First-generation Migrant Student Experiences in Higher Education Spaces in Ireland

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Dedicated to my husband, Pascal, who has walked with me on my educational journey since we met in first year in UCG. You are right Pa, 'we got lucky'. Mo cheoil thú!

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Abstract

First-generation students are a growing cohort in higher education (HE) and research around this group of learners is a developing area in Ireland and internationally. This qualitative study explored the accounts by ten first-generation students who self-selected and who are the first in their families to attend higher education in Ireland, of their experiences while enrolled in a higher education institute in Ireland. One-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions in order to bring to light how they accessed higher education in Ireland, the difficulties they encountered, their motivations, and the strategies that helped them to successfully participate in higher education.

The research presented here is guided by Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework and his concepts of habitus, field, and capital, together with Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), in particular her ideas around familial capital, along with drawing on the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) through which the experiential knowledge shared by the participants in the study is explored. The significance of the role of CCW is offered here as a form of resistant capital that may promote first-generation students' access to and continued study in HE. In doing so, I suggest that a 'personal capital of persistence' is developed.

The findings are centred on four key areas: the long journeys into higher education, the importance of family relationships; pressures; and student engagement with learning. Findings show that cultural capital is supported by positive values around education in the domestic habitus and related familial and peer support networks. The students in this study showed evidence of acting on their capital to accomplish access to HE, and they do this despite the highly complex nature of their lives and the structural barriers to access that were found including: finance, inadequate recognition of prior learning pathways, lengthy periods waiting for acceptance, and language needs. Based on the findings, there is evidence to indicate that the participants encountered a higher education system that did not always have their interests at heart. A richer understanding of first-generation migrant students' experiences is necessary in order to promote equity and diversity in HE. Recommendations are made for policy, practice and future research.

Abbreviations

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCS	Community Childcare Subvention Programme
CCW	Community Cultural Wealth
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CWS	Critical Whiteness Studies
DISCs	Disciplines Inquiring into Societal Challenges
DP	Direct Provision
EEA	European Economic Area
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HE	Higher Education
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institute
ICEF	International Consultants for Education and Fairs
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IoT	Institute of Technology
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

OMC	Open Method of Communication
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PPS	Personal Public Service number
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
RPL	Recognised Prior Learning
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland: Grant and funding of fees for third level education
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UoSI	Universities of Sanctuary Ireland
VPL	Validation of Prior Learning

Chapter 1 Background and Context

1.1 Introduction

This is a study of the accounts of a group of first-generation migrant students in higher education (HE) in Ireland. At the heart of this research are the voices and experiences of ten first-generation migrant students located in one Institute of Technology located outside of Dublin, who have self-selected. The study takes place in a HE environment which has seen increased numbers of students from traditional and non-traditional backgrounds enrolling on a variety of HE educational programmes (Department of Education and Science, 2016). The changing demographics in HE are a reflection of the changes in the make-up of Irish society which have evolved at pace since the 1990s so-called 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom and the increase in the inward movement of people who came to work and live in Ireland since that time (Kirby, 2010). Today one in ten people living in Ireland was born outside the country (Mc Ginnity & Enright, 2020).

Ireland has one of the highest rates of participation in HE in Europe with over 62% of people in the 25 to 34-year-old-age group holding a higher education level qualification (Wilson, 2021). As more people enter the HE system, the percentage of non-traditional students entering its doors is also increasing (Department of Education and Science, 2016), however, there is still much under-representation of some groups, including migrants, in HE (HEA, 2019a). Exercising the

right to an education is problematic for some groups of people (Bourdieu, 1990a), for example, Travellers, and ethnic minorities, (Lynch 2014), and this under-representation includes first-generation migrants (Bunar, 2017; Keane, 2013). Non-traditional students are often represented in research as lacking various forms of capitals and are subsequently viewed from a 'deficit' perspective, which is a lack of knowledge about higher education (Macqueen, 2018). While some of these views are informed by a Western or Euro-centric value system, in particular for education (Dumais, 2015), other views are based on perceptions that there are dominant cultures that reproduce capital which limits access to others who are not part of that culture (Bourdieu, 1986). Not only are these thoughts based on ideas of class and hegemony, they also disregard the social capitals that are relevant to minority groups (Valencia, 2010). Yosso's (2005) concepts about shifting from a deficit approach to one of foregrounding of assets held by minority cultures challenges some of these ideas. In addition, the role of family and familial supports for students in HE is less studied (Jabbar et al., 2019; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019; Yosso, 2005) and this is also true for first-generation migrant students in HE (LeBoeuf & Dworkin, 2021). Even when first-generation migrants gain access to HE, the emerging literature points to particular challenges they experience, which may be unique to this group of students (Streitwieser et al., 2019; Baker et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2019; Ramsey & Baker, 2019; Macqueen, 2018). A focus on some of this group of students and their experiences of HE in Ireland is warranted. Irish

government policy, and in some instances, a lack of policy, limits certain groups of would-be students who are mainly from under-represented minorities, from applying to, and accessing, higher education. As this thesis will explore, much of this non-participation in Higher Education (HE) is caused by structural factors. The aim of this study is to give voice to the participants' experiences so that we can learn from them.

1.2 Research context
Migration and Ireland

Despite a long history of inward migration from some European countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland is often described as a country which has only recently had to adapt to migrants who have moved here to live, to work, and/or to seek refuge or asylum. People have moved to Ireland from many parts of the world over an extended period of time. The first Islamic society in Ireland, for example, was established in the 1950s (Fitzsimons, 2017a). It is the case that increasing numbers of people arrived in Ireland from 1990 on, mainly to support the rapidly expanding economy and the need for additional workers (Gonzalez Pandiella, 2016). This phase in Ireland's economic history coincided with the accession of ten new European Union (EU) states in 2004, and the easy movement of workers across the EU (Röder et al., 2014). Migrants who moved to Ireland for work at this time came from the newly expanded EU (CSO, 2012a). Migrants also

came from outside the EU and were admitted under the various work permits for skilled and non-skilled workers which were in operation at the time (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008). There was also an increase during this period in applications for International Protection by people from a range of different countries (*ibid*). Between 2006 and 2016, there was an increase of over 115,000 non-Irish nationals arriving in Ireland (CSO, 2016a). While Ireland's population has always been heterogeneous (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008), Ireland is becoming an increasingly diverse country, both in urban and rural areas (CSO, 2016a). This change in demographics is also reflected in the more than 200 countries of origin indicated by respondents to the 2016 census, and that one in ten of the population was not born in Ireland (CSO, 2016a). This diversity calls for social and public policies that encompass all these groups of people who call Ireland home, a recognition that for newcomers to Ireland the path to integration is important (Gilmartin & Migge, 2015), and that integration leads to 'social cohesion and inclusive growth' (Mc Ginnity & Enright, 2020:1).

Pathways to participation and inclusion in higher education

Since the 1990s, the Irish state has introduced a series of policies and measures aimed at promoting pathways and increasing participation in higher education (HE) by many so-called 'non-traditional' students of which first-generation migrants are just one cohort. This widening of participation (WP) in HE is conceived of, partly to address the need for

a well-educated labour force in order to satisfy the demands of a 'knowledge economy', and partly, because education at all levels is seen as a means to foster social inclusion and integration (Bunar, 2017; Lynch, 2014). The Irish State's aim of increasing participation in HE across the community is to be achieved through a range of pathways, for example, the promotion of widening participation, further education and training (FET), and via bespoke Access programmes (Fleming et al., 2017). Gaining access to HE, according to Lynch (2006:12), is a 'necessity for the majority, not a privilege for the few'. Because education and learning have great potential in personal learning and individual growth, I argue they should not only be considered as an economic necessity alone. Students who come from migrant backgrounds are just one of a number of under-represented groups in HE, which can also include members of the Travelling communities, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, to name just some (HEA, 2015). Research indicates that students from migrant backgrounds do not have the same ease of access to HE in comparison to students whose backgrounds fit the traditional profile for students who access HE (HEAR, 2021; Lynch, 2014). The reasons for this can include economic inequality, which can be based on a lower level of family wealth, and the inequality of access caused by government cuts to public educational services which affect a range of students including mature students on low incomes, and those who are parenting alone. For some migrant students navigating an

unfamiliar system and structures adds increased challenges to gaining admission (Burke et al., 2020).

Education is an essential and integral part of the inclusion and integration of all people in society including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (Mc Ginnity & Enright, 2020). It is recognised as a basic human right in Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations General Assembly, 1966), and in Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (The United Nations, 1948). However, for some migrants, undocumented people, and others in the process of applying for international protection in Ireland, access to higher education is challenging, or impossible (HEAR, 2021; Stevenson & Baker, 2018). Among the particular barriers they may encounter are: finance, non-recognition of prior learning and qualifications, incomplete or inadequate information about the application process, unfamiliar educational culture, and language competence. In Ireland, access to education, particularly at third level is increasingly used as a means to gain advantage in society (Lynch, 2014). Those who struggle to find the resources to afford third level education in an increasingly marketized educational sector experience greater disadvantage. The inequalities in the wider society tend to be reproduced, and are, according to Linehan & Hogan (2008:17), 'most apparent in higher education'.

In Ireland, all children are eligible to access free education from the age of three to the end of secondary school (usually at the age of eighteen). However, not all students who complete secondary can easily transition into HE (Lynch, 2014). In addition, educational provision for children and adults with special needs is described as '*ad hoc*' by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and will not be resolved until such time as a specific Education Act is introduced for this group of students (NDA, 2021). As well as challenges for the above group, migrant applicants intending to study at higher education may encounter a range of different fees, depending on their eligibility for state financial assistance. From a low base, HE participation in Ireland has expanded from one in five school leavers pursuing undergraduate studies in 1980 (O'Connell et al*., 2006*), to currently 65% of all school leavers (HEA, 2019b). In 2019, there were over 60,000 new undergraduate entrants to HE, and almost 234,000 students were enrolled in third level study (HEA, 2019a). While there has been an increase in numbers participating in HE, this is not the same as widening participation. McGuinness et al., (2012) found that participation rates in HE is highest from professional backgrounds. It is clear from the data that many under-represented groups, including migrants, are still under-represented in HE (HEA, 2019b). *The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* (HEA, 2015) indicates the need for HE to deliver equity of access and to ensure that the students participating in HE in Ireland reflect the social mix, and diversity, of its population.

The role of education in the inclusion and integration of migrants is seen as vital (Linehan & Hogan, 2008). However, Gilmartin & Dagg (2018), suggest that on several scales of comparisons, immigrants to Ireland can have significantly varied experiences of education, inclusion, employment, and citizenship. Globally, increasing numbers across all population groups are attending higher education with more than half of all school leavers from middle and higher-income families participating in HE (Marginson, 2016). As the rate of participation increases, it is likely that there will be a significant cohort who will be the first members of their families to study at third level, and because of the patterns of movement around the world, some will be from migrant groups (Faas, 2020). Although the figures from International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF) (2019) are more than four years old, they provide an indication of the increase in attendance in HE by migrants. In the period from 2013-2017, the numbers of migrants attending HE in Ireland increased by 45% *(ibid).*

The widening participation (WP) agenda suggests greater opportunities for access to HE, which should include various minority groups and result in greater diversity of the student population. However, the framing of WP through a neo-liberal ideology of marketisation that underpins HE policy here in Ireland, and elsewhere (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Lynch, 2012) has led to over-simplistic claims for its success at improving the diversity of the student

body (Thomas & Quinn, 2006). According to Thomas & Quinn (2006), WP, as it is currently imagined, has a limited and limiting approach because it ignores structural barriers, such as, class and educational background. They contend WP may instead help to reinforce rather than overcome socio-economic and cultural barriers.

Higher education bodies in Ireland

Most higher education provision in Ireland is delivered by universities[1], some of which can trace their origins back centuries. More recently HE is also provided by Institutes of Technology (IoTs)[2], which came into being as a result of *The Report of the Commissioner on Higher Education (1967).* There are also some Colleges of Education, and other third level institutions which provide specialist education (Department of Education, 2021a). In addition, there is a small number of for-profit higher education institutes (Harkin & Hazelkorn, 2015). HE provision delivered by IoTs came about to address the increasingly industry-led requirements for graduates with vocational attributes and skills, and to satisfy labour market needs and the human capital that is required to meet this demand (Highman, 2019). IoTs (which were previously known as Regional Technical Colleges) were conceived of in order to offer a range of educational programmes that universities were then not offering, and which were focused on skills' areas that

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[1] Universities in Ireland are deemed public if they work under statute of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and are in receipt of core public funding (HEA, 2020).
[2] Originally set up as Regional Technical Colleges and also deemed public.

were becoming increasingly important for a modernising workforce (*ibid*). As all of the people who participated in this research were IoT students, some background information about IoTs is outlined below.

The introduction of the IoT system of higher educational provision has had many impacts, including helping to create an expansion of the student body. A distinctive feature of the IoT system is its relative flexibility in offering awards that can be incrementally achieved, which was an innovation when it was introduced, and changed how some learning was presented in HE. Under *The Technological Universities Act (TU Act 2018)*, an additional type of Higher Education Institute (HEI) emerged, and the Technological University (TU) has been created (HEA, 2021a). My current work is in one of these IoTs, and I am undertaking this professional doctorate to draw on, and to contribute to professional knowledge and my personal practice.

At the time of writing this thesis, some of the IoTs have recently changed their status to Technological University (TU), and more IoTs are at various stages of their preparation for similar conversion to TU status in the coming years (Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2021a). This change in structure has come about in response to the *National Strategy for Higher Education Report to 2030* (Department of

Education and Skills, 2011)[3], which recommended that a reorganisation of IoTs into regional clusters should take place with a view to offering students better learning pathways. It was further suggested that there would be a resultant improvement in programme quality and a reduction in course duplication as a result of these changes (Hunt, 2011).

Education policy for HE

A full review of educational policy in Ireland is beyond the scope of this study, one which deliberately frontloads the voices of migrant students. However, in the sixty years since the *HEA Act (1971)*, a range of papers and reports have been published, some of which include: The *White Paper on Education (Department of Education and Science, 1995),* the final report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education (HEA, 1995), and the *White Paper on Adult Education* (Department of Education and Science, 2000), which have shaped the development of Higher Education provision in Ireland. *The Equal Status Act 2000* prohibits discrimination by educational organisations on nine grounds. For the higher education sector, which includes IoTs, the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999* focuses on equality. In addition, the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2005; 2008; 2015) published a number of

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[3] 'The National Strategy for Higher Education Report to 2030' is also known as 'The Hunt Report'.

strategic plans for widening participation in HE. Supranational influences, such as the Bologna Process in 1999, the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, combined with the *OEDC Review of Higher Education in Ireland 2004* (OECD, 2004), created the conditions for the Irish government to focus its attention on higher education, and this resulted in further changes to how HE was to be conceived and developed (Harpur 2010).

Some ten years after the *National Strategy for Higher Education Report to 2030' (Hunt Report)* (2011), and five years following the *Cassell's Report* (2016), discussion around funding for HE is again under review. The current Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Mr Simon Harris, announced that the introduction of student loans was not an option the current government were pursuing (Donnelly, 2021), and that in his opinion, student loans were a deterrent to participation by people from disadvantaged communities (McConnell, 2021). Of note, Harris also said that undergraduate education should now 'be seen as a natural extension of our education system, in that it should be free to access' *(ibid).*

1.3 An understanding of the term 'first-generation migrant' used in this research

The term 'first-generation migrant' has been used in a multitude of different ways in higher education (HE) research and many varied definitions have been identified (LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021; Ilett, 2019). LeBouef & Dworkin (2021) also point out that how a study defines first-generation students informs the interpretation and its implications. In this study, I am using the term 'first-generation migrant' in HE to indicate those students who have personally moved, or whose families moved before the student was born, to Ireland in the past twenty-five years, and who are the first in their families to attend HE in Ireland. They, or their family members, may have attended HE in another country prior to beginning their studies in Ireland.

First-generation migrants in HE in Ireland are not a homogenous group, rather this under-represented group includes: applicants who are exiting secondary level but who have not yet obtained Irish citizenship and who can then be liable for higher fees; people who are seeking international protection; anyone who has not lived in Ireland for at least three of the previous five years; and those who are living in Ireland on work permits, as well as migrants who have residential and/or citizenship status in Ireland.

In all other places in this study, the term 'migrant' refers to anyone who has moved away from their place of origin, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

1.4 Aim of this research

This study aims to illuminate the experiences of a particular group of first-generation migrants in one Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland so we might better understand how HEIs might best respond to their needs. By focusing on current students and recent graduates, the goal of the research is to find out how this relatively under-researched group of people (Wainwright & Watts, 2021) navigate the process of gaining access to third level study, how they make sense of their experiences and what the implications are for them as individuals, and the structural processes of HE around them. There has been some research on the experiences of the wider group of 'non-traditional' students in Higher Education in Ireland, such as Ní Dhuinn & Keane (2021), Grummell & Ryan (2017), Loxley et al., (2017), and Ní Chonaill (2009), and some research has been completed which is specific to the experiences of those who enter Ireland as refugees or who are seeking asylum (Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), 2021). There has also been research into the experiences of migrants within the Irish school system (Rodríguez Izquierdo & Darmody, 2019; Darmody et al., 2014). However, less is known about the experiences of first-generation students from migrant

backgrounds in HE in Ireland more broadly, and this study adds to this gap in the literature.

Ten one-to-one, in-depth interviews were carried out with current and graduate students in one Higher Education Institute (HEI), an Institute of Technology (IoT), located outside of Dublin. The participants, who self-selected as migrants, were from 10 different countries in Africa, Europe and Asia. In the group, eight were female and 2 were male, and their age range was from early twenties to late forties. All had moved to Ireland as teenagers, or as adults, and were from 10 different ethnicities.

Based on an epistemology that uses interpretivism as its foundation, this research unpacks the accounts gathered through semi-structured interviews of the ten participants of their decisions to study, their actual experiences in HE, and how they overcame obstacles and challenges to achieve their aims to become students. The study employs a theoretical framework that draws from the influential French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concepts. These include habitus, field, and cultural capital, and are employed here to examine inequities as evidenced in the difficulty of access to appropriate and accessible economic, cultural and social capital for HE. The study also includes some ideas from critical race theorist Tara Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), which identifies additional forms

of capital that can be used by students to help them counter challenges they may experience in their journey into and through HE. According to Yosso (2005:76), CCW creates a framework to challenge the traditional interpretation of Bourdieu's concepts around the cultural capital of minority groups, which is often viewed from a deficit perspective. Instead, Yosso (2005:77) suggests that CCW challenges the legitimacy of dominant cultural practices, which are based on 'Bourdieuian cultural capital theory… [that places]…value on a very narrow range of assets'. In this study, I engage with Yosso's social capital, familial, aspirational, and navigational capitals, which she says helps individuals to move into and through educational spaces, and resistant capital which helps them to challenge inequality. Bourdieu's lenses along with those of Yosso's, allow this study to create a space where access to, and participation in HE, can be seen as a site of struggle for some students. Framing this approach here is an overall recognition of the relevance of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in its challenges to dominant ideologies to confront deficit models of thinking about minority students and its promotion of experiential knowledge. Referencing CRT also allows an acknowledgement of the monocultural basis on which much of the Irish education system has been based.

1.5 Research question

I started this professional doctorate with the overall hope to investigate ways in which the experiences of self-selected first-generation migrants might inform my practice as an educator within a higher education institution. Much research to date has focused more on the experiences of migrants and their work experiences (Cangiano, 2014; Barrett & Duffy, 2008; Barrett & McCarthy, 2007) and migrant experiences in the primary and secondary school systems (Darmody et al., 2014; Ledwith & Reilly, 2013). Less is known about the educational aspirations and hopes and experiences of migrants who are the first-generation of their families to attend HE in Ireland. The study was guided by one main, overarching question:

In what way can the educational experiences of first-generation migrants inform practice within Higher Education in Ireland?

I enquire into the experiences of self-selected migrants in higher education in Ireland by researching their higher education journeys.

There is an emerging body of research into migrants in higher education in Ireland and this current study of first-generation migrants in HE adds to this body of information. In order to address this gap, my research focuses on the experiences of this group of students. This research makes several contributions to the expanding literature about migrants in higher education in Ireland. Specifically, the study examined the experiences of first-generation migrants in one IoT in

Ireland, who are a less researched group. The participants who took part in this study offer a variety of different personal accounts of their experiences as migrants in the Irish HE system. I believe it is important to know about individuals' experiences from their personal perspectives, as well as exploring the topic of migrants in HE from the more typical secondary policy and structural perspectives.

