.

Participants described ways they attempted to challenge this conflict throughout their lives or found ways to participate by completely avoiding the sources of conflict. Sources of conflict included physical appearance, ways of expressing ideas, inclusion of locally valued information, involvement of family and their knowledge, being on the educational institution site or resources, being able to direct learning to meet personal trajectories, being assessed by unrecognised assessors and fitting into the educational system.

For Anne it was about being ignored, her knowledge and needs unrecognised, while continuing to be progressed into a position where she could not cope academically. As a result:

> Halfway through Year nine I gave up and didn’t bother going. I couldn’t read or write, I could spell my name no worries... no one had bothered just let me sit there. All the smart kids got help. I didn’t want anyone to know that I couldn’t cope. So I left.

Identity was described in terms of being a member of a community or family and not others, contexts, places, work roles or futures.

The disjuncture between perceptions and constructions of knowledge, resulted in participants having to choose between developing the skills and roles related to the educational institution's accepted view of knowledge or those of their family peers. For the most part, participants chose that of their families and peers. Being part of the formal educational understanding of learning was often described as opposing full participation in family or community identities or activities.

For example, when Anne attempted university the first time, there was no one in her home or university life to support or push her to pursue her education. She wasn’t sure which degree she wanted, but she wanted an education so she could make that decision and have that choice for her life:
I was on my own. If I wanted to be educated I had to go out there and get it for myself, to really want it.

This tension was challenged throughout their lifetimes when people wanted the outcomes of involvement in formal education: qualification, recognition and related roles in the workplace. For many participants, being involved in the related activities, reading, writing, formal assessment, that is, formal education’s literacies, was an insurmountable challenge. Only when the desire to be involved in education became a clearly articulated need, essential and articulated to their peer group, accepted in those terms, were people able to negotiate ways to take the risks and manage the conflicts inherent in their engagement to their identities.

For example, Peta decided she needed to return to formal education in order to be qualified in a career that would provide for her own family in the future. She chose education because:

...it provided a passport to being able to live in regional areas...I wanted to make sure that people would never have had as bad experiences as I had at school ever again.

This desire or need needed to be stronger than the fear of being excluded or different to take the risk of participation in formal education. The articulation of the study’s purpose did not accord with the representation by the educational institution but in terms of community participation and priorities. The exceptions occurred when the education program was a process to break from the family, although the conflict involved in managing the opposing informal structures and processes of participants’ lives were considerable.

Family and community provided a reference point for interpreting formal education and different kinds of educational engagement. Participants, who were able to negotiate challenges in their engagement in learning, were able to position themselves in terms of people and institutions that were significantly different. They may be different culturally, socially or regionally.

Tamara, for example, said that things improved when:
I started coming out of my shell... I thought I'm really going to listen very well now and then I'm going to go home practice how to speak at school this way and [another way] at home. I can relax, I can be myself when I go into these other learning situations.

Participants who were achieving their goals were able to resolve different identities: as a member of their family, region, industry and educational institution. The balancing of aligned and/or conflicting identities about learning was a major part of the work of successful learners.

The constructions of learning that informed decisions about engagement included: what are the important things to learn, how the knowledge relates to social engagement, how these learning relates to imagined futures and roles. The greater the congruence between the knowledge systems in the home and school, the longer participants enjoyed school and learning, the more likely they saw themselves as successful learners. Conversely when the ways ideas are used, represented and valued were quite different to those in the home, and as participants grew up and their world broadened, the ideas of their peers and imagined futures, participants experienced greater conflict. Participants described the networks they accessed and the way they used them to support their identities as learners. These included the local network of people who had completed a similar degree when participants were studying, the study group in a local industry or the peer group who supported learners’ decisions to reject formal education engagement.

Consider Margaret’s story, she was currently undertaking vocational education in the fitness industry as it will lead to improved opportunities for satisfying work and a future for Margaret’s family. Her study was undertaken with a group of local peers’ support and in flexible delivery mode. A group of people with a similar interest was organised by a local community based enterprise who offered to provide a workplace for mentoring, provide a shared study place and undertake practical activities related to and required by the study. The mentors from the community enterprise negotiated the study program and approach with the educational institution on the students’ behalf and provide a place to practice skills with supervision.
It was more important for learners to be able to connect to and represent their worlds in the educational context, than to do irrelevant and therefore boring study. For participants who felt displaced or disengaged from the education system, there was no bridge made from the learners’ worlds to that of the education system by learners themselves, their peers in the education system. Learners who had achieved their learning goals they were able to show how the institution and educational experience makes links to the learner and their world.

4.4.3 Strategies for managing learning and identity challenges

Participants described the range of challenges they had experienced through, for example explicit language, their interaction with different learning experiences:

…[The) Aboriginal English spoken at home I brought into the school then I started getting teased about some of my common phrases that are used like Shame and sometimes dropping a verb or speaking in an abbreviated way and also the accent seems to do with the word…. there were several words like that where I would pronounce in this other way, where kids would just look at you... [you get) used to get teased about the way I spoke and because of the teasing…I then it became very embarrassing in class so I wouldn't speak up. I think I started coming out of my shell a little in Grade seven in primary school is where I thought I'm really going to listen very well now and then I'm going to go home practice that is how to speak and I let that power when I go to school how to speak this way and one of the home I can relax I can be myself that when I go into these other learning situations if I didn't want to be shame then I had to learn very quickly how to make the other pronunciations (Tamara).

There was considerable discussion about what had occurred, and in some instances reoccurred, over years and different situations. Participants’ descriptions of their responses to and perceptions of challenges in learning informed their discussion about and linkages across learning experiences. Most participants recognised the strategies they had employed and the triggers for employing those strategies had been unconscious and were explicitly discussed for the first time in interviews. Some of these strategies were a revelation for participants, who have reflected on these strategies in subsequent discussions.
For example, Gillian is currently learning a new job and describes herself as being:

…pretty slow at catching up with things...sometimes I need to see, to physically see and not necessarily be spoken to, given direction because it doesn’t all sink in. At school, I had to study hard because it took ages to just sink in your head and stay in there. So I’m a slow learner but once I get it, the more times I do it’s ok. And then you wonder, why was that so hard? But when it’s hard, when you are not getting it, it’s frustrating, makes you cry, but when it’s good, it’s good.

Participants challenged the established identities about learning at different stages in their adult lives in education and in the communities. They were faced by the normative nature of learning communities (Wenger, 1998). For Margaret this was evident in trying to improve educational experiences for her children by attempting to be involved in their education and incorporate different understandings of what is important into their learning.

There were a number of strategies related to the identity resources people drew on to engage with formal education and to manage the conflicts in their identity in relation to these contexts and institutions. For example, participants described actively examining and practicing the oral and written languages used in educational settings and ways to present ideas and themselves. Participants described being able to maintain their engagement through having a self affirmation strategy which included a number of strategies, such as, a way to concentrate on their initial personal goal, a belief in their own ability to participate, or a mentor.

Luke, for example, describes himself as having a high level of determination to complete a chosen goal:

That’s stubbornness, if I say I’m going to do it…I just don’t give up…and I don’t know where that comes from.

He is also resilient in the face of other is laughing or saying he can’t do something. Luke thinks that actually spurs him on to show them they are wrong.

Participants described the value of developing their knowledge of educational structures so they could better predict and manage their relationships to those
structures. This included developing risk management and proactive strategies to anticipate and manage negative comments and supportive networks.

You just have to learn to shake it off (Helen)

Local resources were identified to support those strategies and actively sought by participants who were achieving their goals and demonstrating enacted learner identities. These resources included physical resources, identifying mentors to encourage a participant to continue, specific expertise such as a fixing a computer, or working with the student enrolment processes at the university. Having others from their community who acknowledge, support and know about the study and keep the participants accountable to their goals was part of the resource process.

Tamara, for example, was expected to be independent and support herself. It wasn't about going to university or having a professional career. There weren’t many Aboriginal professional role models to follow. The seed planted by her uncle encouraged Tamara to apply for high school. This was really going out on a limb:

…but then when it came up I think I had a strong fear that if I did that I had to pass, I had a very strong fear of failure and that wasn't put there by my family, but it was very strong in my mind

By talking about their engagement with peers, participants develop the rhetoric to explain and validate their decisions about engagement. This rhetoric reinforced the processes that maintained the status quo and confirmed their community’s beliefs about learning in opposition the educational system. In this way, the power of the accepted ‘truths’ in that community about learning and being part of community, were proven valid.

This did not mean that participants were only involved in community sanctioned educational activities. There is not one community to sanction an activity and people wanted to explore options beyond their initial experience of the world. Rather participants who managed and resolved their learner identity elements by accessing a supportive and recognised group in the community, negotiating their study off campus, finding options in their involvement in the practical components and rehearsing ways to explain their study were able to negotiate their learner identity as it related to their community identity. These included explanations for
Findings and Discussion

disengagement and ways to explain engagement in a number of differing ways to different audiences:

I’d been sitting at home trying to study and friends would drop in and I’d say you know every morning I try and study and they would say come on just have a cup of tea and a bong, piss off. So there was never any spare time to study (Margaret).

One strategy was the active and explicit development and maintenance of a sense of agency as a learner. People did this for themselves and their children. For example, Catherine believed it was important to instill a feeling of self efficacy and responsibility in her children. They had dinner together every night and on Friday there were no other activities and the family would sort out any issues they might have been experiencing. The family talked things through together to resolve such issues. The children were told they can do anything if they try and would have their parents support to do so. This strategy incorporated practicing ways to explain and confirm why, how and that participants could achieve their goals.

What was clear for disenfranchised students these strategies were rarely explicitly taught at school, participants who had learnt these skills learnt them at home or in community development programs. For people who identified themselves as distinctly different to the educational role models and systems, understanding these educational processes changed their approach to challenging situations. For Kalkadoon this was evident in this experience of racism from the teacher who didn’t want to be near Aboriginal students:

… would pinch you real hard when they were talking to you

Kalkadoon said the material studied at school was always too hard and he did not understand it. He was kept down to repeat Grade one and undertook remedial reading throughout school but it didn’t make a difference, he believed he couldn’t do the work. His parents were supportive of school, made him do his homework but ill-equipped to address the learning challenges he faced. Engagement strategies that support learner identities are important to develop because they are not developed at school for students who are different to the institutional identity. Kalkadoon noted that if a learner is different, no-one helps them work out how to manage the conflicts or challenges to achieve a balance within themselves and continue their education.
Findings and Discussion

Participants who were able to participate in post compulsory education throughout their lifetime had very strong support from a family or community member(s) who assisted in resolving the inconsistent identities that were operating. These were achieved through, for example, having high levels of recognition as a member of a long standing and valued member of the community, participating in activities that demonstrate the ways the learning will be translated to maintain the local community or when a family member articulated the need to be prepared for a new world that would involve membership of the local and formal institutions. Community members, then, had a role in defining and affirming sources for their identity as a learner.

Strategies that helped people build their identities were also included having the space to safely make mistakes and take risks, having the chance to improve though practice. One example is Catherine’s family nights where they would talk through any issues and explicitly teach her children how to cope with adversity and to believe in themselves as learners and capable people. Participants described a lack of understanding by teachers of students' issues. Participants liked it when they felt the teacher wanted them to achieve and was prepared and helped them to see different points of view. They were people who would go out of their way to see the students' learning as the centre of the educational experience. Margaret’s example of the Indonesian teacher who was:

...brilliant and a surprise... surprise I aced Indonesian, you know we all used to like going to Indonesian, even if the subject wasn’t very interesting. She smiled, shared a joke and disciplined the class consistently; students knew the consequences of their actions. She felt we were real people not just a number of heads to be taught and processed, she wanted us to get through, she wanted to help.

In these examples, the processes that maintained the status quo confirmed participants' beliefs about learning in the community. That is, for some participants it was more important to be part of their existing community. Any challenge to the community’s norms; the accepted truths about educational participation, had direct and often negative consequences for those participants who wanted to be different to the norm. When the community recognised and supported the participants’ decisions about educational engagement, the consequences were positive. Positive
consequences related to local community membership. The decision to reject educational engagement had positive social outcomes for some participants; such as being recognised as a worker, while the negative outcomes included being ostracised or distracted. It was the processes related to maintaining the status quo that people made decisions about their future. For participants whose communities rejected educational engagement, maintaining a positive engaged learner identity in their community worked in opposition to participating in the educational system. Participants described being part of the educational system as being ultimately negative or positive. The decisions they made depended on the identities participants drew on to understand their experiences.

These interactions are informed by people’s identity as a learner and connected to the social cultural, historical and economic forces that surround and determine their lives. The decisions people make about their engagement in learning was related to the learner identities that they draw on and the opportunities that are available to connect to a range of empowered community, family and workplace identities. These are informed by learners’ diverse cultures, contexts, knowledge systems and experiences. For disenfranchised learners, opportunities to explore their identity as learners and connect with different knowledge systems made the difference in participating in formal education and undertaking qualifications.

4.4.4 Identifying successes
Success was not defined by the researcher. Success was defined by the participants in different ways which provided insights into the priorities of their identity informing communities. Participants recognised their successes through formal and informal learning as it referred to their own, professional or family’s learning. This also related to the success of a family members’ strategy for them, achievement of a goal or change in role or identity. James described his own definition of success for himself and his family. Since moving to Australia, James has undertaken more courses through the defence forces, university, trade based qualifications and occupational health and safety. He saw himself as a good learner who can work things out. For him and his family, Australia has been the ‘land of opportunity’. He worked hard, built his house, followed the opportunities. His children have learned from the ethic instilled in them by their parents, to get an education and to have confidence in themselves. Now James’ grandchildren are
being inspired and he plays a part in supporting that feeling of confidence and purpose. For James, all the commitment to supporting children’s self efficacy is worth it, as the next generation is going to reap the rewards of that achievement.

Success in formal education environments also related to subverting or managing the associated systems or expectations. Success was described in developing an approach to learning that would work beyond the current circumstance, was supported by and possibly included members of the relevant community. There were conflicts in the way participants who do not achieve their goals through educational engagement talk about how they learn or what is good in learning. Some participants didn’t have a clear way to describe what had been successful in education. These learners were more likely to talk about what they don’t like in formal educational engagement: about their existing and previous frustrations. Participants would describe their withdrawal as a success and unproblematic but their lack of completion of a whole program as an unsuccessful outcome. This lack of resolution demonstrates a conflict within their own personal definition: their identity and relationship to learning.

Success related to purpose, which could be in opposition to the education system. Success was interpreted in terms of completing a course or a section of it, achieving a personal or career goal. Success was not consistently measured but regularly related to the individuals’ purposes as they or their mentors understood it. Success was being able to make the time, space and context to maintain and change their identities as a learner. Being a success in the light of the family or peer group was also important. Harry is an example of success in his own and his community’s terms. Harry is a successful tradesman and is happy with his choices in education and work. Being able to access trades based education throughout his post primary education and learn with experienced trades people was a successful strategy and outcome:

Well, I’m still doing the same thing. I’ve always got work, the only times I am out of work is when I want to be out of work. I have changed my jobs in my life but I have always gone back [to the trade] because of the travel.
This included standing up to the education system, winning a battle to maintain his personal integrity as a main light of educational experiences that promoted compliance behaviour.

4.4.5 Identity as a learner

Learner identities were described by participants in terms of time, space, context, and at different scales across the lifespan and a range of different network and communities. The types of identities participants talked about included their family, local community, workplace, school, university, professional, global communities as a young person and as an adult. The identities as learners was frequently connected to place: being able to study in their local place, being comfortable and safe in the educational places and spaces, the representations of those places in the educational setting and place as a reference for understanding content. Like the majority of participants, Gillian wanted to be able to access learning opportunities locally, in a place that is known and part of the community. Gillian would like to see adult learning courses in the area. The distance to town makes those courses prohibitive. She would like to see the courses offered in town condensed and offered locally. She finds it frustrating that she cannot access course locally and feels it’s important to be able to learn near where you live.

Participants described ways they attempted to manage this learner identity conflict throughout their lives or found ways to participate in learning by avoiding the sources of conflict. Sources of conflict for other participants included physical appearance, ways of expressing ideas, inclusion of locally valued information, involvement of family and their knowledge, being on the educational institution site or resources, being able to direct learning to meet personal trajectories, being assessed by unknown assessors, fitting into the educational system. Two examples are Michael who had avoided being seen by the lecturers as he felt he would be assessed on his appearance rather than his ability, and Jason who was placed in a class without any recognition of his prior knowledge and interest in the area. He accessed a technical college’s programme half a day a week in high school but found it boring;

I was doing automotive training. They were trying to show me the most basic of basic things, and I was like I know all this stuff, show me something hard.
These identity conflicts had the power to override other priorities and influence individual's risk assessment.

The participants’ learner identities impacted on their decisions about their ongoing engagement in formal education. This was evident despite the long term advantages of education financially. Participants were aware of those risks and were prepared to miss out on the associated advantages if their engagement was a risk to their role and consequently, their identity in their family, community or workplace. Participants described feeling dumb and undervalued, as Kalkadoon noted, the teachers were visibly happy when they knew he would be leaving soon. Their decision to reject formal education was linked to the gap between their memberships in different communities, and those of educational institutions. At home, the role of family identity defined for participants who they are and their membership in different communities. Community membership of different kinds were found to mediate the ways people work, learn and participate. This was complex as there were conflicts in the ways members of learners’ nuclear and extended family interpreted educational engagement. While the nuclear family supports disengagement in formal education, the extended family may be promoting maintaining that engagement in the long term. Consider Tamara and Peta’s portraits for examples of this conflict.

Activities in educational experiences challenged individuals' identity as an effective and empowered learner. They challenged someone who had efficacy in the management of their learning. This occurred in a number of ways. Participants’ described a lack of recognition of their own knowledge and role outside the educational setting. For participants, educational structures represented institutional frameworks that operated in opposition to the social structures that were valued in participants’ worlds. As Xavier noted, educational systems rewarded compliance and not causing problems while work places rewarded initiative and hard work.

Learners saw themselves as deficit in the institutions’ view for not fitting the models or people, families, or work (work history, finances, family structure). Participants sought but were unable to identify ways to introduce their worlds and knowledge into the learning experience (boring irrelevant, one sided). Successful learner identities had ways to manage this at home, or teachers who engaged learners and their
worlds. For Luke, one teacher that made an impact was someone that most of the
class played up on. Luke followed the same football team and that started a rapport
with him. He saw him as a mate not a disciplinary person, you didn’t get in trouble for
running amok in the class. In this class Luke wanted to learn and his teacher wanted
him to succeed:

He pulled things out of me that I hadn’t [known I could do],… I wrote some
stories that I got awards for at the school…because of him I passed English,
just above the pass marks, because I had him.

Participants with strong learner identities saw their purpose as introducing their
worlds in education and using education to achieve their goals. Teachers who cared
and made a difference were seen as important in creating the space to learn and be
a learner, this was more important than the topic.

4.4.6 Summary of Phase Three
The key findings of this section are that participants’ identity as learners was a
deciding factor in participants’ decisions about learning engagement. When the
learning practices opposed or negated learners’ and communities’ identities, learners
are faced with the choice of being forced to change their identity or rejecting the
experience or activity. As both learning and identity are socially located, the impact
of educational and community processes that legitimate certain types of learning and
social practices, affirmed or challenged the identities of learners across the lifespan
and their communities.

Participants’ learner identity was informed by relationships: their relationships with
their family, community, institutions, work based and large scale groups. The
relationships were different and for some conflicted. The successful management of
those learner identities impacted on the ways participants engaged in education in
the long term and to meet their goals. The ways educational institutions operated,
engaged learners’ identities, or didn’t engage those identities. This also had an
impact on learners’ engagement. Participants developed strategies to manage the
challenges learners experience around engagement in learning while managing their
learner identities and competing priorities.
4.5 Phase Four Theoretical Matrix

In Phase One, the major themes and subthemes of the interviews’ transcripts were identified to provide an overarching structure to consider the key factors and incidents to describe learners’ engagement across the lifespan. Phase Two used this structure to organise and report the detail of the participants’ lifelong learning engagement profiles. Phase Three, the cross-cutting analysis of the portraits, identified the factors that impacted on engagement in formal learning across the lifespan. The interaction between learning engagement and identity within a socially constructed view of learning is powerful in understanding learners’ experiences and actions in relation to formal education systems. The results of the analysis indicate that learners and educators would benefit, then, from having a framework to understand learner identity and, to understand the forces that inform and transform learner identities. This framework could be used to support educational institutions to attract and actively engage disenfranchised learners through educational provision that better aligns with students’ needs and identities.

Phase Four, the theoretical framework, drew on the results of data analysis and the theoretical frameworks examined in Chapter Two, to develop a coherent framework for defining learner identity while characterising the fundamental elements of those identities. Firstly, the enacted learner identity theoretical framework drew on the factors derived from the cross cutting analysis of the portraits, in relation to the learning experiences and outcomes for the three groups of learner in the sample group. Identity as a learner emerged as pivotal in the decisions participants made about their learning engagement. Their learner identities were evident in the ways people defined themselves in relation to family, communities and workplaces. The networks, resources and strategies developed to manage learning experiences informed participants’ interpretation of situations and behaviour. The work related to managing those learner identities.

Secondly, the identification and refinement of elements of the enacted learner identity theoretical framework was informed by relevant theoretical frameworks of learners (Keeffe 1992, Field 2005), identity (Gee 2003, Falk et al. 2003, Wenger 1998) and social capital (Woolcock, 2001; Grootaert, Narayan Nyham Jones and Woolcock, 2004). These theoretical frameworks were examined in depth previously in Chapter Two, the literature review. The vertical axis of the theoretical framework
Findings and Discussion

In Figure 9, draws on descriptions of groups of learners as they relate to educational experiences and the horizontal axis is developed through using key concepts in social capital and identity frameworks. The results of the analysis of the portraits through the learner identity theoretical framework are discussed here. Participants’ quotes are included that typify the intersections between the types of learner engagement and identify and the key theoretical frameworks that describe learner engagement.

Once drafted, the enacted learner identity theoretical framework was tested against the participants’ profiles to refine the framework and create an outline of different but consistent learner identities as they occurred across participants’ experiences of learning. The ‘other’ profile was added to ensure no data would be lost in the final analysis. As no data was identified for this section, it was subsequently removed. The full set of data was categorised according to the framework to identify patterns that describe the scalar profile of different categories of learner identity. This final analytic pass focused on the nature of learning identity for the participants, the ways this was demonstrated and how education and training provision could connect more effectively with a range of disenfranchised learners. The analysis examined participant’s view of learner identity as it pertained to:

- types of training undertaken,
- purpose for learner engagement,
- networks accessed and supported through engagement,
- types of learner identity evident through engagement,
- resources used and demonstrated through engagement
- degree of student centred negotiability and learner empowerment,
- alignment of learners’ identities with informing identities that is, professional, institutional, global and community

Of particular interest, was not only the learner identities that were evident, but also the ways people moved between different identities and changed their capacity to engage in learning that met their criteria of successes and what helped them to make those changes. In this way the analysis examines not the cells in the matrix but also the lines that represent the transitions between them. The enacted learner identity framework follows;
Findings and Discussion

Learner Engagement and Identity

Purpose

Network-Bonding Ties
Network-Bridging Ties
Network-Linking Ties
Identity resources
Processes
Alignment of identities
Sense of agency
Access to information and resources

Persistence
Resistance
Transition
Enacted
Other

Figure 9 Enacted learner identity theoretical analysis matrix

The participants’ reasoning around their learning engagement, the strategies utilised to manage challenges and the demonstrations of participants’ sense of agency as a learner were analysed and has been grouped to describe four descriptions of learner identity. Learners’ identities were mutable, shifting in no prescribed order where multiple identities may be functioning simultaneously in relation to different contexts or situations.

The groupings are described in terms of:

- resistant learner identities, those avoiding externally imposed change to their learner identity at all costs,

- persistent learner identities, those who survive external challenges to learner identity by minimising impact on core identity and

- enacted learner identities, those able to maintain the integrity of an individual’s identity while exploring other learner identities and experiences

- transitional learner identities, those testing different identities in a nonlinear way.

These learner identities are not organised into a sequence or hierarchy. One learner identity is not preferred over another; they can be appropriate or counterproductive in different contexts and for different purposes. Participants described the ways they felt and behaved in different situations that reflected their identity in that context. For example, Sarah has changed from someone who couldn’t wait to leave school and felt alienated in the school system to believing she is able to learn as long as it was something she wanted to learn. Sarah says she wouldn’t have worked well in the
university situation as she has problems with authority. When she undertook previous qualifications it was done through recognition of prior learning by the business manager, who was known and trusted. Sarah feels that in the class situation, she would have given up and walked out. When asked how she would change educational systems, Sarah stated that now she can do anything if it’s needed for work. This belief in herself and perception of herself as a learner in different contexts has changed considerably over her life.

Participants described the ways their experiences, mentors and the related change in their learner identity had changed their behaviours and decision and the associated strategies they had developed. For example, Gina describes her experience in an apprenticeship style position while studying at university:

   I suppose working with lots of academics around technical support was great it really inspired me to be like them...I felt really valued, I felt safe compared to being blasted from the mount [that is, in school] many of my mentors challenged me, that really pushed me, it was probably what I needed at that stage, they were so willing to share about their chosen career, that rubs off on you

These mentors were some of Australia’s leading scientist, historians and anthropologists. The relationships with senior and talented mentors with international profiles, throughout her life helped Gina to learn, think and understand her area of expertise. She got to work with the most relevant and difficult to access materials, the same materials that experts used.

Engagement was not defined here as unilaterally positive as disengaging or renegotiating from a negative learning experience can be a better outcome than uncritical compliance. Each concept is analysed in terms of the types of responses evident in the data, the activities that people engaged in, their interpretations of those events, their related decisions and the roles enacted.

The framework describes the elements of learning identities as the nexus of different learning identities as they relate to peoples worlds: family, local, institution, workplace and global communities. All of these identities incorporate a sense of agency that is enacted differently that is, to reject an institutional identity or to reinforce a nexus of local, workplace or other community memberships or asserting
one’s place within an educational institution despite negative experience. The difference with the way this sense of agency was enacted was the participants’ learner identity. Recognising this sense of agency in all learners rejects a deficit view of people to explain disengagement; such as a lack of commitment or not understanding of the importance of education. It is not that some people are passive agents in learning experiences; they are active agents, who include actively rejecting imposed frameworks, experiences or identities. Learners, then, are more than passive consumers of knowledge and educational systems. They are producers and teachers of knowledge and ideas as they relate to specific contexts (Gee 2003).

In the following characterisations of each learner identity, the specific contexts in which that identity is dominant and are discussed. This is an attempt to understand and group the behaviours demonstrated consistently by learners. It is not intended to imply that the framework would be used to label learners in one way for their entire lives but to understand the learner identities that are in play in any particular situation in order to understand behaviour and decisions by all parties and develop approaches to supporting disenfranchised learners that address the core issues for their learning engagement.

4.5.1 Persistent learner identity profile

The persistent learner identity is described here, as engagement in learning experiences is characterised by trying to adapt and respond to the discontinuous institutional, community and individually based social processes and identities and trying to mirror the dominant identities sufficiently to complete a qualification or master a skill set. These learners persisted in their learner engagement, trying to balance their identity in terms of membership in a range of communities until it was too difficult, unviable or challenged their sense of self. Participants with persistent learner identities described many attempts to express their difficulties and make an impact on the ways they engaged with formal learning experiences. The data has shown that the participants who had been unsuccessful in achieving their formal learning goals or had chosen to reject formal education did not have a strong sense of themselves as learners.

The strategies people, demonstrating persistent learner identities, drew on were limited in number and scope and aimed at maintaining their engagement while also
meeting the often conflicting expectations of teachers, peers and family. This was done in ways that did not change any of these relationships and avoided conflict. The strategies they developed were to try to maintain both worlds by participating in everything, to create the illusion that they are fine, not needing help and to move around the difficulties. They were limited in the types and complexity of situations they could use to respond to a challenge. The strategies included the following examples. Participants that demonstrated persistent learner identities maintained their engagement by attempting to meet the expectations of the educational system and external communities in which they had membership. This was difficult when the social and institutional structures in each if those communities’ memberships were quite different. Participants would comply with any direction of teachers, even when it did not make sense or support the learners’ goals. When the results were poor, participants would blame themselves and their inability to learn or comply with that system’s expectations. They would avoid confrontation when there were any difficulties. They also described avoiding meeting teachers about their learning.

Participants described themselves agreeing with others’ assessment of themselves as learners; whether positive or negative. Some of the participants avoided conflict by blaming themselves and withdrawing from a course. When young, participants tried to fit in by following the direction and decisions of parents and teachers when the learners disagreed with them. They accepted the authority of external agencies as absolute. They continued to have, as a goal, to be recognised by those institutions despite many negative experiences. They maintained their relationships with people inside and outside the education system. Their approach to educational engagement was dominated by choosing responses that focus on doing what has to be done to maintain educational engagement without any personal change.

People with persistent learner identities did not describe any other strategies they used, although this was asked in different ways several times throughout the interview. Jason, for example, said he didn’t like learning in class and liked working with his hands but could not describe any strategies to manage conflict in the educational system or assert himself in an educational setting. He had no stories to share about what happened in school and only talked about the technical college experience. He blamed others for his bad experience and had no way to analyse and interpret what had happened to improve any future attempts at learning.
For participants with persistent learner identities, these strategies meant they could stay engaged until faced with a difficulty that meant they had to choose between participation in their family or peer network or the school one. When faced with the choice between succeeding by conforming to the school or their peer network, they chose to remain a member of their existing non-educational communities. Some participants described their decisions and approaches as natural, they were just this way.

Participants’ behaviour characterised by persistent learner identities did not have the strategies or resources to draw on in order to manage conflicts in their identity. They did not have the networks to help inform that change or understand the processes the support that change in their learning identities or relationships with a range of different institutional and community identities. Their networks were dominated by the relationships with their peers and families and characterised by bonding ties. Participants did not describe linking with people from positions of authority, different backgrounds or experiences. This meant there was no access to professional or educational references to offer support in difficult times and help interpret why things happen and whether or how the learner could respond. As a consequence, learners were not able to see how they fit in with vertical ties when they saw themselves as different from those identities or processes. Participants described feeling able to manage and maintain bonding ties but not to challenge the norms in broader networks. Paul describes an example, he noted that if there is a big problem he wouldn’t approach the teacher of the institution, he would leave the program, if he’s:

…not enjoying it [he] won't continue on…if I'm not sure, I don't know [how to do something] properly, I'm not getting anything out of it, I just won't do it.

Paul described his identity now as ‘drifting along’, fortunate to be in a situation to take advantage of different opportunities. He acts as a mentor in the workplace now, helping new staff to ‘gather experience’ and doesn’t want to change the education system.

The goals for learning engagement of participants, who were persistent learners, were focused on the end product, a qualification and then access to employment opportunities. Participants did not talk about the transformation inherent in the learning process as a goal in their educational process. They have persisted by
imitating the other or changing learner identities until the stress of managing an aligned identity membership is greater than the need for achieving the goal. Learners actively made the choice to withdraw from formal learning when the risk to their identity was too great and the potential reward too small.

This choice was exercised when the work of balancing membership in different identity informing groups became too difficult to resolve successfully. The identity informing groups included family, regional and workplace peers and members of institutional hierarchies, including educational institutions. People made decisions related to the risk level they could manage in resolving the conflicts inherent in balancing different learner identities and alliances. It was at this point that participants worked out another path that was less risky to their various identities. Persistent learners generally decided to leave education and return later as completion was an important part of their identity:

I was always going to go back and do matric you start earning an income and I was working … and I thought I had to go back and finish year 12 but they said no all you have to do is go and do a bridging course, tough it out at Uni, but I thought I didn’t finish matric. I meant to do that it’s the order it goes in … in America you’re a dropout… College is something there if your college educated (Sarah).

The purpose for learning engagement was defined by others’ standards or expectations. The standard for making decisions about learner engagement, then, was defined and assessed externally; participants who were persistent learners assessed themselves against that standard. They did not talk about their own learning expectations beyond this. This framework was used by learners to define themselves as learners. It provided a reference point to explain their reasons for making decisions about learning engagement. This was sufficient for some audiences that accepted the teachers’ authority; such as parents and teachers. These reference points were not sufficient for those that did not accept that authority such as, members of their peer group;

…and people say what do you expect having six kids, you don’t need that, you already know it yourself. My friends couldn’t believe I was [choosing study
over other things] and a couple of my friends who were professionals were quite negative about it (Margaret).

The impacts or outcomes of institutional behaviour or decisions (for example, teachers’ attitudes towards learners) were interpreted as being based on personal relationships and assessments. The institutional structures were not analysed as having a sound structure that impacted on teachers’ and other students’ behaviour. Educational authorities’ behaviour and decisions were interpreted as a response to an individual that they should accept and respond to.

Participants who were described as persistent learners said they liked school. They wanted and believed in the rewards that education offers on completion of qualifications. They accepted the authority of teachers and, for the most part, their decisions about their own individuals’ abilities and futures. They saw themselves as poor learners and that many of the problems in education were their poor intellectual capacity or skills. This internalisation of failure was not challenged, and sometimes echoed, by their peers and reinforced by some teachers. Throughout their lives, participants with persistent learner identities invested considerable energy in attempting work out the relationships with all the different identities to remain engaged:

I think once your educational spirit is broken you start thinking that you’re dumb because you can’t do it. It was never said some people are good at this and some people are good at that (Margaret)

Their sense of agency was connected to being able to participate in their own communities rather than challenge the perceptions of themselves by others or their experiences. This sense of self as a learner was evident in relation to their family or peer group or workplace:

I didn’t think I was very clever I didn’t think I was very clever at all. I was hopeful certainly after I mentioned to my father that I want to do medicine he said what a waste of time you hate school you’re not smart enough you don’t have the brainpower [to] study for 10 years at Uni (Margaret).

These negative experiences had a significant impact on learners’ perception and assessment of themselves. One experience or teacher’s actions could outweigh any
other experiences and therefore their assessment of themselves as learners. People who were persistent learners could identify when their interpretation of educational experiences and teachers’ words impacted directly on their learner identity.

Once the conflicts related to learner identity became a risk to non-educational identities, the participants described their purpose as meeting expectations as defined by others:

I have tried correspondence before, bachelor of business, majoring in accounting of all things and I had been using accounting practices at work so it can’t be that hard. Accounting one was basically bookkeeping, I thought goodness sake you have to get through this now, I passed bookkeeping I certainly though I shouldn’t have if I tell this woman I really don’t understand this crap she’s going to fail me ok my boss would be pissed off, he paid for this course (Margaret).

Once learners were faced with high risk challenges, they found they didn’t have the appropriate resources to manage these challenges to their identity as a learner for example, failing. Anne’s portrait includes an example of this decision making. After being progressed without achievement throughout her schooling, in Year eight, Anne pretended she could do the work and no-one picked that she couldn’t, so she progressed to Year nine:

Halfway through Year nine I gave up and didn’t bother going. I couldn’t read or write, I could spell my name no worries... no one had bothered just let me sit there. All the smart kids got help. I didn’t want anyone to know that I couldn’t cope. So I left.

They were victims of the educational systems’ processes and systems. Learners with persistent learner identities did what they had to do to survive their learning engagement; they were not ready to change their learner identity in order to achieve their goals in education. They did not have the strategies to balance their learner identities in ways that supported their formal educational engagement or influence those around them to support their engagement and learner identity. The work of aligning learner identities was a significant factor in making decisions about learner engagement.
Participants with persistent learner identities made decision about educational engagement based on their need for the outcomes, and their calculations of the risks involved. Connections to others and different knowledge frameworks was very important. The things that changed people from persistent learners to use other learner identities were access to supports that helped people build their strategies. These strategies included developing their knowledge of educational systems and an increased ability to manage problems in their learning engagement. The consequent successes helped them feel that the risks were reduced and they had the confidence in themselves to act in new ways. Learners with persistent learner identities’ knowledge of the educational system did not provide a framework to understand and negotiate any issues.

For example, Margaret had tried to undertake post compulsory education by correspondence as she had the lived in a rural area. She attempted the Bachelor of Business, the first unit was a familiar topic that she thought she could pass. Due to subsequent study, Margaret’s behaviours were dominated by managing her family and peer relationships. She didn’t understand the topic and felt she should not have passed. Margaret didn’t feel she could tell the instructor she did not understand the topic or her employer who had paid for the course. She did not like putting her children into childcare. She said having a sympathetic lecturer helped, one who understood when she couldn’t attend a lecture, but even so she failed the first examination. It was also difficult as she studied in the morning and friends would drop around to say:

Come on, just have a cup of tea and a bong.

She’d tell them to leave but they couldn’t understand why she’d choose study over other community activities

Participants’, with persistent learner identities, understanding of those systems and acceptance of the associated authority supported avoidance behaviours when faced with conflict. In these ways learners with persistent learner identities felt they were subject to, or even victims of, the educational system and their active decisions were about avoiding conflict and leaving education. These included the development of building and linking networks which provided a different perspective and framework, alternative sources for their identity resources such as mentors, explicit
understanding of the language switches, learning other strategies from learners with enacted identities.

Participants with persistent learner identities were trying to balance their identity in terms of membership in a range of communities until it was too difficult, unviable or challenged their sense of self. Participants with persistent learner identities described many attempts to express their difficulties within the educational system and make an impact on the ways. Participants with persistent learner identities, when asked how they would like the education system to operate identified the need to have courses developed for building common skills (in particular using computers) to be offered locally and for mentoring and tutorial support for learners at all ages.

4.5.2 Resistant learner identity profile
For learners with a resistant learner identity, engagement in learning experiences is characterised by resisting the transformative effects of learning and maintaining the integrity of the individual’s existing learner identity in relation to the discontinuous institutional, community and individually based social processes and identities.

Learners, who had managed their engagement in learning by resisting the educational institution’s impact on their identity, until their own identities were challenged are described as resistant learners. These learners participated until the risk of their involvement in education meant being disconnected from their own communities which was a greater risk than the leaving education. While this is similar to persistent learners, the way their made decisions was different.

Learners’ purpose for engagement in formal education was defined by their assessment of the impact on their own continued or improved participation in the groups they valued. Participants describe the resources they could draw on to change their engagement in terms of their opposition to educational authority’s perspective and active alliance with other communities or authorities. The dominant resources were non-educational related identities; they were the senior people or peers in their community and families. Their decisions to comply with these identities was about survival in the shared community vision of their lives and futures rather than complying with the vision of those in power in educational institutions. Participants with resistant learner identities relied on these decisions, patterns or behaviours, even when this was detrimental to the learners’ engagement. The
resources learners chosen and the way they used them, were informed by a focus on survival in educational systems until it was threatening their external alliances. There was no reason to change, but there was value in having good strategies and resources for disengaging and showing that community affiliation.

Participants with resistant learner identities were able to describe one or two stories about what happened in their own education. They described being distrustful of other people’s ability if this was learnt through formal education such as completion of formal qualifications. Those stories showed participants active separation of their own learner identity from that of the educational institution where they were challenged or undervalued. There were few positive stories about education but participants commented on why others couldn’t have treated them in a positive manner and questioned the value of those qualifications. Participants whose behaviour was characterised as resistant learners described their teachers as people of authority and opposition. Good teachers were described as people, not like teachers. Kalkadoon comments are an example of this assessment.

Participants’ worlds were dominated by the bonding ties in their local workplace, community and families. These strong ties were a source of support and definition of their own reasons for engaging or disengaging from formal learning and other informal learning. Resistant learners described the informing sources for their learner identity and consequent engagement were their family, peers and workmates. There was little or no recognition of these learners’ worlds in school.

Participants described the ways the places and people outside the recognised curriculum were described as the ‘other’ by teachers. Participants described education contexts as having little or no connections with those places, people or the identities used to characterise them as learners. The most important sources of learner identity were friends and, peers. They were used as a reference pot to define learning strategies and rationale. There were few points of connection to formal educational identities other than resistance, when there was a positive connection this was described as an irregularity. This experience informed participants’ identities within their own communities as successful, strong and capable people. This was in opposition to their own identity in education, as someone who doesn’t have the
valued knowledge and skills such as reading and writing written English or knowing about southern Australian social mores and systems.

Participants, demonstrating resistant learner identities, utilised strategies that focused on maintaining the known and non-educational connections. They did not describe bridging or linking ties with people who were different to those in their own community, regional, family or workplace communities. Each of these communities had similar mores and histories, peers and families worked together, employed each other, worked in the same region and undertook work that was valued by their families or peers. People described people from other places, social groups, positions of authority as the ‘other’ and demonstrated their successful opposition to the authority or pressure of these people to conform and continue their learning engagement.

Participants with resistant learner identities had limited ways to talk about formal education experiences. They had few examples of ways to talk about their experiences and found it difficult to describe their experience, strategies, or thinking about learning. Their examples were characterised by ways to survive rather than dwelling on the negative. They focused on their active decisions to defy educational authority. They were able to describe the community based authorities and their acceptance of the associated authority and underlying values. Learners actively made the choice to withdraw from formal learning as the risk to their identity was too great and the potential reward too small. The examples described by participants with resistant learner identities demonstrated they had focused on how to survive.

Participants with resistant learner identities had limited strategies to manage their ongoing learning engagement, in formal education. They described learning one and for some two strategies early in life and used them throughout their lives. The strategies were dominated by standing back, watching and following the example and asking a few questions. Luke describes his learning style as:

I stand back and I watch, I learn by watching, and then after that I find the best way of learning is to make a mistake.

While Jason’s strategy was to ask questions of someone else who was doing the job in the work context.
The other related strategies were to develop a learner identity that is the opposite of the institutional one. They demonstrated their skills through talking about the ways employed to defy authority and their active participation and alignment with their own communities. The sources of the bonding ties were powerful influences in their lives and maintaining connection or an accepted identity within these groups was more important than taking the risk to pursue formal education, even when the impacts on their lives were reduced workforce outcomes. Those who tried to do something different were quickly singled out for punitive behaviour by their group. Their language and actions demonstrated their commitment to and participation in their own group identity.

Participants describing features of resistant learner identities had a number of strategies for managing disengagement. They could articulate their reasons for active disengagement, identify strategies to maintain their disengagement and had a set of standards to define their disengagement. They described themselves as learners in other contexts, at work or in their families because they were different contexts, places, approaches and relationships to figures of authority. For example they learnt outside on the job, through doing the activity in its normal setting and not in classrooms, being expected to demonstrate learning in situ and to peers/employers, and that instructions were given by people they respected as experts. Harry is a good example. Harry is dismissive of many people’s skills that have been developed through formal qualifications. He has not undertaken any formal education courses as an adult. His skills, knowledge and additional learning have been developed in relation to his work. Harry has developed specialist skills and knowledge that are valued in his industry. These additional welding tickets can be learnt in a course but Harry earned his extra welding tickets through recognition of his work on site. This was achieved through work in mines and on power stations.

They engaged in educational events in various ways but the authority and expertise of that person was paramount. Classrooms and school were places where people felt uncomfortable, ridiculed and that the materials were irrelevant. Their abilities were not recognised and the learning situations focused on deficit models.

The impact of any imbalance in their learner identities was resolved by disengaging with formal education. Thus their decisions were driven by resisting groups that
were unfamiliar and not part of their own accepted communities of practice or spheres of influence. The participants had not been explicitly or implicitly taught strategies or the mindset that would support their educational engagement when their view of themselves as strong active learners and personal integrity was challenged by the educational system. Their network encouraged resistance and wasn’t able to suggest alternative strategies.

There was no value in investing in changing or managing the difficult relationship that would result from engaging in learning activities or process that were seen as the Other. Ultimately for these learners, the educational, financial and social outcomes were not worth the risk.

Participants with resistant learner identities described themselves as people who learnt and taught others in their own community or reference group but not in formal educational settings. They had limited strategies in formal education settings which meant they had not strategies when faced with new or complex difficulties. Therefore they maintained contact in the worlds where they had the skills to learn effectively, in the workplace and with their reference groups in their communities; that is, their peers or family. They knew the learning approaches they used and associated values would be valued and appreciated. The majority of perceived possible sources of support or information were connected to the educational institutions and therefore controlled by the very forces and identities participants were resisting.

Participants with resistant learner identities had many local community reference points for themselves as learners; they had ways to assess success that did not relate to qualifications. These related to being able to undertake a particular task. Their success was related by the ways others commented on their ability. Participants with resistant learner identities did not define themselves in terms of education and did not respect the authority of teachers, as Jason and Harry stated. They did not aspire to further education. They would only engage in formal education if absolutely required by their employer and organised by their employer.

They generally described teachers as a group negatively, not as individuals but part of an authoritarian structure. A good teacher was described as person, not like a teacher. Good teachers were described as individuals who cared about the learners’
success; this was noted by both Margaret and Kalkadoon. Participants saw those learners as people and had relevant and respected experiences. In these situations, the connections between the learner’s identities and the identities offered in the learning context were crucial in making decisions about engagement. Participants with resistant learner identities were highly distrustful of formal education and comfortable with their existing identity informing reference points.

When faced with the choice of succeeding by conforming to the educational institution in opposition to their own community affiliations, some people chose to remain a member of their existing communities at the expense of engagement. Anne and Margaret noted that they should have stayed at school as an education was essential but they could not maintain that engagement in the face of community and family pressures. For them, the bonding ties (Woolcock, 2001; Field, 2005; Grootaert et al., 2004) were strong and reinforced while the bridging ties were weak. Bonding ties are those that link within homogenous groups, while bridging ties are the links across heterogeneous groups. Developing or accessing those bridging ties with the educational community was a risk they were not willing to take. It was more important to be accepted within their informing communities.