1.6 Thesis structure

The overall structure of this study takes the form of seven chapters. This chapter introduced the research and the research question, and I give an outline of the motivations for the study. It is followed by **Chapter 2**, which introduces the body of literature that was studied for this study. The first part of the literature review examines research on migration from an international and national perspective. The broader body of international literature provides a context for past and on-going current movements of migrants across the globe, and points to some of the similarities of experience here in Ireland. The historic nature of the Irish government's resistance to providing for immigration is also presented as a backdrop to understanding the hesitancy of the Irish State's response to immigrants, including in education policy for access to higher education, in more recent times. The rapid increase in migrants who moved to Ireland during the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' years of economic success and the Accession of European states, which provided for the free movement of all EU citizens is presented

as a means to understand the lead-up to the referendum for the Citizenship Act of 2004, which saw the automatic right to citizenship based on being born in Ireland removed, and which has had a significant impact on the lives of many migrants in Ireland. This leads to the discourses which took place around migration, and which fed into the debates about migrants' rights. This part is then followed by an outline of the Direct Provision system in Ireland, which contextualizes the lived experiences of some of the participants in this study. This throws light on the structural disadvantage and institutionally created poverty that has resulted for migrants housed in this system of supervision, and which has long-lasting impacts. The review also explores literature on the impact of lack of permissions and access for families. The chapter then continues with a review of the existing literature on the right to education and going to college in Ireland. Motivations, pathways into HE, widening participation for HE (WP) policy, pathways into HE, and first-generation migrants in HE are also explored. The overview also presents a review of the issues involved around access to and attending HE, including recognition of prior learning (RPL), racism, English language needs, financial pressures, family and peer support networks and the culture of learning in the home.

Chapter 3 introduces the decisions I made about the theoretical framework used and explains the selection of conceptual frameworks

for the study. Bourdieu's framework, outlined in his *Theory of Practice,* suggests that through social and cultural capital, processes, structures, and mechanisms can legitimise and reproduce inequalities. I also consider Bourdieu's theoretical framework from his views on economic capital, field, and habitus. To do this, I include an additional theoretical perspective that allows me to enlarge on Bourdieu's work by using Yosso's (2005) ideas around social capital, and community cultural wealth (CCW). This conceptual framework is further augmented by using Yosso's *(ibid)* familial capital to illustrate the nature of first-generation in HE migrants' lives and is underpinned by a recognition of how Critical Race Theory (CRT) can inform our thinking about how dominant ideologies construct and maintain disadvantage, and how experiential knowledge should be valued.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology used to elicit the views of students. It commences with a description of the research design I employed based on its epistemological, ontological positionality. The reasons for choosing a qualitative approach are outlined, and my role as the researcher and my positioning is discussed. I explain how I recruited my participants, how I conducted my interviews, how I addressed my role in the research process, what the ethical implications were, and the scope and limitations of the methods I used. In addition, the chapter also contains reflections on the transcription process and the challenges of coding and thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the first part of the findings of the previous chapter, and it seeks to present insights about the issues raised in this research. The excerpts from the participants are lengthy in part and this was intentional and was based on my initial thoughts about researching this group of first-generation migrants. This section of the findings is focused on the challenges the participants reported about accessing HE. This includes an overview of the main barriers they experienced, their sometimes indeterminate eligibility to access HE, and how financial pressures, shaped their experiences. The chapter then moves on to examine the role of pathway education which can lead to HE and then considers English language needs, both to enter, and to continue in HE.

Chapter 6 presents the second part of the study's findings and focuses on joining college, support networks, being a role model, pressures, and organisational culture of teaching and learning.

Chapter 7 discusses students' experiences of their higher education, identifying the importance of cultural capital in the domestic habitus. The chapter concludes the study with final words on the main research question, the findings and recommendations and some words of reflection on the experiences of carrying out this research. This chapter gives a summary of the conclusions reached, identifies areas

for future research, and makes recommendations for practice in HE for the future.

There are ten pen-pictures of the students who participated in this research distributed between the chapters of this study. The first person you will meet is **Angie.**

Angie

Angie is from Romania. She has had two children since coming to Ireland and was pregnant with her second child while completing her master's studies. She is in her late twenties and lives in a small town in Ireland in a home that she shares with her children. She commuted forty minutes each way from her home to college during her studies. Her primary motivation for moving to Ireland was to secure employment and she worked in retail for some time but then decided to return to college following a redundancy, *'I lost my job, so I say, I will use this time to prepare for college'... 'I wanted a better job because I was just a sales assistant... I didn't even think if I liked it (studying) or not.* Angie's experiences of college life were also shaped by her having a child, *"I have a small kid ... and I didn't have time for any extracurricular activities at all... he was my extra-curricular activity'.* Her father and brother live in a town nearby and are both working in construction. Her mother lives in Romania with her younger brother, who is a student. Her mother has regularly come to stay with her in Ireland, especially when she was pregnant with both of her children. Angie studied for an Economics degree in Romania and, here in Ireland, she studied for a master's in business. Her academic qualifications from Romania were sufficient to enrol on her chosen course but in preparation for application, she first attended a local Education and Training Board (ETB) English class in her town to

develop her English language skills in order to achieve the level required by the college. ETBs routinely provide English language instruction up to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) QQI Level 3, which is approximately an elementary level of English. However, students who wish to study for QQI Level 5 English, which is accepted for proof of English language competency for HE, must find a Post Leaving Certificate centre (PLC), or ETB offering this level, or study for another examination such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Entry requirements for postgraduate courses usually require applicants to achieve a minimum band score of 6 or higher on IELTS, or the equivalent on another accepted English exam. Centres which offer these higher-level English courses are not always located in the same areas as ETBs and may not have direct public transport links from outlying areas. For Angie, achieving the required English language result for her college application was challenging because her local ETB did not provide English language courses up to the level required for admission to HE. As a result, Angie had to work alone on her English most of the time but was given feedback by her former ETB tutor who wanted to see her succeed *'I went to my Adult Learning Centre* (for help) … *'because I did some English there* (previously)*, so they helped me'*. Angie currently runs her own business as a web designer as well as tutoring to business students online. Prior to coming to Ireland, she had work experience as an indexing operator and as a manager.

Chapter 2 'Céad mile fáilte[4]'?

2.1 Introduction

The experiences of being a migrant can affect access to higher education (HE) in particular ways, including entry to, and participation in HE (Lynch, 2014). Despite extensive research into Irish student experiences of HE the experiences of first-generation migrants (the first in their families to attend HE) remains somewhat under-researched (Harris & Ní Chonaill, 2016). This chapter is not intended as an all-encompassing, stand-alone account of first-generation migrant experiences, rather it is part of an overall framing of what has been written about the phenomenon. The chapter is divided into a number of parts, the first of which is a broad outline of the global nature of migration activity. Secondly, the chapter then outlines Ireland's migration policy, which, I argue has historically been underdeveloped and reactive rather than pre-emptive and I focus on discourses around migration. At times, I draw from my own relationship with migration. The Nationality and Citizenship Referendum (2004) is also addressed. This is because the outcome of this referendum has had, and continues to have, significant impact on the rights of some migrants to access higher education. The chapter then moves on to information about the Direct Provision (DP) system in Ireland which many migrants who request international protection experience. I next outline pathways to HE and widening participation in higher education. For

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[4] 'Céad mile fáilte' is an Irish expression which means 'a hundred thousand welcomes'.

those for whom English is a second or subsequent language, the relevance of English language skills to success in accessing and completing higher education is then explored. Finally, the chapter looks at the impact of financial challenges, and at the implication of family and peer support structures and learning and teaching cultures on student outcomes. The chapter ends with a short review of student persistence.

2.2 People moving

Migration today is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon which occurs in both low, and high-income countries and the reasons people migrate are not only economic, or to escape conflict. Many of the world's highly educated migrants are moving to work in employment, where their skills are needed (Weinar & von Koppenfels, 2020). Other reasons for migration are deeply personal - people move to escape various types of persecution including for example: persecution of sexual identity, persecution of religion, because of a lack of resources, because of land grabbing by either local or international enterprises or foreign governments, to improve their quality of life, to gain an education, to reunite family, and also to have new experiences. Migration is part of being human and it is a global experience (O'Hagan, 2017).

Changes to political borders around the world along with an increasingly mobile international population, who can access travel in ways that were not possible in the past, have helped to propel people to new destinations and lives. These movements of people can operate as a single migratory event, or people may move more than one time, both in linear and circular fashions. Not all people who move reach their intended destinations, and the policies and regulations created by intermediary countries can consign many people to lives of indeterminate status, to be stuck in refugee camps, in informally arranged locations, and left with uncertain futures, which can persist for them over generations.

Migration is frequently seen as a modern phenomenon, but it is as old as human history. People have always moved from place to place - from the early migration of people out of Africa towards the eastern and northern regions of the world - to today's movement by people across all parts of the world. While historians may speculate on why, and when, people first began to move, modern migration patterns suggest that it is an activity that takes place in response to a variety of reasons, which can include but is not limited to: economic needs; the need to seek asylum; to escape conflict; or to escape trauma. Migration happens either on an individual level, or on a collective level. It also occurs and evolves in response to how social frameworks are organised over space and time (Massey, 1990).

For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2020), a migrant is identified as an individual who moves from one location to live in another, which can be, both within the geographical boundaries of a country, or in movement between countries. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2021a) uses a broader explanation of a migrant as: 'any person who is moving or has moved across an international border, or within a State, away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is'.

Migrants who arrive in Ireland from other countries may have regularised their travel in advance, but for others who wish to seek asylum, they must apply to the International Protection Office (Department of Justice, 2021). Free movement is possible across the European Union (EU) for EU citizens and their families (European Parliament, 2021). Currently in Ireland, in the International Protection Act 2015, the term 'application for international protection' is used to describe the initial application that an individual may make for asylum (Cronin et al., 2020).

2.3 Historical context of migration

Initially, much of the early research into theorising migration examined the macro influences, such as, 'migration as a system' (Mabogunje,

1970). This approach argues that if situations remain favourable to the migrants who have moved to a new location, then other immigrants would be encouraged to follow and so making migration a system that reinforces itself (*ibid*). Wallerstein (1974) describes a 'world system theory' in which migration is viewed as a natural result of economic globalization and market forces across national boundaries, whilst Priore (1979) refers to a 'dual labour market theory' which sees immigration linked to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies. However, more recently, the micro influences of individual and community choices are also considered including ideas such as economic 'push/pull' factors where the factors influencing migration are located in the source region as well as in the receiving regions of migrants (Lee, 1966), and 'theory of social systems' (Hoffmann-Novotny, 1981). A clear example of this migratory process can be seen in the nursing profession (Kingma, 2018). Economic theory, in particular the concepts around push/pull factors, dominated the migration discussion and in turn influenced how many states organised their policy and preparations about migration (Borjas, 1989). In periods of economic success, migrants have been essential to expanding business, in times of economic downturn, migrants can be seen in less favourable light by the receiving country and so, receiving countries can extend a welcome, or close their borders according to their perceived needs.

The one hundred years before World War 1 (WW1) saw the first significant mass international migration of approximately 48 million people from Europe to North America (Massey et al., 1999). It is noteworthy that amongst that group were slaves and indentured workers (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). Economically, there was a view that only those wealthy enough could travel and that the cost of travel placed a restriction on the numbers who moved. Although the numbers of recorded migrants were small initially, by the middle of the 19th century, the numbers had increased significantly (O'Rourke, 2009). One notable feature of this movement was the shift in migration from countries in northern Europe to countries in southern Europe. Various attempts at explaining the reasons for migration in general, and the shift in countries of origin, point to several factors, which include people moving to work in successful economies, often due to the lack of economic opportunities in their place of origin (Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014).

It is over-simplistic to see migration in this period of history as one-directional, Fernihough & Ó Gráda (2019) demonstrate that in the period from the late 1800s to early in the twentieth century, migrants from the poorer western counties in Ireland were more likely to return to Ireland than migrants from the east of the country, and that they were more likely to have better skills and literacy than those who never left (p.25). The modern trope of migrants being poor, illiterate, or from

rural areas is not reflected in the demographics of migration patterns today. Quite often, poorer people do not have the means to escape poverty and war, and they often remain trapped in their place of origin, or if circumstances permit, they move to a neighbouring region, or a neighbouring country (Castelli, 2018). Equally, modern stereotyping of migrants 'flooding' countries is also not true as the majority of migrants move within the borders of their own countries (IOM, 2021a).

A casual reading of the public narrative of Irish emigration may create the illusion that all movement by Irish people was only outward, yet statistically, there is a record of the return movement of Irish people too (CSO, 2021). Many Irish families have multi-generational histories that illustrate this. In my own case, both of my paternal grandparents left Ireland in the 1920s, one for the U.S.A. and the other for India and the Middle East, before independently returning to Ireland and marrying. Two uncles left for New York in the mid-1950s, returned briefly with their families in the early 1970s and departed again in the 1970s. Three more of my father's siblings moved to the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1950s and all returned to live in Ireland. My mother's sister left Ireland for New York in the early 1960s but also returned, and of their four brothers, one went to the UK at fifteen years of age and remains there, another died in an accident while living in London; the other two brothers went to San Francisco in the 1990s; one returned, and one is still in the United States. Of my generation,

two of my sisters went to New York in the 1990s and then returned. I left Ireland in the 1980s and spent three years living in Spain, and later returned. My brother moved to the U.S.A. in 2011 and is still there. More recently, my youngest son went to Australia for two years and then came back to Ireland. My family members left and returned to Ireland, and in some cases left again, for a myriad of reasons, which I believe are experienced and echoed in the many reasons why immigrants have come to live in Ireland. Immigration and migration are multi-faceted actions, and they are deeply personal.

During those three years when I lived abroad, I worked for various private language schools and one of my personal teaching highlights was working on-site for the building branch of the Barcelona Olympic Committee while the shell of the 1920s stadium, up on the hill of Montjuïc above the city, was redeveloped and upgraded around us in preparation for the 1992 Olympics.

To get there, I took two metros and a bus each way. I started my journey on Line 1 on one of the old trundling underground trains that screeched and lurched through the tunnels. My journey usually began just after 6am, and one morning as I stood and swayed with the other passengers, I was looking at people around me, who were almost all men in their fifties and sixties. I knew they noticed me because they nodded and greeted me that morning and on many other mornings,

and this greatly added to my personal sense of fitting in. I later discovered that I was living in an area of the city that was built to house the rapidly expanding population that moved from the countryside to work in Barcelona in the 1960s and 1970s. These were workers and their families who moved from economically challenged regions of Spain, when during Franco's dictatorship, a major programme of industrialisation and building took place in the major cities. Like me, many of my travelling companions had not always lived in this city.

As I went through the gates of the Olympic stadium each morning that I was teaching there, I would meet some of the night-shift workers leaving, and over time as my grasp of Spanish and Catalan improved, I began to notice that there were many different accents among the shift-workers indicating that they had come from many different parts of Catalonia, Spain, and other Spanish-speaking parts of the world.

One morning when I was entering the site was my 'stop and think' moment as it struck me that apart from meeting exchange students in university, and the annual flow of American tourists through the small country village where I grew up, I had never really met, engaged with, or thought about the lives and experiences of people who move around the world, apart from my own narrow world experience. I worked and socialised mostly with other English language speakers in my first year in Barcelona. It also struck me then that my experiences as a so-called

'ex-pat' were likely to be different to the migrant night-shift workers I met each morning at the stadium and I realised that my experiences were underpinned by significant advantage – I was university educated, held a well-paid job with pleasant hours, lived in a nice apartment in a nice area, and was generally held in respect by both students and my employers simply because I was an English teacher from Ireland.

2.3.1 Recent global migration context

My own story sits within a much broader context. According to IOM (2021b), migration has increased three-fold since 1970 (84.5 million, or 2.3%) to more than 272 million people, or 3.5% of the population of the world in 2019. Almost 26% of the people who moved are refugees and more than 50% of the refugee total are children under the age of 18 years. One in five migrants around the world dies while migrating and one in every fourteen sea crossings to Europe results in death (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020). Approximately the same number of women as men migrate (IOM, 2021b) and in recent research there is increasing evidence also of the migration of children, sometimes who are unaccompanied by adults (IOM, 2021b). Just as there are many different reasons why people migrate, there are also diverse experiences of migration and displacement, influenced by a range of social, economic, environmental, and political factors.

Increasingly, climate change and environmental threats have resulted in the displacement of people within many countries such as in the United States, Mozambique, China, India and the Philippines (IOM, 2021b). One driver of migration as a response to climate changes is the impact of the 'Dry Corridor' in Central America, or the breakdown of traditional weather patterns and its impacts on food production, which has led to a significant increase in the numbers of people wishing to migrate to the United States (García Escobar & Rabanales, 2020). Nearer to home, recent floods in Europe in 2021, and the recent eruption of the *Cumbre Vieja* volcano in La Palma in 2021 point to on-going climatic impacts on people's lives, which can include having to move. According to Arslan et al., (2014), between 2008 and 2014, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014) estimates that 26.4 million people have been displaced every year due to natural disasters. Displacement is described as the movement of people within a country to another part of the same country, such as people leaving New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, for other parts of the United States, but in some cases, displacement can lead to temporary, or permanent migration out of a country such as the experiences of Syrians who were initially displaced because of conflict and who have since moved to various parts of the world (UNHCR, 2021).

Unplanned migration broadly comes about as a result of factors such as, coercion, responses to conflict, ethnic and religious conflict, and, increasingly, as mentioned above, as a response to natural disaster and climate change (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2020). In recent years, it has become evident in some parts of the world that planning for migration for whole communities because of the effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels, extremes in temperatures, and competition for dwindling natural resources such as water or fuel is necessary. Three times as many people migrate because of climate disaster as the number of people who move because of conflict, and this is likely to continue to be the main cause of migration in the future (IOM, 2021a). Large scale planned movement, according to Warner et al., (2013), creates a need to take care of, not only people's physical relocation needs, but to ensure communities can replace their assets, remain together, and to return to their livelihoods. Relocating people is not only about physical movement but people must be assisted to replace their housing, assets, livelihoods, land, access to resources and services, and to at least restore their living standard to its previous level *(ibid).* These recent trends suggest that governments must plan for more movements of people, and address their likely economic, social and educational needs. Despite the efforts of many governments and political systems across the world to regulate and sometimes restrict both the planned and unplanned movement of people within, and between, countries, the number of people on the move is increasing (UNHCR, 2020).

Migration for economic reasons attracts people who are mostly in the 15-65 age group, and it has both positive and negative impacts on the source region, and on the destination region. The economies of the United States and countries such as Germany, and France are just some examples of the contribution that migrants have made. Positive consequences include releasing economic pressure on the source region's resources and employment markets, and in addition, remittances sent back to source regions can help to improve the quality of life of family members that remain there (Amuedo-Dorantes, 2014), and to improve schooling for children (Bucheli et al., 2018). On the other hand, the population that remains in the source region can be concentrated in the elderly and very young, and family networks of support may be reduced. In addition, source region labour needs may not be met (Amuedo-Dorantes, 2014). For destination countries, there are advantages of plentiful labour and increased diversity. The OECD (2014:4) report demonstrates that migrants contribute to destination regions by increasing the flexibility of the workforce, contribute more into the tax system than they receive in return, and that the proportion of highly educated migrants in OECD countries is increasing sharply. Whatever the underlying reasons for people to move are, research shows that migration is constant and initiated by a variety of predictable and unpredictable factors (Castelli, 2018).

2.4 Ireland's migration policy

To understand Ireland's current relationship with migration, it helps to look to history and examine our less than welcoming response to migrants during, and post, the Second World War period, which began less than twenty years into Ireland's independence. Although Ireland remained a neutral country during the War, it was not immune to its consequences, particularly in relation to the displacement of people. Following the cessation of the Second World War, significant numbers of people in Europe were either displaced or dispossessed through the processes of border re-alignments, political upheaval, and ethnic or religious persecution (Gatrell, 2007). The largest movement of people that Europe had ever experienced saw millions of people fleeing cities, regions, and their former countries in the turbulent post-war years. Over 1.1m people had been brought to Germany to work as unpaid labourers during the Second World War, and a significant number perished in the Concentration Camps (*ibid).* After the end of the war, while many were able to return to their homelands, others were unable to do so due to fears of repression or persecution. In addition, millions of Germans left or were forced to leave Eastern Europe, and, at the same time, large numbers of Jewish people were leaving their birth countries to seek safety elsewhere. Additionally, significant numbers of people rushed to escape the newly installed communist regimes. Displaced persons' camps were set up in some European countries as temporary facilities to accommodate refugees from Eastern Europe and for former inmates of the Nazi Concentration camps. Although

conceived of as a temporary solution, it would be 1957/8 before the last of these displaced persons' camps was finally closed (Wyrwich, 2020). Many of the residents of these camps were unwilling to be returned to their countries or regions of origin, and subsequently were resettled in Canada, Australia, the United States of America, and Western Europe. A consequence of this period in history was the first international focus on a large-scale refugee crisis, and it is arguable that this period foretold the many concerns and discourses that would emerge in relation to immigration policies and processes worldwide, and in Ireland today.

The Irish state's role in post-war refugee aid and resettlement was minimal and by-and-large unwelcoming in its nature. Initially, the *Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act* (1935) recognised two types of people in Ireland: people were either 'aliens' or 'Irish citizens'. Refugees were not recognised by this Act and until the *Refugee Act* (1996) was passed; this *Nationality and Citizenship Act* was Ireland's legal framework for all refugee issues (Daly, 2001). Policies, such as existed, were organic and deeply embedded in conservative thinking, particularly from the Department of Justice in the years following the creation of the Irish State and later (Ward, 1999). This is significant, as the absence of a refugee policy enshrined in Irish law I argue, effectively became a policy of indifference and political abstention by default.

In answer to the appeals for help for refugee re-settlement from the United Nations, Ireland used the excuse that because of the large numbers of Irish people leaving Ireland, it was not possible for Ireland to make a meaningful contribution to the resettlement of refugees (Ward, 1999). While Ireland made claims to not be in a financial position to accept many refugees, it is clear from government documents that some people were less welcome than others. Spanish refugees after the Spanish Civil War were rejected as they were potentially 'communists', and Jewish people were considered to be too wealthy and too influential. There were also concerns that Jewish people in numbers would become 'a social problem' (Fanning, 2016).

Calls to the Irish Government in 1946 for 100 orphan Jewish children from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Poland to be temporarily settled in Ireland were rejected based on that now infamous Department of Justice memo (1945, cited in Fanning 2016) which claimed that as 'Jews do not become assimilated with the native population, like other immigrants, there is a danger that any big increase in their numbers might create a social problem'. This was despite the fact that the temporary re-settlement was to be funded by members of the Irish and British Jewish communities at no cost to the Irish state. Ward (1999:135) reports that the Department of Justice in the same memo in 1945 deemed Jewish people 'a potential irritant in the body politic'. Over 130 Jewish children eventually came to Ireland

at the intervention of Eamon de Valera[5], who, according to Holfter & Dickel (2016), declined to create a more receptive Irish refugee policy. Most of the children were eventually re-united with surviving family members in other countries in the following years.

Resistance embedded in Irish Government policy to refugees was not only confined to Jewish people. In 1956, two weeks after Ireland joined the UN, Ireland was requested by that organisation to accept Hungarian refugees fleeing the invasion of Hungary by the USSR. Of the 539 refugees who came to Ireland, only 60 people remained within two years of their arrival; the vast majority left for Northern America and the UK, and some returned to Hungary. Their experiences in Ireland were difficult as they were largely abandoned by the State, and it was left to the Red Cross to look after them. They were housed in poor quality former army huts and endured cold conditions, cold food, isolation, and their children were not allowed to attend the local schools. An attempt by some of the Hungarian group to travel to Dublin to make direct appeals to the Irish government on behalf of the group was thwarted by their being apprehended and returned to the former army camp. Ward (1996) suggests that Ireland only accepted the group to appease the UN, and Ireland's complete lack of experience and interest in the group resulted in the group engaging in a hunger

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[5] Ireland's *Taoiseach* (Irish word for Leader of Government) from 1937-1948

strike for better conditions (Joyce, 2010). In 2020, migrants housed in Direct Provision in Ireland also went on hunger strike for better conditions (Coyne, 2020).

Recent Irish migration policy – a response to economic demands

The so-called 'Celtic Tiger', or rapid escalation of economic activity in Ireland began to develop around the beginning of the 1990s and lasted until the banking collapse and financial crises of 2008 (Cronin et al., 2020). During that period of time, Ireland's labour needs could no longer be met by the population resident in Ireland and public policy initiatives encouraged people to come to work in Ireland and to join the escalating economic activity *(ibid).* The IOM (2015) describes Irish migration policy as being largely employer driven at that time. There were two strands to labour needs in Ireland, on the one hand, high-skilled workers were needed for the advanced technical industries created by foreign direct investment that was taking place at this time, and on the other hand, the growth in the construction sector saw a demand for lower-to-medium skilled workers, especially in the hospitality and service sectors (Wright, 2007). This period of labour need coincided with the accession of European countries into the European Union (EU) in 2004, which initially provided a mobile young workforce that arrived to meet the growing demands for labour here. In addition, working permits were made available to people from countries outside of the EU so that, alongside the arrival of people from

EU countries, others arrived from various parts of the world. Some of the arrivals were returning emigrants who had been born in Ireland and had left during the persistent recession of the 1980s (CSO, 2002), and there were also people who arrived to seek international protection (Fanning, n.d).

According to Kirby (2010), the banking collapse of 2008 in Ireland was a result of the over-extension of loans to property developers and because of the United States (US) subprime crisis, banks in Ireland were unable to borrow to cover their liabilities. The economic impact of the US subprime crisis had profound social and political impacts, both in Ireland, and internationally. On the one hand, some people who had been living and working in Ireland and who were now either unemployed, or on reduced pay, began to leave Ireland to find work in other countries and, on the other hand, many of those remaining in Ireland who kept their jobs, experienced significant loss of income through redundancy and through restructuring of wage agreements. Some of the employment areas that were worst hit were those that had depended on workers from the migrant work visa programme predominantly in the hospitality and services industries (CS0, 2016b; Papademetriou et al., 2010).

2.4.1 Who is here?

As previously stated, there were varying levels of migration before these contemporary examples. For example, highly skilled workers such as doctors moved here to work in the Irish health system (Fitzsimons, 2017a). Following the foundation of the Irish State in 1922, there was a reduction in the movement of people into Ireland, which may have had less to do with people not wanting to come here, and perhaps more to do with official barriers that were put up to prevent people coming to Ireland, which I will outline below. It is therefore an overly simplistic view that, because so few migrants came to Ireland, that there was no official position on inward migration. The Irish Free State inherited its legal structures from Britain, in laws relating to who were citizens of the state and those who were perceived as 'aliens', which had been enshrined in the *Aliens Restriction Act* (1914), and the *Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act* of (1919). Both of these Acts were adopted into Irish law (Daly, 2001). These laws, accordingly, were the framework against which decisions were made by the State about who could migrate into Ireland and who could not.

Government documents from the early years of the State demonstrate that Ireland as a state had experience of immigration on a policy level which created the structures to bar people from arriving (Scally, 2017). Despite the Irish government's attempts to restrict immigration into

Ireland, Mac Éinrí and White (2008) have suggested that Ireland has long been a heterogeneous country, and it is not the country of homogenous Roman Catholic, white people, which has been a popular mis-construal of the make-up of the population in Ireland. Ireland's population is diversified and in the most recent 2016 census (CSO, 2016a), 200 nationalities representing 535,475 people (approximately 11% of the total population of over 4.5 million) were recorded. Gilmartin & White (2008:147), also point out that this movement of people into Ireland is no longer 'a stand-alone and exceptional process' but rather is 'a component, and outcome of broader global processes'.

The oft-held notion of the Irish population being a homogenous group mentioned above is 'embedded in the hegemonic narrative that emigration from a mono-ethnic society has been replaced by immigration into a rapidly changing, multi-ethnic society' (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008: 150). However, this position on homogeneity can not only have been a product of popular perception. Lentin (2007) says that the Irish state, in constructing a narrative of racial homogeneity in Ireland, is complicit in obscuring heterogeneities, which leads to popular and political discourses that reflect so-called 'crises' around the inward movement of people. She further suggests that this narrative around racial homogeneity allows the state to disregard the rights of other minority people such as Travellers, and others who have lived here

over long periods of time. Indeed, Gilmartin & White (2008:147) have claimed that Ireland's treatment of migrant minorities is based on the premise that their time in Ireland is 'temporary', and therefore they will somehow go away. Mac Éinrí & White (2008:162), said 'claims are repeatedly made that Ireland's experience of immigration is new. These are often used as an (increasingly dated) explanation for the Irish State's failure to plan and provide services for Ireland's (migrant and non-migrant) communities'.

This lack of planning can be seen in the State's public policy at this time, which was reactive, rather than pre-emptive. This was reflected in the legislation that was introduced including the *Refugee Act 1996* to respond to the increasing numbers of applications for asylum, and in the *Immigration Act 1999*, which was introduced to deal with the irregular status of migrants who had been refused international protection by the State. The *Immigration Act 2003* came into force so that the powers of the Minister for Justice to revoke, grant or modify the status of non-EU nationals, could be clarified. This Act granted considerable powers to civil servants, under ministerial direction, to make decisions regarding an applicant's status in the State. A lacuna in the provision of legislation from 2003 was finally addressed in 2015 with the introduction of the *International Protection Act 2015,* and it is arguable that this lack of government action coupled with the discreet

decision-making of individuals in the Department of Justice may be contributing to the stalled lives of some migrants in Ireland.

2.5 Discourses around migration

While the movement of people from one part of the world to another can have a beneficial impact on innovation, knowledge, trade, and ideas, increases in the movement of people can give rise to considerable debate regarding the social and economic impact on both receiving and sending countries (Gheasi & Nijkamp, 2017). Part of the current discourse globally about migrants is rooted in the negative perceptions of some receiving communities, who may feel fearful of people arriving from other countries, or regions. This is a pattern that has been seen in many countries. People's fear often is not based on facts. For example, in the United States Southeast, Mountain Northwest, and Mideast areas, people expressed more concerns about the migrant caravan travelling from Central and South America in 2017 than did residents in the Northeast and Southwest where greater numbers of immigrants constituted a larger part of the population (Monmouth University, 2018). According to Gonzales & Delgado (2015), this fear of others is being translated into some voters making political choices for more right-wing government in the United States. This is also happening across many European countries (Mulholland, 2012). This has resulted in policies which restrict the numbers of people being allowed to enter some countries, and

restrictions of the rights of those already there. Thus, there are implications for the civil liberties of all people. Mehta (2019) argues that 'the west is being destroyed not by migrants but by the fear of migrants'. This negative discourse has fed into the discussions around migration and migrant rights in Ireland.

2.5.1 Discourses in Ireland

In Ireland, the public discourses around migration increased significantly before the 2004 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Referendum, the then minister for Justice, Mr Michael Mc Dowell opined,

> *'persons with no substantial links to Ireland, North or South, are arranging their affairs so as to ensure that a child is born within the island of Ireland, thus acquiring, despite the lack of association with either part of the island, an entitlement and birthright to be part of the Irish nation'[6].*

More recent debates on the proposed Irish Nationality and Citizenship (*Restoration of Birthright Citizenship)* Bill 2017, show little evidence of a shift in political memory. The Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr Charles Flanagan, offered the following response to the proposed bill,

> '*This discretion is an important check on any potential abuse. I remind the House, … that the 2004 referendum which placed this rule in the Constitution arose following a direct call from the three masters of the maternity hospitals in Dublin for a change in the law. They made that call because of their concern about*

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[6] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2004: Second Stage', Dáil Éireann debate, Vol. 583, No. 6, 21 April 2004, available at www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2004-04-21/3.

the rapidly increasing number of mothers who were presenting for the first time at advanced stages of pregnancy, with consequent risks to the health of the mother and the child and implications for the capacity of the maternity hospitals to function. The view at that time was that in many cases women were being exploited, forced either to travel here in late stages of pregnancy or to give birth here as a means of guaranteeing citizenship and residency for a wider cohort of family members. Of course, these were the cases witnessed by the maternity hospitals and the immigration services; they were not the cases in the public domain. It seems most convenient for some to forget about them now'[7].

The reported call for a referendum by the masters of the maternity hospitals had been refuted in 2004 and Lentin says that an 'alleged 'baby boom' was attributed by politicians and media citing the 'masters' of Dublin's maternity hospitals' (2007). This claim by Minister Mc Dowell about the masters' call for a referendum was refuted by two of the three masters of the main maternity hospitals in Dublin when they denied they had ever requested a referendum on the right to automatic citizenship for children born in Ireland (Breen et al., 2005). However, the negative discourses around immigrants from around that time persist for some. Lentin (2007:623) claims that the 'leading actor in creating anti-immigrant sentiment in Ireland has been the state'.

Daly (2001) suggests that Birthright citizenship for all people born on the island of Ireland had been a belief both before and after independence in 1922. In the 2004 referendum period, the impact of

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[7] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Irish Nationality and Citizenship (Restoration of Birthright Citizenship) Bill 2017: Second Stage', Dáil Éireann debate, Vol. 977, No. 6, 17 January 2019, www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-01- 17/53.

Ireland's decision-making around Birthright citizenship on European Union states was invoked by the Minister, despite Ireland having been a member of the European Union structure for thirty years, and '*jus soli*', (the right to citizenship based on where someone is born), had not been previously identified as a difficulty for other member states in the previous years of EU membership,

> *'This would create a major incentive for non-EEA[8] nationals in other EU member states, particularly those there illegally and without lawful authority and those with non-reckonable residency, to come here to have their child. Such persons could in turn return to the original EU member state as soon as the child is born having secured Irish citizenship, thereby circumventing the immigration laws of any EU member state'.[9]*

One of the most notable features of the discourses around migration at this time was the particular attention given to women migrants, and their bodies, by politicians and the media (Garner, 2007). Luibhéid (2013:31) suggests this type of discourse is a product of establishing 'hierarchies of difference' and is based on 'whose childbearing was envisioned as perpetuating the nation' (p.35). As the rhetoric immediately before the referendum ramped up, the tone of the discourse became more crude. Hewson (2018:582) describes the construction in the media of women as being 'childbearing threats'. The former Minister for Justice, John O'Donoghue, said that a

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[8] European Economic Area comprises the Member States of the EU along with Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.
[9] Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Irish Nationality and Citizenship (Restoration of Birthright Citizenship) Bill 2017: Second Stage', Dáil Éireann debate, Vol. 977, No. 6, 17 January 2019, www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-01- 17/53.

significant proportion of female migrants who were arriving into Ireland were pregnant and that Ireland had become a baby 'magnet' (Brophy, 2001). The discourse fed into a long history in Ireland of women being seen as incapable of looking after themselves and needing supervision (Lentin, 2004). This is reflective of the 'subtle forms of rule wielded by technocrats and intellectuals in the name of culture and rationality... (and) ... of established patterns of power and privilege as well as of the politics that supports them' (Wacquant 2015:217). The media's role was also significant in building up a public perception of threat. One infamous piece delivered by Keane (2002), who was reporting on a County Council meeting in Kilkenny, quoted Councillor Dixie Doyle, who claimed that migrants were 'breeding like rabbits'.

2.6 Citizenship

The Citizenship Referendum of 2004 marked a pivotal moment in the debates and discourses about migration. Up to this point, citizenship was determined by the *Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956* (as amended) (the 1956 Act). This acquisition of citizenship could be determined at birth by descent, by birth on the island of Ireland, and naturalisation. Following the 27th constitutional Referendum for the first time in the history of the state, the right to '*jus soli*', or automatic citizenship by birth right, was removed from any person who is born in the Irish state who does not have at least one parent who is a citizen, or who is entitled to be one. Alongside *'jus soli'*, Ireland, like most of

Europe, also operated *'jus sanguinis'*, or citizenship by direct descent from a parent, or grandparent[10]. The consequences of *'jus sanguinis'* is significant for those born on Irish soil but who do not have a right to claim citizenship based on the residency status of a parent. Conversely, it is entirely possible for a person who is the immediate offspring, or a grandchild, of an Irish citizen to request citizenship even if they have never actually set foot on Irish soil. However, a person born here, and who has lived here all their life here may not be able to claim automatic citizenship, and consequently, they do not experience the same rights as others who have citizenship.

According to the CSO (2016a), 65,860 children under the age of 14 do not have Irish citizenship. Some of these children are now approaching the end of their secondary school years and may not be in a position to apply to higher education because of the circumstances of their citizenship. However, the CSO figure at the time of writing was five years old, and the planned census of 2021 was postponed because of the Covid19 pandemic. A significant number of this group of people will have become naturalised citizens in the intervening years.

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[10] This right to citizenship has been used in recruiting players from outside of Ireland for various national teams and has been given the moniker, the 'Irish granny rule'.

2.7 Direct Provision in Ireland

At least four of the ten participants (Anne, John, Hazel, and Tek-kwo) in this study had experience of the Direct Provision (DP) process in Ireland and they had difficult experiences when trying to access higher education, work, and an income while they were living in Direct Provision. According to Luibhéid (2013), this system of welfare does not support people to be productive, integrated members of Irish society, rather it operates as a deterrent to people who may seek protection. These centres are mostly privatised and some people, such as hotel owners, are making millions of euro in profit from providing the service to the state (Deegan, 2020). Of the 40 centres around the country; only seven of the accommodation centres in Ireland are State-owned (Doras, 2020). As of September 2020, Asylum Information Database (AIDA, 2021) states that there were 5,529 people in DP[11] and 249 were living in an Emergency Reception and Accommodation Centre (EROC), which all newly arrived applicants for protection go first to for initial assessment.

Direct Provision, which is operated by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice, has been the Irish State's response to the accommodation needs of people who come to Ireland seeking international protection. The DP system was set up in 2000 as an 'interim' solution and provides institutional accommodation in

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[11] This is the most recent report available as of July 12, 2021.

centres mainly located outside Dublin as part of the Irish Government's 'dispersal' policy. Prior to the establishment of DP, applicants for international protection could claim social welfare payments and usually sourced their own accommodation, with more than 90% choosing to live in Dublin (Royal College of Physicians Ireland, 2019). Applicants for international protection who access DP provision are obliged to live in designated accommodation centres while they wait for a decision on their application for refuge, or humanitarian leave to remain status. This application process can be lengthy (Irish Refugee Council, 2021; Stapleton, 2012). Doras (2020) reports that the average length of stay in DP is twenty-four months, with some applicants spending up to '10 or 12 years living in these conditions'. According to RIA (2018), 309 people had been waiting for a decision on their status for 7 years, or longer. This prolonged waiting has impacts on all aspects of people's lives including physical and mental health, and especially on children's education (O'Reilly, 2018).

One of the consequences of living in the DP system is that most, if not all, residents will experience poverty. The three main types of poverty experienced include health poverty, food poverty, and financial poverty (Luibhéid, 2013:96). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (2020) also identifies the DP system as being a contributor to the poverty experienced by migrants, particularly if the period of time in DP is long. This can have long-term effects socially, psychologically,

economically, and educationally. Research in the period post-2008 economic crash shows that migrants in Ireland experienced a higher rate of unemployment and less recognition of their academic qualifications (ESRI, 2020). Overall, in 2016, migrants in Ireland from African countries of origin experienced a rate of consistent poverty of 29% in comparison to a rate of 8% for people who were Irish born (Irish Times, 2018).

Although many individuals in DP have few direct opportunities to engage Irish people directly in discussion about their difficult living conditions, some members of the Irish public have had plenty to say publicly about migrants. There was a noticeable increase in negative media reporting that was well established by 2002 (Breen et al., 2005). The rhetoric around applicants for international protection increased in the times before and after the Citizenship Referendum in 2004. The rhetoric was added to by politicians. The then Minister for Justice, John O' Donoghue, claimed that the numbers applying for protection were 'spiralling out of control' (Holland, 2005). The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform created a policy of direct provision in response to the political and public concerns that were being voiced at that time. People arriving in Ireland were being differentiated in the public consciousness based on whether they were labelled as 'welcomed' (work related migration), or 'unwelcomed' (migration that

was perceived to be based on people coming to Ireland to gain capital) (Ní Chonaill, 2009).

People living in DP are largely isolated from the communities they live alongside because of their segregated accommodation. A lack of meaningful finances that would allow them to shop, or to participate in local social or sports activities that charge fees creates other causes of isolation. Applicants for international protection can choose not to live in DP, however, as the current government weekly payment to applicants is €38.70 per adult and €29.80 per child which is to pay for all needs (Citizens Information 2021a), it is highly unlikely that finding and being able to afford their own accommodation is a realistic option. In addition, there are restrictions on education and the right to work (Irish Refugee Council, 2017; Stapleton, 2012). The quality of accommodation and facilities varies from centre to centre (Nasc, 2020). Most centres exercise an unusual level of control over the inhabitants' lives, including the setting of inflexible mealtimes, restrictions on who may visit residents, a ban on residents preparing their own food, and controls over leaving and re-entering the accommodation (O'Reilly, 2018). Conlon (2010:101) describes these centres as a 'hodge-podge of accommodations' which include caravan parks, former army barracks, hostels, and hotels. Invariably, these spaces are over-crowded and there is little opportunity for privacy, or to make personal choices (O'Reilly, 2018). Since 2017, Child Benefit

has been paid to parents or carers of Irish-born children in the DP system, but not on behalf of any other children who were not born in Ireland, although they live here and despite the Irish government's recognition of the cost to raise children (Citizens Information 2021b; Government of Ireland Social Inclusion Division, 2020).

Critics of DP point out that the DP process is exclusionary, contributes to poor mental and physical health, and enforces dependency (RCPI, 2019; Loyal, 2018; Fanning 2007). Some of the criticisms which have been levelled at DP practices include: the placing of unaccompanied minors who reach adulthood in shared accommodation with older unrelated adults; a lack of basic privacy for families; and the arbitrary movement of families and young people from one centre to another against their wishes, which has serious impacts on their social networks and education (Edmund Rice Schools Report, 2019). O'Reilly (2018:830) claims that DP is analogous to Foucault's (1979) 'microphysics of power' where strategies of power are ingrained in all aspects of intimate daily life and this power is something that is exercised and not possessed.

One significant difficulty which intending students of HE can encounter is that if they reach 18 while in their final years of secondary schooling, they are immediately categorised as an adult and may be required to move away from a host family, or to another DP centre, regardless of

where they are on their educational journey. According to the Edmund Rice Schools Report (2019), this is a key reason why some students in DP do not complete their final state examinations with the consequence that they may not be able to access higher education. Recent research by Maynooth University on the experience of people living in DP of accessing higher education reveals the deeply troubling consequences of this for those at the receiving end who are simply excluded from education as a result (HEAR, 2021). Many pupils and students struggle to find quiet spaces to study in the centres and they often cannot access food after the DP centres close their kitchens in the evenings. This challenge is summarised by Arnold (2012:26) who comments that 'life in Direct Provision is not conducive to active participation in education and limits children from taking full advantage of their school experiences'.