Ultimately for participants described here as resistant learners, belonging was more important than achieving the purpose for learning. These participants believed there was a no place for them to belong in the educational system. Learners with resistant learner identities, when asked how they would like the education system to operate, identified the need to have courses that building common skills (in particular using computers) and are offered locally or in the workplace. They wanted to be paid to study if it was part of employment requirements and, be taught by local experts in the field. These participants wanted to be taught skills that are useful for living and working in the region and have their existing skills recognised.

4.5.3 Transitional learner identity profile

The transitional learner identity is described here as learning engagement characterised by moving between and experimenting with different learner identities in a nonlinear order. The data has shown that when participants made the transition from one identity to another, they were developing some strategies to manage the risk taking and the difficulties that had previously presented their learning
engagement. In this way they were developing the capacity to manage their learner and other identities based on their connections to local, family, peers and workplaces communities. During this period participants described being pulled between different and conflicting values, expectations and community affinities.

The keys for making transition from one sort of identity to another were related to identification with a purpose of the education system or experience that overrode the risks for their identity and external approval for learning engagement. One of the core sources was their family or home community, Emily noted:

…my father always said you can do anything you want to do, I had a very traditional mother who was home all the time…my mother didn’t study, so they had a very traditional household and he always said if you want to study I will back you to the hilt and I always did (Emily).

There was an external influence that provided a strong impetus for attempting change and taking a risk with the learner identity and the networks that informed those identities. The purpose for learning engagement that supported the decisions to risk engagement related to changing employment opportunities and addressing a perceived need in their community. The importance of role models and external supports for challenging accepted identities was significant for participants who were challenging expectations and attempting a different sort of learning engagement, Learners used these reference points to explicitly learn and trial new strategies and different identities. They described a range of strategies included telling themselves they could participate in formal educational experiences, had a growing belief that belonged in the educational system , and could try to survive any education-related experience and had some strategies for asking questions inside and outside class when others do not feel comfortable to do that. For example Rhonda recalled feeling confused after a negative experience at the education institution regarding enrolment that:

…when someone does it to me, it very, how can you do that to another person? I don’t understand what I’m doing and the confusion knocks your confidence, it’s part of your confidence. It’s a direct result of a lack of confidence because you think, should I really be here? I have spent a lot of time here thinking, should I really be here? I have spent lot of time asking
myself, maybe I’m not really going to be a good teacher, maybe I am not going to be good at this.

Participants with transitional identities commented on being accountable to a body external to those of their peer or family group; the members of their bonding ties. They also described being accountable to their own assessment of how the learning experience was helping them meet their goals and how they were meeting their own expectations. They described moving between feeling successful and that they should be engaged in formal learning and feeling that they didn’t belong and were working against their community allegiances. Participants were testing some strategies to participate in learning. The most challenging part of the transitional learner identity was negotiating the emerging learner identity; as someone who is participating in learning and other communities.

The strategies participants utilised, were supported by having people to test new identities with and getting explicit feedback, meeting other people who had come from a similar background who were actively engaged in contexts that aligned with their aspirations, that is, in contexts that challenged their communities’ identities. This timing of the process of developing a new identity as a learner was connected to developing wider experiences of the world, identifying new possibilities and making the connection to their communities that informed their practice and decision-making. This identity could operate over time, fluctuating with the participants’ experiences: positive or negative. Through this process, learners took greater risks with their learning engagement strategies and connections and an incident could mean a learner would question their identity all over again.

Like all of the learner identities, the transitional learner identity is not static. One or more could also operate at the same time in different contexts. Participants drew on different learner identities over time. This changed as the learners were trialing new learning strategies, coping mechanisms and, visions of themselves as learners. This was a process of refining their understanding of their purpose for engagement. The events that challenged learners’ goals were that which was relevant to that individual. The relevance was determined by reference to the social networks that informed the participants’ understanding of social norms. For Tamara, for example, her informing networks included her nuclear and extended family as well as
Findings and Discussion

members of the public service. Learners’ resilience developed through these conflicts as they experienced recovering from the uncertainty and the success of strategies. The risks became higher as people tried more strategies and continued with their study but the strategies to manage those risks increased as well. During this time, participants were gaining experience and skill in managing the nexus of membership of their identities. This supported them to cope with and respond positively to challenges.

Participants with transitional learner identities, had strong bonding ties with their own networks and were developing or testing their bridging ties through their new networks. The combination of participants’ different social networks provided a range of interpretations of experience, points of support and challenges and to a limited degree linking ties. As they developed connections to diverse groups, institutions and identities, they assessed the outcomes for their own identities and made decisions about pursuing their goals and engaging in the new or unknown.

Participants with transitional learner identities drew on a range of Identity resources. Without a complete range of interrelated skills, participants described feeling exposed by not having the language or access to networks or other resources to engage in an educational situation. This was a stage where participants could identify the skills they brought to learning, tried to develop their own approach and predict what would happen in a given situation. At this stage, participants were developing a sense of agency as it related to their experience. Once they had found successful strategies in certain situations that supported their ongoing risk assessments. Participants were developing some confidence in their changing learner identity and their relationship to formal educational contexts. Participants, with transitional identities, were working out their own learner identity and their relationship to educational and other contexts, places and the relevant identities.

When asked how they would like the education system to operate, learners with transitional identities identified the need for their different skills and goals to be recognised and to make the education system more student focused and flexible rather than institutionally focused and flexible. They also wanted the system to work with learners rather than prescribing what they had to do.
4.5.4 Enacted learner identity profile

The data has shown that the participants who had achieved their learning goals, identified outcomes from education had a strong sense of self as learners, were able to articulate that identity to themselves and others and had a range of resources on which to draw to manage their learning engagement when things were difficult. They were able to balance or manage the range of identities with which they had membership or rejected membership as they created and negotiated their learner identities. This alignment of membership was complex and difficult, this was managed by students so they could face challenges, deal with complexity and take risks. These participants are described here as demonstrating an enacted learner identity.

Learners, with enacted learner identities, referred to their different networks to make decisions about their learning engagement. These networks are characterised by people who are close and similar with whom they have bonding ties and develop connections with others which whom they have bridging ties. The skill was being able to manage their existing relationships and develop new connections to achieve their learning goals. Rhonda described managing the struggle to maintain her identity as a learner in higher education by drawing on her family’s often repeated belief that she could achieve her goal to be a teacher and her identity as an expert in her previous employment. She noted that on a topic in her area of expertise she can hold her own in any relevant conversation. This was despite any lecturers’ apparent greater knowledge and position of power which could define her potential as a successful learner. This helped reinforce her learner identities when it was challenged. The identity resources (Falk et al., 2000) people drew on included the language to describe their educational engagement conflict, the networks to help inform that change or understand the processes with learning identities and their relationships with a range of institutional and community identities.

Participants with enacted identities could manage the risk taking associated with learner engagement and resolve the difficulties previously experienced in formal education, in a way that enabled their further engagement. Emily described preferring to be involved in external studies as she intensely dislikes ‘being spoon-fed stuff’, that is, having to sit in a class and being forced to talk about a topic, having to conform to times and days of the week’, being told what to do and having
to wait seven hours between classes on campus. Instead, she preferred to manage her own learning. She likes have time to think things through and work things out in her own time, believes she does not think well on her feet. She prefers being able to consider ideas through, study in the early hours which she continues to prefer. Over this time, she has not attended a residential block. Emily chose to stay with her family while studying and living in regional and isolated areas. People, who had achieved their educational goals, had developed the capacity to understand, manage and articulate their learner and other identities. For some, this meant full engagement, for others compliance to achieve their goals but each could explain, negotiate and enact their strategy and achieve their goal. Many people talked about the ways they worked to respond to and make change in their experiences in education.

Participants with an enacted learner identity described their goals in terms of their own and others’ expectations. Their purpose was to achieve a goal that they could articulate as more than a qualification or another’s’ expectation. Participants explained that when their involvement would benefit their role in their communities, their education would be supported and approved in that community, family or other affiliation. Rhonda noted her interest in studying to be a teacher in the local school was justified in terms of teaching local children about concepts, and using pedagogy, of importance to that community. She approached local people to act as a network who were prepared to help, endorse, explain and support participation. The strategies that underpinned participants’ belief in their identities as a learner related to participants’ ability to explain their ability to be a learner. The participants were able to explain their reason for studying and their role as a learner to a range of people, in a range of ways. This explanation was explained in different ways that were valued and respected by different communities. This gave permission for the participant to do something out of the norm. Learners with an enacted identity in that situation were able to identify connections to others’ purposes and values through a range of different lenses.

Learners had a range of networks. They had local, family and peer networks that supported and challenged their choices about learning engagement. They had relationships with these networks that they were able to articulate and examine from an internal and external perspective. For example:
…from the very, very early age and I don’t know how it got put in there I think it was my grandmother’s teaching, she was always there because her experience with the systems, or with government or institutions was where they didn’t value who she was (Tamara).

Participants, with enacted learner identities, had strong bridging ties with people, groups and institutions that were significantly different to those of their peer groups. These ties provided an informing framework for engagement, accountability and mentoring support. They were also developing linking ties with people in authority to support their learning engagement. Participants had negotiated resources and support from these networks. Participants had identified many points of connection on which to base their relationships and decisions. They described good teachers as individuals who cared about them as an individual, recognised their worlds and saw the participants as people who should experience success.

Participants were able to interpret activity in the educational systems from a number of perspectives and make decisions on the basis of that analysis. They had an awareness of the change in learner identity they were experiencing and the conflicts that are inherent in that process. The work of balancing the nexus of membership of different identities was an important part of their learning engagement. This was one of the strategies that made a difference to the stability of this enacted learner identity.

People, with enacted learner identities, utilised strategies to maintain their learning engagement. These strategies included being able to; articulate their purpose to a range of people the purpose and experience of their education, in terms different people and networks could understand. They had become skilled at seeking support from trusted mentors. They were also able to articulate their purpose and strategies; their identity and capacity as a learner to themselves. They were able to articulate to themselves and others their belief that they belonged in a program in a formal course and that an educational institution should ensure they achieve their learning goals. These learners, when faced with difficulties in maintaining their engagement in learning had negotiated alternative approaches with representatives of the educational institution.
Other strategies included negotiating support from institutional and local resources to manage their continued engagement and the ongoing conflicts that impacted on their decisions to remain engaged. These resources were used to respond to issues anticipated and experienced. Participants identified and accessed a number of local resources who provided physical and emotional support them so that they might to maintain their engagement in formal education. Despite opposition and difficulty, these learners developed self affirmations about themselves as learners who are and should be members of learning institutions despite opposition and difficulty. Participants had developed a belief they belonged and could contribute to the learning context. They saw institutions and teachers as fallible. Participants who had an enacted learner identity differentiated themselves from the interactions in the educational institution. For example, they described teachers as people who can have a bad day or misinterpret an interaction without personalizing any interactions or feeling a victim of others’ behaviour.

Participants with an enacted learner identity engaged actively with the education system, negotiating curriculum, assessment or delivery methods with their lecturers. Their behaviours were characterised by asking questions and demanding that teachers explain concepts and expectations until they understand the material being taught. As Tamara noted:

…the skills that my grandmother gave me helped me to survive in my own family structure and strive for higher levels whilst at the same time still be respectful aware and act appropriately in my own system and that was such a subtle way of handing over the skills… I never appreciated that until probably about 10 years or more ago that I started to reflect on it…I have started to and I have actually written on the system that she has handed over to me…and then she groomed me from a very early age (Tamara).

Participants with enacted learner identities were able to describe their own preferred learning processes and environments. They had the ability to use and switch between the languages modes used in different spheres of learning, community contexts and institutions. As Rhonda noted:

You can do anything, you just have to follow through. the problem was he didn’t know what he was saying by playing on my insecurities, he didn’t know,
Findings and Discussion

it wasn’t on purpose...he had a more scientific background and I had a more practical background...we would be even...I remember him saying that if you don’t understand genetics you will never get a degree. I remember feeling totally shattered and really down...I was like I’m not really a very bright person...I felt like that for about 15 minutes and then I went home and got over it. (Rhonda)

Participants with enacted learner identities had developed strategies to insert themselves and their perspective into learning contexts. They were able to negotiate the way they learner, the contexts used for reference points, introduce their own examples and perceptions from their world into learning experiences. They had learnt about managing their personal, community institutional identities and engaging their view of themselves.

Participants with enacted learner identities, when asked how they would like the education system to operate said they could handle any system now (see Sarah and Rhonda’s portraits. They also identified the need to have programmes that recognised and supported the development of people’s skills to learn and introduce their knowledge to the classroom, to recognise learners’ goals and focus on the students’ needs. They were less concerned with the way educational programmes were offered, as they had strategies to manage the structure of the any programme. They were able to identify their preferred learning styles as they could negotiate different educational offerings.

For many participants with enacted learner identities, the successful resolution of the contradictions between how local, peer, workplace and educational institutional communities informed their identities was related strongly to a belief that they should have a role in education system. This did not mean being compliant. Participants with an enacted learner identity described their role as to master, maintain their own integrity as a learner and community member and, for most, challenge the existing paradigm.

Participants’ sense of self as a learner, their learner identity was defined by themselves and others, that is, their informing networks was described in relation to their engagement in learning. As Rhonda said:
I've notice the ones [asking] more questions and [who] are prepared to put forward their views are the older people, not the younger people. The people with experience in life, who’ve had the hard knocks, and had to try and get over them. Because if I don’t understand something I’ll say hm, sorry don’t understand I’ve learnt now that I really don’t care if you’re going to make me feel bad because I don’t understand, cause I just want to understand it. So I’ve learnt to say to myself, I don’t care what you think, I want to understand to I’m going to ask you the question 10 times and you can shake your head as much as you like, but I really need to know the answer and I really need to understand.

Learners described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy. Those who had rejected formal education utilised self talk which focused on confirming their membership in their existing communities despite challenges from institutional processes and in opposition to that of the educational institution. For Michael, participating in formal education was a challenge to his established ways of understanding the world. It made him ask:

…who am I? How do I reconcile who I am with who I was before? Our extended family groups have a certain set of morays and things they know and the way they understand the world.

These were conflicts that impacted on his engagement in higher education. Participants with an enacted learner identity described their role as to maintain their own integrity as a learner and community member. They were ready to challenge the paradigms around education they were taught in their communities, or challenge the paradigms in formal educational institutions to incorporate their worlds and knowledge. Rhonda described the need to manage their own learner identity despite considerable challenges from the educational institution about their enrolment:

I was devastated and I was crying, god, I've had enough of this that lasted 10 minutes and talked myself around and said you are made of sterner stuff than that.

The following sections consider the data in terms of the features of learner identities. These are listed in the horizontal axis in Figure 9.
4.5.5 Purpose

The data showed the interactions between learners’ identity and their purpose of identity had an impact on the kinds of identities that were enacted in the learning experience. When learners were participating in order to comply with an external requirement that is not reinforced by local and valued community memberships, learner identities focused on surviving the difficult and conflicting experiences.

The way people understand themselves as learners and their purpose for engaging in education or community membership is understood through participation in a range of groups and through the perceptions of others. Regional learners described their educational experiences in childhood as an accepted activity that was taken for granted while the activities were not necessarily understood, support for homework and other activities varied considerably. Participants described seeking out an extended family member who showed interest and made space for her interest in learning. As participants moved to secondary education, the content was perceived to be irrelevant. The individual’s realities at home, imagined futures and in their peer groups were not recognised or reflected in the curriculum. Participants described the conflict between the membership of school and family and peer communities increasing over time, although each of the participants saw themselves as a learner and participation in schools became more difficult. Most left before completing high school.

The participants undertook learning through participation in working and peer communities, including working, for example, for the public service, as a ringer (stationhand), as a caregiver and housekeeper, as a factory worker, as a labourer, as a fruitpicker etc. These roles had an embedded informal apprenticeship system where people developed expertise as a member of a group. The community defined and refined their roles as beginning workers and those with developing expertise. This was recognised as acceptable by the participants and their families and peer groups and the continued involvement was supported in actions and attitudes. Participants describe developing a view of themselves and their capacities in terms of work, learning and family life in relation to these systems.

When the purpose was actively undermined by members of valued communities, particularly when that educational participation challenged the bonding ties in their
Findings and Discussion

own community, they felt they had to resist what was happening in their community and school based identity.

Purposes for engagement were described in terms of getting access to different employment and taking advantage of opportunities for advancement or recognition. Where the purpose for learning was endorsed or could be explained satisfactorily in the learners’ local, family or community networks, enacted learner identities were evident and provided a support base for learners to negotiate the identity challenges along the way. Rhonda’s example showed that taking the risk of education to become a teacher in a local school, an approved goal, was worth the risk of engagement and frustration in the course. The decisions about whether engagement was worth the risk to their own identity and participation in their own and other social or workplace communities was based in part in their decisions about their purpose for engagement. Purpose was described in terms of getting access to different employment and taking advantage of opportunities for advancement or recognition.

Margaret had rejected formal educational institutions offerings several times and subsequently for her children. She had left school as soon as possible as it had become irrelevant. This was supported by her family as she could work in the family business. For her children, Margaret tried home schooling them as she did not support the approaches undertaken in the schooling system. Her purpose was to address her assessment of the deficiencies of the education system and to improve their chances in life. Her first successful experience of formal education was situated in a local community organisation, managed by a local employer, undertaken with others from the community and supported by locals through workbased practical sessions. Her purpose was supported by being overtly approved by community members. This meant her engagement was recognised and authorised by the local community who also followed up on her progress and shared in celebrating each success.

As Gee (2007) noted, teaching and learning needs to build bridges from damaged to positive learner identities in order for active and critical learning to happen. Gee (2007:58) described this kind of learning and teaching in terms of enticing learners to try despite learners’ often valid fears related to learning engagement. It establishes a basis on which the learner makes considerable effort despite having little
Confidence in successful outcomes and achieves meaningful success as a result of that effort:

I realised people were using these qualifications against me that I knew I had to get them I had confidence then because these people who were attempting to use it against me. I realised I was better than them anyway so I thought well okay I just have to get a piece of paper (Tamara).

Participants made decisions about learning in relation to their own and others’ expectations. The decisions about whether to meet those expectations or resist them, was related to the individual’s perception of what is important to reinforce that learner’s identity. The processes that helped make a difference to learners’ identity, and consequent engagement, was not about being an outsider or an insider but being able to find points to share and value difference and find themselves within the new environment. These learners were able to manage the different learner identities and community memberships in their life, using the appropriate language and social systems in each while understanding themselves and their purpose in each of those spaces.

4.5.6 Network: bonding, bridging and linking ties

Participants who were able to participate in post compulsory education throughout their lifetime had very strong support from a family or community member(s) who assisted in resolving the inconsistent identities that were operating. These were achieved through, for example, having high levels of recognition as a long standing and valued member of the community, participating in activities that demonstrate the ways the learning will be relevant in local community or when a family member articulated the need to be prepared for a new world that would involve membership of the local and formal institutions. In these situations the risk of being involved in formal education was reduced and an individual had a support mechanism to mediate and explain their involvement in education.

Participants’ sense of self as a learner, their learner identity as defined by themselves and others, (that is, their networks) was described in relation to their experiences of learning. Learners described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their behaviours and feelings of self efficacy. Learners’ identity resources drew on a range of strategies and networks informed by their relationships and
community identities. This included the networks that acted in opposition to institutional identities. Learners talked about how they maintained their identity while studying and the strategies they employed. For example, Michael discussed studying off site so there was no need to be physically on campus or identifying a local mentor to support an individual’s study programme.

When faced with the choice of succeeding by conforming to the educational institution in opposition to their own community affiliations, some people chose to remain a member of their existing communities at the expense of engagement. For them, the bonding ties (Woolcock, 2001; Field, 2005; Grootaert et al., 2004) were strong and reinforced while the bridging ties were weak. Bonding ties are those that link within homogenous groups, while bridging ties are the links across heterogeneous groups. Developing or accessing those bridging ties with the educational community was a risk they were not willing to take. It was more important to be accepted within their informing communities.

Participants, having enacted learner identities, were able to refer the sources of bonding ties and develop their bridging ties to manage their existing relationships and develop new ones to achieve their learning goals. Rhonda described managing the struggle to maintain her identity as a learner in higher education by drawing on her family’s often repeated belief that she could achieve her goal to be a teacher and her identity as an expert in her previous employment. She noted that on a topic in her area of expertise she can hold her own in any relevant conversation. This was despite any lecturers’ apparent greater knowledge and position of power which could define her potential as a successful learner. This helped reinforce her learner identities when that was challenged. The identity resources (Kilpatrick and Falk 2000) people drew on included the language to describe their educational engagement conflict, the networks to help inform that change or understand the processes with learning identities and their relationships with a range of institutional and community identities.

Participants had variously persisted, resisted or manage the conflicts within learner identities until the stress of managing their learner identity was more stress than it was worth to achieve the learners’ goal. Peta noted that:
…it took three goes at different institutions to complete my degree, in the end I had to focus on finishing through compliance rather than learning and questioning in order to achieve the goal of becoming a teacher and changing other students’ experiences of education.

Participants, who had an enacted learner identity, were able to sustain their engagement in learning, through various challenges, by drawing on their learner identities to help them to address those challenges.

For many learners the successful resolution of the contradictions between how local, peer, workplace and educational institutional communities informed their identities was related strongly to a belief that they should have a role in education system. This did not mean being compliant:

I got…trainee of the year…which is a pretty big deal..I knew I had the confidence, if I wanted to achieve something could do it (Rhonda).

Participants with an enacted learner identity described their role as to master, maintain their own integrity as a learner and community member and, for most, challenge the existing paradigm. Rhonda described the need to manage their own learner identity despite considerable challenges from the educational institution about their enrolment:

I was devastated and I was crying, god, I've had enough of this that lasted 10 minutes and talked myself around and said you are made of sterner stuff than that (Rhonda).

This attitude tended to be more important in being successful than the strategy used. Supporting students' identity and participation is more than teaching a range of strategies; it was about recognised the importance of resolving the nexus of membership (of different identities see Wenger 1998) that includes educational institutional community membership. Michael noted:

I suffered a lot at the hands of my supervisors because I looked different to the other(s)…when I did external studies, I took great pains not to let anyone know what I looked like because I wanted them to judge me on what the output of my brain was.
The learners, who had managed to continue engagement for a part of their programme, described their learner identity as it related to the institution and their own community. They had been able to negotiate strategies that worked for them to actively participate. This was optimised when students were able to make strong connections to their own purpose and understandings of the world. Rhonda described her disenfranchisement from the formal education institution in which she was enrolled and replaced them with a local network:

I basically have got my network of people happening in the rural area who have books and knowledge and other external students and school teachers there have been fantastic (Rhonda).

The ways that bonding, bridging and linking ties function in relation to education has been documented (Field 2005). For learners whose communities aligned well to that of the educational systems, bonding ties support learner engagement. Emily described the ways her partner’s confidence and support was important in supporting their children to cope when people around them were:

…saying it’s hopeless you’ll never be able to do it.