2.8 Right to work and to education

This next section explores some of the rights to work and to an education that are underpinned by the United Nations declaration, and by Irish law for migrants who are applying for international protection, and for non-EEA applicants. For some, the lack of permissions can lead to long-term lack of progress and an impact on the right to education due to lack of resources.

Right to work

The basic right to work is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (The United Nations, 1948). This right is recognised in international law in Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and says that States have an obligation to recognise this fundamental right, and to proactively ensure the full realisation of its obligation. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also clearly states that "everyone has the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation" (Article 15). From the introduction of the *Refugee Act* in 1996 to the *International Protection Act 2015*, the Irish State has consistently prohibited asylum seekers arriving to Ireland from being able to invoke this right to work while waiting for a determination on their applications for asylum. Some of the lengths of time waiting for a decision have been as long as nine years as in the case of the appellant in *N.H.V. v Minister for Justice and Equality* (2017). In 2015, following the publication of the *McMahon Report* (2015), applicants for international protection have been able to access the labour market for the first time if they have been waiting for over nine months for an initial decision on their application for international protection – this work permit is known as a Labour Market Access Permission. There is a cap on the income that can be earned (currently €30,000 p.a.), which is despite the high numbers of well-educated 'non-Irish nationals' (CSO, 2019). In addition, there are restrictions on what jobs a permit holder can apply

for and so this renders meaningful work appropriate to skill set difficult if not impossible[12]. This restriction on employment is underpinned by a *N.H.V. v Supreme Court* decision of (2017), which says that the State can regulate the types of employment an applicant for international protection may access on the grounds of economic or *societal* reasons (my italics).

For non-EEA migrants who do not enter Ireland through applications for international protection, but who have come to seek employment, there are criteria that have to be met in order to access a work permit. The right to work in Ireland for non-EEA nationals is regulated through employment and immigration policy set by the State. In the initial response to Ireland's labour needs in the period from 1999 to 2003, more than three quarters of all work permits issued were for low-skilled jobs (Barrett & Duffy, 2008). Labour market information indicated a maturing migrant labour market based on the higher occupational position of longer-term migrants to Ireland at that time. Barrett & Duffy (2008) point out that occupation attainment during this period was regardless of age or level of education. They also noted that immigrants who had arrived earlier than this period who experienced higher occupational attainment were more a reflection of a changing

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[12] See DBEI, Ineligible Categories of Employment for Employment Permits available at https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We- Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Employment-Permit-Eligibility/Ineligible-Categories-of-Employment/

national mix in recent migration and less a reflection of labour market integration.

For migrants arriving to work in the low-skilled Irish labour market at that time, work permits were tied to employers and were on a one-year renewable basis. Permit holders could not change jobs as the permit was non-transferable, and because of the State's policy at this time, intending migrants had to have secured a job before they could enter the State. Copparri (2019) suggests that being trapped in Ireland's low-skilled labour market could lead to exploitation and discrimination with consequences for job progression. This could also have implications for family reunification. Currently, intending applicants for a first General Employment Permit must stay with their employer for twelve months unless there are exceptional circumstances, and after a year, applicants can re-apply (Citizens Information, 2022a).

Lack of permissions and access for families

From late 2003, a change in employment permits was introduced in Ireland where applications for non-EU nationals (other than those applicants from EU accession states) were steadily refused. More recently, critical skills permits are now issued to two groups of workers which include those who find work based on the Critical Skills

Occupation List with a salary of at least €30,000, and those who find work that pays at least €60,000 but is not on the Critical Skills Occupation List (Arnold et al., 2019). However, unless an individual who is seeking family reunification in Ireland has a Stamp 1 (General Employment permit holder) or is granted a Stamp 4 (which permits employment without a permit) then they do not have permission to work (Department of Justice, 2022a). March 2019 saw the introduction of Stamp 1G for spouses of Critical Skills Occupation List permit holders. This enables full access to the labour market for this category of individuals without the need to obtain an Employment Permit (O'Connell, 2021).

The right to family reunification is problematic and according to Götzelman (2016:75) is 'governed by a patchwork of fragmented legislation, non-absolute rights stemming from a variety of domestic and international sources, and discretionary regimes'. Statutory law exists for only certain types of migrants including, EU/EEA, Swiss nationals, and returning Irish citizens. The discretionary power of the Minister for Justice and Equality to grant reunification visas to family members happens, despite the fact that the migrants from non-EEA countries who can make applications are legally resident in the Irish State. In addition, this ministerial discretionary power persists despite a lack of clarity and 'material law' (Becker, 2014:103).

Apart from the disadvantages of not securing a Stamp 1, Stamp 1G, or a Stamp 4, which can give access to the labour market, those family members who are allowed to enter Ireland on other categories of stamps face other challenges. They may not be able to access state services such as public health services or welfare entitlements. This can mean that applicants for family reunification either take on the burden of private health insurance or pay for medical services personally. Families with children must be able to demonstrate a minimum earning per week that is incrementally increased depending on the number of children (INIS, 2016). Another challenge for dependents of work permit holders in Ireland is that their permission to reside here is usually tied to the permit holder's right to work and residency. However, in the case of family breakdown as a result of domestic violence, there is a process that an applicant with a change of circumstance can apply to in their own name (Department of Justice, 2022b).

Long term lack of progress

Chiswick's (1978) seminal work on migrant earnings which influenced thinking on the integration of immigrant workers into host communities, described immigrant men in the United States as initially earning less than native-born men with similar characteristics in the US. However, as they developed knowledge of the labour markets and language, and acquired skills relevant to jobs in the US, then their incomes

improved more rapidly than those of native-born men. This seemed to suggest benefits to being a migrant in a modern economy. Since then, Chiswick & Millar (2007) point to the significance of the age of migrants when they leave their home countries and the ability of younger migrants to adapt more easily than older migrants which may be more important in explaining wage differences.

Across Europe, studies on wage discrepancies show that non-European migrants are more likely to be engaged in low-wage work. For example, according to Algan et al., (2010), in France, first-generation immigrant men from Europe do not encounter a wage gap, however, workers from sub-Saharan Africa earn much less than French citizens do and that in the UK, the earning gap is larger when compared to that in Germany and France. Venturini & Villosio (2006) also show a substantial wage gap over time between natives and foreign workers with workers from African countries being the least well-paid, while East Europeans' earnings are similar to the earnings of 'natives'. In Italy, Fullin & Reyneri (2011) report that migrants regardless of their standard of education are increasingly segregated into low-skilled jobs because they experience significant challenges in entering non-manual jobs that they are well qualified for, or in becoming self-employed.

These international findings from European labour markets, which demonstrate that a migrant background in general leads to less career success or less individual outcome on the labour market of the new home country (Algan et al., 2010), are also seen in Ireland and concur with Barrett & McCarthy's (2007) study, which showed that migrants in Ireland earned on average 18 per cent less, in comparison to native workers. This discrepancy in earnings was also found in a study by Barrett et al., (2016). In addition to the difficulties associated with lower incomes for similar work, there are also concerns about the exclusion of some groups from employment. The significantly worse labour market outcome of migrants from African countries is notable in Ireland as only up to 40% of adult Africans are in employment (O'Connell, 2019). Although a higher percentage of migrants were made unemployed in the economic crash of 2008 (CSO, 2012b), two out of three people who came from migrant backgrounds made the decision to remain in Ireland (Smyth, 2010a), some of whom then chose to enter HE in Ireland for the first time. However, they were then, as now, entering a third-level system that expects individuals to be autonomous in terms of their learning and personal self-development (Grummell (2007:186), and according to Lynch (2004, cited in Grummell 2007:187), they are not necessarily in a position to 'make active consumer choices due to the poverty of their resources'.

While some research points to socio-demographic background (for example education, gender, age, country of birth) and other attributes, such as, language skills and length of stay as being partially responsible for the lower performances of migrants in some labour markets, the migration policies and systemic disadvantages placed on migrants by receiving countries are also significant (Cangiano, 2014). Economic disadvantages can lead to long term lack of progress but can be ameliorated by success in education (Ballarino & Panichella, 2015). However, for many migrants who cannot access education, long-term challenges can persist. In addition to the potential for long-term economic disadvantage, there are also the consequences for accessing further education for the individual themselves and following generations, as well as finding a place in society (Darmody et al., 2014). Other challenges around mental and physical health for migrants also occur including struggles with personal well-being (Satyen & Becerra, 2022). The impact of well-being not only is experienced by the migrants themselves, but also by those family members and loved ones the migrant has left (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2021).

Right to education

The right to free education for all children who are applicants for international protection is guaranteed up to the end of secondary school (Department of Education, 2021b). A number of human rights

instruments, including the Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR, 2018), point to the right to education that should be a 'legally binding norm' and that it be 'equally accessible to all' (Kotzmann, 2018:20). In 2018, *Carter v The Minister for Education and Skills* (2019) established that there was a right to higher education for all in Ireland, which has since been appealed. Since June 2019, a grant scheme for third level applicants has been put in place by the Department of Education and Skills and is based on the Pilot Support Scheme of 2015. Recent easing of the requirement to attend the Irish school system for three years from five years has brought the residency requirement into line with the statutory-based Student Grant Scheme run by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) (Department of Education, 2019).

2.9 Going to college

In this section, the literature on access to, and participation by migrants in higher education, is examined and contextualised by key issues that underpin access to and involvement in higher education by this group. By virtue of the fact that all the participants in this study attended an Institute of Technology (IoT), the main focus on Higher Education (HE) in this section is on the educational provision offered by this sector as it plays a greater role in access to HE by non-traditional students, including migrants (HEA, 2019b). While there is extensive research into the student higher education experience of traditional students, non-traditional student participation by first-generation migrants in

Higher Education in Ireland is an emerging research area, both from the perspective of higher education research, and refugee/migrant studies. Building on the discussion above on the background to migration to Ireland, this section below opens by considering HE provision in Europe and beyond and then moves to higher education provision in Ireland. This overview includes some factors that impact on access to HE by migrants, such as, widening access policy, pathways, language support, finance, educational culture in the home, and support networks and relationships in college in student success.

One of the main outcomes of the Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy, (which are mentioned in Chapter 1), was the formalising into Irish HE educational policy of a marketisation approach to higher education (Wedlin, 2008). This was an important shift to implementing principles of marketized neoliberal thought in education policy The impact of this shift can be seen explicitly in the goals set out in the *Hunt Report* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) and in the follow-up *Report to the Minister for Education and Skills on system reconfiguration, interinstitutional collaboration and system governance in Irish higher education* (HEA, 2013), which mirrored a marketization trend which had been developing in HE internationally since at least the late 1960s, including in Ireland (Vaizey, 1967). Supranational organisations such as the European Union (EU), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have been

promoters of the concepts of 'learning society' and 'knowledge economy' and have influenced policy-making both here in Ireland, and internationally, and which feed into the ideas around higher education being a marketplace (Fitzsimons, 2017b). This push for the development of economic systems to run hand-in-hand with educational changes in the form of the marketisation of education was conceived of to promote economic growth (Vaizey, 1967). The neo-liberal turn to the marketisation of education, even as early as the late 1960s, was promoted as being the cornerstone of all future economic development (*ibid*).

The promotion of a knowledge economy prioritised the economic ahead of the social, and made participation in HE a measurable, quantifiable activity. What these measurements do not reveal are the stories of individual successes, challenges, and achievements. McCaig (2011:31) suggests that this increasing marketization of higher education should have led to an increase in diversity of ethnicity, social class, gender and age profile in higher education, however, most students in HE are 'still from the same social classes as entered university in the 1970s'. Grummell (2007:182) says that the lack of a meaningful chance to access educational opportunity is a result of educational policy being shaped by these neo-liberal discourses that mould adult education to its own needs and limit inclusion and equality of opportunity.

Recent HEA (2019b) data demonstrates that most new entrants to the third level sector still come from higher income households and areas. In this marketized HE model, students have become consumers, and HE is the product provider, with the reassurance of all the accompanying checks and balances. Essentially, this shift marks an important change in a philosophy of education which had its roots in liberal education, to a neo-liberal ideology (Wedlin, 2008). This shift also gives increased power to those who are privileged and increasingly marginalises others such as migrants in education. In effect, it helps in the perpetuation of social reproduction of advantage (Bourdieu, 1986). Fundamentally, this leads to questions about what we, as educators, can do to make certain that the student experience is inclusive of the intrinsic values of education, and not just a consumer product.

2.10 Motivations for going to college

As higher education institutes see increasing numbers of non-traditional students, including first-generation students entering college, understanding the motivational choices and influences behind those decisions this group make is important. In a study of traditional and non-traditional students who entered higher education, Johnson (2019) found that each group demonstrated different types of motivations that were influenced by their personal responsibilities, their circumstances, and that non-traditional students displayed higher

levels of intrinsic motivation. In the case of extrinsic motivation, Tumuheki et al., (2016) say that both individual and non-individual extrinsic motivations exist.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the personal reasons that guide a person's decision making. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation suggests that there is a related value and reward from a particular course of action (Swain & Hammond, 2011). There is evidence that students who, for example, choose technical subjects are career focused and have materialistic motivations (Taylor & House, 2010). Schmidt et al., (2014) also point to the importance of family influences. Taylor & House (2010), indicate that age can be a factor on whether an individual identified whether they were influenced by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Younger students were more likely to be influenced by extrinsic factors *(ibid).* Among the primary motivators for adult students are: planning for a different future life for self and family (Kara et al., 2019), being a role model for children (Wainwright & Marandet, 2010), and family and community support (Macqueen, 2018). Other reasons can, according to Schmidt et al., (2014), include a desire to prove someone who underestimated an individual wrong.

Internationally, there are differences in the interpretation of terms such as extrinsic motivations for going to college and for other career choices. For example, Tumuheki et al., (2016) say that in African

communities the socio-cultural context, the choices made by individuals are related to the collective and that according to Mbiti (1990), sociocultural factors such as kinship and family (including extended family) are influential. Tumuheki et al., (2016) also point out that extended family, regardless of whether they have completed higher education themselves, play a role in motivating family members who are non-traditional students to pursue higher education paths.

2.11 Pathways to higher education

The route for non-traditional students into HE is conversely flexible, and complex. Angie (one of the participants in this study) shares an example of this *"the letter, the approval letter to participate was coming three months, or two months before the course started, but I was waiting for a while for assistance which come one week before the course started, so I didn't know if I would go or not. Because I was depending, relying 100% on the grant."* and this topic will be evidenced further in Chapter 5. Equitable access to HE has been mooted since the 1971 *HEA Act,* in which 'equality of opportunity' was put forward as a major function of HEA provision. On the one hand, there are various programmes and modules delivered through secondary schools, and other educational providers (both public and private) that can be amassed by an applicant to meet entry requirements. On the other hand, for applicants to HE who are not familiar with the Irish educational system, there are many stumbling blocks (Linehan &

Hogan, 2008). Apart from the challenges presented by financial difficulties, some of these obstacles are encountered when an applicant's prior learning is not recognised, or the pathway through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) modular qualifications is not clear, or if the applicants have difficulty processing their application for a grant. In Ireland, the typical pathways into HE include: completion of Leaving Certificate examination at the end of secondary level, PLC programmes, Further Education and Training (FET) courses provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), which are available to people who are unemployed, redundant or who are not in full-time education. Eligibility is also available to people who receive a One-Parent Family Payment, or who receive a disability-related social welfare payment (Citizens Information 2022b). Other routes are via private providers of QQI accredited courses, Access programmes offered by various HE institutions, and programmes such as those offered through Universities of Sanctuary (UoSI, 2022).

The response of many higher education institutions (HEIs) to applications for admission to college is a reflection of general government policy (Baker et al., 2019). Some colleges may be more proactive than others in their responses to non-traditional students (through various access programmes) and others may be active in their roles as college of sanctuary and welcome students from marginalised groups (UoSI, 2022). Amongst the other challenges

experienced by some migrants are issues with interrupted studies as a consequence of war such as was experienced by many Iraqi and Syrian students (Al-Hessan, 2016). Arar et al., (2020) point out that despite the complications of forced migration, many young people on arrival in destination countries seek opportunities to continue their higher education. However, difficulties with applications can come about as a result of incomplete or absent supporting academic documentation (Streitwieser et al., 2019). Systematic barriers to gaining access to enrolment can still persist (Dunwoodie et al., 2020a) because even when the rights of migrants to continue their studies is recognised, there remains a challenge to ensure access to higher education actually happens.

Lack of information about HE

Facilitation of access to higher education depends on easily accessible information available to as many people as possible. In Ireland, all providers of training and education are obliged to inform students of the progression and transfer routes available for any chosen course (Citizens Information, 2022b) and individuals can contact QQI for certification of existing knowledge, competence or skill through QQI recognised programmes, and through NAIRC[13] for qualifications earned in other countries *(ibid)*. The process of

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[13] NAIRC Ireland provides guidance on recognition of academic qualifications gained in other countries and hosts a database of qualifications from other countries for comparison with qualifications in Ireland where possible.

recognition for prior learning is also available and will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.13 below.

While information about standards and educational requirements are central to accessing HE, Barone et al., (2017) suggest that information barriers about HE within families can have an impact on enrolment rates from minority groups on a number of different levels. These barriers include a lack of knowledge about costs and financial aid, a perception that HE studies are too difficult, and that the benefits for future occupations may be underestimated *(ibid).* Bourdieu's (1986) theory of the importance of social and cultural capital and habitus has been useful in informing the development of research on access to HE, although some researchers have advised against using these concepts in a too deterministic way because of the focus on social class. However, Scanlon et al., (2019) demonstrate in an Irish study that there is a lack of structures in schools attended by working-class communities, where higher percentages of non-EU migrants in Ireland tend to live (Pollak, 2019), which promote progression to higher education. Even when children from these communities go to college, they are quite often restricted in their choices by their need to live at home as student accommodation is unaffordable (Scanlon et al., 2019), an experience also described in this study. According to Bourdieu (1984:471) 'the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds', so that people develop 'a sense of limits … a sense

of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded'.

Amongst the suggestions mooted by some researchers into improving access to information about HE are a centralised multilingual web resource for applicants and their families to use (Cin & Doğan, 2020), the creation of community outreach programmes, and peer mentoring by immigrants who have successfully completed studies at third level (Ramsey & Baker, 2019).

2.12 Widening participation in higher education

Widening access to, and taking part in, higher education (HE) is a policy objective for governments, both here in Ireland, and around the world (Burke, 2016). The focus on widening participation (WP) has come about as a response to concerns that despite the massification of higher education that has occurred since the 1980s, there has been an underrepresentation of some social groups in higher education. Regardless of an expansion in HE, this has not resulted in equality of access and success (Burke, 2016; Osborne, 2003). Archer (2007:646) says that even when diversity of students entering education does occur, there is unequitable participation 'with regard to who studies what and where'. In the United States, there is a low level of

participation by non-traditional students in Ivy League[14] colleges and a higher number in community colleges (Mullen, 2013), a trend that is mirrored in the United Kingdom's data on low level participation by the same group in similarly elite colleges (Reay, 2018a), and is also evident here in Ireland in the data for HE attendance of non-traditional groups in universities (HEA, 2019a).

In Europe, the widening participation (WP) approach in higher education has also been influenced by the Bologna Process and by the Open Method of Communication (OMC) which was adopted by the European Union (Weedon & Ridell, 2016). For some states, the WP agenda is well established and for other states the move to widening access is a more recent feature of educational policy (Mergner et al., 2019).

The definition of WP is also contested and political discourse on the topic varies depending on national background (Mergner et al., 2019; Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). Adding further complexity to exploring the concepts of access to and participation in higher education, is that varied perspectives on the meaning of WP can depend on whether WP is seen as a mechanism to secure a pool of skilled labour or to improve social justice – 'widening participation discourse is dominated

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[14] Elite colleges in the United States of America

by economic as well as social justice imperatives' (Mergner et al., 2019:67). Furthermore, Archer (2007:248) suggests that the 'construction of WP as synonymous with 'diversity' thus works to silence and challenge alternative interpretations or criticisms of the ways in which it is being configured and delivered'.

2.12.1 Widening participation in higher education in Ireland

Widening access to participation in higher education (HE) is part of a commitment by the Irish state to expand, diversify, and create equity of access for the student cohort. The overview which follows here is primarily from an educator's and a teaching focus rather than that of a student's. WP has come about as a response to the under-representation of certain groups in HE, including people from low-income families, people with a disability, Travellers, and ethnic minorities including migrants (HEA, 2015). This under-representation also extends to staff in HE, 'Low numbers of academic staff from Irish traveller, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), or migrant backgrounds in particular in senior positions represents both a deficit and a challenge to be addressed in Ireland' (Royal Irish Academy-British Council, 2020:8). This lack of representation of diversity in the teaching cohort also extends to primary and secondary levels, and in teacher education (McDaid & Walsh, 2016). *The National Access Plan Consultation Paper 2022-2026* (HEA 2021b) recognises that education, while it 'has the power to transform lives, lift people out of

poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage', our higher education system is 'not as inclusive as it should be'. In Ireland, one of the difficulties for strategy planning around diversity and inclusion in HE is that there is inadequate data being kept on how many students there are from ethnic minorities, and other minority groups, who are attending college (McGuire, 2020b). The consequences are, that if we do not know who is in college, it is impossible to create focused support interventions (*ibid*).