When there was considerable difference between the community’s and the educational norms and values, when people are disenfranchised the balance of bonding and bridging ties make a big difference to learning engagement. Here the role of social capital ties is related to the alignment of the individual to the educational system and the decisions made based on the participants’ worldviews and identities:

Teachers didn’t take the time they didn’t have the time, I suppose to get to know each individual, certainly in the high school situation… I had an Indonesian teacher who was brilliant and surprise, surprise I aced Indonesian you know we all used to like going to Indonesian… She would always smile she would always joke, at first we thought she was ancient …there was no generation gap if we were being disrespectful we got blasted we knew the consequences …[in this class] we were real people not were just heads she had to teach you know I’ve got to get as many of these kids through as possible this year to make it look like am doing the best job a lot of kids didn’t
find Indonesian very interesting but we still when we still got through, she wanted us to get through, she wanted to help (Margaret).

When faced with the choice of succeeding by conforming to the educational institution in opposition to their own community affiliations, some people chose to remain a member of their existing communities at the expense of engagement. For them, the bonding ties were strong and reinforced; while the bridging ties weak.

### 4.5.7 Identity resources

Learners who were empowered, able to sustain their engagement in learning through challenges to their learning experiences described the learner identity on which they drew to address those challenges. Learners, who had managed their learning engagement for a part of their programme, described their learner identity as it related to the institution and their own community. They described themselves and their behaviour in terms of others’ expectations and structures. They did not describe models for interpreting educational engagement that challenged others’ interpretations of peoples’ behaviour. Learners, who persist in their learner engagement, are able to do so until it is too difficult. It becomes unviable to maintain their personal integrity in that situation which challenges their sense of self. Their learner identity operated in opposition to institutional learner identities. Learner identity was conceived in terms of their tested survival tactics.

Participants’ sense of self as a learner, their learner identity as defined by themselves and others, that is, their informing networks, was described in relation to their engagement in learning. Learners described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy. Those who had rejected formal education utilised self talk that confirm their membership of their existing communities and the education system. This self talk works despite the challenges from institutional processes and maintains participants’ membership in opposition to the pressures of the educational institution. The self talk about the reason for studying can affirm or oppose the teachers’ view of learners. For Michael, participating in formal education was a challenge to his established ways of understanding the world, it made him ask:
Findings and Discussion

…who am I? How do I reconcile who I am with who I was before? Our extended family groups have a certain set of morays and things they know and the way they understand the world.

These were conflicts that impacted on his engagement in higher education. Some participants had tried many different ways of challenging and participating, as students, as parents, and as community members but to maintain their identity they had chosen to withdraw from formal education. For many participants, their learner identities were affirmed by teachers; i.e. that they did not belong in the education system and needed to change to be accepted or that, alternatively, their learner identity and associated strategies meant they belonged in school.

Participants’, who had achieved their educational goals, used self talk that focused on having a strong sense of themselves as engaged learners as active agents in the formal system. Learners who had actively participated and negotiated their involvement used self talk about why they should be studying and rationalised that involvement despite what others might say. Rhonda managed her frustration and conflicting feelings by saying to herself repeatedly:

I really don’t care if you’re going to make me feel bad because I don’t understand, cause I just want to understand it… I don’t care what you think I want to understand so I’m going to ask you the question 10 times and you can shake your head as much as you like but I really need to know the answer and I really need to understand.

A clear understanding of one’s purpose in a specific situation, as Gee (2004, 2007) has noted, implies being able understand the word or concepts in relation to a specific context or situation. Verbal understanding of words ‘implies an ability to explicate one’s understanding in terms of other words or general principles, but not necessarily an ability to apply this knowledge to actual situations’ (Gee 2007:113).

So how do learners take their feeling and description of their learner identity and enact it. Learners’ identities are informed and impacted on by a range of identities and the community memberships. The ways that participants responded to, managed, and resolved the inherent tensions in the nexus of membership, in their own learner identity, had an impact on the outcomes from engagement or disengagement in education. Participants described the identity resources they drew
on to make decisions about engagement on formal education. These resources can be described as knowledge and identity resources (Kilpatrick et al 2000) which include networks, language, knowledge of processes, trust, imagination, affinity, values.

Participants with enacted learner identities were able to transfer their learner identity and associated strategies to other situations. The complexity of this work increased as the difference of the original and alternative learning contexts increased. The ability to articulate their reasons of engagement to a range of different audiences, in ways that make sense in that context, was one of the strategies utilised to make decisions about engagement and manage adversity. This dialogue was used to help connect decisions in terms of often differing community, education, family and work based knowledge systems, perspectives and beliefs. Learners are then perceived as connected to their communities that inform their work and incorporate an understanding of community forces as they relate to pedagogy that is student centred approach.

The greater the difference and the fewer the points of mutual recognition about what their different perspectives meant, the more complex this identity work was for learners. Helen noted the exclusionary impact of lecturers talking to students as if they had worked in the relevant industry area for an extended period and already understood the terminology and reference points:

… they talk to you like you are already meant to know.

Recognition and understanding of different perspectives cannot be assumed and is developed through purposeful work. The degree of understanding also impacts on the ways learners interpret or assume the motives of teachers and people who represent education institutional authority. Identity work involves the ability to switch between different kinds of language and use those languages appropriately, to understand motives from a number of perspectives. One example was the assumption of resistance and persistent learners that many decisions or behaviours of authority figures were personally directed at them, and they were a victim of that decision making. For learners with enacted identities, they assessed that people in authority made decisions for reasons that could be personally directed at the learner or for entirely unrelated reasons, strategies and belief in the right to manage conflict.
For teachers and trainers, this meant understanding why learners make decisions and behave in certain ways.

4.5.8 Processes

When formal learning situations ignored or tokenised students’ knowledge, students became conflicted about their involvement. In many ways they described being so uncomfortable in a system that did not recognise or link to their communities’, their only choice was to disengage. Participants described repeated attempts to engage in adult learning and the frustrations experienced in being part of schooling and their own communities. Participants who successfully addressed these conflicts described the interactive ties, and strategies employed to negotiate their learning and to develop a strong learner identity. Once participants had ‘cracked the code’, they were confident to participate in a range of learning experiences. Also interesting were the topics that were not identified by participants as having an impact on their engagement, that is, transport, finances or literacy support. These represent some of the ways disenfranchised students are often offered support.

A shared understanding of educational goals, processes and priorities can be developed through the involvement of local community members as staff in as part of the teaching and learning team, participants in school events and the involvement of the school community in local events and valued roles. The processes for developing a shared understanding of communities and educational institutions are as complex as any group of people and involve many inherent contradictions. These processes have challenges and setbacks over time and involve persistence and goodwill. It is these things that establish the bases of relationships and the sharing of ideas and knowledge. The ongoing nature and shared power relationships and willingness to listen and change in light of developing understandings will challenge accepted practice but offer insights that inform these processes.

The way participants negotiated their relationship with education institutions and other being informing groups was mediated by their learner identity. Participants, who were empowered and had an enacted learner identity, were able to sustain their engagement in learning, through various challenges, by drawing on their learner identities and associated resources to help them to address those challenges. One
of the attributes of the processes learners’ drew on, was their readiness to take a risk for themselves and their learner identity. Helen’s example of this was:

I am very determined because this is something that I really want and I believe that if you really want something, you go for it. You don’t give up. And if any people stand in the way, then, yes, they are going to yell and scream at you and get frustrated at you but why not try to understand that, than just walk out the door offended (Helen).

For many learners the successful resolution of the contradictions between how local, peer, workplace and educational institutional communities informed their identities was related strongly to a belief that they should have a role in the education system. This did not mean being compliant. Participants with an enacted learner identity described their role as to master, maintain their own integrity as a learner and community member and, for most, challenge the existing paradigm. Rhonda described the need to manage their own learner identity despite considerable challenges from the educational institution about their enrolment:

I was devastated and I was crying, god, I've had enough of this that lasted 10 minutes and talked myself around and said you are made of sterner stuff than that.

Individuals’ control of their learner identity resources, informed their decisions about learning engagement. In this way learners’ sense of agency tended to be more important in being successful than the strategy used. Supporting students’ identity and participation is more than teaching a range of strategies; it was about recognised the importance of resolving the nexus of membership (of different identities, see Wenger 1998) that includes educational institutional community membership. As Michael noted:

I suffered a lot at the hands of my supervisors because I looked different to the other[s]...when I did external studies, I took great pains not to let anyone know what I looked like because I wanted them to judge me on what the output of my brain was.

Individuals interpreted the educational experience and expectations in a different way through different learner identity frameworks.
Findings and Discussion

The learners, who had managed to continue engagement for a part of their programme, described their learner identity as it related to the institution and their own community. They had been able to negotiate strategies that worked for them to actively participate. This was optimised when students were able to make strong connections to their own purpose and understandings of the world. Rhonda described her disenfranchisement from the formal education institution in which she was enrolled and replaced them with a local network:

> I basically have got my network of people happening in the rural area who have books and knowledge and other external students and school teachers there have been fantastic.

There are low penalties for non-conformity and co-production is valued

This attitude tended to be more important in being successful than the strategy used. Supporting students’ identity and participation is more than teaching a range of strategies; it was about recognised the importance of resolving the nexus of membership (of different identities see Wenger 1998) that includes educational institutional community membership. Michael noted:

> I suffered a lot at the hands of my supervisors because I looked different to the other[s]...when I did external studies, I took great pains not to let anyone know what I looked like because I wanted them to judge me on what the output of my brain was.

The keys for making transition from one sort of identity to another were related to identification with purpose of the education system or experience and approval for engagement. One of the core sources was their family or home community, Karen noted

> my father always said you can do anything you want to do, I had a very traditional mother who was home all the time...my mother didn’t study, so they had a very traditional household and he always said if you want to study I will back you to the hilt and I always did.

The participants, who had managed to continue engagement for a part of their programme, described their learner identity as it related to the institution and their own community. They had been able to negotiate strategies that worked for them to
actively participate. This was optimised when students were able to make strong connections to their own purpose and understandings of the world. Participants developed and then were able to draw on a range of resources through empowerment, negotiation, access to info ability to manage the alignment of identities through change/complexity on an ongoing basis.

Participants’ sense of self as a learner, their learner identity was defined by their interpretation of their relationships with themselves and others, that is, their networks was described in relation to their engagement in learning. Learners described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy. Rhonda noted that she:

…wouldn’t let the bastards meet me, because I started it and I wanted it. You only get places in the world if you try and better yourself, be it in any way, shape or form, physically, mentally, emotionally, you are only going to grow if you keep trying to better yourself.

Empowered learners had worked out how to negotiate their learning identity and were prepared to manage the associated challenges. Learners who hadn’t achieved their learning goals had resolved conflicts by leaving the educational institution. As Scott (2001:39) found ‘adopting a particular way of working, a particular understanding of knowledge the learner is rejecting or turning aside from other frameworks and this itself is an act of power’. Learner identity was being continuously renegotiating through participants’ interpretation of themselves in terms of learning events and contexts and their membership of relevant communities. This practice involves negotiating diverse ways of engaging in practice that reflect the participants’ individuality, accountability to significant communities, and performance elements that are recognised or not as valid by the relevant communities.

The practices, domains, community and meaning (the social components of learning, Wenger 1998), within a community of shared practice are recognised and affirmed by the participants or rejected if they challenge the cohesiveness of the group. The practices of participants in their different communities described positively were strongly influenced by the things they had learnt from those recognised as experts in the community. It was important that the reference points for participants’ practices were their learning on the job, the skills and knowledge valued in their regional
Findings and Discussion

area, and through shared activities with others in the community. The practices increased complexity as the participants developed expertise and networks. This expertise was tested by community members’ observation of skills, that is, laying concrete, driving in difficult conditions or contributing to a shared community event. This is possible in a small community where the lines between social and working relationships are blurred and there a high level of transience between working locations. This is due to seasonal work, casual work, work requiring particular skills, an abundance of work at particular times and employment based on strong community networks. Some of the valued roles included non-participation in reading and writing activities beyond those absolutely necessary for managing everyday life including, that is, not participating in reading books, writing letters, using computers, or learning through attending courses. Participants who had undertaken literate and formal learning based activities, had developed ways to minimise the perception of their involvement and expertise. Their expertise did not generally increase their community membership as these skills are not valued. This did involve some conflict in identity for participants, which was managed in different ways.

Participants described their experiences of completing and leaving schooling, no matter the level, in negative terms. Those who completed Year 12 ascribed this achievement to the impact and support of their families, or their extended families, who valued the activity. A result has been considerable conflict with the education system. As processes of communities that maintain roles and relationships are difficult to challenge and more complex than they initially appear, the impact can be far reaching. Participants valued the qualifications that formal education offered as they related to their role in the community for example, that is, forklift driving or teacher education. Despite this, although many have shown interest, enrolled or commenced a formal education course, few have fully participated and even fewer completed their studies. Some of the issues included not wanting to attend the educational site as it is confronting, there is no local post compulsory education site.

Participants identified a range of marginalizing practices in educational institutions. These included being tested by people who are not known, trusted or recognised as expert, a lack of support to take time and energy to study, a lack of understanding in the community about the expectations and content of study and active intervention by local community members to impede a participant’s study. These issues are
related to negative experiences of education in the past, the broader community’s negative perception of those involved in formal education and the normative behaviour of groups.

Learners had developed ways of having local membership in a community through relating to the global practices and profile of the broader group. The community groups, in which participants had membership, generally accepted stereotyped views about people who learn through formal as opposed to informal education processes; that is, those that learn through books from teachers as opposed to those who learn through activity and from recognised local experts. People who learn through formal education were perceived to have inferior knowledge as their learning was perceived to be theoretical and acquired only provided to give them the authority over others. People who learn locally are perceived to have a deep practical understanding that can be applied to a variety of settings, the types of contexts that currently exist and assessed by those with the appropriate knowledge. These people know and have earned their place in the community and workplace, even if granted a place of authority as a result of the learning. Participants identified their involvement in learning as similar to that of people who live in other regional farming areas and in opposition to urban based communities. This was evident in a focus on family and community participation and maintenance over individual or career focuses goals.

4.5.9 Alignment of identities

Learner engagement challenged learners’ to assess and draw on their own learner identity. When participants’ engagement in educational experiences, was closely aligned to their current learner identity, learners felt safe and able to manage their engagement. In this situation, learners were able to manage challenges and maintain the equilibrium of their learner identity. Their resources matched the needs of the situation. They knew the situation, knew how to speak, react or connect to the activities. When the learner experience challenged the learner’s current learner identity and its informing frameworks; they experienced discomfort and referred to their identity resources for support. When those identity resources did not match the situation, the learner’s engagement was also challenged. Being able to manage situations where the participants’ own learner identity was challenged and remain
engaged was a balancing act. Participants’ engagement then, was determined by the degree to which participants could align disparate learner identities.

Participants, characterised by enacted learner identities, were able to manage the range of community-based identities with which they were associated or to reject membership as they created and negotiated their changing learner identities. This alignment of membership was complex and difficult, but it was managed by some learners so that they could face challenges, complexity and take risks. The task of developing, maintaining and enhancing learner identity was an ongoing project which was redefined and challenged by new or different experiences. These participants could articulate their own relationship to other identities and act on it:

I felt really valued, I felt safe, compared to being blasted from the mount, many of my mentors challenged me. That really pushed me probably what I needed at that stage. They were so willing to share about their chosen career that rubs off on you. I am getting more confidence to try these strategies that are working in the classroom (Gina).

After leaving school as early as possible, Gina worked through a number of jobs around her area of interest. One thing that made an impact was:

...working with a phenomenal curator had such a passion for natural history was an professional entomologist and pushed me really hard in several areas of taxonomy proper scientific writing and just so much fun to work with I suppose working with lots of academics around technical support was great it really inspired me to be like them... it's like an apprenticeship.

This alignment of membership was complex and difficult, but it was managed by some learners so that they could face challenges, complexity and take risks. The task of developing, maintaining and enhancing learner identity was an ongoing project which was redefined and challenged by new or different experiences. These participants could articulate their own relationship to other identities and act on it:

I felt really valued, I felt safe, compared to being blasted from the mount, many of my mentors challenge me. That really pushed me probably what I needed at that stage. They were so willing to share about their chosen career
that rubs off on you. I am getting more confidence to try these strategies that are working in the classroom (Gina).

Participants, who were able resolve the complexity inherent in the misalignment in their learning identities and informing community memberships, drew on a range of resources to do this. They included access to bridging and linking ties to a range of networks such as professional, formal education and family communities. These participants understood the processes that operated for themselves and in the educational institution (or wherever the conflict) originates, able to objectify that experience and link to other successful events. This doesn’t mean it's easy but that people have the resources to work through the problem.

To explore other identities and their associated contexts and content – learners needed to have a good ideas of where they were as a learner, what to do if things go wrong. They needed to know how to explain their decisions and actions to themselves and the range of communities with which they identify. Learners made decision about their engagement by weighing up their purpose for study against the risks in that engagement. Learners also needed to be allowed opportunities to explore their relationship to different knowledge systems, contexts and relationships. These opportunities needed to be constructed to support engaging learners as active participants in the interaction. They needed to produce learner identities by themselves, with others, peers and create new sources of identity:

…seeing a lot of Aboriginal people around me that I have now worked with and mentored in an informal way it is always coming back to that sense of if a white person says to them that you are and this is your ability they accept it unchallenged and then they perform to it, ...you need to rise above it and you set your own benchmark to frame who you are and you go about continuing to challenge until you're satisfied until you have achieved that high expectation you put for yourself and it only has to be one small area of improvement not to change the world but if you keep striving for that you'll get there (Tamara)

Managing the alignment of learners’ identities, with a range of, professional, institutional, global and community networks impacted on learners’ decisions about the advantages and risks in learner engagement. Learner engagement challenged learners’ to assess and draw on their own learner identity. Empowered learners

299
were able to manage the range of community-based identities with whom they were associated or had rejected membership as they created and negotiated their changing learner identities. This alignment of membership was complex and difficult, it was managed by students so they could face challenges, complexity and take risks. The project of developing, maintaining and enhancing learner identity was an ongoing project redefined and challenged by one different experience. People could articulate their own and relationship to other identities and act on it.

Educational institutions and pedagogies need to recognise and integrate the plurality of the society in which it operates and to be relevant to the participants’ experiences. To achieve this goal, educational institutions need to develop approaches that recruit, rather than tokenise, ignore or erase difference; understand and explore the diverse ways students, live, operate and negotiate their worlds; the languages, discourses and registers. This develops the opportunity for pedagogy that creates the conditions for greater access to learning, knowledge and multiliteracies (Wallace 2005) and a range of Discourses.

Discourses are impacted by identities as the ways individuals identify themselves and in relation to their socially relevant communities or networks. An individual may be negotiating their identities in terms of a number of Discourses simultaneously; for example, those of their peers, professional associations, a specific situation, personal belief and cultural mores. The recognition and acceptance of the individual’s performance by the relevant communities confirms or marginalizes an individual in terms of the relevant community’s accepted Discourse (p167). The resultant power relationships and individual and group internal conflict inherent in resolving the diverse identities can create complexity that has significant impact on learners’ engagement and views about learning and knowledge. This was particularly evident when the complexity is unrecognized or trivialised.

The learner identities of the people described in the examples are clearly situated in the social worlds they inhabit, create and interpret. For regional students anomalies could appear when the literate practices being constructed in the classroom operate in opposition to socially constructed identities and the co-located learning practices.

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3 Gee (1996) defines Discourses, as distinct from discourses, as the words, language, attitudes, actions, body language, beliefs, movements and positions; the ways people exist in the world. On the other hand discourses are defined as ‘connected stretches of language that make sense’ (Gee 1996:127).
When learning situations and structures did not reflect or understand students’ literate practices and identities, potential for conflict exists. How does one choose between learning the valued practices of their group and the practices involved in participating in a new group that does not understand one’s social realities and is marked as ‘other’? An important strategy for successful learners was to be able to balance all of these learner identities and community memberships. They saw themselves as learners who could manage others expectations of their educational and social engagement, and the often competing purposes and pressures on individuals.

4.5.10  Sense of agency

Successful learners were able to articulate their own learner identity, their purpose for learning strategies, and their ability to work with the system to meet their own learning goals, their right to an education and how this fits with their community’s expectations. They were able to articulate a philosophy of success and strength as a learner. Participants, who had not been successful, reflected that they felt disempowered in the education system, that they did not have the power to make a change in order to achieve their goals. These participants demonstrated their sense of agency by rejecting the educational system and its expectations and/or participating in communities where they were accepted, recognised as a community member and able to influence change. This sense of agency reflects the description of efficacy (Giddens 1979) and learning agency (Pillay et al 2004) previously outlined.

A sense of agency was linked to the identity resources that individual draw on to interpret their learning engagement. This sense of agency was supported by an individual being able to understand and manage the language, social norms, relationships and places associated with educational engagement and community membership. This sense of agency was affirmed by local, family, work, school and mentors when participants demonstrated their knowledge of the relevant process and priorities. Learners’ identity was connected to their sense of themselves as a learner and the degree, to which they could control their learning environments,
'Deep learning requires the learner being willing and able to take on a new identity in the world, to see the world and act on it in new ways' Gee 2007:172. Participants' sense of self as a learner, their learner identity, was defined by themselves and others, that is, their networks was described in relation to their engagement in learning. Participants described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy:

With the education degree it was a whole different world to me, because it was higher ed, and it's a whole different ball game. Even though when I started the diploma, a lot of it was in higher ed, with science, I knew what I was getting into because I had spent time in the science labs…I had an idea of what that was like (Rhonda).

All of these identities incorporated a sense of agency that is enacted differently. This may be evident in a rejection of an institutional identity or reinforcement of the nexus of local, workplace or other community memberships or asserting one’s place within an educational institution despite negative experience:

…wouldn’t let the bastards beat me, because I started it and I wanted it. You only get places in the world if you try and better yourself, be it in any way, shape or form, physically, mentally, emotionally, you are only going to grow if you keep trying to better yourself (Rhonda).

Recognition of the role of agency in learning engagement rejects deficit views of people’s disengagement, explanations such as a lack of commitment or not understanding of the importance of education. Rather than describing people as passive agents in learning experiences; people are viewed as active agents. People’s behaviours can be understood as actively accepting or rejecting externally imposed frameworks, experiences or identities. Learners, then, are much more than passive consumers of knowledge and educational systems; they are producers and teachers of knowledge and ideas as they relate to specific contexts (Gee 2003).

Place had an important role in individual’s sense of agency. Participants preferred studying in settings where they knew the place, it was related to their home or work place and was integrated into their own community. The place had a local reference that was significant to them and the educational institution representative had left their place to collaborate on the learner’s place. Kalkadoon described avoiding
participating in a machinery license course, even though he had driven this kind of machinery for over 10 years. Recent occupational health and safety regulations in the participant’s workplace had changed and a license was required to continue working. He was offered negotiated assessment and low literacy based materials to support his participation. When he had to go to the urban institution site and be assessed by people with unknown credibility, Kalkadoon decided not to attend. As a result his employment opportunities were reduced. A loss of income was not worth the personal risk for him.