There have been a number of key policy interventions by the HEA to address equity of access and which have attempted to create a framework for the promotion of widening participation. The HEA (2008) targets for widening participation (WP) identified mature students; people with a disability; and those from low socio-economic circumstances. The HEA (2015) strategy for increased participation in HE focused on: students with disabilities; Further Education (FE) entrants; mature students; part-time students; and Irish Travellers/Mincéir. While there is an aspiration 'to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population' (HEA, 2015, p. 6), there is no recognition, other than for international students of Black, ethnic minorities, or Asian backgrounds resident in Ireland who come from these groups in the HEA plans. At the time of writing, the HEA *National Access Plan:*

Consultation Paper (2022-2026) for widening access is seeking contributions to its strategy, and for the first time the HEA mentions 'ethnic minority' as a cohort of interest (HEA, 2021b).

In Ireland, HEIs and educators have been involved in the development and delivery of resources to improve and address the experiences of migrant learners. The HE4U2 Erasmus project, carried out over 7 locations, has created a number of resources for addressing migrant experiences including guidelines for staff (HE4U2, 2021). This project is aimed at developing an approach to the intercultural dimension of existing curricula, the development of generic CPD courses for staff, and it has drawn up a set of policy recommendations focusing on the curricula and the teachers of adults in HE (Fitzsimons et al., 2017). Other projects include the Disciplines Inquiring into Societal Challenge (DISCs) project (DISCs, 2021), which explores novel ways of researching and developing inclusive pedagogy and the development of policies that can support greater cultural inclusion for students from ethnic minorities. In 2007, Partners Training for Transformation (2021) published their Partners Intercultural Companion to Training for Transformation, which provides exercises, processes, resources, and reflections on intercultural work for educators (Sheehy et al., 2007). Among the resources developed for migrant teachers are those available from Marino Institute of Education (McGuire, 2021).

2.13 First-generation migrant students in HE

First-generation students include both students who have moved country or region, for example, people who move through the EU, and also refugees and asylum seekers from outside the EU who have left their country or region as a response to conflict, to seek protection, and as a result of other factors such as natural disasters. Europe, including Ireland, in common with regions and countries elsewhere, has received increased numbers of people seeking protection and asylum (UNHCR, 2019; Bunar, 2017; Streitwieser & Taylor 2016). Among this group of people are many young adults who enter, or attempt to enter, the educational sectors of the countries they reach. However, this access to HE is not equitable - internationally, thirty-seven percent of the world's youth are enrolled in higher education, however, only 3% of people who seek refugee status are HE students (UNHCR, 2020). While many countries in Europe, and other parts of the world, have had experience of migration that encompasses many generations, as a result of recent migration patterns, these countries also have, in common with Ireland, current experiences of first-generation migrants engaging in higher education and demand is likely to continue (UNESCO, 2020). The section below explores some literature on who first-generation students in HE are and it also examines the emerging theoretical approaches being used for framing an understanding of this group of students. These approaches include: a deficit approach, learning challenges, and social capital theory.

Defining a first-generation student

Reaching an agreement on who 'first-generation students' are, is problematic as there is no agreed usage of the term, and in a critical review of the relevant literature Ilet (2019) identified eighteen different definitions. These definitions range from children of migrants who have no formal education to children of parents with no post-secondary level education to migrants who have recently moved to the country where they are engaging with HE. This challenge in defining first-generation students according to LeBouef & Dworkin (2021), Toutkoushian et al., (2018), and Spiegler & Bednarek (2013), makes comparison and analysis of their experiences across the various studies complex. In addition to the breadth of definitions, there are concerns about how the use of the term impacts on outcomes for first-generation migrants. For example, Patfield et al., (2020) argue that Australia's definition of the term 'first-generation status' as those students whose parents do not have a higher education qualification is a narrow and limiting definition in its ambition for academic equity.

In addition to the challenges with comparing first-generation student experiences because of the variations in how they are defined, there is an additional concern of how widening participation (WP) as outlined above is imagined for this group of students. The widening participation approach, which informs many policies world-wide on increasing participation for less represented groups in HE, is often

used as evidence of positive demographic changes towards greater equality and diversity in HE (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). However, this is not always the case, as while overall numbers in HE have increased, there is not necessarily a proportional increase in all groups (McGuinness et al., 2012). This second challenge when reviewing the WP literature is that different countries employ the term 'widening participation in HE' to include or exclude various groups of non-traditional students (Mergner et al., 2019). In the literature on access to HE, this may in some cases exclude some migrants, but include other groups. For example, in Australia, despite ongoing attempts to widen participation for all groups for HE, most focus has been on people from lower socio-economic groups and this group may not include migrants whose residency status has not been resolved (Edwards & Mc Millan, 2017).

In Ireland, much research on first-generation students in education is represented by literature that focuses to a greater extent on the experiences of migrant children's experiences in primary and secondary school (Ní Dhuinn & Keane 2021; Mc Ginnity 2017; Darmody et al., 2014; and O'Connor 2014). This information is useful here as increasing numbers of children of immigrant backgrounds are maturing into the age profile for application to HE and their experiences pre entry may limit their choices and transition into HE. Mc Ginnity (2017) points to the stratified experiences of primary and

secondary education that many students from immigrant backgrounds experience, including their overrepresentation in urban, larger schools, and schools that have an intake from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and who tend to have lower attendance in HE. This access to schools and placement in certain classes in school has also been identified by Darmody et al., (2014) as evidence of educational barriers which have consequent repercussions for future applications to HE and for work possibilities. In a study of HE students reflecting on their experiences in secondary school, Ní Dhuinn & Keane (2021) point to specific challenges faced by migrant students in their attempts to integrate into the school community, and to advance their studies.

Theoretical framing of first-generation students in HE

Academic interest in first-generation students in HE is a developing area of research and this group has been theorised from a number of perspectives including: a deficit approach, learning differences, and a social capital approach, to name just some. While the literature on first-generation students in HE is an emerging one in Ireland, there has been a larger amount of research carried out in the United States and increasingly in other countries, such as (but not limited to), the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Sweden.

Deficit approach

According to Patfield et al., (2020), a large amount of international literature on first-generation college students posits that, as a result of their parents not attending higher education, this group of first-generation students are somehow lacking in important resources around academic knowledge to succeed in HE and are deemed an at-risk group (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In framing first-generation students in HE from a deficit-based approach, there is a suggestion within the literature that this group of students lack assets which mainstream students hold, and so they meet challenges that increase the likelihood of them not being academically successful. Furthermore, by framing first-generation students in this way, attention is drawn to the differences between this group of students and their peers from so-called traditional educational backgrounds. In the United States, first-generation migrants in HE come from a variety of demographic backgrounds and account for increasing numbers who are going to college (Ward et al., 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008). However, further studies point to the backgrounds of first-generation students, which are frequently low-income (Engle & Tinto, 2008) and the lower rates of completion of primary degrees by this group (Petty, 2014). In Ireland, there is evidence from the work of Kitching (2014) that students from minority ethnic backgrounds are constructed as having racialised deficits based on their ethnicity and perceived academic abilities.

Learning challenges

According to Kristen et al., (2008) many students, including non-traditional students and first-generation migrants, often enter HE with specific study skills challenges. This can be a result of many different factors such as the length of time since the individual last studied, experience of different curricula, and a lack of knowledge about what is expected of them, and interrupted educations (Naidoo et al., 2018). In effect, for some in this cohort they are either still learning the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1986), or may even be learning them for the first time. In the case of first-generation migrants, there are often other factors unique to their circumstances, for example, their habitus and social capitals (Bourdieu, 1984), which can make their crossing over the threshold into the academic world of HE difficult. According to Darmody et al., (2014), English language proficiency is also used as a marker of whether a student is successful as a learner and for those who are less proficient in English there is a possibility they will be seen as 'problematic' (Nowlan, 2008:262).

There are also high levels of intersectionality, such as socioeconomic status, age, and educational culture that impact on access to, and progression in HE within this cohort (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). A feature of first-generation students in HE is that they tend to be older (Nomi, 2005), a characteristic also found in this study. A closer examination of the financial circumstances of students who choose

community colleges points to their lower socio-economic backgrounds and their need to work to support themselves and often their wider family (Ward et al., 2012). The developing international research attention on this cohort of students points to a range of challenges the first-generation students may face from all stages of the student cycle including access (Engle & Tinto, (2008), early experiences (Makrooni, 2019; Ward et al., 2012), completion (Morales, 2014), and retention (Pratt et al., 2019).

While numbers of non-traditional students increased for some groups in community colleges and other universities in the United States, and 24% of all undergraduates were deemed first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2007), entry to elite colleges from this group fell sharply (Erisman & Looney, 2007). The type of institution that first-generation students attend also has an impact on graduation figures. Those who enter institutions in the United States offering four-year degrees are seven times more likely to complete their courses than those who take two-year programmes in community colleges (Engle & Tinto, 2007). First-generation students can experience many challenges in accessing and attending HE, Lunceford (2011), and internationally, there is a higher attrition rate in comparison to other students (Glaessgen et al., 2018). Makrooni & Ropo (2021) note that much of the international research on first-generation students emanates from

the US and the focus there is more on completion and retention data and less on access.

Social capital

The lens of social capital is frequently employed to examine first-generation students' experiences in HE (Pascarella et al., 2004). Having access to social capital leads to the reproduction of further kinds of capital. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital is relevant to this group of students and has been extensively used to explore how, because of their perceived lack of capitals, students who are from non-traditional backgrounds experience disadvantage in accessing and continuing with their studies in higher education. This lack of institutionalised capital (Bourdieu, 1986) points to students who may not have the knowledge that is valued by an institution and thus may not be successful at negotiating the 'hidden curriculum'. However, some such as Yosso, (2005) see difficulties with Bourdieu's theory as it is based on a model that preferences a construct of male whiteness as the standard, and places marginalized students as deficient to their peers and this does not account for the range of resources this group of students have (LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021). Yosso (2005) has problematized the idea that there are accumulated disadvantages because this group of students do not belong to the dominant class and instead suggests that there is a richness available to this group of students through community cultural wealth (CCW). Yosso (*ibid*)

claims that by valuing experiential knowledge, there is the possibility to challenge the legitimisation of dominant cultural practices, which are based on standards of white middle-class culture. For Yosso, other forms of cultural knowledge are equally as valuable and that Bourdieu's (2005:77) cultural capital theory focuses on 'a very narrow range of assets and characteristics'. Being able to access community cultural capital allows the first-generation students to accumulate advantage and other forms of capital. This topic will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter 3.

While there are public interests in the expansion of access to HE, there are also personal benefits. Research shows that individuals who have successfully completed HE, have better access to obvious economic advantage because of greater earning power and thus better living standards, however, there are also reported benefits in terms of health, family life and social capital (Schuller, 2004). Social inclusion is a key objective of the *National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028* (HEA, 2022a). Successful integration of migrants into a receiving society depends on fair and equitable access to all the facilities of the state.

Skjerven & Chao (2018) argue that education for the increasingly mobile migrant global population should be seen as a necessity which

should frame supranational and national education policy. Providing access to higher education in a world that is under-pinned by knowledge-based societies would enable an already vulnerable group of people to develop economic independence (ibid), and according to the UNHCR (2020) people can become self-sufficient. Guo (2015) indicates that for migrants, (both voluntary and humanitarian), who are attempting to go to college, the main issue is gaining access to an organizational space. As a response, some colleges of higher education are recognising their roles in social equity and have embarked on offering specific scholarships for applicants for international protections (Dunwoodie et al., 2020b). However, Arar et al., (2020), in a study of recent Syrian migrants in Turkey who wish to enter HE, suggest that despite awareness of the benefits of HE as a tool to ameliorate migrant displacement, and the increased benefits it brings for social integration and better financial security, not enough has been done to address this.

2.14 Recognition of prior learning

One particular challenge for people who move away to another country is having their educational qualifications, or previous educational experiences, accepted by host countries. For some, not being able to produce relevant documentation can restrict access to HE, or require that they engage with other programmes of education until such time as they can reach the qualifications that a higher education institute in

the receiving country requires. Some countries have adopted alternative approaches, for example, Norway has implemented an innovative model to assess migrant educational levels where no documentation is available called NOKUT qualification Passport for Refugees. This process is based on evaluation of available documents and structured interview (Skjerven & Chao, 2018). In Germany, the pragmatic reality of creating additional school places and staffing has resulted in a positive review and evaluation of migrants' educational credentials leading to easier access to HE (Unangst, 2020). According to Al-Mubuk & Alrebh (2018), Germany uses aptitude tests as an alternative to formal credentials for Syrian applicants to HE and a four-year budget provides language and academic preparation. The IOM (2019) reports that under the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there is a legal framework for the recognition of previous study and professional qualifications. Students often experience delays in gaining recognition for their studies because some institutions believe that the applicants' qualifications must meet the ENIC NARIC[15] criteria, which is not the case (*ibid*).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process where prior individual learning is recognised and given value (NQAI, 2005; OECD, 2004, European Commission, 2001; UNESCO, 1972). RPL is located

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[15] ENIC European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
    NARIC National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

philosophically in the work of John Dewey (1938:74) who said that the "beginning of instruction shall be made with the experience learners already have . . . this experience and the capacities that have been developed during its course provide the starting point for all further learning" and it is also found in the work of educators such as Vygotsky (1978), and Kolb (1976). RPL practice in higher education occurs when a learner's knowledge and skills are assessed by the institution's content experts to give recognition (or not) to the applicant's prior learning (Conrad, 2010).

This prior learning can take the form of formal learning (such as learning in an educational setting), non-formal learning (such as learning through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), or informal learning, (such as tacit learning found in unstructured learning through being engaged in daily activities), (Prior Learning, 2022). Souto-Otero (2021) suggests that the definitions of the above terms for learning are open to change as they are usually defined by the particular considerations and needs of various institutions and organisations. For Werquin (2012), the OECD's definitions of the different types of prior learning point to the intentionality of formal learning, which is based on a system of legal registration, whereas non-formal learning, although it may be organised, may not have learning objectives and is not registered. UNESCO broadens this view of non-formal learning to include characteristic features such as the relative brevity of duration

of non-formal learning, and that it is not recognised by the formal education system (UNESCO, 2012:12). Results when issued for these non-formal courses are not usually recognised as equivalent to formal qualifications and do not lead to access to higher education (Tereseviciene et al., 2020; Moss, 2013).

In the context of education, including higher education, RPL can provide evidence of learning that has taken place prior to enrolment on a course or programme of study (Goggin et al., 2015). According to Andersson (2021:15), RPL is 'related to mobility in one sense or another', for example, in widening access to higher education. In addition to the framework of education, RPL is also used to evaluate prior learning in the area of employment, and increasingly in the 'third sector' (volunteering) (Andersson et al., 2020). García & Leibrandt (2020) point out that many people have significant amounts of learning which they acquire from various experiences, such as, work, volunteering, self-study, and online learning via various MOOCs. An important principle of RPL is that learners should not be required to relearn things which they already know (Prior Learning, 2022). The role of RPL is not uncontested. According to Harris (2006:178), RPL can be aligned to 'competing social projects', such as, widening of participation in higher education, calls for changes to curricular practices with a view to increasing agility and centring the learner experience, as well as a response to wider intentions to establish

connections between employment and education for personal and/or public gain, and to address national strategy.

In RPL, assessment is carried out to recognise existing individual learning and/or skills, which may have taken place outside the (formal) classroom. According to Andersson (2021), RPL is an integral part of the integration of highly-skilled migrants into receiving societies and as such demonstrates the mobility of knowledge. However, there are different processes for, and practices of, RPL around the world (ibid). Notwithstanding these variations in definitions, according to Staunton (2021:6), RPL 'has a pivotal role in addressing the issue of access equality into education and qualifications for all who wish to apply for admission, progression and recognition in formal education and training'.

RPL in HE internationally

The practice of RPL is not a uniform process across different countries, although many aim to bring some form of consistency to the process both internationally (Luomi Messerer, 2019), and here in Ireland (Murphy, 2019). Cooper et al., (2017) suggest that although RPL is seen as attractive, its evolution and uptake has happened relatively slowly. In some countries such as Switzerland and Sweden, RPL has been used over a longer period of time, yet its expansion has been

more gradual than anticipated (Maurer, 2021). The rate of roll out of RPL is varied internationally, for example, countries such as Malaysia have well-advanced RPL processes (UNESCO, 2020). Other countries such as Sri Lanka (Business Standard, 2020), and Ukraine (Babushka & Solovie, 2019) are in the earlier stages of developing RPL.

Not all people applying for RPL experience the process in the same way. For example, according to Bucken-Knapp et al., (2019), recent arrivals of refugees from Syria to Sweden have experienced long delays in their experience of RPL, which does not always result in recognition of their prior education, or work experiences. On the other hand, current refugees in 2022 from Ukraine in Sweden who wish to continue their higher education are experiencing a quicker process (Myklebust, 2022). This suggests a greater recognition of the need for RPL decisions to be expedited. There are a range of reasons for these differing experiences that occur in various countries. These experiences can occur because of a lack of political will to translate RPL policies into practice (Maurer, 2021), because of a lack of familiarity with other education systems by the receiving country, the volumes of applications that need addressing, and incomplete, or absent documentation (Andersson, 2020).

In Canada, Bauder (2003) suggests that the non-recognition of credentials of migrants from the former Yugoslavia and South Asian countries resulted in a deskilling of migrants who experienced how Canada's institutionalised cultural capital devalued credentials obtained outside the country. This led to exclusion from employment for migrants in some professions. Effectively, the Canadian version of qualifications is given preference and migrants who do not, or cannot, convert their qualifications into ones accepted by Canada, can experience less opportunity, and lower wages. Konle-Seidl's (2018) review of the integration of refugees in Sweden, Germany, and Austria also points to the significance of host countries recognising credentials and prior learning so that better integration can occur.

Ireland and RPL

According to Murphy (2019), non-formal and informal learning when validated in Ireland through RPL should include all types of prior learning. Other terms are also used in the discussion around RPL, such as, accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), validation of prior learning (VPL), and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) are also used to signify RPL in various countries (Andersson, 2020). According to García & Leibrandt (2020), third level institutions have the option to evaluate prior learning for the purpose of admittance

to study as well as the purpose of awarding credit towards formal qualifications such as a degree.

In Ireland, the *Qualifications Act 1999* formed the basis for the promotion and development of RPL. RPL has been referenced in many Irish national policies and reports in recent years. These include: the *Recognition of Prior Learning in the Community Education Sector* (AONTAS, 2021), the *National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy* (SOLAS, 2020), the *Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021* (HEA, 2018), the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* (DES, 2016), *the Action Plan for Jobs 2018* (DETE, 2018), *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025* (DES, 2017), and the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DES, 2011).

The above are informed by the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, and the Bologna Framework for the European Higher Education Area adopt RPL as a fundamental concept and see it as essential for learning pathways and learning developments (European Commission, 2015; Council of the European Union, 2012; Bologna Framework, 1999). The above framework placed learning attainment across different countries on a comparable framework of achieved learning, and this assists in cross-national recognition of learning and assessment. On an international level, the recent

UNESCO (2022) policy brief, *Increasing equity through diverse entry pathways into higher education,* seeks to promote RPL on a global basis. UNESCO (2022) advises that because of the greater diversity among students applying to higher education, greater flexibility in RPL is needed; this is particularly true for non-traditional and disadvantaged groups. Many of the participants in this study can be considered representative of these groups, and they have had varying experiences of RPL here in Ireland.

RPL and first-generation migrants

There are a range of assumptions underlying RPL that may not always be visible to all HE applicants. Andersson (2020) suggests that, at a minimum, applicants need awareness of what they already know, what is required for the recognition process, and an understanding about how to present that knowledge in order to be successful. This assumed awareness of underlying processes can create particular challenges for migrant applicants for RPL. In addition, Cameron (2006) says, RPL presupposes that, all applicants are acquainted with the formal learning practices that operate in the receiving country, that they can demonstrate a level of literacy appropriate to the generation of academic texts, and in addition, they can apply their life and work experiences to the context of organised formal knowledge. If this is not the case, then what occurs is a lack of understanding which is particularly important in the situation of migrants where differences in

cultural contexts and language issues could impact mutual understanding (Andersson, 2020). Cameron (2006) also suggests that greater value can be placed on formal learning, and RPL does not always benefit those who have economic pressures, or those who have little or no experience of formal learning. In effect, according to Cameron & Miller (2004), RPL assumes applicants have the necessary cultural capital to accomplish an application. Another important consideration is that of the power relations that exist between the various stakeholders. Andersson (2020:16) asks, who 'has the power to decide what knowledge and competence should be assessed and given recognition'.

As mentioned above, RPL is connected to the mobility or transfer of knowledge either in place or in time (Andersson, 2020). One particular challenge for people who move is having their educational qualifications, or previous educational experiences, accepted by host countries. Bauder (2003) points out that the non-recognition of formal credentials previously gained in an applicant's home country can often result in requests for supplementary education in the receiving country, and that effectively the recognition process becomes a barrier instead of being a facilitator, which was also revealed in this study. Examples of organisations that regulate formal credentials here in Ireland include the nursing, medicine, and teaching professions. For others, not being able to produce relevant documentation which has

been lost or destroyed in conflict areas can also restrict access to HE (Newman, 2019). The other possibility is that the individuals may be required to engage with other programmes of education until such time as they can reach the qualifications that a HEI requires similar to the augmentation of the recognition of credentials mentioned above. For some intending students of higher education, this can involve extra periods of time spent preparing for entry to third level, which may create additional costs and constraints on their choices.