4.5.11 Access to information and resources

Participants described access to information about infrastructure and processes in educational systems, particularly when trying to address a problem that could mean the difference between choosing to remain or leave. The resources that made a difference were grouped into physical resources and identity resources.

The physical resources included transport, child care, a place to study and finance. Identity resources dominated the issues around access. Many of these have been discussed previously and are only mentioned briefly here. For many participants, not being able to decode or understand the educational system, particularly when facing difficulties. As Rhonda noted:

You can’t know what you don’t know.

Participants weren’t sure what they should be studying, or who to ask. Few participants had access to people who could mentor them through these decisions. Participants referred to members of their community as a reference point for these decisions and information as the community members were more likely to accept them as a learner with potential and existing skills and knowledge. This was not always successful, as some local community or family members undermined their attempts at learning engagement. Consider Margaret’s father telling her she didn’t have the capacity to study and Jason’s friends teasing him about studying and using a computer. Mentors played an important role in people’s lives (such as Sarah and Peta) in moving learners from a negative view of themselves as learners to a positive one.
4.6 Synthesis of the learner identity profile analysis

The detailed thematic analysis of the portraits through the learner identity profile matrix has resulted in the following findings.

The ways that the purpose for study interacted with learners’ identity had an impact on the kinds of identities that were enacted in the learning experience. When learners were participating in education in order to comply with an external requirement that is not reinforced by local and valued community memberships, learner identities focussed on surviving the difficult and conflicting situations they found themselves in. When the purpose was actively undermined by members of valued communities, particularly when that educational participation challenged the bonding ties, they had to resist what was happening in their community and school based identity. Where the purpose was endorsed or could be explained satisfactorily in the community networks, empowered identities were evident and provided a support base to negotiate the identity challenges along the way. People explained why their involvement would benefit their role in their communities, a role that would be supported and approved in that community, family or other affiliation. For example, wanting to study to be a teacher in the local school and teach local children’s about concepts and using pedagogy of importance to that community, from an insider’s view. It also meant that a network of supporters is needed to understand the learning engagement and are prepared to help reinterpret it to support participation.

A range of local, family, peer, community, workplace and global networks were accessed through participants’ engagement in learning. Participants’ sense of themselves as a learner, that is, their learner identity as defined by themselves and others, their networks was described in relation to their social networks. Learners described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy. Learners’ identity resources drew on a range of strategies and networks informed by their relationships and community identities, including those that act in opposition to institutional identities. Learners talked about how they maintained their identity while studying and the strategies they employed. Such as, studying off site so there was no need to be physically on campus or identifying a local mentor to support an individual’s study programme.
When faced with the choice of succeeding by conforming to the educational institution in opposition to their own community affiliations, some people chose to remain a member of their existing communities at the expense of engagement. For them, the bonding ties were strong and reinforced, while the bridging ties weak. The resources participants drew on included language to describe their conflict, the networks to help inform their understanding of events and their relationships with a range of institutional and community identities. Participants had persisted, resisted or manage the conflicts within learner identities until the stress of managing an aligned identity membership was greater than the need for achieving the goal.

Participants with enacted learner identities could manage the associated risk taking and resolve the difficulties that had previously presented through their learning engagement, in a way that enabled their further engagement. In this way they had developed the capacity to manage their learner and other identities. Participants discussed the ways they worked to respond to and make change in their experiences in education. The keys for making transition from one sort of identity to another, this was related to their identification with the education system or experience.

Different types of learner identity were evident through engagement in formal education. Learners had, at some stage, persisted until the stress of managing the alignment of their identity membership was greater than the need for the achieving the educational goal. Identity resources are used and demonstrated through engagement. These resources are valued and shared through participants’ networks. Participants described their identity in terms of their informing networks, their experiences and self efficacy. Those who had rejected formal education utilised self talk focused on confirming their membership of their existing communities despite challenges from institutional processes and in opposition to that of the educational institution.

Participants who had achieved their educational goals utilised self talk that focused on having a strong sense of themselves as empowered learners and as active agents in the formal system. They had tried many different ways of challenging and participating, as students, as parents, as community members but in order maintain their identity as a strong person in their own community, they had chosen to
Findings and Discussion

withdraw. Learners who had actively participated and negotiated their involvement used self talk about why they should be studying and how to rationalise that involvement despite what others might say.

Important to learners’ decision making about engagement was the degree of student centred negotiability and learner empowerment. Participants, who were empowered, were able to sustain their engagement in learning through challenges to their learning identities. These participants drew on enacted and how learner identities and associated resources and networks to address those challenges. For many learners the successful resolution of the contradictions between local, peer, workplace and educational institutional communities informing identities was related strongly to a belief that they should have a role in education system. This did not mean being compliant, participants described successful learners as people who can maintain their own integrity as a learner and as a community member, despite the lack of connection between the two knowledge systems that underlie those systems. This attitude tended to be more important in being successful than the strategy used. Supporting students’ identity and participation are more than teaching a range of strategies; it was about resolving the nexus of membership that includes educational institutional community membership. The learners, who had managed to continue engagement for a part of their programme, described their learner identity as it related to the institution and their own community. They had been able to negotiate strategies that worked for them to actively participate. This was optimised when students were able to make strong connections to their own purpose and understandings of the world.

The learning identities were described in terms of the participants’ reasoning around their learning engagement, the strategies utilised to manage challenges and the demonstrations of participants’ sense of agency as a learner. They were analysed and has been grouped to describe four descriptions of learner identity. This is represented in Figure 9. The analysis grouped the different learner identities enacted over time as:

- **Persistence**: engagement in learning experiences is characterised by trying to adapt to and respond to the discontinuous institutional, community and
individually based social processes and identities and trying to mirror the dominant identities sufficiently to complete a qualification or master a skill set,

- **Resistance**: engagement in learning experiences is characterised by resisting the transformative effects of learning and maintaining the integrity of the individual’s existing learner identity in relation to the discontinuous institutional, community and individually based social processes and identities,

- **Transition**: engagement in learning experiences is characterised by moving between and experimenting with different learner identities over a short term in a nonlinear order without settling in one identity.

- **Enacted**: engagement in learning experiences is characterised by negotiating the discontinuous institutional, community and individually based social processes and identities actively managing the intersections between the inherent social values and processes.

The framework described the elements of learning identities as the nexus of different learning identities as they relate to participants’ worlds: family, local, institution, workplace and global communities. One learner identity was not preferred over another, they are enacted in different contexts and for different purposes as the learner deems appropriate. That is, when the learner assesses the risks of engagement in learning situations and their membership in a range of communities for their identity as a learner and a member of their various communities.

Learners’ identities were mutable, shifting in no prescribed order where multiple identities may be functioning simultaneously, in relation to different contexts or situations. Engagement was not defined here as unilaterally positive as disengaging or renegotiating from a negative learning experience can be a better outcome than uncritical compliance. Each concept is analysed in terms of the types of responses evident in the data, the activities that people engaged in, their interpretations of those events, their related decisions and the roles enacted.

When faced with the choice of succeeding by conforming to the educational institution in opposition to their own community affiliations, some people chose to remain a member of their existing communities at the expense of engagement. For
them, the bonding ties were strong and reinforced, while the bridging ties weak. The resources they drew on, the language to describe their conflict, the networks to help inform that change or understand the processes with learning identities and their relationships with a range of institutional and community identities. They have persisted, resisted or managed the conflicts within learner identities until the stress of managing an aligned identity membership was higher than the participants’ need for the achieving the goal.

Learners had variously persisted, resisted or managed the conflicts within learner identities until the stress of managing their learner identity was more stress than it was worth to achieve the learners’ goal. Learners, who were empowered and had an enacted learner identity, were able to sustain their engagement in learning, through various challenges, by drawing on their learner identities to help them to address those challenges.

Learner identities are a work in progress; they change and develop through social interaction, relationships and experience. Learners need the opportunity to explore other identities and the associated knowledge systems, their content, contexts and insider perspectives. Learners with empowered identities may not necessarily confident of their position in relation to formal education but know they have the resources and sense of self efficacy as a learner to manage challenges as they occur. They can undertake the complex tasks involved in balancing their learner identity membership of their informing communities. Learners’ activities that supported learners helped to build their learner identity resources and sense of efficacy. This could be achieved through a range of strategies that focus around the co-production of knowledge where there are low penalties for non-conformity and co-production is valued.

Some of the strategies are summarised below. Learner identities’ development is supported by the making the underlying social structures and knowledge processes of formal educational institutions explicit and connecting people to those structures to those processes. Formal educational experiences provide opportunities to experiment with a range of identities and reflect on what this might mean for their existing identities. This involves the provision of opportunities to explore new contexts using their own content. Learning experiences incorporate activities that
value the co-production of knowledge that accesses the existing knowledge and links to other forms of knowledge through the co-creation of a new way of understanding a content or context.

Strategies that supported engagement helped learners to normalise enacted learner identities in difficult situations. An example is establishing a mentoring group for learners undertaking traineeships in mainstream organisations where they can talk about their experiences and reflect on why they happen and how to manage them with senior successful disenfranchised mentors, importantly learners have the opportunity to examine the reasons that institutional discrimination occurs and what that means for them and their identity. Educational institutions can utilise approaches to training that start by recognising the learners’ strengths and skills as the starting and reference point for learning. Learning experiences support people to practice and articulate an explanation of that risk-taking/engagement to a range of audience, including themselves. Allow the opportunity to explore knowledge systems as active participants who can interact.

This study’s analysis demonstrates that the ability to develop and maintain a strong learner identity repeatedly over a lifetime had a direct impact on learning engagement. Therefore, understanding the complex and multifaceted relationships that are engaged in developing and maintaining an enacted learner identity would benefit learners, teachers and learning partners.

The central elements related to a sense of efficacy as a learner, being able to articulate their own identity as a learner to a range of audiences and being able to align the different community, family, professional and global identities and the associated purposes that impact on that individual and their connection to the world. The identity of learning institutions may not align with those of disenfranchised learners. Investment in learner identity negotiation partnerships across the lifespan and lifeworlds, is about understanding the nature of the connections made and mediated through the intersection of identity and learning. Educational activities and institutional approaches, then, that incorporate the development of these skills and attitudes can support the ongoing engagement of a range of learners.
4.7 Synthesis of data analysis

The study explored the question “How do identities affect engagement with formal post compulsory education and training with particular reference to adults from social groups historically disenfranchised from educational institutions?” The research sought to understand for regional learners the issues of identity as they relate to learning engagement, the barriers and enablers related to identity that impact on the active engagement in formal education and training, the ways the adults in this study develop the skills, knowledge and identity resources to effectively engage with and affect change educational institutions and the constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training and the implications for post compulsory education. The data was analysed through four stages which are summarised here.

Phase One of the data analysis examined the interview transcripts to identify the broad themes in participants description of their learning journey: their experiences, perceptions, behaviours, contexts and decisions. This process identified the stages and events in their learning journeys that were common to participants. It also identified the outlying themes and informed the development of the overarching structure to describe learners’ engagement and associated decisions. The seven major themes and nine subthemes identified through Phase One’s thematic analysis are summarised as:

1. Individual and family contexts for learning
2. Community contexts for learning
3. Educational contexts experienced across the lifespan
4. Formal and informal educational experiences
5. Workplace contexts related to learning
6. Individuals’ insights into the nature of learning
7. Critical incidents that described experiences in learning and their impact on learners’ engagement and identities. These critical moments are described by participants in terms of:
   a. Attitudes by institutional authorities to the learners
Findings and Discussion

b. Attitudes to learning and educational institutions of the learner
c. Perception of self as a learner
d. Purposes for undertaking learning events
e. Key resources influencing decisions about learning engagement
f. Responses to positive and negative experiences of learning
g. Reasons for completing or not completing learning events
h. Preferred ways of learning and learning provision of education for the community
i. Personal reflections about learning and learner identities

This phase of the data analysis provided a structure for understanding similarities across the groups consistent with typologies related to social capital, social perspectives of learning and identity, sense of agency as a learner and the alignment of individual and institutional identities. It was evident that participants' decisions about, their ability to engage in, learning was impacted on by availability of physical resources and personal circumstances. However, the key common element of all the influences in people's decision making about engagement in learning was their identity as a learner. Participants' identity as a learner emerged as the key that made the difference in understanding themselves and acting in relation to learning experiences and environments. This was evident no matter the social, ethnic or economic backgrounds of the participants and was a predictor of the outcomes of their decisions about their educational engagement. Phase Two of the data analysis process drew on the themes in Phase One in order to structure and examine the participants' profiles. This process was used to examine the ways learner engagement and identities had changed over time and the major influences on that change.

The portraits were used to present the depth and complexity of the participants' reflections. It did so by connecting their experiences to its context within individual learning experiences and their relationships that impacted on learning engagement inside and outside the formal educational sphere. The portraits provided a framework to explore interactions and reflections on experiences. As an
understanding of learning engagement is developed through interviews and the later reflections by the learners with the researcher, participants’ deeper reflections over time were able to be incorporated. The inclusion of the researchers’ profile as a participant-researcher supported the development of an accurate representation of learners’ experiences and the process of thinking through a trusting relationship.

The profiles were organised using the following strands: attitudes to learning, attitudes to self as a learner, preferred ways of learning, relationship to milestones and community, stages and purpose of learning events. These were developed through the thematic analysis of the participants’ interviews, from the synthesis of the preceding critical categories and in discussion with participants when confirming the content of their profiles. Finally each profile concluded with the individual’s personal reflections as they related to their data and the particular ideas or emphases that did not fit into the main thematic areas.

The profiles were organized to represent the three sample groupings:

- **Group A** are non participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- **Group B** are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- **Group C** are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

The content and presentation of the profiles and the researchers interpretation of the each interview was confirmed with the relevant participant as accurate and approved to be shared.

Phase Three of the data analysis identified the twenty Portraits to establish the key themes across participants’ educational experiences. The six key thematic areas that informed learner identity and consequently learning engagement emerging from that cross-cutting analysis of the Portraits were:
Findings and Discussion

Layers of analysis
1. (Dis) Engagement in formal education and learning identities
2. Role of family and community learning identities
3. Strategies for managing learning identities and learning challenges
4. Identifying successes
5. Identity as a learner
6. Attitude to education and learning identities

The findings of Phase Three of the data analysis determined participants’ identity as learners was a deciding factor in participants’ decisions about learning engagement. Participants’ experiences of learning practices that either opposed or negated learners’ and communities’ identities impacted on the ways learners assessed of the risk related and their response, to formal learning engagement. Learners who did not identify themselves as a part of formal education; its practices, intentions and learning, rejected participation in learning experiences that negated their identity as an individual and in relation to other groups. By refusing to adapt and participate in a number of ways, learners were reinforcing or maintaining their own identities. Learners who had learned and developed strategies to negotiate the learner identities represented in formal education systems and their own learner identities were able to negotiate and sustain their learning engagement.

Alignment of identities refers to the ways participants reconciled the different types of membership as they relate to an individual. Some participants had successfully negotiated their involvement in formal educational opportunities. Participants described facing a crisis in their identity as a reason for participating in study; needing a change of lifestyle as the norm is perceived as destructive, needing a change of occupation as physical work relies on physical health while jeopardising it and needing to support extended family members. Only when the desire to participate in formal learning becomes, and can be articulated, as a need did participants develop ways to reconcile their identities as learners. This was true even when there is a desire to get a qualification to improve pay and to have skills recognised. When this is a desire, rather than a need, participants were reluctant to take the risks to challenge their identities and be involved in the associated learning.
opportunities. The participants who had managed this had developed a discourse about their learning practices that is gender, cultural and age-specific in relation to the community, they also articulated the ways they were applying the knowledge to the community context in approved roles and practices.

Participants’ learner identity was informed by relationships with a range of networks. The informing relationships included family, community, institutions, work based and large scale groups. These networks could be characterised as bonding, bridging and linking ties. Learning engagement of disenfranchised learners was found to be predominately determined by the ways individuals interpreted themselves and their own learner identity in relation to educational institutions and the ways educational institutions and systems were able to support or engage learners’ identities. The successful management of those learner identities impacted on the ways participants engaged in education in the long term and to meet their goals.

Phase Four of the data analysis, drew on the results of the previous phases, to develop a coherent framework for defining learner identity and characterising the fundamental elements of those identities. The groupings, which are not organised into a sequence or hierarchy and are mutable, were described in terms of:

- resistant learner identities, those avoiding externally imposed change to their learner identity at all costs,

- persistent learner identities, those who survive external challenges to learner identity by minimising impact on core identity,

- enacted learner identities, those able to maintain the integrity of an individual’s identity while exploring other learner identities and experiences, and

- transitional learner identities, those testing different identities in a nonlinear way.

Each of these groupings were analysed in terms of the features of these learner identities:

- the purpose for attempting learning engagement

- networks classified by their bonding, bridging and linking ties
Findings and Discussion

- identity resources drawn on the learning experience or decision making process
- processes utilised to make and act on decisions about learning engagement
- the alignment of the learners’ membership in different identities and the associated groups
- sense of agency as a learner, and
- learners' access to information and resources related to learning engagement.

Each of these learner identity profiles was examined to identify the behaviours, decisions and the associated characterisations associated with each of the profiles.

The combination of self talk, articulating learner identity to others and identity resources were key in understanding learner identity. Participants who had achieved their learning goals, identified outcomes from education and had a strong sense of self as learners, were able to articulate that identity to themselves and others and had a range of resources on which to draw to manage their continued engagement in learning, particularly when continued engagement was a challenge to that individual's sense of self and efficacy.

The key for learner engagement was the development of an empowered learner identity that worked across knowledge systems and enabled the students to interpret the formal learning system for their own and communities' purpose. This offers an insight into formal education structures and processes that function in a disenfranchised community and the impact on its members. The outcome of these findings has been the development and description of a framework that recognises the range of identities that learners draw on. This has been used to develop approaches that recognise the advantage of working with students and communities’ knowledge, for students’ and educational institutions’ benefits.

4.8 Research findings and answering the research questions

The research was conducted with disenfranchised learners in a regional area of northern Australia and explored the following question. How does identity affect engagement with formal post compulsory education and training with particular reference to adults from social groups disenfranchised from educational institutions?
Specifically the research sought to understand for regional learners:

- How do issues of identity relate to learning engagement?
- What are the barriers related to identity that hinder active engagement in formal education and training?
- How do some adults learn from their experiences to effect change in their lives and on the institutions they engage with?
- What are the ways the adults develop the skills, knowledge and identity resources to effectively engage with and affect change educational institutions?
- What are the constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training?
- What are the implications of answers to these sub questions for post compulsory learning providers?

In response to each of the research questions the study resulted in the following findings:

- How do issues of identity relate to learning engagement?

Issues of identity relate to learning engagement in a number of ways. In regional, rural and remote areas of the northern Australian, engagement in vocational education and training reflects students’ identities as learners in terms of their social, physical, historical and cultural location. The impact of any disparity between those students’ realities and the assumptions of school institutions, curriculum and educators may impact on the students’ engagement in learning. Importantly, people’s identity or knowledge and view of themselves, and the way they are identified by others, determines the way they interact with educational institutions.

The study found while there were a range of factors that impacted on regional disenfranchised learners’ engagement in formal education, the identity as a learner underpinned almost all of them and for the most part made the difference in the way learners made decisions about their engagement. Identity is being continuously renegotiated through participants’ interpretation of themselves in terms of learning events and contexts and their membership of relevant communities. This practice
involves negotiating diverse ways of engaging in practice that reflect the participants' individuality, accountability to significant communities, and performance elements that are recognised, or not, as valid by the relevant communities. Participants explored, with the researcher in a number of discussions, the connection between identity and community membership as an essential part of learners' behaviour and practice. The research found that regional adults' engagement in post compulsory learning is determined by their capacity and opportunity to undertake the work related to actively manage the membership of learner identity groups in relation to each learning context. This learner identity work is described in terms of a sense of agency within learning contexts.

Regionally based learners' engagement in formal education was differentiated by the learner identity resources and strategies that individuals drew on to manage the relationships between complex and oppositional learning cultures. Learner identities that supported engagement in formal education to achieve individual's goals were developed through opportunities for individuals to acknowledge, invest in and undertake the work of learner identity management. While different experiences, relationships or concerns impacted on participants' attitudes and strategies to manage learning engagement, their identity as a learner was the underlying factor that made the difference to their decisions about learning engagement. Learner identity management included drawing on and creating identity resources to manage the intersections of discordant, or opposing, learner identities.

- What are the barriers related to identity that hinder active engagement in formal education and training?

The barriers related to identity that hinder active engagement in formal education and training were identified. Successfully managing the disparities between learners' and formal education systems' and the interpretation of life and knowledge in regional Australia impacts on adults' engagement in lifelong learning. Concepts and theories of knowledge and learning are defined by people's cultural and social experiences, individual and social realities and identities. These understandings are influenced by the way people use and interact with the knowledge systems they encounter in their lives in learning situations. Where knowledge was taught in ways that aligned with participants' own identity, participants' learning practices were
affirmed and create a basis for learning. When the learning practices oppose or negate learners’, and community identities, learners are faced with the choice of being forced to change their identity or rejecting the proffered or acknowledged literate practice. As both learning and identity are socially located, the impact of schooling processes that legitimate certain literacies and social practices can affirm or challenge the identities of students and their communities.

- How do some adults learn from their experiences to effect change in their lives and on the institutions they engage with?

The alignment of learners’ identities with the social structures and processes of the local and global groups that inform those identities impacts on formal learning engagement. Learners’ engagement challenged them to assess the risk to the existing alignment of those identities. When those learner engagement events were closely aligned to and were reflected by their current learner identity, their engagement was supported. When the learning experience challenged that identity alignment and the learners were able to manage the realignment, they were able to manage their engagement in formal education. In these cases, their identity resources supported the realignment of their learner identity. When a challenge to the alignment of different learner identity and networks is balanced, participants felt safe and able to manage in that environment. When these identities and networks were not aligned, participants felt threatened or ostracised. When this occurred, participants drew, on their identity resources and made the decision that to maintain their learner identity withdrawing from educational engagement. In this way, learners’ understanding of themselves as a learner was mediated in relation to their learning identity informing experiences and networks.

- What are the ways the adults develop the skills, knowledge and identity resources to effectively engage with and affect change educational institutions?

Participants with enacted learner identities were able to manage the range of community-based identities with whom they were associated or had rejected membership. This alignment of membership was complex and difficult, it was managed by students so they could face challenges, complexity and take risks. The project of developing, maintaining and enhancing learner identity was an ongoing
Findings and Discussion

one redefined and challenged by each different experience. Some participants had successfully negotiated their involvement in formal educational opportunities. Participants described facing a crisis in their identity as a reason for participating in study. For these participants, needing a change of lifestyle that differs from the norm was perceived as destructive by many of their peers unless there was an acceptable reason and process for this change. One example was needing a change of occupation as physical workers became older as physical work relies on physical health while jeopardizing it and needing to support extended family members. Only when the desire to participate in formal learning becomes, and can be articulated, as a need did participants develop ways to reconcile their identities as learners. This was true even when there is a desire to get a qualification to improve pay and to have skills recognised. When this was a desire, rather than a need and the learners’ identities were challenged, participants’ identity resources had an important impact on their decisions about that challenge their identities, their informing networks and decision to be involved in the associated learning opportunities. The participants who had managed this had developed a discourse about their learning practices that is gender, cultural and age-specific in relation to the community, they also articulated the ways they were applying the knowledge to the community context in approved roles and practices.

- What are the constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training?

Learners’ identities are informed and impacted on by a range of identities and community memberships. The ways that participants respond to, manage, and resolve the inherent tensions in the nexus of membership of their own learner identity, had an impact on their engagement or disengagement in education. The connections between identity and community membership are an essential part of learners’ behaviour and practice. The tensions in and decisions made about learning, is based on learners’ identities and identification with social agendas or communities. These tensions impact on educational experiences, decisions about involvement in learning and participants’ self-definition as a learner.

Learner identities were informed by the social norms, processes and structures of their networks. Networks are also used to assist practitioners and varied stakeholder
groups to build relationships and be responsive to students and community needs. They recognise and are able to work with a range of knowledge and associated practices. Participants who had successfully undertaken educational activities had a combination of strong bonding, bridging and linking ties that helped them to reinterpret and connect to different groups and identities while also being well connected to their existing networks. Those who had chosen to withdraw from formal education and were experiencing success through disengagement had strong bonding ties and poor bridging and linking ties. This meant that when faced with opposition, their informing networks interpreted the opposition as a threat and supported the decision to withdraw or did not offer an alternative.

The combination of self talk, articulating learner identity to others and identity resources were key in understanding learner identity. Participants who had achieved their learning goals and identified outcomes from education had a strong sense of self as learners, were able to articulate that identity to themselves and others and had a range of resources on which to draw to manage their continued engagement in learning. Particularly when continued engagement was a challenge to that individual’s sense of self and efficacy. Strategies that drew on identity resources to manage learning identities included accessing mentors who support the negotiation of learner identities across different communities. Another learner identity resource strategy was the use of language in different contexts and networks, understanding how others use that language and their intentions, and being able to code switch across the different contexts.

The key for learner engagement was the development of an empowered learner identity that worked across knowledge systems and enabled the students to interpret the formal learning system for their own and their communities’ purpose. This offers an insight into formal education structures and processes that functions in a disenfranchised community and the impact on those community members. The implication of these findings is the development of a framework that recognises the range of identities and knowledge systems and can develop approaches that recognise the advantage of working with students and communities’ knowledge for students’ and educational institutions’ benefit. The study found that the ability to develop and maintain a strong learner identity repeatedly over a lifetime had a direct impact on learning engagement. Therefore, understanding the complex and
multifaceted relationships that are engaged in developing and maintaining an enacted learner identity would benefit learners, teachers and learning partners.

Regional adults who developed the skills, knowledge and identity resources were able to effectively engage with and affect change in their experience in educational institutions. Participants who were able to participate in post compulsory education throughout their lifetime had very strong support from a family member(s), mentor or industry mentor who assisted in resolving the inconsistent identities that were operating. These were achieved through, for example, having high levels of recognition as a member of a long standing and valued member of the community. Connections were also made by community members participating in activities that demonstrated the ways the learning can be incorporated in order to maintain the authority local community or when a family member articulated the need to be prepared for membership of the local and formal institutions.

Learners, who had an enacted learner identity, were able to sustain their engagement in learning through various challenges, by drawing on their learner identities to help them to address those challenges. For many learners the successful resolution of the contradictions between the ways local, peer, workplace and educational institutional communities informed their identities which was related strongly to a belief that they should have a role in education system. This did not mean being compliant with external communities expectations. Participants with an enacted learner identity described their role as to master, maintain their own integrity as a learner and community member and, for most, challenge the existing paradigm.

The key factors of learning engagement that impact on the different learner identities are understood in terms of the multiple identities individuals draw on and the efficacy of those identities in negotiating new learning experiences. These identities are situated and negotiated in each context, time and place. Just as learning is situated (Scott 2001) and identities are informed by individuals’ contexts and practices (Gee 1999) so learner identities are situated in their informing local, regional and global communities’ lifeworlds. Developing innovative and successful approaches to engage disenfranchised regional learners in formal education relies on understanding the ways people’s identities are entrenched in and in turn, the impact
Findings and Discussion

of the relationships between individuals’ worlds and that of the formal education system.

The constructs of learner identity that support active involvement in formal education and training are described through the learner identity theoretical framework. Learner identities can be defined, typified and measured in terms of adults’ connection to the individual’s socially determined purpose for learning, the networks and other identity resources that are drawn upon and created through learning engagement, the processes utilised to manage and describe conflict as well the sense of agency experienced by individuals and communities. The four broad groupings of learner identity are described as resistant (reactive), persistent, transitional and enacted. These learner identities are mutable and non linear as they relate to a complex set of social relationships. An understanding of each profile can inform educational policy and practice.

The value of the enacted learner identity theoretical model is in identifying the informing frameworks of learners’ identities and the keys to transition people between learner identities. The combination of self talk, being able to articulate one’s identity to others and draw on a range of identity resources were central in understanding learner identity. In the study, participants who had achieved their learning goals, were able to identify outcomes from education had a strong sense of self as learners. They were able to articulate that identity to themselves and others, and had a range of resources on which to draw to manage their continued engagement in learning. These were evident when continued engagement was a challenge to that individual’s sense of self and efficacy. Disengaged learners demonstrated the features of resistant and persistent learner identities who drew on resources that included local experts and defined themselves in terms of their community memberships. This was found to be context driven.

- What are the implications of answers to these sub questions for post compulsory learning providers?

The implications for post compulsory learning providers include pedagogy, support services and institutional structures. Implementation of effective educational pedagogy and support services recognises the role of learner identity in learners’ decisions about their engagement. It was found that learning, as a social
Findings and Discussion

experience, is linked to many aspects of learners' lives. By engaging students in learning and assessment experiences that recognise and build links between their existing worlds and those of others, educational institutions can offer an engaged learning experience that leads to positive learning and professional outcomes for students. Learners have the opportunity to be involved in deep learning that builds knowledge and skills in the area of learning and how to engage in learning across the lifespan. The challenges for learners and lecturers alike, provide an opportunity to be partners in learning with, about and through each other and experiencing the joy of discovering the new or unknown.

These approaches incorporate this learner identity work into learning structures and processes. They recognise that learners' bring their own strengths and knowledge to learning and make active decisions based on their own community memberships and identity resources. More than recognising the factors of learning identities, pedagogical and educational structures can work out how to make meaningful connections and enact their learner identity. Learner identity ‘work’ for learners and institutions alike is conflicted, discontinuous, and can operate without the overt knowledge of the participants. Learning identities operate across the lifespan and lifeworlds, formal and informal learning systems. The pedagogy utilises investment in negotiating partnerships that recognise that learner identities is about understanding the nature of the connections made and mediated through the intersection of identity and learning. These partnerships understand that within them people manage conflict, difference and complexity to achieve their own learner identity goals and that can be described in terms of learner identity: purpose, networks, identity resources, and agency.

Educational systems need to recognise and integrate the plurality of the society in which it operates. They actively make space for a multiplicity of views and support learners to experiment and link across different identities while celebrating that difference. Educational institutions that choose to engage disenfranchised regional learners incorporate local communities as part of the learning equation and make spaces for different perspectives. Pedagogy and support structures are based on partnerships that recognise learners’ identities and those of institutions and its members and explicitly support learners to manage the conflicts in their learner identity. These approaches help learners practice enacted learner identities.
It is found that the engagement of disenfranchised learners in regional areas of the northern Australia is based on their learner identity. Engaging in formal education is not based on an individual's lack of engagement; rather their engagement is linked to the degree which their learner identity aligns with that of the educational systems. Learning engagement decisions are made based on the alignment of individual and institutional learner identities and operate despite the best intention of educational systems.

In Chapter Five which follows, the research findings, analysis and the conclusions of the study are summarized. In addition, the implications that emerge for education policy, practice and results are outlined.
Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Implications
Summary, Conclusions and Implications

5 Summary, Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Introduction
This research explored the ways that the learners' identities of participating disenfranchised regional learners were constructed in opposition to those of educational institutions. An analysis of these narratives found that some of the ways educational institutions have operated have acted to threaten the identities of disenfranchised regional learners. That stress resulted in learners making decisions about their engagement in learning based on their learner identity, their identity resources and the networks that informed their identity as a member of different communities. Learner's identities were connected to participants' communities: their school, peer, familial, local and global networks. These participants learn from their experiences and social networks, including ways to effect change in their lives and on their relationships with the educational institutions with which they engage.

Decisions to engage or disengage in formal education were based on participants' assessment of the risks involved in participating in formal learning. Many of the risks identified by learners were underpinned by aspects of their learner identity. Learner identity was developed through a learners' experience, their relationship to the norms and attitudes of their social networks and learners' interpretations of the outcomes of those experiences. Individuals' strategies and resources to manage the intersection of these identities were also analysed in order to develop a learner identity framework. The enacted learner identity framework (figure 9) describes the different learner identities that individuals accessed throughout their lives. This framework provides a basis for understanding the impact of learners' networks, processes and identity resources on learners' assessment about the risks involved. Through learners' interviews, the elements of learner identity were detailed. Each chapter is summarised to identify the central arguments and points. This includes a description of the enacted learner identity framework. The four conclusions of the research related to learner engagement and learner identity are discussed. The development of the learner identity framework has implications for educational practice, systems, institutions and research. These are also outlined in the following chapter.
5.2 Summary

In Chapter One, it was established that participation in education and training is considered vital for a flexible and responsive workforce (OECD, 2001) in a Western society characterised by an emphasis on a learning society, a knowledge economy and lifelong learning (Kearns, 1999; OECD, 2000). Further, this focus on the development of a learning society is framed by a recognition of the strong connection between global connectedness and the well-being of local and regional communities (Falk, 2001; Hugonnier, 1999). The OECD’s examination of 21 OECD countries found a correlation between investment in human capital, and national productivity by improving engagement in formal education and (Bassanini et al., 2001). The Australian Federal Government and Council of Australian Governments have identified the need to improve productivity through increasing educational participation and outcomes in the tertiary sector (Gillard, 2008). The Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP has announced that in response to the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, the Australian Federal Government aims ‘that by 2025, 40 per cent of all 25-34 year olds will have a qualification at bachelor level or above’ and that ‘by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be of people from low socio-economic backgrounds’ (DEEWR, 2009).

Improving the enrolments and qualification levels of adults involves understanding the underlying drivers of adults’ decision making regarding engagement in post compulsory education. Achieving an increase in the number of Australians with higher qualifications involves understanding the issues for disenfranchised groups in Australian society who have the potential to significantly increase their participation in formal education in order to utilise the pathways from vocational to undergraduate qualifications. Such groups include regional and Indigenous learners who have disengaged from formal education and are underrepresented in participation rates at higher level qualifications (Certificate IV and above).

Chapter Two examined the literature in relation to understanding the nature of learning. The review recognises that learning is a social process which is central in understanding the connections between identity, learning and engagement. The literature related to the socially mediated nature of society, knowledge and resources and their relationship to learning theory discussed. Learning is the ‘active process
by which we engage with our changing environment and try to take control of our lives’ (Field, 2005 p.3). Gee (2003 p.26) notes that learning is involved with understanding how to ‘situate (build) meanings for that domain in the sorts of situations the domain involves’. Wenger (1998) describes learning as social and experienced as part of social contexts where people utilise their relationships to engage in meaningful experiences where they negotiate their shared understandings of the world.

Learning transcends classrooms and workplaces, it is a ‘continuous, cultural process – not simply a series of events… organizational learning is as much about what happens outside formal learning programs as it is about the programs themselves’ (Rosenburg, 2001). The terms formal, informal, non-formal and incidental learning describe learning that relates to different levels of formal recognition through qualification. Formal learning relates to that which is recognised and assessed through a formal institution by a qualification while non-formal learning relates to education that occurs through organisations. Incidental learning occurs when people are not consciously engaging in learning, although this may be intentional and informal learning is that learning which is not organised formally and occurs through daily life and work. (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Jeffs and Smith, 1990; Colletta, 1996; Hamadache, 1993; Field, 2005). As Tough (1979) found, the difference between formal and informal learning is the intent of the learner and the involvement in learning in a programmed or experiential way.

Gee (2004) asserts that people learn better through embodied processes, where content is related to activities, discussion and sharing ideas. Embodied knowledge is embedded in educational systems’ element and interactions (Sharples et al, 2007). Through these interactions and experiences related to specific contexts, people learn and become partners in creating ways of understanding those elements in that context. The interactions related to learning create connections that are mediated through communities of common interest, that may be connected through learning processes across regional, social and workplace boundaries, just to name a few. Gee (2003) describes the communities of learners as affinity groups that form initially around a common purpose, and secondly about the community members’ sociocultural connections. This knowledge is understood as it relates to a specific context. Learners’ knowledge base is learnt and enacted in a holistic sense across
their lives, not used as separate and specific discipline areas. Learners also have intensive and deep knowledge about the related matters of importance to the community.

The complex nature of learning as a social and mediated practice was described previously. This study has shown this practice relates to the interplay of such factors participants' learner identities, the institutional or context specific nature of learning. This knowledge is mediated through socially constructed power relationships. The inherent knowledge and power relationships are often hidden or accepted across a number of levels of educational policy, pedagogy and practices. This is evident in the construction and implementation of the curriculum, and the knowledge structures it values. The way community operates prioritises certain relationships and institutional behaviours; those that align with and understand the underlying social structures. These priorities respond to different communities' perception of what is important. Incorporation of this knowledge into educational pedagogy demands a level of understanding in order to be able to recognise, and make connections, between these realities. This does not necessarily involve overly complex processes but does imply practitioners need to understand the underpinning theory before using and adapting the processes.

Field (2005 p.99) grouped people’s attitudes to lifelong learning engagement (or disengagement) into three broad clusters:

- those who are skeptical about education's potential for achieving social change,
- those who participate, then reject some kinds of participation to avoid indecision,
- those who actively engage in lifelong learning as part of personal development and community participation.

What is of interest, then, is to understand how people make the decision to reflect these different types of engagement in formal learning. Understanding the contexts in which learners operate, the role and implications of learning practices, means understanding the role of identity in learning. Falk et al. (2003) have found that a link exists between education and identity, that learners are affected by the ways they
understand themselves and understand their identity as a learner in relation to both formal and informal education. They describe the dimensions of identity as the processes applied to experience (the interactive elements of forming, reforming and co-constructions that happen through learning), the categories of experience for identity in learning (the identities that are created through the individual, community and place) and the identity resources produced from the processing experience (the behaviours, beliefs, feelings and knowledge that are accessed through interactions).

A social theory of learning identity was developed by reference to the social theory of learning and identity. Tajfel et al. (1979) pose a theory of social identity through an understanding of group membership and discrimination. They discuss social identity in terms of:

- categorisation, the socially defined groups that are used to label groups (such as gender, ethnicity, activity, religion),
- identification where individuals assign membership of a group, and
- comparison with other groups to affirm existing membership and psychological distinctiveness from, and in terms of, other groups.

Crenshaw (2003), explores identities as socially constructed, with particular reference to socially constructed notions of gender and race and their impact on identities, Crenshaw has contributed to an examination of social processes and their impacts through an analysis of identity and gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Tajfel (1974) describes identity in terms of social and psychological understandings of group behaviour and the impact of group membership on interactions between individuals. Tajfel asserts that behaviour is informed by personal identity, an individual’s characteristic and relationships, social identity, and membership of a group. Based on the social context, an individual makes decisions about which of this repertoire of identities to draw on and in which combination. These identities range from the interpersonal to the intergroup.

For Gee (2001 p.100) identity is defined in four ways: (a) in terms of the genetic make up of individual, (b) the institutional identity defined in terms of an individual's relationship to authority, (c) the discursive identity which functions in relation to being recognised by discourse or language use and (d) affinity-identity or identifying as a
part of group with similar interests or experiences and certain shared practices. There are connections and tensions between these types of identity as we define ourselves through belonging to a range of local Discourses that are also located in our global understandings of the world. Côté et al. (2002) explore the multidimensionality of identity, where individuals synthesise their psychological, personal, and social identities in order to make sense of their own identity internally and externally, that is, to the broader society. The resolution of these identities is then connected to success in interacting with social structures and processes.

Chapter Three outlined the research methodology which utilised a critical approach to social research that draws on a series of complementary theoretical social research frameworks and techniques. As noted earlier, critical ethnography (Thomas 1993) uses knowledge to speak to an audience on behalf of the subjects as a means of empowering them rather than speaking for the subjects. To ensure this research study spoke on behalf of participants accurately, the data collection techniques involved interviewing socially diverse and disenfranchised participants. The structure of the interviews was flexible and encouraged and valued diversity and views that challenged the researchers’ preconceptions, social institutions and theories. That is, in accordance with the tenets of the critical narrative inquiry approach (Cortazzi 1993), the methodology utilised techniques designed to best capture the richness and depth of disenfranchised learners’ relevant experiences. The research approach was therefore designed to examine and understand frameworks that focus on the situated, constructed and negotiated nature of meaning in the social order.

The sample group of 20 people was identified from three representative groups from a northern Australian regional area. The participants have varying degrees of formal educational engagement across their lives and engagement in post compulsory education or training. The groups were identified according to the following criteria where learning goals may include qualifications, skills sets, recognition of knowledge, personal or professional development and defined as follows:

- Group A are non participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.
Summary, Conclusions and Implications

- Group B are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as not achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

- Group C are participators in post compulsory education and describe themselves as achieving their learning goals through engagement in formal education.

The in-depth interviews were used to examine the complexities of participants’ engagement in social constructions of knowledge, learning and identity and associated processes. The techniques allowed for the inclusion of a critical perspective that could make visible the taken-for-granted and invisible but influential, social processes and institutions. The research design assumed that the examination of cultural and social perspectives requires in-depth analysis of behaviour, perceptions and experiences.

The research process followed these interrelated stages, each of which provided opportunities for the researcher and participant to reflect on each stage while refining and undertaking the next.

![Research design framework](image)

**Figure 1 Research design framework**

*Chapter Four* summarised the data and the results of four phases of data analysis in accordance with the four phases of analysis: thematic analysis of the interviews, narrative portraits of the participants, analysis of the portraits and finally the development of the theoretical matrix of enacted learner identity theoretical
In this stage, Stage Two, the interview transcripts were analysed in four phases. In Phase One, the major themes and subthemes of the interviews' transcripts were identified to provide an overarching structure to consider the key factors and incidents to describe learners’ engagement across the lifespan. Phase Two used this structure to organise and report the detail of the participants’ lifelong learning engagement profiles. Phase Three, the cross-cutting analysis of the portraits, identified the factors that impacted on engagement in formal learning across the lifespan. The interaction between learning engagement, identity within a socially constructed view of learning is powerful in understanding learners’ experiences and actions in relation to formal education systems.

The learners’ portraits are not organised by an external assessment of their status, other than ensuring they were representative of the regional community involved and the three broad categories of learner engagement. It was their own assessment of success and failure in life, engagement in valued or undervalued roles and level of educational engagement that determined the way their narrative was represented and analysed. One of the most interesting findings is that the key issues about the role of identity was consistent for all participants, no matter their background or achievements. The key difference lay in the resources and identities on which they drew to manage their learner identities, and the situations that supported or challenged their learner identity. As the study developed, it was clear that that key issue was not demographics but rather the categories of identity that operated in their learning experiences.

The results of the analysis suggested the need to develop a framework in order to consistently describe learner identity and its key elements to communicate the findings with educators and those in the education system. In Phase Four, the enacted learner identity framework was developed to better understand the types and elements of learner identities. This can be used to support educational institutions actively engage disenfranchised learners through educational provision that better aligns with students’ needs and identities.

Participants’ learner identities were different at different times and in different contexts. The identities changed, in no prescribed order, between one to four different types of learner identity. The resistant learner identities are characterised as
avoiding externally imposed change to their learner identity at all costs. Participants with persistent learner identities survive external challenges to learner identity by minimising impact on core identity. Transitional learner identities are demonstrated by people experimenting and moving between learner identities. Enacted learner identities are described as able to maintain the integrity of an individual’s identity while exploring other learner identities and experiences. Learners’ identities were mutable, shifting in no prescribed order where multiple identities may be functioning simultaneously, in relation to different contexts or situations.

Therefore, understanding the complex and multifaceted relationships that are engaged in developing and maintaining an enacted learner identity would benefit learners, teachers and learning partners. The central elements of the learner identity related to having a sense of efficacy as a learner, being able to articulate their own identity as a learner to a range of audiences, being able to align different community, family, professional and global identities and purpose for study in ways that impact positively on that individual and their connection to the world. The identity of learning institutions may not align with those of disenfranchised learners. Understanding of and investment in the negotiation of learner identity occurs across the lifespan and in reference to learners' worlds. This negotiation is concerned with understanding the nature of the connections made and mediated through the intersection of identity and learning. Educational activities and institutional approaches then, that incorporate the development of these skills and attitudes can support the ongoing engagement of a range of learners.

Disenfranchisement was related to the lack of connection between learners’ contexts, purpose and learning experiences. For disenfranchised learners, learning experiences created a struggle over identity where learners had learn to negotiate or suppress their own identities. Learners who had developed approaches to learning that ranged from survive or withdraw from their learning experiences. People with empowered identities see themselves as learners in ways that do not denigrate their own abilities, identities and connections to work, local and global communities. It was found that learners had variously persisted, resisted or managed the conflicts within learner identities until the stress of managing their learner identity was more stress than it was worth to achieve the learners’ original goal. The value of the
enacted learner identity theoretical model is identifying the informing frameworks of learners’ identities and the transitions between those learner identities.

Learning opportunities that related to students’ social practices and group memberships, worked from learners’ points of strength and knowledge. These were starting points for mentors and learners to build bridges between students, educators and communities’ understanding of each other’s knowledge. Developing identity-affirming learning experiences supported regional students and communities’ identities. When the educational system operated from a cultural deficit view, the learners’ knowledge is not being recognised. The deficit view of students’ knowledge actively disempowered teachers and students, reducing their opportunities for learning. If a student does not identify themselves as a part of the classroom: its practices, knowledge sets and identities it is understandable they would reject participation in a learning experience that negates their identity as an individual and in relation to other groups.

Understanding the role of identity is a key to developing a community and student centred approach to learning. By offering opportunities for learners’ identities to be validated and for learners to analyse a range of knowledge in terms of their identities, the educational system develops its understanding of students’ knowledge and their social context. Students are then offered opportunities to maintain their integrity while negotiating other forms of knowledge, literacy and identity on their terms. Community experts and members, and their knowledge can have a role in the educational system. A community centred approach to learning, works to understand the impact of identity on participation and develop pedagogies in partnership with community members, and to accurately represent and share their own worlds while also exploring others in safe environments. A range of people, knowledge and contexts that are meaningful for empowering learners identity can be shared and explored to support individual’s learning.