2.15 Challenges for students from non-traditional backgrounds in HE in Ireland

Studies related to the experiences of students from migrant backgrounds, which include people who are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) in HE in Ireland do not always specify that they are first-generation, however, based on the lengths of time they have been living in Ireland, it is quite likely that some are members of this cohort. A number of studies have emerged focusing on the experiences of distinct groups, such as, the experiences of African students in Ireland (Malone, 2012), Polish speakers (Sobiesiak, 2012), and Russian speakers (Faas et al., 2019). This current study looks at participants across a range of nationalities and ethnicities, rather than focus on one group. Other themes which have emerged in the literature include: belonging on campus, racism and micro-aggressions (Darby, 2020), minoritised migrant student experiences (Ní Dhuinn & Keane, 2021),

and institutionally racist practices around migrant access to HE (Mc Gloin, 2016).

For migrants who are also racialised, racism can also be a significant feature of their journey through HE (Fitzsimons & Nwanze, 2021; Darby, 2020; Linehan and Hogan, 2008). Racism in educational settings can be structural, such as in historic policies that perpetuate adverse practices along racial lines; institutional, which gives advantage to a majority over minority; or individual, where personalised attitudes or beliefs are expressed (Wong et al., 2020). In practical terms, racial bias, whether intentional or subconscious can result in white privilege (Bhopal, 2018). Darby (2020) identifies the myriad of ways racism in Irish institutions can also be experienced as a series of micro-aggressions. As well as the possibility that micro-aggressions can exclude and *other* individuals, there is also the possibility of the micro-aggressions resulting in physical and mental stress (Franklin et al., 2006). While the topic of racism did not present in this study, it is important here to recognise the impact, whether overt or not, of racism.

Andrews (2019), says that the curricula of schools, colleges and universities are overwhelmingly Eurocentric. However, Wong et al., (2020) caution against creating programmes in response that are mere tokenism. Meaningful curricular changes involve taking on-board

contributions from various parts of the world and accepting alternative epistemologies and knowledge (Campus, 2019). As a response to this, the Irish Universities Association (2021) reviews student and staff inclusion in their monitoring of their policies, culture and procedures in universities, and addresses equality, diversity and inclusion across the university system.

O'Connor (2014) points to several barriers to social integration experienced by children who are first-generation in the Irish secondary school system, including racist bullying, systematic inequality, and inadequate English language supports. This challenge of English language competency, according to Harris & Ní Chonailll (2014), results in students being more likely to go to an IoT, and that there are continued needs for support for academic writing deficits while in HE. Harris & Ní Chonailll (2014), also suggest that there can be underperformance of students from migrant backgrounds in HE with subsequent implications for postgraduate studies and future work opportunities. In common with the above studies and this study here, Linehan & Hogan's (2008) study also pointed to similar barriers, such as, clear information about accessing HE, recognition of prior learning, fees, and the impact of English language competency on where students from migrant backgrounds apply to HE. A number of these themes are explored below beginning with language as a barrier.

2.16 Language as a barrier in higher education

In this study, eight of the participants, (Angie, Liz, John, Molly, Tek-kwo, Mera, Princess, and Tia), indicated that English was not their first language, and the other two participants indicated that they were multilingual. Language needs can permeate every aspect of an individual's life, and in the increasingly diverse society that Ireland is becoming, there are people who are living here in a world that differs socially, culturally, and linguistically from their home environments. Linguistic competency mediates how easily people can access education, work, and medical care. It also facilitates cultural integration both in society and in educational spaces, which can lead to better levels of acculturation (McGinnity et al., 2012; Dunbar, 2008). Language can be both an enabler and a barrier to well-being and success in all aspects of life (Morrice et al., 2019). Jungblut et al., (2020) point to the importance of being not able to use the language of instruction in the host country as a barrier to entering HE. In a Canadian study, Hout et al., (2020) found that learning English was identified by migrants as the single most important facilitator of their realisation of their desired occupations via training or education. Linehan & Hogan (2008) also point out that in Ireland, English language competence is a significant factor for access to higher education. Pollack (2019) has found that in Ireland, many people with low levels of English live in areas with lower rates of third-level completion.

While the main focus in this study is on adults in HE, because some students in HE may not have completed all of their secondary education in Ireland, it is useful to consider that they may have language needs too. English language needs are often associated with adult migrants because children and adolescents are usually perceived as fast learners of second and additional languages and demonstrate cognitive flexibility (King & Mackey, 2007). There is a popular perception that being immersed in a language eventually leads to proficiency in all aspects of that language. It is erroneous to expect that just by being in the same environment as English-speakers that the language will be learned, and that meaningful competency will develop. For children from minority language groups, and those who have not had enough exposure to English before they begin their primary education, there is evidence that these children have lower rates of progression in education overall (Genesee et al., 2006). As a consequence, this may have a follow-on impact on adolescents as they move through to the secondary level educational system in preparation for study in HE. Some international researchers refer to this group of learners as 'generation 1.5' – by this they mean a group of learners who have English language needs, but because they are not immediately seen as being English as Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners, they may lose out on supports being offered (García et al., 2012:177). This is a situation that also exists in HE in Ireland as many migrants access HE through mainstream channels, such as the Central Applications Office (CAO), and they

become subsumed into the general student population, whereas, International students are easily identifiable and may have language needs addressed through established college supports and so consideration of the former group's potential needs by HEIs is also warranted.

Research shows that having language needs can impede or prevent admission to HE, however, less is known about the experiences of speakers of other languages while they are in HE. Bergey et al., (2018) pointed to the increasing numbers of English language learners in higher education and say that they have diverse educational and linguistic abilities. Warner (2006) showed that a lack of language proficiency was one of the main reasons that students do not complete their studies.

Once in HE, students from multi-lingual backgrounds will find themselves in a monolingual learning environment, which according to Ní Dhuinn (2017), is problematic. A range of less favourable outcomes of this monolingual environment include students with language needs being seen from a 'deficit' perspective and lacking some of Bourdieu's (1986) capital because of the prioritising of monolingualism (Kangas, 2021), and a failure to recognise the learning resource that home languages can be (Alisaari et al., 2019). It also leads to questions

about how this linguistic hegemony is shared and passed on by educational organisations and the students and staff who inhabit these spaces, which resonates with Yosso's (2005) question about why some culture has more capital than others.

Warner (2006) found that students in HE need access to academic English tutoring that is discipline specific as significant differences exist between the more general skills of everyday English and the demands of English suitable for academic expression (Lyons & Little, 2009). This lack of knowledge about academic language and understanding what is expected of them in the academic environment can be a stressor for some (Mangan, 2015) and can impact on academic success (Linehan & Hogan, 2008). Sheridan (2015) points to the importance of knowledge of all aspects of the use of English both socially and academically as being important for fitting in or finding one's place in the world.

The next section explores the role of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) as a route into language learning, training, and HE.

2.17 Role of Education and Training Boards and ESOL[16]

In Ireland, sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) located throughout the country are responsible for the delivery of education and training, youth work, and other statutory functions including language support (ETBI, 2022). ETBs are responsible for delivering education and training at post-primary level in community schools, in further education colleges, and in other further education training centres. ETBs are the largest providers of education and training in the state and are active in local communities across the country (ETBI, 2022). Further Education and Training (FET) is overseen by SOLAS who has responsibility for the funding and co-ordination of services, and it works in partnership with the ETBs to deliver programmes across Ireland (SOLAS, 2022). Under the *National Further Education Strategy 2020-2024* (SOLAS, 2020), fostering inclusion, facilitating pathways and building skills are its three core pillars. ETBs have a particular role in the lives of many refugees and migrants who wish to study or upskill in Ireland as ETBs are responsible for the provision of relevant training and English language courses in order to enable migrant learners to develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in Irish society.

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[16] 'ESOL' is a term that is used when discussing the English language educational needs of people who speak at least one other language. In Ireland, English language provision is mainly publicly funded and delivered through ETB centres. 'EFL' (English as a Foreign Language) refers mainly to the provision of English in private, for-profit language schools to short-term visitors to Ireland (SOLAS, 2018).

The provision of English language courses by ETBs grew out of the recommendations of *The White Paper on Adult Education 2000,* and ETBs are often one of the first educational points of contact that migrants have with the Irish education system. In this section, an overview of the emergence of English language provision through ETBs[17] is provided along with some information on some limitations that language learners experience with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision, and which has an impact on study choices they can make. It is also important to note here that not all migrants who move to Ireland need access to English language courses. Migrants are a heterogenous group, and many are multilingual while others are fluent mono-lingual English speakers. The section here ends with an overview of some of the reports that inform policy on ESOL provision.

Some migrants in Ireland access post-secondary education within higher education structures, and others who continue their education engage with FET. The *Education and Training Boards Act* (2013) provides for a national network of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to provide Further Education and Training (FET) principally, though not exclusively, for employment. ETB programmes can be

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[17] A number of other English language projects and programmes for adults have also existed at various times (SOLAS, 2018), including voluntary (Third Age, 2021), and sponsored programmes (Little, 2008).

accessed by all non-EU nationals, refugees and, in some cases, asylum seekers. Applicants for places can apply directly to an ETB or be referred by another agency they already have contact with. Along with training for work, English language classes are available. Currently, ETBs offer free English language courses up to Level 3 to people who are over 21 years of age and who are in receipt of a social welfare payment, (Transitions Reform Working Paper, 2020). Level 3 equates to an achievement of Junior Certificate[18] level of English (QQI, 2021).

By and large, the provision of English language classes through the ETBs was envisaged by the Irish government as being a short-term response to support the needs of some incoming migrant workers following the accession of European Union (EU) member states (DES, 2000). The focus of policy in the *Learning for Life*: *The White Paper for Adult Education* (DES, 2000) *(the White Paper)*, imagined English language provision for migrants as equipping them for workforce participation through 'basic literacy and language programmes for all immigrants'. This limited view of learner needs ran contrary to the fact that the above *White Paper* contained information that pointed to the diverse social capital in the high levels of literacy and educational qualifications among this group of people, who might reasonably be expecting to continue work in the areas of their qualifications and skill

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[18] National examinations taken after 3 years of secondary/post-primary school.

sets. In 2004, the Irish Vocational Education Association introduced guidelines on further education and ESOL (IVEA, 2004) and indicated that a rights-based approach, as framed by the pedagogical philosophy of literacy provision for adult learners, was the appropriate way to recognise diversity and foster inclusion. An important note is that the *White Paper* also supported the inclusion of all migrants, regardless of their legal status in ESOL provision (DES, 2000). However, the request for Personal Public Services numbers (SOLAS, 2018), to register on courses may be a deterrent for some who are undocumented.

Some migrants who may express an interest in attending ESOL classes may also have an interest in accessing higher education. For an individual who needs proof of English language competency in order to access HE, there are a number of qualifications they can use including QQI ESOL at Level 5. To enter HE, a qualification in English at Level 5 (or Leaving Certificate[19] pass level, or another recognised result) is usually required, so students who participate in ETB educational programmes, or training, and who can complete Level 3 English, but do not have access to Level 5, are not being provided with an opportunity to develop their English to the appropriate level for this purpose. In some cases, the cost of the course, where available, may be prohibitive. Students who cannot access Level 5 English classes in

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[19] National examinations taken on completion of secondary education.

their local ETB to help in their application for HE are then left with a dilemma. They need to consider whether they abandon their immediate plans to go on to HE because they cannot gain a recognition for their level of English to satisfy entry requirements, or if they should try to find resources to pay for this. The option to find their own resources is so that they can study for another accepted type of English examination with a personal tutor or in a fee-paying private language school. The difficulty is further compounded if intending ESOL students do not live near a language centre that offers English at a suitable level for recognition by a HE college, which they can easily access. SOLAS (2018) reports that the majority of attendees at ESOL courses are migrant workers with upper secondary level of education or above and SOLAS recommends that additional resources should be made available to address their needs.

A number of reports have been delivered on the state of ESOL provision in Ireland, *The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) Report (2004),* and the *Howarth Report (2008)* identified a dearth of training, materials and a dedicated ESOL budget – a situation that had not improved by the time of Linehan & Hogan's (2008) report. In particular, *the Howarth Report* identified the importance of the provision of ESOL for the educational opportunities of the second-generation of migrants to Ireland (although its main focus was on legally resident immigrants in Ireland). Linehan & Hogan's (2008)

report also points to the need for better funding and expansion of English language supports. Following the economic crash of 2008, not many of the recommendations from either the IVEA or Howarth reports were enacted (Sheridan, 2015). In *A Study of the role, contribution and impact of Education and Training Board (ETB) Further Education and Training (FET) Services on Active Inclusion in Ireland (2021)* (ETBI, 2021)*,* recognition is given to the impact of limited availability of English classes as a barrier to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to accessing education or training. More recently, a report commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality and Integration from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), (2022) points to the serious impact of a lack of English fluency on integration into Irish society by Syrian refugees in Ireland, and also on their ability to access higher education. Ireland's *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* identifies holding a further education award as a priority pathway for access to Higher Education. *The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2019) also recognises the importance of education as a pillar of integration and outlines a number of actions which are the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills, the ETBs, and SOLAS. This strategy reports on the delivery to date of ESOL at levels 1-3 and indicates the necessity of providing follow-on English in order that migrants can break out of the cycle of low-paid jobs (Action 37) and the need to increase key

underrepresented groups in public jobs through improving proficiency in English (Action 46).

2.18 Finance

Students from certain groups, who have a lack of financial resources and who have financial difficulties before joining HE, are likely to leave HE with the same, if not worse, financial problems (Houle, 2014). The ESRI (2021) states that families which are parented alone, which includes lone parents in HE, experience greater levels of poverty than families where two parents are present. On the other hand, students in HE who have stable financial backgrounds tend to have enough resources to continue their studies, and in addition, they say that they have more confidence that they could access resources if the need arose (Houle, 2014). Callender & Jackson (2008) found that fear of debt was a particular constraint in the decision-making about where to study for students from low-income families. Furthermore, research suggests that concerns about finances play a major role in the choices around where, and what to study, thus reducing meaningful programme choice (Archer et al., 2003). In my research here, many participants chose their third-level college simply based on its proximity to the family home, including the four participants who lived, or had lived in Direct Provision. This geographical barrier caused by constrained finances, meant that some students are limited in their course choices (Linehan & Hogan, 2008).

One promising financial intervention for students in HE, which was introduced in Ireland in 1999, was the provision of the so-called 'Free Fees Initiative' (HEA, 2021c) for undergraduate education, which was presented as a stimulus to increase the participation of under-represented people, such as those in lower socio-economic groups in HE (Conway, 2009). Over time, HE colleges introduced a yearly contribution fee[20] which is payable by all students and is not always covered by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI). SUSI is the responsible body for the Student Grant Scheme and the grants available are divided into fee grants and maintenance grants. In order to be considered for a student grant, a number of conditions including nationality, residency, means, course of study, progression and course duration, must be met (SUSI, 2021). In its means testing, SUSI tests the income into a household rather than of an individual. Migrants who are in the process of applying for International Protection can apply to SUSI under the Student Support Scheme for Asylum Seekers, subject to meeting the conditions attached to the application process.

There are two other possible routes for some migrant students who cannot afford HE fees, and who are not eligible for SUSI grants. One route is through an application to a university or college of sanctuary and this is only available for refugees and asylum seekers and not for

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[20] For the academic year 2021-2022, the contribution fee to HE colleges was set at a maximum €3000 (Citizens Information, 2021c).

those who have regularised their residency in other ways such as a spouse of a worker. The Universities and Colleges of Sanctuary (UoSI) was initiated to encourage universities, colleges and other education institutes to welcome applicants for International Protection, refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants into their university and college communities. UoSI is part of a larger umbrella organisation called Places of Sanctuary Ireland whose focus is to create a culture of welcome and awareness throughout Ireland. On campus, HEIs and staff should constantly look for ways to support and show solidarity in ways that promotes inclusion and integration for asylum seekers (Barnes, 2019). UoSI institutions must demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and diversity and be proactive in the creation of educational pathways for applicants for International Protection, refugees and asylum seekers. HEIs can allocate funding in the form of scholarships for successful applicants (Maynooth University, 2021a; University of Limerick, 2021). The recognition by HEIs that a proactive stance is needed to support a greater diversity of students who can enter HE is also evidenced in the College Connect initiative (2021), which is another route that migrant students may apply to. College Connect is a collaboration between three universities and an IoT to track barriers to higher education at local levels, and to identify areas of low education attainment. This initiative is the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) (HEA, 2022b) and is a range of financed projects by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) fund to create opportunities for access to HE for people from groups that are under-

represented in third level programmes. The PATH strands include: Initial Teacher Education, the 1916 Bursary fund, and the Higher Education Access Fund (HEA, 2022b). 'We are Here Hear' (HEAR, 2021) originated from the College Connect project.

2.19 Family, support networks, and educational culture in the home

In the context of the need to expand the diversity of participation in HE, it is also important to explore the impact of family and the home learning culture of first-generation migrant students. Jabbar et al., (2019:261) suggest that 'the concept of *pedagogies of the home* recognises the practices of the home and family as sources of knowledge which students use to navigate educational systems'. Fleming & Murphy (1997) refer to this process as college knowledge. Families are often seen as a primary source of learning for individuals, and are seen as having long-lasting influence through primary, secondary, tertiary, and higher education levels (Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Feinstein et al., 2004). Family involvement in educational choice and decision making is expressed in the literature through the ways, and means, that families provide guidance, practical assistance, or other forms of help to each other. Research points to the particular importance of family involvement in discussions and decision-making about HE, particularly in the families of non-traditional students and who have financial concerns. Carey (2016:718) proposes that despite

the above challenges, a type of capital called 'college familial capital' can account for the sharing of knowledge, information, and resources by means of the support, beliefs, and practices that families have, and which supports their children's HE choices and access. Roksa & Kinsley (2019) expand this concept further to indicate that as well as providing financial support, the emotional support that families give leads to better academic attainment and student engagement and say that family involvement is an important indicator of student success. Bathmaker et al., (2013) do not see emotional support as being the same as social and cultural support, however, Yosso's (2005) definition of social capital supports this view specifically through *familial capital* which takes an asset-based approach to understanding family cultural capital. This is made up of the cultural knowledge nurtured in the family and broader kinship and happens regardless of the economic status of the family group.

Reay et al., (2005) on the other hand, says that intending students who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and whose parents had limited knowledge of HE, were not able to rely on their parents to advise them on their study options as they lacked the experience to do so. While some students may have these experiences, other research points to strong familial engagement through supporting intending HE students including from families with no knowledge of HE (Macqueen, 2018; Carey, 2016) and evidence of a rich network of familial supports

and information (Jabbar et al., 2019). Mitchall & Jaeger (2018) also found that positive parental support was an important motivator for non-traditional students entering HE.

Familial expectations around accessing higher education

Family and wider peer groups have an impact on the higher education expectations of migrant children (Kirui & Kao, 2018). Feliciano & Lanzuna (2017) describe as a paradoxical pattern the success of migrant students, which they note, happens despite an unfamiliarity with the educational system and possible language challenges. Some studies point to the taken-for-granted nature of some families who have experience of HE and who expect their children to also attend HE (Carey, 2016; Glick & White, 2004). This can be because there is a family tradition of going to college and because a family has the resources to support a family member going to college. Kirui & Kao (2018) suggest a theory of immigrant optimism to help explain the significance of having at least one migrant parent who completed HE. This results in their children being more likely to complete their education and earning advanced degrees. These expectations also persist into adulthood and are seen in higher levels of persistence and achievement that having a migrant parent grants (*ibid*). Jeynes (2022) also found that the resulting academic success was seen in students of varying age groups, genders, nationalities, and races, and not just

limited to students who had recently finished their secondary education.

An important indicator of access to cultural capital is parental education because parents can share knowledge, experiences and values about education with their children and can place an individual 'on course for a life of learning or its avoidance' (Gorard et al., 2001:176). Statistics Canada (2002, cited in Thomas & Quinn, 2006), indicates that, while parental income can be a determinant of whether a family member goes to HE, parental education is a more important factor. Notwithstanding the high level of support from parents for going to college, when variables such as income, family structure, and academic achievements which were known to impact on applying to HE were considered, first-generation students were still less likely to go to HE *(ibid).* Having one or more parents who attended HE, while beneficial, does not seem to be essential for all students' success. In common with this study here, Roksa & Kinsley (2019) show that the emotional support and encouragement that parents offer in lieu of factual information and knowledge about HE is just as significant. Jabbar et al., (2019) also point out that when only parents' lack of HE history is noted for first-generation students, because of the networks of family supports, information may be overlooked about the impact of successful HE activity in the wider family. These networks can be leveraged strategically.

Wainwright & Watts (2021) note that the impact of family cultures on learning is less recognised by HEIs and that more communication and research is needed on the links between home and HE. Daly (2021) suggests that this is partly due to minority and migrant parents' contributions being viewed from a deficit perspective. Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama (2012) suggest that families should be seen in terms of possibilities, so that negative representations of under-represented students in HE can be countered. This can illuminate how students from non-traditional groups operationalise familial and social capitals.