All of these identities incorporate a sense of agency that is enacted differently depending on the context and the social memberships of the people involved. This may be evident in a rejection of an institutional identity or reinforcement of the nexus of local, workplace or other community memberships or asserting one’s place within an educational institution despite negative experiences. Recognition of the role of
agency in learning engagement rejects deficit views of people’s disengagement, explanations such as a lack of commitment or not understanding of the importance of education. Rather than describing people as passive agents in learning experiences; people are viewed as active agents. People’s behaviours can be understood as actively accepting or rejecting externally imposed frameworks, experiences or identities. Learners, are more than passive consumers of knowledge and educational systems, they are producers and teachers of knowledge and ideas as they relate to specific contexts (Gee, 2003). Learners are active interpreters of all learning its use and potential. These interpretations relate to a sound understanding of the relevant context and relationship to people, places and knowledge systems.

The combination of self talk, being able to articulate one’s identity to others and being able to draw on a range of identity resources were central in understanding learner identity. In the study, participants who had achieved their learning goals, were able to identify outcomes from education and had a strong sense of self as learners. They were able to articulate that identity to themselves and others. These were evident when continued engagement was a challenge to that individual's sense of self and efficacy. Disengaged learners demonstrating resistant and persistent learner identities drew on identity resources that included; their peers, local experts and their definition of themselves in terms of different community memberships. These resources and the individual or group’s definition of a learner, was found to be context driven. The place and social connections within which people operated and made decisions about their priorities and behaviour informed their decisions about learning engagement. It was found that participants demonstrated enacted learner identities in contexts where their learner identity was aligned with their other identities. When there was a lack of connection, learners drew on a range of learner identities. Each learner identity tended to support different decisions in the face of difficulty when engaging with the educational situation. These ranged from persistence, resistance, experimentation to active engagement.

The strength of the learner identity framework is in being able to understand individual's behaviour and decisions. The framework assists in establishing the related identity resources that individuals draw on and why this may occur, even when the outcome is withdrawal from education. The framework helps to understand
the learner identity that individuals articulate in different ways. Being able to articulate one's learner identity relates to being a part of multiple groups while retaining personal integrity. That is, having a vision of oneself in relation to different groups' mores and priorities is essential to develop an enacted learner identity and maintain learner engagement. Being able to describe oneself as a learner, and achieving one's goals in a range of formal education contexts means being resilient; that is, able to cope with adversity. The framework described the elements of learning identities as the nexus of different learning identities as they relate to people's worlds: family, local, institution, workplace and global communities.

Participants discussed the adjustments and changes that occurred in relation to their own learner identity through a range of formal and informal educational experiences. This was informed by a complex range of factors and was discussed by all participants in different ways. Participants shared the key impact factors on their learner identity over their lives, the ways this had functioned, supported and/or challenged them. This was not seen generally as immutable, it had been moulded by experiences and that could change again. Some participants described the achievement of a strong and empowered learner identity where the participant felt engaged in their learning on terms that they recognised as valid and supported through extended networks. The achievement of an empowered learner identity took away many of the perceived restrictions about engaging disenfranchised learners in formal education.

The learner identities that are recognised and accounted for in the education process are those accepted by those who control and those who perceive them externally. The practices that reinforce these identities are often invisible and unchallenged thereby continuing the relationships involved. Of course the realities of understanding and incorporating different types of knowledge and priorities in formal education systems are complex and not only change the educational institution's perception of the student but also of the course delivery. Learner identities are a work in progress; they change and develop through social interaction, relationships and experience. By developing a sense of self as a competent learner; as one who has agency and has an impact on the learning context and content, learners have the chance to recognise that their identity is at the centre of their learning experience.
and are then able to negotiate their learning outcomes in a range of learning institutions.

### 5.3 Conclusions of the study

This study found many disenfranchised regional learners' identities are constructed in opposition to those of educational institutions because educational institutions have presented themselves in ways that act to threaten the identities of many regional learners. The ability of educators to manage the impact of any disparity between those students' realities and assumptions of educational institutions and the institution’s curriculum influences students’ potential engagement in learning. Importantly, disenfranchised learners’ identity, their view of themselves as learners, and the way they are identified by others, determines the ways they interact with educational institutions. The implications of these findings are discussed and a series of recommendations are made for pedagogy, policy and practice that will support regional learners and providers.

The data suggests that the learner identities of disenfranchised regional learners impacted on their ongoing engagement in formal education, and had greater impact than any long term health or economic advantages. These disenfranchised learners’ decisions were based on their learner identities which are described in terms of transition, resistance, persistence and enacted learner identities. The decisions of disenfranchised regional learners to reject formal education are linked to the gap between their identification as a member of a complex web of valued global and local communities. The connections between different identities and their informing knowledge systems and communities are often unseen, complex and unrecognised. The implications for educational institutions to ensure they represent and include learners’ identities as well as the opportunity to connect to other identities and knowledge. This learner identity ‘work’ for learners and institutions alike is conflicted, discontinuous, and can operate without the overt knowledge of the participants. Investment in learner identity negotiation partnerships across the lifespan and lifeworlds is about understanding the nature of the connections made and mediated through the intersection of identity and learning. Social partnerships in learning (as described by Wallace 2009) may provide a way for understanding the ways people
and institutions manage conflict, difference and complexity to achieve their own goals. These partnerships are concerned with understanding the way different people, systems and institutions interact and build meaningful and productive connections across language, culture, knowledge systems, disciplines and levels in society,

The conclusions now follow.

5.3.1 Conclusion 1.

It is first concluded that disenfranchised adults from regional northern Australia’s engagement with post compulsory learning is determined by an individual’s learner identity. That is, engagement in learning is informed by the intersections between an individual’s social and institutional, local and global identities and the identities that are reproduced or denied in educational institutions. There are exceptions when there are physical factors that make it impossible for a learner to resolve their engagement. Learners’ identities are linked to the social contexts that inform them. These identities work across the diverse knowledge systems that operate within established power structures and clarify the relationships that inform regional learners’ decisions about participation in formal learning. Individual’s learner identity is built through daily interactions. People learn in many different ways and need to understand their learning processes and be encouraged to experiment with others.

5.3.2 Conclusion 2.

It is secondly concluded that adults’ engagement in post compulsory learning is determined by their capacity and opportunity to undertake the identity work related to actively managing/balancing learner identity in relation to each learning context. There are multiple routes to learning: learners make choices based on their experiences: their strengths, preferred ways of learning and exploring other ways of learning. For the most part, disenfranchised regional adults draw on their learner identity and associated identity resources to assess the risk of formal educational engagement to their identity and actively make decisions to engage or disengage. The risk to the individual's learner identity and learners’ ability to manage that risk determine their decisions about formal educational engagement. That is, the opportunities for individuals to acknowledge, invest in and undertake the work of learner identity management is based on drawing on and creating identity resources
in order to manage the intersections of their learner identities and community memberships. Achieving success through formal learning engagement is about having the strategies to manage learner identity work and being able to enact them. Learner identity work can be learnt and learning identity can be scaffolded through social processes within formal educational institutions and learners communities. The intersection of individual’s purpose and alignment can be described as their sense of agency.

5.3.3 Conclusion 3.
It is then concluded that an enacted learner identity can be defined and described in terms of the learner identity profile which can inform educational policy and practice. Learner identity can be profiled as resistant, persistent, transitional or enacted. These learner profiles are evident through:

- an individual’s sense of agency as it relates to their community memberships,
- their networks,
- the identity resources on which they draw and create through learner engagement,
- the ways learners articulate their learning engagement to themselves and different audiences,
- the learners’ purpose for engagement and
- the processes they utilise in connection with the learning experiences.

This process can be described as the zone of proximal identity, there is a point where engaging in an enacted learner identity is unattainable and a point where it is attainable with support. This is developed from Vgotsky’s work on the ‘zone of proximal development’, which is the zone that promotes the maximum potential cognitive growth. Learners are supported through scaffolded support to achieve increasing levels of competence through assistance from those with advanced and relevant expertise. When a learner achieves that enacted identity they are able to continue the process of identifying a new goal and working through the stages of their zones of proximal identity.
5.3.4 Conclusion 4.

It is finally concluded that ways that disenfranchised regional learners in northern Australia manage conflict, difference and complexity impacts on their ability to achieve their own learner identity goals through identity work. Being able to identify identity resources is an important part of developing an individual's learner identity. However, decisions about learner engagement are impacted on by the ability to enact those resources as they relate to the individual's learner identity. This learner identity work for learners and institutions is obscure, conflicted, discontinuous, and can operate without the overt knowledge of the participants. Investment in learner identity negotiation and partnerships across the lifespan and lifeworlds is about understanding the nature of the connections made and mediated through the intersection of identity and learning.

5.4 Implications

The implications of the research findings are listed below as they relate to adult education provisions, systems and institutions, pedagogy, support for pedagogy and research.

5.4.1 Implications for provision of adult education pedagogy

Learners are diverse, with a range of experiences, informing networks and preferred ways of learning, the implications of this study for adult education pedagogy relates to making space to recognise and incorporate learners’ identities, worldviews and experiences. People are supported to develop enacted learner identities and adjust their learning experience as it suits them. Pedagogy is then based on partnership with different identities, knowledge systems, communities and contexts. An approach that incorporates the enacted learner identity framework supports learners and teachers to explore the ways identity has informed individuals’ participation in learning experiences and illuminates the underlying role of identity in learning contexts. Learners’ identities are linked to the social contexts that inform them. These identities work across the diverse knowledge systems that operate within established power structures and clarify the relationships that inform regional learners’ decisions about participation in formal learning.

Developing innovative and successful approaches to education with disenfranchised individuals necessitates the recognition of diverse knowledge systems and identities
as they relate to the worlds of work, community engagement and learning. This can occur through a partnership approach that recognises, and is informed by the learning contexts that inform an individual’s participation in formal learning and the connections to other knowledge and skills sets. In order to look closely at the reasons for this disenfranchisement and to look at possible strategies to overcome it, it is necessary to develop learning profiles of adults with particular emphasis on understanding the collective work of realising shared goal(s) (Seddon and Billett 2004). Educational systems that work in partnerships with different knowledge systems and identities have the potential to re-negotiate adult education so that it is able to align with workforce and regional community and individuals’ outcomes.

What could this mean for learners, particularly disenfranchised learners? If learning concepts and pedagogies are linked to the learners’ perceptual frameworks, then there is a space in which to explore ideas and their connections to learners’ identities. The learners’ previous experience is not only valued but it informs the learning process. The implications for educators is that it may be more appropriate to start by making space for the learners’ experience and knowledge and make links to learning about a range of other experiences before considering the theoretical frameworks that help in articulating and discussing this experience. After recognising the diverse knowledge system that exists, learning approaches are designed to connect to those different worlds in meaningful ways.

Adult education pedagogy then can support disenfranchised learners by recognising a range of learner identities as valid. Individuals may adopt, explore and reject these at any time and repeatedly. This is part of the learning process which, in formal educational situations, may have to change direction, stop for a time or provide a range of options which are different and go beyond just the approach to the topic or context. These changes may mean making space for learners’ experiences and worldviews in the curriculum and recognise how these relate to regional communities’ priorities. Learners’ inter-agency, institutional, personal and community relationships are overtly recognised and discussed as part of growing understanding about the world. These are complex and difficult dimensions to build into formal learning yet provide a rich source of understanding for each learner’s context, purpose, networks and possible futures.
By developing a sense of self as a competent learner, one who has a sense of agency as a learner and has an impact on the learning context and content, learners have the chance to recognise that their identity is at the centre of their learning experiences and are then able to negotiate their learning outcomes in a range of learning situations. This approach starts with learner identities and implies formal customisation of the curriculum, in order to include and represent the diversity and continual negotiations of valued knowledge, learner identities and worldviews.

Learners need the opportunity to explore other identities and the associated knowledge systems, their content, contexts and insider perspectives. Learners operating with enacted identities in that context may not necessarily be confident of their position in relation to formal education but know they have the resources and sense of self efficacy as a learner to manage challenges as they occur. They can undertake the complex tasks involved in balancing their learner identity membership with that of their informing communities. Learners’ activities that supported learners helped to build their learner identity resources and sense of efficacy. This could be achieved through a range of strategies that focus around the co-production of knowledge where there are low penalties for non-conformity and co-production is valued. These might include:

- Making the underlying social structures and knowledge processes of formal educational institutions explicit and connecting people to those structures and processes. For example, showing that people are involved in knowledge work in their communities as well as those in educational institutions, and showing how each has its own language, codes and ways of protecting their power base and intellectual property;

- Providing opportunities to experiment with a range of identities and to reflect on what this might mean for their existing identities. This involves the provision of opportunities to explore new contexts using their own content. An example would be to produce books in learners’ own language, which use imagery and concepts drawn from their own community. New identities could be tested by publishing and presenting the talking books to an audience that is respected primarily by the learners;
Co-producing knowledge that accesses existing knowledge and links this to other forms of knowledge through the co-creation of a new way of understanding a content or context. An example is the partnership of traditional owners of country and the park ranger for that region negotiating appropriate and accurate ways of classifying the flora and fauna of a region that are informative and meet both of their expectations;

Normalise enacted learner identities in difficult situations. This could be achieved by analysing a position within a community that appears unattainable, for example becoming a police officer in a community of people who have historically had poor relationships with the police. Another example is establishing a mentoring group for learners undertaking traineeships in mainstream organisations where they can talk about their experiences and reflect on why they happen and how to manage them with senior successful mentors from their own community. It is important that learners have the opportunity to examine the reasons that institutional discrimination occurs and what that means for them and their identity;

Approaches to training that start by recognising the learners’ strengths and skills as the starting and valid reference point for learning;

Rejection of deficit approaches to learning and focusing on helping learners make connections between what they know, have experience in, the contexts in which it was undertaken and their purpose for learning;

Learning experiences that support people to practice and articulate an explanation of risk-taking/engagement to a range of audiences, including themselves. The audiences include community members, educational institutions and workplaces. This would allow the opportunity to explore knowledge systems as active participants who can legitimately interact;

Identity work recognising resistant and persistent identities and realising to different identities through articulation strength, a sense of emerging technology into different worlds.

Within this model, teachers contribute as active participants in learning how to guide and support learners to make connections, and to practice articulating their own
ideas in relation to others. Teachers, then, facilitate and support disenfranchised learners to develop an enacted identity as a learner. Teachers are able to recognise that while they are specialist discipline educators, they are not necessarily expert in learners’ knowledge sets and the cultural norms related to learning and histories as they operate in learners’ and teachers’ communities. The learning that learners may be expert in, exposed to or interested in developing in their own community can be understood as valid starting points to learning. The social, cultural and historical contexts are explored as learners’ interpretation of these factors places their learning in relation to their relevant learning communities and identities.

The diversity of learning represented then in the classroom, those of the learners, teachers and curriculum can be understood in their social context as representations of diversity rather than rated from acceptable to unacceptable, inferior to superior, acknowledged to ignored. Learners and teachers construct opportunities to examine different forms and representations of learning, their use and relationships to different types of communities and identities. These might be based locally or globally, be practical or academic and relate to recognised or emerging industries. Developing expertise in learning in an area learners and teachers recognise and value can create starting points for commencing other related forms of learning. For example, learners’ abilities to recognise cattle or tracks in the dirt road are clearly related to being able to discriminate letters.

Some of the important elements of the relationships and expertise in regional networks and workplaces can be recognised and incorporated into the formal education system to benefit many marginalised regional learners. One of those elements is the role learning communities’ members undertake as non-accredited facilitators and assessors. These marginalised regional learners have a wealth of knowledge and experience in their content area and in training people in their area. Their expert knowledge of context and content can assist in deepening knowledge of a particular practice and support rigorous assessment of outcomes in situ. They are accepted as understanding the norms of the community and the context in which people will be working. Formal education institutions could form partnerships with local expertise to offer local workplace based accredited assessment. This is an opportunity to develop a shared understanding about the role of learning and connections between formal and informal learning. This process is premised on
affirming the capability regional people’s identity and maintaining the focus on negotiating education systems and practices rather than negotiating identity and learning deficits. In addition, local regional experts and accredited trainers can develop strong partnerships that broker the learning experience, content and qualification.

Through understanding learners’ relevant skills, cultural and social contexts, their histories and future development, trainers have an opportunity to discuss other forms of knowing or being that may have limited or no relation to learners’ experiences or identities. This approach reinforces, rather than threatens or displaces, learners’ learning and identities. Learners can choose to explore and possibly include alternate learning in their multiple learner identities. In this process, learners have ways to consider the relevance of the learning to their life before needing to explain and test the use of the learning with other members of their communities. Learners can use different learning to support their identity, to share their knowledge in new ways and ensure their identity as literate people is affirmed in their multiple communities.

By developing pedagogies that make space for and value diversity, educational experiences invite learners to make connections between the known and the unknown and to make sense of learning experiences. This is particularly valuable as Gee (2004 p. 39) notes learning is a cultural process, enacted through experiences and action, ‘no one just reads: rather they read something…learning to read is about learning to read different types of text with real understanding’. Learning activities are designed to engage learners in activities where they are active participants, they share their knowledge and contexts, are able to practice ideas in their own contexts and assessment focuses on undertaking project based work to explore themes. Participants are critical consumers of knowledge and are involved in examining rather than absorbing knowledge and the associated theoretical and practical frameworks. Good learning events involve participants as active producers. Their process provides ways to include and base their assessment production on experience. The curriculum is learner, community and learner identity centered, this curriculum starts from, and makes explicit links to the learners’ worlds. This approach recognises that people connect to places and experiences in different
ways, for example a regional learner and an urban based teacher connect to an urban or rural landscape in different ways.

In this model of learning partnership that builds disenfranchised learner identities, different forms of knowledge are part of a rich tapestry where knowledge is valued within its context and with purpose. Learners and teachers are involved in co-production of knowledge that references their experience and makes links to other forms of knowledge. Developing an understanding of learners’ identities in relation to their family, local and global communities’ knowledge and identities as individuals and group players, creates a starting point for an education system that works from learners’ strengths, knowledge and adapts teaching and learning to support and reinforce people’s identities as learning practitioners. There are important implications for the construction of learning situations as places where identities and learning are negotiated. By offering opportunities for learners to be validated and test a range of knowledge in terms of learners’ identities, the educational system develops its understanding of learners, their knowledge and their physical and social context. In this way learners are offered opportunities to maintain their integrity while negotiating other forms of knowledge, learning and identity on their terms. This recognises the social constructions that underpin these relationships and the knowledge, learning, cultures, discourses and activities that are often ignored or unrepresented in regional learning and education contexts.

This approach utilises a community centred approach to the learner; one that recognizes identity in terms of influential learning communities would effectively support these learners. What is different here, is that the approach to education recognises and develops learner identity as a central component of improving learner engagement and understanding disengagement. Developing an understanding of learners’ identities in relation to learning practices and identities as individuals and group players, the starting point for an education system that works from learners’ strengths and knowledge is developed and adapts teaching and learning approaches to support and reinforce people’s identities as empowered practitioners. This connection between learners’ and educators’ worldviews describes a challenge for educator institutions and developers. There are important implications for the construction of learning situations as places where identities and learning are negotiated. By offering opportunities for learners to be validated and
test a range of knowledge and ways to represent that knowledge, in terms of their identities, the educational system develops its understanding of learners, their knowledge, literacies and their social context. In this way, learners are able to engage in educational experiences that support and build their learner identity while also learning how to engage with different learning opportunities, contexts and learner identities across the lifespan.

Working in partnership across knowledge systems involves recognising that the work is complex and, at times, uncomfortable. A major challenge is to understand the unsettled and discomforting states of partnership. This is an important part of developing a shared basis for working and sharing knowledge as it relates to various contexts. In many ways this is not new but having a framework to operationalise it is new. Relationships of trust take time but are fruitful in achieving positive outcomes for all stakeholders. By working from across different knowledge systems and by taking time to develop that trust between stakeholders, learner and educators could see new opportunities for learning engagement that are worth the risks involved.

Digital technologies and forms of media that are already connected to learners’ worlds, knowledge systems and priorities are potentially effective tools for pedagogy that improves the engagement of regional learners. This is opposed to the technologies that are located in educational institutions and not learners’ own homes. Consider the power of constructing learning experiences that utilise existing mobile telephones rather learning how to use a computer in a classroom that has restricted access and for activities that meet the teachers’ purpose.

5.4.2 Implications for provision of adult education support

This analysis of regional learners’ experiences of learning engagement challenges formal educational institutions to consider the appropriateness of current approaches to supporting learners’ learning. An approach that is based on developing socially informed partnerships in learning seeks to develop a shared understanding and value of learners and educators’ different knowledge systems and practices. This approach offers a construct for shifting the focus of educational practice and policy to understand the role of identity and relationships in learning engagement. The development of responsive and inclusive education models are underpinned by learning partnerships that explicitly recognise and are skilled in working across
knowledge systems and power structures. The continued input and ownership of learning contexts, purposes and processes by learners is essential in this process. In combination with the ability to analyse, articulate and operationalise partnerships that improve engagement of learners, educators, community government and industry stakeholders. These partnerships can contribute to and benefit from the development of better processes and modeling that focuses on improving outcomes for individuals and communities and provide a framework for improving educational and workforce outcomes in regional areas.

5.4.3 Implications for adult education systems and policy

Learner centered education has developed opportunities to adapt learning to the individual’s needs but in practice hasn’t recognised critical aspects of their learning identities: their communities. Of interest for professional educators are the influences of the learning communities, learners develop to support their learning experience and the roles learning communities’ members undertake as non-accredited ‘facilitators’. These findings suggest a need for professional educational programs that utilise a community centred approach to the learner and recognise identity in terms of influential learning communities which would effectively support learners.

Through understanding learning as a social activity framed through relationships or partnership, organisational barriers can be understood. By incorporating learning partnerships into the workplace or classroom through active involvement in learning communities, the possibility of improving learning engagement is increased. This could be by providing catalysts, support for action and effective feedback about outcomes. Effective processes need to group individuals’ areas of interest, ensuring sufficient access to resources, change management, evidence based practice and celebration of success. Learning partnerships concentrate on providing valuable and transformative learning opportunities to create new knowledge, understandings and solutions to problems in the group, rather than the transmission of knowledge and skills (Smith and Blake 2005).

This study demonstrates the value of considering learners’ identities in addressing engagement of disenfranchised learners which reinforces Field’s view of the role of educational systems and policies. Field (2005 p.155) challenges educators to
consider the development of ‘policies and practices that will build trust and reciprocity, and help people to reconstruct forms of community that are appropriate to a reflexive, networked world’. In this view of education it is important to ensure educational policy and practice work to empower and support the engagement of disenfranchised learners until institutional structures, processes and identities change.