Traditionally, the influence of family on learning is by older generations on younger generations. In the case of migrants who apply to HE, research shows that they are likely to come from family backgrounds with little or no experience of the culture of HE in the country where they have settled (Waite, 2013). Because family and peer groups have important influence over a potential applicant to HE, these are groups that merit attention as they hold cultural, financial, and social capitals (Macqueen, 2018). Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama (2012) suggest that families should be seen in terms of possibilities, so that negative representations of under-represented students in HE can be countered.

Although parental educational attainment is a strong predictor of their children's academic success (Vincent, 2017; Ellwood & Kane 2000),

less is known about the impact of younger generations of their parents' educational aspirations. Wainwright and Watts (2021:112) refer to the positive effects that any family member in HE has as the 'slipstream effect'. This is a conceptualization they use to explain the effect of studying in HE on entire families, including on siblings and parents and is a further indicator that HE should engage with families more.

Influence of peers on academic outcomes

While various studies indicate that family has the initial influencing role on transmitting values about education to their children (Carey, 2016), there is also an impact from peer groups (Rabbe et al., 2019); both of which are seen in this study. Jabbar et al., (2019) also found peer groups to have significant input into college choices of Latino/a HE students. In Australia, Macqueen (2018) pointed out that while peer support was beneficial, support from friends with higher cultural capital was better. Membership of beneficial social networks allows individuals to access a wide range of resources (Schulz et al., 2017) and this includes accessing and continuing in HE.

This conceptualization of the benefits of social networks ties in with Bourdieu's (1986) definition of 'social capital', which he defined as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised

relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 248) and with Yosso's (2005) ideas around the connections between family and extended peer groups. Social networks can be strong or weak. Strong social networks support access to various kinds of social capital, such as, individual and family social support, information, and financial resources in a variety of manners which depend on the level of attachments and connections between the members of the group (Schulz et al., 2017). The information that students receive from their friends, families, and academic tutors can shape their capacity to cope with the challenges associated with life in HE.

There is a great deal of literature that focuses on why students from minority groups are not successful in HE across the world (Denton et al., 2020; Koljatic & Silva 2013; Crozier et al., 2008) but less is written on why students from these groups succeed (Palmer et al., 2011). Lin (2017) suggests that to promote success, an individual's access to resources, such as finances or information, can be developed by building relationships and acquiring social capital through deliberate ties and developing relationships outside their immediate networks. These networks are also important for student integration, which impacts on success and retention (Gallop & Bastien 2016). Through developing relationships both on and off campus with academic staff or student peers, students can obtain resources that are required for their personal academic success. Yosso (2005) takes an assets-

based view of minority students' resources and says that although students from minority groups can lack specific types of social capital, they have access to other particular forms of capital which are unique to them. Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) highlights the role of social and family support in the academic success and persistence of students from minority groups.

2.20 Learning and teaching culture in HE

As the diversification of the student body slowly expands (HEA, 2019b), the teaching and learning culture in HE is becoming increasingly important. This means that HE colleges and the educators within them need to respond and engage in new approaches, or practices. Kolb (1976) introduced the idea of learning styles which differ depending on an individual's life experiences, personality and their purpose in learning. Recent research points to the importance of higher educational organisations having a greater awareness of the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Bergey et al., 2018). Lester (2012) suggests that HE institutions recognise the benefits of increasing student engagement in improving student educational outcomes, some of which begins at the classroom level. Despite the value of understanding what goes on in the classroom, research on the socialization into academic culture of first-generation migrants has had less attention than for traditional students of HE (Kiyama & Harper, 2018).

Social capital provides a helpful framework for understanding the experiences of first-generation students entering HE. In this framework, networks of relationships can help students adapt to unfamiliar environments by providing them with relevant information, emotional support, and guidance for access and persistence in HE (Yosso, 2005). This networking benefits students from an academic as well as a social perspective. First-generation HE students may need greater support than other traditional students to make a successful transition to college, however, this group of students can have difficulty identifying help when they arrive in HE because they may lack the social capital that would engage them a HE social network (Bourdieu, 1986). Soria & Stebleton (2012) found that first-generation students had lower academic engagement, however, Kim & Sax (2009) have found that despite expectations of students from minority backgrounds having so-called low cultural capital, which suggests that there would be negative effect on them, students were, on the contrary, open to meaningful contacts with staff in HE. Similar levels of engagement were also reported by Cook-Sather et al., (2014), and Wolf-Wendel et al., (2009).

2.21 Student persistence

We know that students persist, or do not persist in HE for a variety of reasons, and the majority of research until relatively recently, probably looked at this phenomenon from the perspectives of middle class,

white students (Byrne, 2009). Less is known about the reasons first-generation migrant students remain, or leave HE (Mangan, 2015). Some of the theorising about student retention has looked at success (accessing and gaining a qualification) in HE from a perspective of the capitals a student may have (Bourdieu, 1986), however, Bourdieu also used the concept of 'objective limits' to account for how people know about their place in the world and make deliberate choices about places they feel they do not belong to. They demonstrate that they have 'a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is excluded' (Bourdieu 1984 cited in Reay et al., 2005:91) and this may also help to account for success in HE if individuals have found a place where they feel they belong (Bunar, 2017).

Tinto's (1975) model of student drop-out from higher education has been used extensively to account for why students persist with their studies or fail to complete them. While there are several synergies between Tinto's and Bourdieu's views on social and cultural capitals, other dimensions in Tinto's ideas should also be considered. For example, earlier research suggested that breaking off connections with family and friends helped in the transition into new identities for students, however, Tinto & Pusser (2006), suggest that the opposite is true and that maintaining those relationships in fact builds persistence. Tinto (1975) also says that in particular, the academic

environment and interactions with staff are also important. As seen above, it is also clear that financial constraints are a significant reason for students to leave their course.

2.22 Conclusion

Migration is an increasingly international phenomenon that is three times more likely to be initiated because of natural disasters rather than conflict, or war. While much displacement occurs within the borders of the countries where the reasons for migration occur, nevertheless, there is a need for most governments around the world to plan for migration as a potential likely event. In Ireland, the State's policy for migrants is underpinned by decades of historic political neglect. This has created a policy lacuna that has not been fully addressed and this underpins modern Irish policy for international protection, education rights, citizenship and the Direct Provision system. Irish HE policy is based on neo-liberal ideology, which sees learners as self-motivated and, therefore, by implication, any failure is an individual's responsibility if they do not succeed.

The literature demonstrates that there are many influencing factors that first-generation migrant students, and their wider family and kinship groups must consider, which makes the decision to engage in HE studies a complex experience. The literature points to a greater recognition for the role of family cultural wealth. Motivational factors

can vary between individuals and cultures and impact on the choices around education. Many first-generation migrant students encounter a variety of limitations in terms of their personal, linguistic, domestic, and financial circumstances. In addition, their lives can be highly intersected and so adding additional dimensions to their lived experiences. As a result, restrictions and impediments to their success which they can encounter should be considered at both at the level of the individual HE Institute, and also at national policy level in order to safeguard equitable access to HE.

Following pen-pictures below for **Liz**, **Tek-kwo**, and **Anne**, Chapter 3 will detail theoretical ideas that helped shape my perception of the students' experiences.

Liz

Liz is from Slovakia and is married with two grown-up daughters and is studying Business. The family lives in a small town in Ireland, which involves a commute every day to college for Liz. The family has one car so she needs to manage her time so that she can collect her husband if he needs transport after his work. The younger of her two daughters is planning to go to college, but she would like to move away to experience a new place. This could place additional financial strains on the family as Liz is not earning money while she is studying. Liz has worked in a variety of lower income positions in Ireland and sees coming to college as an opportunity to develop herself and to search for a more meaningful job, *'I started like a cleaner and the kitchen assistant...I wanted to do something more meaningful, what I found more fulfilling'.* She says that although she was diagnosed with a disability, this was the catalyst for her to re-imagine her life and how she would live it, *'I was hoping that I can get some skills or some benefits which I could use for getting ... finding a job in which I could physically do because of the illness, ah... of my diagnosis'.* As a result, she went to a centre that offered FETAC[1] awards to up-skill, and while completing a series of modules, she visited an Institute of Technology (IoT) with her classmates and began to realise that it could be possible for her to study at third level. She describes being able to do this as something she could not have previously imagined for herself in her home country, *'it wouldn't be possible... Not, at least, in that until we came over*

here (Ireland)'. Her family life is very important to her, but she also sees the need for balance in the running of the family to take account of her changed role. She no longer feels that she must do everything for her family, *'it's difficult to know when you decide to leave something, isn't it? To move to something else. You kind of go- uh?... I was told that I am giving too much time to college, but I don't care. I need that time'.*

Tek-kwo

Tek-kwo came to Ireland alone from South Sudan and is currently living in Direct Provision (DP), which is outlined in more detail below in Chapter 4. He is in his late twenties. His parents and some siblings live in South Sudan, while other brothers and a sister live in Uganda. He has not seen his family for four years and although he had hoped to visit them in 2019, he did not think that was likely to happen. Tek-kwo describes getting an education as a primary motive for moving to Ireland, *'what brought to me here in Ireland is education'*. His father graduated as an engineer in South Sudan but, because of the ongoing conflict there, he was unable to use his qualification, *'because of war, he did not do nothing. So, I could say that his qualification just run to the drain and he did not work in that line, although he used to teach'*. Tek-Kwo entered college in Ireland through an Access[1] programme, and he had also studied for QQI levels 3 and 4 before that. Tek-kwo is very focused on his Engineering studies and has developed a variety of learning strategies from his experiences of living in Direct Provision to augment his learning outside the classroom. He describes waking up early in the morning to go to college as a motivation for making him go forward, coming to classes, *'So I feel like this education has made me to forget where I came from and what I was going through… it keep me, make me move forward'*. He had felt that because of his

age he had missed his opportunity to study (first year undergraduate), *'I've grown in education that I never thought that I would be at this stage where I am right now'*. He has met a wide variety of people during his time in Direct Provision and is concerned about friends and acquaintances in the asylum process who have become disheartened about the long wait for refugee status and the possibility that they have missed their opportunity to enter higher education, *'why are they not coming to college?'*.

Anne

Anne came to Ireland from Kenya and has two primary school-aged children. Initially, Anne and her children lived in Direct Provision (DP) but her family now lives in a house together. During her time in DP Anne was unable to go to college because of the immigration status, 'I couldn't … I wasn't in a position to go back to education because I haven't even gotten my status in the country. So, I was still in limbo … There was nothing for me to do. I just had to stay there'. After some time, her immigration status changed, 'the moment all things started working out right, and I got my Stamp Four, and I thought to myself, "Well, I've got to do something with my life, not just sit and do nothing"'. Her weekly routine revolves around all of their studies and making time for the family at the weekend but there are financial strains, 'It is difficult, especially when I was doing the Access, because you don't get any funding or anything, so you're just barely surviving on what you get from the Social Office'. Her siblings are living in the United Kingdom and in Kenya and work in professional roles. She balances her studies and home life and is very focused on encouraging her children to work hard at school, 'I think I motivate them, the fact that I go to school. I find it so motivating for them because they say, "If Mommy is doing her homework, we should do our homework too"'. Initially, Anne joined an Access course in college before transferring into her current course of

study. In the first year of her studies, she shared childcare with a friend who looked after Anne's children after school for four afternoons a week while Anne looked after her friend's children from Friday afternoon to Sunday night. Anne found that she did not have quality family time alone with her children and was relieved to find a Community Childcare Scheme (CCS) place for her children when she started her first year in higher education. She said that she had never heard of the CCS programme before an acquaintance mentioned it to her and that it took a lot of pressure off her finances and family life, 'It's *a fiver a week, so it's good … It makes a really big difference. That was helpful'*. She enjoys her studies immensely and takes a keen interest in how her classmates are getting on in their courses. When she notices someone has been absent, she calls them to check how they are. She is a student of Computer Engineering and has mapped out a plan after graduation, '*I wanted to get a career. I want to have a proper career, something I can fall back on, something I can move. I can relocate to Ireland, to America. I can work worldwide, something I can earn a living on'*. Anne also has plans for which company she is hoping to work for first. Ahe has her interview jacket already hanging in her wardrobe, *I keep saying to myself … I've got a jacket that I've bought that I'm going to work in [Company Name], and I've been putting it in the wardrobe. I look at it and say [Company Name], here I come!"'* Anne also says that she would love to be a lecturer in the future.

Chapter 3 Turning to Bourdieu and Yosso.

3.1 Introduction

Now that you have met some more of the participants in this study, the purpose of this chapter is to outline the main developments in my conceptual thinking which underpins my interpretations of their stories. This development in my thinking is located in my own personal experiences, including my experience as an English language educator and teacher trainer, both in private and public settings. While a comprehensive discussion on critical race theory is beyond the scope of this study, the framework in this study also draws from critical theory in recognising how structural barriers are navigated through the resources, individual strengths, and experiential knowledge that first-generation students bring with them into their studies (Yosso, 2005).

My research and thinking are influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and specifically what he calls his 'thinking tools' of *field, habitus,* capital, and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1986). I also take inspiration from Tara Yosso's (2005) insights from her Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) concepts, in particular familial capital, which says that other forms of capitals are available to individuals and that instead of seeing students from non-traditional groups as carrying deficits, their social and cultural capitals should be given more attention. By considering complementary ways of thinking, I suggest this allows some aspects

of Bourdieu's and Yosso's ideas to meld and create space for what I see as a *'personal model of persistence',* which I believe works in parallel with the other capitals, but without which, it is difficult for migrants in Higher Education (HE) to gain access to, or to succeed in their studies. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is also included here because the knowledge of people from minority groups is important and legitimate (Yosso & García, 2007) and a critical race perspective allows an additional lens through which to examine experiential learning and to pay attention to the strengths families offer to their first-generation family members in HE as well as to recognise the impact of unconscious biases held by the majority culture.

The chapter next continues by addressing Bourdieu's concepts of field, *habitus,* capitals, and cultural reproduction. Following this, Yosso's ideas around social capital and resistance are explored. This section is then followed by an overview of CRT, which allows a more nuanced understanding of experiential knowledge and its significance in understanding family support, which was a feature of the accounts of the participants in this study. By including it here, recognition is given to the unconscious biases that underpin dominant cultures, including in HE.

3.2 Using Bourdieu to illuminate the participants' experiences of HE

The conceptual framework that informs this study is built around a Bourdieusian framework working alongside Yosso's (2005) concepts around social capital, and also viewed through the lens of CRT. In this section, I introduce Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of *field, habitus,* capitals, and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1986) to illuminate how education as a field recreates itself and is a site of negotiation for people who are not in dominant positions within it. Murphy & Costa (2016) describe Bourdieu's theories as having a global dimension and application to the area of education. Bourdieu's concepts have implications for the first-generation migrant student experience in Higher Education (HE) because of how, and why, some people experience disadvantage in accessing and engaging with higher education. This is relevant because the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities through education can persist over generations (Jæger & Breen, 2016; Rawolle & Lingard, 2013; Grenfell, 2009). Further information on Yosso's ideas and CRT follows below.

3.2.1 Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'

Bourdieu's wide-ranging theory of social and cultural reproduction examines the structures and power that maintain inequality within 'fields', and over time. Bourdieu (1979:80) suggests that 'different

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classes and class fractions are engaged in a specifically symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world that is most consistent with their interests'. Bourdieu's focus was on the identification and explanation of how social systems and those in positions of power, through influence or wealth, produce, preserve, and reproduce their advantages in society. In the case of education, Bourdieu (1986:26) said that because it is 'an instrument of reproduction capable of disguising its own function, the scope of the educational system tends to increase, and together with this increase is the unification of the market in social qualifications which gives rights to occupy rare positions'. These advantages are linked to a 'durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group' (Bourdieu:1986:21). Individuals are in competition for capital, which consists of 'the specific profits that are at stake in the field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant:1992:97). Lizardo (2012), says Bourdieu casts his attention on the behaviours, actions and struggles of actors and how structures in societies, along with personal histories, mould those actions. Harker (1990) says that Bourdieu's theory is valuable because it provides a basis from which to explore persistent inequalities in educational experience. Bourdieu (1990a), says that for some groups, education is easy to access, but for others it is not easily accessed because of the amounts of capital they hold.

Bourdieu (1990a), in his work, attempts to identify and illuminate the structures of inequality through 'thinking tools' of field, *habitus*, and capital which he uses to explore how a social system may develop, sustain, and reproduce itself for the benefit of those within that society, and to the exclusion of others. Bourdieu's thinking tools are expanded on below. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), no unique factor can be taken in isolation, instead, the intersectionality of a variety of factors which include gender, race and social class should be explored as they together comprise a person's *habitus. Habitus* is 'society written into the body, into the biological individual' (Bourdieu, 1990b:63)*.* In addition to his 'thinking tools', Bourdieu also used metaphors and analogies to illustrate his thoughts; two well-known phrases are: 'rules of the game', and 'fish out of water'.

Bourdieu (1986:21) claims that people exist in a world that is ordered by social spaces. These spaces are defined by structures which are 'systems of power and relations of meaning' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:7). Bourdieu used a number of concepts to isolate and explain the above structures. These concepts or 'thinking tools are: *field* (the objective), *habitus* (the subjective), and *capital* (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic), which function through 'ontological complicity between the former two and their medium of operation through the latter' (Grenfell, 2009:152). The significance of these three concepts when applied to the area of education is that they 'aid understanding

of the way policies and institutions can contribute to reproducing inequalities as well as overcoming them' (Hart, 2012:51-52). While Bourdieu claimed these 'thinking tools' cannot exist in isolation of each other, it can help to introduce each one separately below.

Field

Bourdieu used the concept of *'field'* as an integral element in his theory to illustrate the constantly changing and always complex nature of human activities and relationships, and in particular, to uncover 'the workings of power and inequality in particular social spaces' (Bathmaker, 2015:65). Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:16), consider fields, such as the field of education, as 'a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital'. For Bourdieu, 'practice' could not be understood without considering the 'field' in which social interactions take place (Thomson, 2014). While all fields share a number of generic properties, each has several unique properties *(ibid).* Fields, which are constantly in a state of flux, are the location of dispute and disagreement between their various social actors and while it is easy to imagine a field as a scene which is loud and confrontational, it is equally possible that the actors and their activities may be subtle, non-confrontational and discreet (Bathmaker, 2015). Webb et al., (2002:28) suggest that the fluidity found in fields can be changed 'by internal practices and by politics', in addition to the influences of other

fields. Positions in fields are bounded by how much capital an actor has and this is aggregated by *habitus* (Thomson 2014). Fields are occupied by positions, which can be people or organizations, such as colleges and schools, and Bourdieu (1986:17) argues that in the field of education, one particular type of capital, cultural capital, is extremely significant because 'the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family'. An example of this cultural capital is academic capital, and in a family with an accumulation of academic capital, Bourdieu (2004:23) says it is 'the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission of the school' and so, children from such a family can be expected to go to progress well academically and go to college.

Playing the game

Part of a field's success is inherent in the fact that not all people will know how to 'play the game' (Bourdieu, 1998:24). This is because, Grenfell (2014) suggests, rules, values and practices are not always made explicit. Thomson (2014) describes Bourdieu's fields as game-like and each will have its own histories, particular logics of practice, and their own specific rules. These practices, values and rules are uncontested by the field's social actors because participating within the field has value. Not only does an individual need to know how to

play a game, an individual must also actually know what the game is (O'Donoghue 2013). So, by protecting knowledge about a field from others, the field can remain out of reach to some. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:126-127) suggest that *habitus* 'contributes to constructing the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy'.

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:97) say that individuals compete to acquire the most capital and that 'the specific profits are the stake in the field'. Bourdieu likens these contests to 'games'. He uses the term '*illusio*' to explain that individuals can be 'taken in and by the game' and will need 'a tacit understanding of the value of the stakes of the game as practical mastery of its rules' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:115). Only participants with a high level of commitment and the necessary skills to play can participate and succeed. In addition, those already within the field who have the most power can leverage this to make changes to the rules of the game to best suit their own agendas (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Bourdieu describes this as,

> … in every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1993:72)

While Bourdieu's fields have organising structures with implicit rules, values, practices, and legitimate knowledge about how things should be done, it is also possible that the fields are the location for a battle for access to them, and/or control of them. Power is therefore not evenly distributed, and to be most effective, the actors who are convinced that the game is worth it will also need capital to play, but ultimately those with the most power are the winners. For this reason, Bourdieu (1990b:56) says that *habitus* can only be understood 'by relating the social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was constituted, to the conditions in which it is implemented' To be successful students, or players, in a game of education, accruing some power is not only a necessary part of their own development as students, but also in the handing on of their academic success to their families.