The terms of learner engagement is defined by learners and educational systems view of marginalisation and conflicting memberships in different educational and non-education communities. This defines non-participators and consequently, the risks taken by the people involved when faced with difficulties. Learning occurs across and in reference to diverse knowledge systems. What is needed are approaches to education that support recognition and development of learner identities and the related resources to manage education involvement. These approaches include opportunities for the coproduction of knowledge, diverse representations of ideas connected to the contexts within which they exist and the rules that govern their use in those contexts. Educational systems that establish effective engagement models with regional community, industry and government stakeholders understand the key drivers for stakeholders’ engagement and are able to work across knowledge systems in their relevant contexts. Innovative approaches to education are based on relationships through locally based action for shared benefit. In this way we can build bridges between learners, educators and communities’ understanding of each other’s knowledge and development of learning experiences that support regional learners and communities’ identities. Also, in this way the system understands that learners are actively rejecting some identities and adopting others.

Processes and structures are required that engage learners, and their learner identities as works in progress, and allow a negotiation of self as we all relate to our various worlds of work, leisure, region, knowledge, formal and informal learning. The range of perspectives that coexist can be examined and understood, rather than as processes operating to reinforcing the dominant view, at the expense of responding to local and systemic requirements. This recognises the need to create space for learners to resolve the nexus of their membership in different learner identities: as a learner in an unknown field, a mentor in the workplace, a member of a regional
community and a global professional body. The associated education structures support learners to follow a series of threads to move between ideas and their connections, as the learner deems important, rather than following the preset and approved learning acquisition route. In this approach, the learners include participants, teachers, and institutional systems which interact to try and balance a sense of self, understanding what is good for self and others, and perceptions of change as involving a mutual negotiating of a range of identities.

To improve educational delivery in regional areas, there is a need for educational partnerships that incorporate local communities and formal learning that focus on improving disenfranchised learners' outcomes. These learning partnerships engage learners' identities, workplaces and futures that learners’ value. These partnerships recognise the importance of the social contexts in determining the ways people and institutions operate and interact. Educational systems need to explore the structures that invest in building the relationships between educational systems and learners’ contexts. Effective partnership work embraces and harnesses the contributions of local partners and external agencies, their interactions and the changes they make in the collective work of realising shared goals. The processes of working together allow…(c)ommunities to identify and represent their needs and secure quality partners and partnership arrangements that will enable them to achieve their objectives’ and for government and other agencies to support those goals (Billet et al 2005 p. 24).

Supporting the development of enacted identities and providing education that recognises that learners may have resistant, persistent or transitional identities need to be supportive and consistent with a level of predictability to assist the exploration of identities. Teachers and representatives of the education system demonstrate in their words and actions that they are committed to learners’ success. While this is often the rhetoric of education, the participants’ experiences demonstrate this is not the reality. By understanding a learners’ identity, the response to their behaviour, the ways they are assessed and supported can be tailored to their needs as learners whose identities are informed by communities, expectations and histories that may be different to that of the educational system. While these ideas may not be novel, the learner identity framework assists in understanding why and how people engage, disengage or articulate with others in certain ways that makes the difference.
Summary, Conclusions and Implications

5.4.4 Implications for adult education institutions

Informal learning processes functioned well for regional learners. The challenge is for established educational institutions to recognise these processes and identities and subsequently, adapt to incorporate the best aspects of these practices. Some of the important elements of the relationships and expertise in regional networks and workplaces system can be recognised and incorporated into the formal education system to benefit many marginalised regional learners. One facet is the role members of learning communities undertake as non-accredited facilitators and assessors. These people often have a wealth of knowledge and experience in their content area and in training people. They are accepted as understanding the norms of the community and the context in which people will be working. Formal education institutions could form partnerships with local expertise that recognise that expertise in order to offer local workplace based accredited assessment. This is an opportunity to develop a shared understanding about the role of learning and connections between formal and informal learning. This process is premised on affirming regional people’s identity as capable and keeps the focus on negotiating education systems and practices rather than negotiating identity and basing learning on a deficit curriculum model as defined by the institutional culture. In addition, local regional experts and accredited trainers can develop strong partnerships that broker the learning experience, content and qualification.

The implications suggest that educational systems that establish effective engagement models with regional community, industry and government stakeholders understands the key impetus for stakeholders’ engagement and are able to work across knowledge systems in their relevant contexts. Innovative approaches to education are based on relationships through locally based action for shared benefit. While this has been the goal of many in educational institutions and among policy makers for a long time, the missing element has been an understanding of the multidisciplinary and multiscalar relationships that underpin information exchange and shared engagement in the formal institutional process and outcomes. These are described here as social partnerships in learning. The development of social partnerships can operate to embrace the contributions of local partners and external agencies, their interactions and the changes they make in the collective work of realising shared goal(s) (Seddon and Billett 2004).
The importance of developing approaches that align with learners’ identity forming communities rather solely on than the established and accepted knowledge and identities of the dominant formal educational systems can improve the engagement of regional learners. The opportunities to incorporate this knowledge might include a number of strategies that have profound implications for pedagogy. The power relations inherent in educational systems and relationships, and their impact on engagement, need to be understood explicitly when attempting to challenge established and accepted systems and relationships. The establishment of pedagogies that defines educators as learners and not necessarily expert in the learners’ own community’s context is a concern. It is possible to imagine a teacher from an urban background not recognising and incorporating learners’ knowledge and learning practices or unintentionally denigrating or ignoring knowledge that are an important part of learners’ identity and membership in their communities.

To better understand the knowledge and learning practices that operate in the community and the classroom, there needs to be opportunities to openly explore and make explicit stakeholders’ knowledge and their embedded beliefs or values. This presents not only one view of a topic or issue but demonstrates the multiplicity of views and treats the teacher as an equal member in this exploration. Knowledge and practices are then examined to offer opportunities to explore their complexity, uses, impact and relationship to identities, group membership and imagined futures. One important aspect would be the recognition of the similarities between learning practices that could forge bridges to understanding. These could include similarities like identifying animal tracks and letter recognition or seeing the representation of local histories through digital media and oral histories. These activities can be a logical extension of one another and build practitioners’ identities rather than offered as an option, one choice negating involvement in the other. These are related rather than oppositional practices and offer chances to be involved by choice.

Through understanding learners’ knowledge and strengths: their relevant skills, their cultural and social contexts and their histories and future development, teachers have an opportunity to discuss other forms of knowledge that may have limited or no relation to learners’ experiences or identities. The related practices and knowledge sets such as report writing, presentation, online learning, and undertaking research in understanding workplace communications can then be understood as an option.
for literate people rather than considered the ideal. This approach reinforces, rather than threatens or displaces learners’ knowledge and identities. Learners can choose to explore and possibly include alternate knowledge sets and resources in their multiple identities. In this process, learners have ways to consider the relevance of knowledge to their life before needing to explain and test the practices with other members of their communities. Learners can use different knowledge sets to support their identity, to share their knowledge in new ways and ensure their identities as empowered people are affirmed in their multiple communities. In these ways, learners are supported to do identity work.

Formal education institutions have particular, well-established identities, informed by past experiences, relationships and interpretations of their stakeholders’ expectations. People’s perception of themselves as learners is informed by their understanding of the underlying relationships between themselves, their communities and various institutions. Learners, who do not traditionally see themselves as part of formal adult education institutions, have established and shared identities about learning and engagement in formal and informal learning contexts. These learner identities impact on people’s engagement in learning activities. The impact of these identities on behaviour is evident when the learner identities of individuals and post-compulsory education providers (both universities and training providers) intersect.

Learner identities are constructed in relation to the identities represented by the formal education system, and for many disenfranchised learners in opposition to that of educational institutions. Learner identities are also connected to non-formal and community-defined norms, processes and practices. The communities may include workplace, local and peer communities. Educational institutions can improve their connection with those disenfranchised learners by addressing the disconnects that exist between the individuals, communities and educational institutions. This means addressing assumptions about engagement in learning activities and understanding the underlying nature of people’s and institutional connections or lack thereof. Essentially it means understanding the ways people interpret, operate within or make decisions about their education based on their learner identities.
Partnerships with community members can offer valuable learning experiences for educators in educational institutions and the systems that design training packages and pedagogy. By assuming that everyone involved in learning is both expert and learner in differing aspects, changes the dynamics within a group. In this approach, everyone has something to teach and to learn. No individual’s or group’s worldview is absolute. This encourages recognition of diverse ways of knowing and expressing ideas and the value of learning in partnership. The relationship is then able to focus on developing understanding of each other, establishing relationships that affirm everyone’s identity as valued and essential participants in knowledge construction and expression.

The relationships between learners, lecturers and learner support, including administration are important. Programs invest in these relationships to ensure that lectures know learners as part of a family and community, their background and experience. Learners are able to study from home and engage in learning sessions using digital technologies and social networking tools. The connections between individuals and institutions are negotiated by ensuring learners have a person they can contact to support their involvement in study. This might involve academic or personal support and provides a liaison between people and large institutions.

Developing situations where the teacher and disenfranchised learner can develop enacted learners as the risk is sufficiently low so they can maintain their engagement but there is also sufficient support to experiment with different identities.

5.4.5 Implications for research

This study has developed the enacted learner identity theoretical framework based on in-depth interviews with disenfranchised learners in a regional area of Northern Australia. There is a need to test this profile with a broader group of disenfranchised learners to test the efficacy of the learner profiles and refine the theoretical model and develop an assessment model. This model will test the test the enacted learner identity profiles with empirical data and assess the accuracy and generalisability of the enacted learner identity profile model.

While this study has focused on learner identity, to have a complete picture it is important to analyse the other identities which operate in the formal educational space. There is a need to develop approaches of teacher and institutional identity to
understand the impact of the interactions between these identities that can be in conflict or support learners’ outcomes. This approach problematises all of the identities that operate in formal educational contexts and can also be used to analyse connections to the identities that operate outside but impact on educational engagement. These include workplace, community and peer identities. The outcome could be a profile assessment that can be used to map the learner and teacher identities that impact on the conduct of any learning event and the decisions made by the participants. It can also be used to refine support services for disenfranchised learners.

There is a need to examine the research methodologies that extend the social contract with disenfranchised communities in order to understand their perceptions of the world, from their perspective and incorporate participants in different ways across the entire research process. This analysis helps develop research methodologies that build from local experience to theoretical models and provide a basis for researchers and disenfranchised community members to negotiate and continually renegotiate their involvement in research over the life of the project.

There is a need to develop and examine the implementation plan for an educational partnership with disenfranchised learners, and their communities that is underpinned by understandings their existing learner identities and enabling access to enacted learner identities. A part of this plan is the examination of pedagogies and resources that will support learners to demonstrate and introduce their strengths, preferred ways of learning and ways of learning that differ from existing paradigms. This examination would include e-learning, particularly mobile learning, as these tools extend the ways information can be collected, formatted, mixed and shared, particularly as learners can use readily available technologies in socially approved and recognised ways. Learners are then able to organise and create information that is mediated in different ways that include a range of digital tools. As Erstad (2008 p. 185) noted

Digital tools create new possibilities for getting access to information, for producing sharing and reusing...The main point is more and more people in our culture can take part in these remixing activities; not only elite or specific groups. Everyone engages in remix in this general sense of the idea… The
possibilities of remixing all kinds of textual expressions and artefacts have thereby changed (Erstad 2008 p. 185).

This approach would recognise that learners are, more than passive consumers of knowledge, they are also are producers and teachers of knowledge and ideas as they relate to specific contexts (Gee 2003).

The integration of e-learning, including mobile learning, has the potential for learners, particularly disenfranchised learners, to accurately represent and share their own worlds while also exploring others in safe environments. A range of people, knowledge and contexts that are meaningful for empowering learners’ identity can be shared and explored to support individual’s learning. Research into developing an education systems that incorporate a learner identity framework would describe how to supports learners and teachers to work across knowledge systems and identities. This approach values different perspectives and works with them without tokenizing or co-opting diverse views. It provides a basis for recognising diverse knowledge systems and negotiating learner identities in order to improve educational engagement and outcomes. A social partnerships in learning approach examines the interactions between agents, specifically the interagency and interdisciplinary relationships that enable effective learning in and between a range of informing contexts: different disciplines, workplaces, training sites and communities.

These partnerships are the relationships that attempt to work across diverse knowledge systems and governance structures. The different knowledge systems, groups or institutions that attempt to work together can often be characterised as a ‘system of systems’ as described by Norman and Kuras (2004). They note that systems of systems are not designed rather they are opportunistic interactions amongst existing or previously planned systems. By focusing on systems and their interactions, any consideration of learning systems can focus on addressing systemic failure, rather than deficit notions of learning and learners, and the influences on learners that are invisible to educational institutions.

The concept of social partnerships in learning aims to describe the ways people and social institutions interact and the diverse knowledge systems on which they draw. Social partnerships in learning do not describe what stakeholders should be, but rather focuses on understanding what actually happens when people either engage
or decline to engage with institutions and knowledge systems. They describe the attributes of the relationships that operate across various networks: across the different levels and knowledge systems that enable effective learning in different disciplines, workplaces and training sites. In addition, these frameworks describe the interactions that operate at and across all levels (that is, individuals, organisations and learning systems). They can be used to redefine learning relationships and to develop models of learning that support the re-engagement of disenfranchised learners. They are particularly useful in understanding how people work to manage change, conflict, complexity, social influences and lack of connection. Understanding social partnerships in learning provides frameworks to establish and explore learner identities, coproduction of knowledge, representations of ideas, the contexts within which they exist and the rules that govern their use.

5.5 Conclusion

The ways that disenfranchised regional learners negotiate and make decisions about engagement in formal education is connected to their learner identity: the ways that learners understand themselves in relation to place, time, context and others. Being able to describe, articulate and engage with learner identities’ supports an understanding of an individual’s decision making processes. These frameworks are used to discuss ideas from a range of perspectives and to appreciate others’ views as valid. A learner identity framework, then, provides a series of threads to understand learners’ decisions and behaviour. The framework provides a structure to develop pedagogy that moves between ideas, contexts and their connections, as the learner deems important, rather than following a preset and approved learning acquisition route. Processes and structures are required that engage learners, engage learner identities as a work in progress, and allow a negotiation of self as we all relate to our various worlds of work, leisure, region, knowledge, formal and informal learning. In this approach, the learners include participants, teachers, and institutional systems which interact to try and balance sense of self, understanding of what is good for self and others, and perceptions of change as involving a mutual negotiating of a range of identities. Student centred pedagogies are then extended to incorporate learners’ community identities and realities. In this way we can build bridges between students, educators and communities’ understanding of each
other’s knowledge to develop learning experiences that support regional students and communities’ identities.
References and Appendices
6 References


References


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References


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Appendices
7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix One Non-school qualifications in regional areas

Figure 10 People aged 25-64 years with a non-school qualification by degree of remoteness Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

NB. People who stated they had a non-school qualification but did not state the type or inadequately described the level of education were excluded prior to the calculation of percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of highest non-school qualification</th>
<th>Major Cities</th>
<th>Inner Regional</th>
<th>Outer Regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very Remote</th>
<th>Total(d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above Bachelor degree(a)</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced diploma and Diploma</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III and IV</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I and II</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total with non-school qualification(b)</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total non-Indigenous(c) with non-school qualification(b) | 57.1% | 49.9% | 45.8% | 45.6% | 47.8% | 54.5% |

Total Indigenous(c) with non-school qualification(b) | 37.8% | 33.0% | 27.5% | 21.9% | 14.5% | 29.4% |

Figure 11 People aged 25-64 years: level of highest non-school qualification by degree of remoteness - 2006 Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

(a) Includes Postgraduate Degree and Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate.
(b) People who stated they had a non-school qualification but did not state the type of qualification, or for whom the type or level of qualification was inadequately described, were excluded prior to the calculation of percentages. Includes certificate not further defined.
(c) Excludes those who have not stated their Indigenous status.
(d) Includes those in Migratory Australia and those who had no usual address.
### 7.2 Appendix Two Plain Language Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PROJECT:</strong></th>
<th>What is the relationship between people’s identity and their engagement with post compulsory education and training?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHIEF INVESTIGATOR:</strong></td>
<td>Ruth Wallace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:</strong></td>
<td>To understand the learning experiences of people who live in a semi rural and rural area of the XXXX(^4) and ways to improve learning so more people can access education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:</strong></td>
<td>The outcomes from this research will help teachers and people involved in education to develop learning experiences that better meet the needs of people in rural, regional and remote areas of the XXXX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF YOU?</strong></td>
<td>You will be invited to participate in an interview about your experiences learning and using learning during your life. You will also be asked to agree on a report of your interview to be used for the thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISCOMFORTS/ RISKS:</strong></td>
<td>You will be asked to talk about your experiences of learning during your life. If there are any issues you are uncomfortable talking about this will be negotiated with the researcher who will act with sensitivity. If you do not want to talk about any issue or prefer that a story is not used, it will be removed from the report of your interview. You will not be identified in any way in the report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONFIDENTIALITY:</strong></td>
<td>The interview, data analysis, thesis or any publications will not reveal participants’ names or details by which you could be identified. Your name and any information you supplied will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet and in password protected computer files.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUR PARTICIPATION:</strong></td>
<td>We would be grateful if you did volunteer to participate in the project but you are totally free not to. Even if you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the project without any repercussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESULTS OF THE STUDY</strong></td>
<td>The results of the study will be reported in a plain language report sent to all participants. The results will be explained or translated to you if the paper is not clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONS TO CONTACT</strong></td>
<td>If you have any questions about the project please contact the project leader by telephone on 89 466 390 or email her at <a href="mailto:ruth.wallace@cdu.edu.au">ruth.wallace@cdu.edu.au</a>. If you have any concerns about the project before it starts, during it or after is finished you are invited to contact the Executive Officer of the Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Committee, Ms Hemali Seneviratne, on 89 467 064 or at <a href="mailto:Hemali.Seneviratne@cdu.edu.au">Hemali.Seneviratne@cdu.edu.au</a> who can pass on such concerns to appropriate officers within the University.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\) XXXX is used to replace any detail that could assist in identifying the participants


### 7.3 Appendix Three Consent form

I, …………………………………………………………………………….,
of ………………………………………………………………………………….

hereby consent to participate in the project ‘What is the relationship between people’s identity and their engagement with post compulsory education and training?’ being undertaken by a Charles Darwin University PhD student, Ruth Wallace.

I understand the purpose of the research project is to understand the learning experiences of people who live in a semi rural and rural area of XXXX and ways to improve learning so more people can access education.

I acknowledge that:

- the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks of the study, have been explained to me by Ruth Wallace.
- I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such study.
- I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific journals and academic journals.
- individual results **will not** be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

I acknowledge that I have read a Plain Language Statement that explains all aspects of the project, including my rights regarding confidentiality and participation, and have had an opportunity to discuss these aspects with the researcher, Ruth Wallace.

Signature ………………………….. Date …………………
# Appendix Four Semi Structured Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main questions</th>
<th>Probe Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tell me about school and your schooling experiences                          | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education? |
| Tell me about any training experiences that you've had                         | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education?  
• Why were you involved?  
• Did you complete your study?  
• Why did you keep going or what made you leave?  
• Did the training help you? |
| Tell me about the learning that you do in your work                           | • Describe some positive experiences  
• Describe some negative experiences  
• How did this affect your involvement in education?  
• Why were you involved?  
• Did you complete your study?  
• Why did you keep going or what made you leave?  
• Did the training help you? |
| How would you like learning experiences to be?                                | • What are the barriers for accessing formal post compulsory education and training?  
• What helps you accessing formal post compulsory education and training?  
• What strategies have you used to survive and manage institutions (For example, Centrelink, school, TAFE training employment)?  
• Describe the values and attitudes that affect your participation in education and training.  
• What aspects of your personal identity affect your learning?  
• Describe your preferred ways of learning. |
7.5 **Appendix Five Analysis and comparison of the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Community Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source 2006 Community Profile series</th>
<th>XXXX&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt; shire</th>
<th>Northern Territory</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size sq kms</td>
<td>2914.3</td>
<td>1353201.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subset % of region's total population</td>
<td>2914.3</td>
<td>135201.5</td>
<td>7759538.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17461</td>
<td>192898</td>
<td>19,855,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54.22%</td>
<td>51.51%</td>
<td>49.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Indigenous people</td>
<td>45.78%</td>
<td>48.49%</td>
<td>50.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of persons</td>
<td>550%</td>
<td>27.82%</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subset % of region's total population</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total by age group (15 years and over)</td>
<td>28.95%</td>
<td>42.28%</td>
<td>33.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-34 years</td>
<td>44.04%</td>
<td>39.67%</td>
<td>35.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>27.01%</td>
<td>18.06%</td>
<td>30.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total people 15 years and over</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male by age group (15 years and over)</td>
<td>31.09%</td>
<td>41.51%</td>
<td>34.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-34 years</td>
<td>42.95%</td>
<td>39.46%</td>
<td>35.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>25.96%</td>
<td>19.03%</td>
<td>29.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total males 15 years and over</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female by age group (15 years and over)</td>
<td>27.38%</td>
<td>43.10%</td>
<td>32.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-34 years</td>
<td>46.83%</td>
<td>39.88%</td>
<td>35.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>25.79%</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>31.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total females 15 years and over</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Labour force status</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>4.39%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unemployment</td>
<td>63.69%</td>
<td>62.76%</td>
<td>60.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Labour force participation</td>
<td>61.73%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>57.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male labour force status</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unemployment</td>
<td>66.87%</td>
<td>66.20%</td>
<td>66.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Labour force participation</td>
<td>64.86%</td>
<td>63.32%</td>
<td>63.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female labour force status</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
<td>4.46%</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unemployment</td>
<td>59.80%</td>
<td>59.11%</td>
<td>54.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Employment to population</td>
<td>57.91%</td>
<td>56.47%</td>
<td>51.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-school qualifications for adults 15 years and older</td>
<td>1.13%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Degree</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>5</sup> XXXX is used to replace any regional detail that could assist in identifying the participants
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>% of adults 15 and over with non-school qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>9.76%</td>
<td>38.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma and Diploma</td>
<td>6.27%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>35.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate Level</td>
<td>22.64%</td>
<td>11.81%</td>
<td>11.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.25%</td>
<td>44.07%</td>
<td>39.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Male by non-school qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>% of males 15 and over with non-school qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Degree</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
<td>1.24%</td>
<td>44.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>0.87%</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>37.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>4.53%</td>
<td>9.76%</td>
<td>10.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma and Diploma</td>
<td>5.17%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>6.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate Level</td>
<td>32.43%</td>
<td>11.81%</td>
<td>23.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.07%</td>
<td>32.38%</td>
<td>44.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Female by non-school qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>% of females 15 and over with non-school qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Degree</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>2.01%</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>6.81%</td>
<td>9.76%</td>
<td>12.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma and Diploma</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>7.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate Level</td>
<td>22.77%</td>
<td>11.33%</td>
<td>10.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.09%</td>
<td>32.38%</td>
<td>35.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>