It is also important to note that, according to Wacquant (2005a), Bourdieu's fields are not static. Wacquant (2005a) explains that fields change and evolve continuously according to the interests of the social actors acting within them. Fields do not exist in isolation either – they can overlap the boundaries of other fields, or exist inside of other fields (Thomson, 2014). For example, being able to access HE in Ireland means that it is of value for a person to be able to not only have their application for a place accepted, but in order to make that happen, funding is also necessary, therefore meeting the requirements of the

grant authority, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), is also necessary. All fields will have their own 'logic, rules and regularities and actors can exist in many different fields with differing levels of power in each one' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:104). This suggests that there can be a high level of awareness by actors within fields, and there is a dynamic, constantly shifting experience of social interaction and engagement. Fields have rules and strategies, and struggles occur both in operating the rules and in how the actors define those rules (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Fields are also 'historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish, over time' (Wacquant, 2005b, p. 268). People engaging with a field for the first time will compare their pre-existing knowledge and experiences to the new field, a concept which has its origins in Jean Piaget's '*schema'* for '*accommodation'* and '*assimilation'* (Lizardo, 2004). Occasionally, the pre-existing knowledge that an individual has will not support them in a new field. For example, it is possible that an individual finds that, although they had completed secondary school education in their countries of origin, their academic qualifications may not be accepted for admission to the 'new field' of HE here in Ireland. This is significant because Bourdieu (1986:16) says that recognition of 'educational qualifications…is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital'. Bourdieu explains the importance of having a recognised qualification,

> With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given time.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1986:20)

According to Rawolle & Lingard (2013), the type of connections between actors, and the location of groups of actors relative to each other, is crucial to being able to analyse fields and this is central to Bourdieu's social theorising. People's thinking and activity can be shaped by their experiences within a field, and this evolves over time and is contained in the concept of '*habitus*'. An unfamiliar field where an individual does not feel comfortable, can lead to the person leaving, or removing themselves unless they learn the 'rules of the game'. This may mean that someone who does not have enough knowledge of the game may either, never present as a student, or they leave without a qualification. This then prevents an individual from acquiring any economic capital that can be accumulated in the form of qualifications, which can then result in a lack of access to meaningful employment and economic and social capital.

For Thomson (2014: 82), Bourdieu's education as a 'game' is fundamentally about 'sorting and selecting people' by giving higher

recognition to particular sets of knowledge and routes into education. Certain students who have higher levels of academic capital are likely to continue their academic journeys because this academic capital is, as Bourdieu (2004:23) suggests, 'the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school'. However, this is only true if the academic capital they carry is held as valuable by the receiving HE institution.

Habitus

> And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a fish in water: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.
>
> (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:127)

Habitus for Bourdieu (1990a:53) represents what he calls 'durable, transposable dispositions' that develop from engaging with, and within a field, and these layered and dynamic dispositions are moulded by past structures and events, and so *habitus* is 'practice generating' (Bourdieu, 1984:101). I understand 'dispositions' to mean group culture and personal history that comes about through shared social experiences, which contribute to a person's sense of belonging. This suggests that people can enter fields such as HE because they are comfortable, or believe they will be comfortable, in this social field, and HE is part of their habitus (Callender & Dougherty, 2018). Specifically, Wacquant (2005a:319), says dispositions 'can be eroded, countered

or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by situations of migration', and in the case of new participants in HE by an unfamiliarity with the academic environment. It is clear that some people can succeed in certain fields, including education, and while a person's habitus can influence the possibilities open to a person, it is also the case that when circumstances change, then habitus can change too (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Habitus exists both at an individual level and at an institutional level and 'the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history' (Bourdieu, 1977a:82). Habitus is influenced by customs, history, hidden principles, and traditions but, as Bourdieu (2005:45) stresses, habitus is 'not a fate, not a destiny'. Habitus recognises that in the set of fields, actors share common purpose which Bourdieu (1977a:80) says is 'harmonised'. Habitus is a means to analyse how the social world works, and for whom, and according to Bourdieu (1990b:59) it is 'the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination'. However, not all actors inhabit the fields equally – individuals bring their own perceptions and thinking to each field and hold different amounts and forms of capital, and in the case of education, the 'share in profits which scarce cultural capital secures in class-divided societies is based, in the last analysis, on the fact that all agents

do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children's education beyond the minimum necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power least valorized at a given moment' (Bourdieu:1986:19). Capital's symbolic and actual value will be affected by how the much worth the field places on it. Consequently, the degree to which a person's habitus aligns with an educational institute dictates their success there (Brooks 2008). For these reasons, the field of HE is not an equally shared space. A migrant student can change, or try to change, their habitus to enter HE – an action which Bourdieu (1977b:72) describes as 'generative', and so allowing for modifications through experiences. However, if the individuals have no shared identity or cultural history of HE habitus, they may remain at a disadvantage in it, or fail to feel like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu 2007:127).

For Bourdieu (1984:170), habitus is shaped and replicated unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence…without any conscious concentration'. Wacquant (2005a:319) further says, habitus is 'both structur*ed* (by past social milieus) and structur*ing* (of present representations and actions)', this also includes educational experiences. Although habitus is not static, conversely, according to Rawolle & Lingard (2013:319), it is 'endowed with built-in inertia, insofar as habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them' – this suggests that habitus is replicated

through the imitation of peer groups, families, and schools. Bourdieu (1990b:54) describes this embodying of values and attitudes in habitus as 'the active presence of past experiences', which can be replicated. A positive example of this replication is when going to college is an understood expectation within a peer group or family. A negative example of this replication is when a would-be student of HE is not supported by peers, or family. Habitus helps us to make sense of the field, and at the same time, the field structures the habitus. While each individual brings their own perceptions and thinking to each field and holds different amounts and forms of capital, habitus evolves through a social process and not because of individual actions,

> It designates a practical competency, acquired in and for action, that operates beneath the level of consciousness, …habitus encapsulates not a natural but a social aptitude which is for this very reason variable across time, place, and most importantly across distributions of power.

> (Wacquant, 2005a:318)

Institutional organisations also have a type of habitus, which Reay et al., (2005) refer to as 'institutional habitus', which is controlled by the group with most power. This type of habitus also extends to institutions of higher education, where the values, knowledge, and norms, i.e., cultural capital, control the institutions' practices, policies and production. Students who are successful in gaining admittance to HE and who are successful tend to share the same habitus as the educational organisation. Bourdieu (2000:210) comments that it is the

'presence of the past in the present which makes possible the presence in the present of the forth-coming'. Families with a history of parents going to college can expect the same future for their children. This suggests that students, such as some migrant students, who may not share this habitus are likely to belong to under-represented groups in HE.

3.2.2 How capital rules the game

All fields depend entirely on capital and the types of capital the various actors in it can access and use. According to Bourdieu (2008:281), 'depending on the field in which it functions, … capital can present itself in three fundamental guises', which are: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Capital does not only mean material assets or, having an educated style of language – it includes lifestyles, values, and aesthetic choices. Capital means all of the resources that an individual has at their disposal and so, a person who has a rich reserve of these resources will be in a position to succeed more easily than a person who does not. Capital, according to Bourdieu (2007:46), is 'accumulated labour' that expresses itself in three forms. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three core types of capital, which are, economic, social, and cultural capitals, and these give rise to a fourth called 'symbolic' capital. Economic capital represents wealth, and this term can be used as an umbrella term for all types of economic resources such as, property, wealth, and income. The source of wealth

can be varied and could come from; earnings, accumulations of wealth, inheritances, and prize money from gambling or lotteries, and according to Bourdieu (1986:252), economic capital is 'the root of all other forms of capital'. For students attempting to access HE, not having economic capital means that some students may not be able to gain entry and so other types of capital, for example, a qualification that leads to a better paid job, are not possible. At third level, students who come from a family tradition of going to HE, and whose families have wealth, experience more success in HE, so they have two important forms of capital available to them (Wainwright & Watts, 2021). A lack of economic capital could be a significant impediment and stressor.

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) say that there is a distinction between social capital, which is the result of a network of social relations, and cultural capital, which can be a result of education and upbringing. So, to do well at school or in higher education does not depend on individual talent or ability, it depends on having, and being able to control cultural capital. Being able to play the game of 'education' requires having the most capital of all types available (Reay, 2018b). This is a known feature of student enrolments on high point courses[21], which yield high income careers, such as medicine. For example,

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[21] A points system is used to calculate eligibility for HE courses. Courses in high demand require applicants to have higher points.

frequently, applicants to courses of medicine are related to other graduates of medicine. This is an example where inter-generational cultural capital reproduces wealth and advantage, as evidenced in the low rate of applications to medicine from people from constrained financial circumstances (HEA, 2019b), and who, according to Bourdieu may not have the cultural capital to do so.

Brennan & Osborn (2008), suggest that the students who can make the best choices in higher education have the greatest reserves of all capitals. According to O'Shea (2016), many students entering HE from migrant families will lack the types of capitals, by nature of their circumstances, that result in success, and students who are also the first in their families to attend colleges of higher education are the least likely to complete their studies. Tett et al., (2017) point to the importance of students being prepared, (i.e., having capital), for the complexities of behaviours, assumptions and practices that participating in higher education requires.

3.2.3 Social capital

Bourdieu's social capital theory suggests that we can use our social connections as a resource. Bourdieu says it is,

> 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, membership in a group – which

> provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word'.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1986:248-249)

Social capital is not as easily measured as economic capital, where monetary units clearly indicate economic worth, but it 'accrues from networks of relationships, especially institutionalized relationships, such as the family' (Power, 1999). It is a continuous process, and Bourdieu (1986:22) says that 'the reproduction of social capital is an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and re-affirmed'. Social capital includes networks that effect gain or advantage, and unlike economic capital, social capital actually increases the more it is used, so like any form of capital, it is implied that gain should accrue. Social capital, above all, involves social relations, and the networks an individual has made, or maintained through primarily family connections, which make resources available to its members. These networks range from, more easily accessible close friends and family, to more complex, less accessible groups, such as, social institutions. How these connections are employed allows the person to improve their standing, so a person with established links to a given network with ties to, say, a higher educational organisation may find gaining admission there less challenging than a migrant who may have fewer of these connections to reach out to.

In the case of a person with insufficient funds for study, their family might call on their familial social capital to enable them to borrow money from friends and community to pay fees. As a consequence of the person's admission to college, their family social capital could increase if gaining a place in college was held in high regard by their community of family and friends.

Woolcock (1998) introduces the idea of 'vertical' relationships, where improved social capital comes about because of deliberate positioning with people who have more power or resources. An example of this is when an individual can access information or resources. Being able to cross the borders of social capital means that not only does an individual have to make changes to their thinking, but it may also allow access to more resources and information (McGhee, 2006). 'Playing the game' for Bourdieu is about understanding these relationships between networks.

3.2.4 Cultural capital

Capital, which Bourdieu (1986:17) sees as a resource, results from investment in 'three forms' of cultural capital. These include, embodied or incorporated state, a type of capital that consists of knowledge that is both actively acquired and passively inherited through cultural socialisation and traditions associated with this. One example of this

is language acquisition and use which allows the individual to communicate and engage with their culture. Another is 'the *objectified* state in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.' (*ibid*), which can be accumulated. In addition, cultural capital consists of whatever property an individual has that can be converted into economic gain in conjunction with the symbolic conveying of its associated cultural capital. Lastly, *institutionalised* state which is the recognition by an organisation of an individual's personal cultural capital, which usually in the case of education consists of the formal recognition of professional or academic qualifications, which has been outlined above.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and cultural reproduction is an influential explanation of why, and how, social, and educational inequalities persist over generations (Jæger & Breen 2016). For Bourdieu (1986:245), this mechanism of cultural reproduction is vital for social reproduction to occur, and it embodies as 'biological singularity… to a hereditary transmission'. Within the literature on education and cultural capital, much research has focused on 'high status cultural participation' by linking this to variations of culture such as music, or art appreciation (Reay, 2010).

According to Moskal (2016:143), cultural capital is especially important in any study of migration and the adaptation of migrants to their new host societies since 'cultural capital is degraded as a result of migration'. She also suggests that cultural capitals are heavily dependent on the social circumstances and the contexts for which those capitals have been acquired, and as mentioned above 'playing the game' for Bourdieu occurs when individuals understand how these relationships between networks work. In the context of HE, students can be academically successful if they can adapt to the learning styles required, thus leading to their being able to increase their academic achievements. This success is readily combined with other capitals they have and allows them to enhance and increase their existing and future social influence and privilege (Bourdieu, 1990a). Yosso (2005:76) raises a critique of Bourdieu's view of cultural capital, 'his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposed White, middle-class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are considered in comparison to this 'norm''.

3.2.5 Linguistic capital

Another factor worth considering is the notion of linguistic capital. Moskal (2016) identifies linguistic capital as relevant to the discussion of migrants in education, and this is an intersection that Nichols & Stahl

(2019) say is under-researched. Moskal says there is a degradation of cultural capital for migrants when they move to an area where a language is spoken that they are not proficient in. This, Moskal (2016:143) says, is because all cultural capital is 'dependent on the context and society in which and for which they have been acquired'. In this study, some of the participants had to learn English from the very beginning when they arrived in Ireland. Others who had quite high levels of English felt the need to improve their level before beginning their courses. Since it can take a language learner between five and seven years for academic language proficiency to develop comparable linguistic competency to a speaker who has used a language from birth, language then is an important example of cultural capital *(ibid).* There is also evidence according to Stiftung (2010), that in comparisons of academic performance for entry to higher education by migrant students, there are sometimes academic discrepancies that can represent up to 1.5 years of schooling for students who are still learning competency in a language. This can have an impact on who can, or cannot, enter higher education. It can also, influence the course of choices a person can make.

Language and symbolic power

Bourdieu introduced the concept of language as power to explain the almost unconscious modes of domination in society by some people

over others (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu's approach to language and linguistic exchange was to say that it could be understood as the result of a relationship between a linguistic habitus and a linguistic market. The linguistic habitus is the manifestation of the cultural capital of language skills, and operates in the reproduction of social inequality, and the linguistic market represents the idea that some people's language use is given more credibility than others, hence power relations control whose standards are given credibility (*ibid*) and power is exercised and disguised at the same time. Different groups have different accents and ways of speaking and this is a socially structured character of the habitus of their language.

Bourdieu's concepts of linguistic habitus, linguistic markets, symbolic capital and domination are useful for challenging the 'unproblematic' nature of language. Bourdieu's contestation is that social domination takes place through linguistic practices.   According to Bourdieu (1991:45) in order for linguistic domination to occur, 'the linguistic market has to be unified and the different dialects ... have to be measured practically against the legitimate language or usage'. Different manners of communication from the 'norm' are measured as problematic or deficient. Bourdieu points to a relationship between language, power, and symbolic domination. He says that 'relations of communication par excellence - linguistic exchanges - are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between

speakers or their respective groups are actualized' (Bourdieu, 1991:37). In other words, linguistic exchanges are representations of power.

Value given to capitals is arbitrary, however, it is misrecognized as common sense and natural. This is a misrecognition that makes it not only challenging to query the valuation, but it also results in some capitals acquiring symbolic power. Symbolic power manages an individual's place in the social hierarchy, in particular in education (*ibid*). When some types of language, or dialects, or accents are devalued by the dominant group, the struggle for position in society is real. The struggle is less about language and more about power. Bourdieu (1991:106) suggests that 'In the struggle to impose the legitimate vision … agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital, i.e. in the proportion to the recognition they receive from a group'. However, Bull (2013) says that this concept does not always have to be deterministic and that out of linguistic power, linguistic emancipation can evolve.

Symbolic violence, the normalization of power, can emerge as a form of objective violence through language (Bourdieu, 1991). One of its main features is that it operates at a level of normality so the status quo is maintained and in the case of discourse it neutralizes and legitimises the system of domination and naturalizes power relations.

Foucault (1972) argued that discourse represents how the world is embodied in terms of power and dominance and reproduction is regulated through certain rules agreed by society. An example of this can be seen in the discourse around migration into Ireland in section 2.5.1 in Chapter 2.

In the world of education, the subtle forms of power and censorship over language operate, not only in the production of oral discourse, but also in the production of academic written texts. This censorship is not physical but rather is the requirement to observe the requirements of that field. English language has symbolic value and at a personal level can set a 'sense of limits' (Bourdieu, 1991:123).

3.3 Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory

For Bourdieu (1977b), families and individuals have resources in the form of various types of capital, which include economic, social, cultural, and arising out of these is the concept of symbolic capital. These different types of capital are invested in to generate more resources or in exchange for other types of capital and they take time to accumulate (Bourdieu, 1986). For Brennan & Osborn (2008), students in higher education who can make the best choices are those who are holders of the greatest amount of capital. Bourdieu describes this type of capital as cultural capital and says that it is transmitted by parents to children, who exploit this acquired capital in the education

system and this leads to families being able to reproduce positions of privilege (Jæger & Breen, 2016). Those families with the largest amounts of capital will find it easiest to play the game (Reay, 2018b). However, even when an individual has economic capital, Bourdieu (1977b) suggests that some students in higher education cannot process the complexities of university culture because of their lack of appropriate capital, and also because higher education has a role in reinforcing social inequality by means of social reproduction through its internal conditions. To understand the structure and functioning of the social world, according to Bourdieu (1986), it is not enough to simply see capital from the perspective of economics, all other forms of capital should be considered too. For Bourdieu, (1986:471) 'social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds' through 'cultural products' such as, language, systems of education, values, how capital is valued and the routine activities of daily life.

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory is sometimes criticised for being overly deterministic and that it fails to take into account the role of individual agency in transforming fields. Recent research suggests that agency and voice should also be considered (Clark 2017). It is also likely that the types of capital that Bourdieu claims are the preferred capitals (based on high intellectual culture) needed for success may not be the ones that have most impact on migrant students. For example, in this study Chapter 5 will highlight how far

more emphasis was placed by the participants on being able to afford fees than on any concerns about other people's perceptions of their personal cultural capital. Bourdieu's approach also fails to account for cultural diversity that individuals bring to their educational spheres and so he homogenises all people who are not traditionally from the established dominant group and places them in a position of deficit. Thomson (2014), explains that the taken-for-granted belief, or truth, of merit and ability, hides the reality that students enter education with all types of capital originating in their families and which is perpetuated by the educational system through,

> pedagogical practices dependent on specific language and disciplinary capitals and processes such as examinations. These combine to produce and reproduce dominant ways of knowing, acting and being. As educational 'game' players, children start from different positions.
>
> Thomson (2014:91)

Consequently, the differences in academic outcomes are personalised and attributed to inadequacies in the social structures of schools, families and whole neighbourhoods and are accepted as 'truth' by not only the dominant group, but also by the dominated group (Thomson, 2014), through practices which continue to differentiate, and which allow capitals to be directed to those already advantaged in the field. Jæger & Breen (2016) have questioned how Bourdieu's theory is applied in real situations. One of their concerns relates to the lack of clarity in Bourdieu's theory regarding cultural reproduction and how it

transfers from parents to children, and whether it facilitates success both educationally and socioeconomically. However, their concern stems from what they describe as a lack of empirical basis for Bourdieu's theory when applied in current research. The very advantages of Bourdieu's theory, such as its potential to be used in combination with other theory, lends itself to wide application across research, however, this would seem to be problematic for Jæger & Breen (2016). I argue that this flexibility in Bourdieu's theory is why it has proven so useful across cultures and educational settings.

Another concern expressed about Bourdieu's theory is that it does not allow for conscious social change and that because of his focus on 'reproduction', there is never any real change (Guillory 2000:20). Guillory also suggests that struggles within fields allow them to interrupt and interfere with each other and that while unconscious change can result, it is not always for progressive reasons (p.370). Yang (2014:1523) also suggests that in Bourdieu's theory, the 'inability to anticipate change and the lack of rationality are believed to be the most crucial weaknesses of his theory'. Yang proposes that while habitus operates beneath our consciousness, it has 'endless capacity' to generate expressions, thoughts, actions and perceptions (p.1525). Yang (*ibid*:) suggests that Bourdieu's own acknowledgement of 'how change and conscious deliberation can be achieved in his theory, actually more often than many of his critics have recognized' (p.1537).

With these considerations in mind, the next section introduces Yosso and her ideas around social capital, community cultural wealth (CCW), familial capital and resistance.

3.4 Yosso's ideas around social capital and community cultural wealth

Yosso's (2005) work on Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) came about as a challenge to the limitations of Bourdieu's deficit-based approach, which is outlined below. Yosso's (2005) work on the experiences of ethnic minority returning to education presents claims that first-generation students in HE are often problematized. A particular difficulty with a deficit-based approach is that institutional barriers such as discrimination are overlooked, and blame can be inappropriately aimed at some communities for what is seen as their underachievement. In addition, a deficit-based approach does not generate ideas for institutional improvement, whereas a community cultural wealth approach focuses on what factors generate success.

Yosso & García (2007:153) point to erroneous interpretations by some researchers who employ Bourdieu's social capital, as evidence of a 'deficits' approach, which sees White middle-class culture as being the norm. This approach, Yosso & García (2007), say, completely disregards other forms and expressions of cultural knowledge, and

implies that the only way for anyone who is not White to acquire capital is to acquire and display the cultural capital of White people, in order to be socially mobile. By implication, using Bourdieu's theory as a 'deficits' interpretation leads to claims that the cultural skills, knowledge, and social groups of non-White people are not considered as valuable or relevant (*ibid*). Yosso (2005:75) says this is evidence of educational organisations filling students with 'forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society'.

Many factors can contribute to the success of first-generation students in HE. There are valuable resources located in communities that first-generation students come from and research by Yosso (2006), and Yosso & García (2007), say that this community wealth should be recognised by schools and HE. Where Bourdieu (1986) focused on the supposed deficits of some groups based on their lack of similar capital to other groups, Yosso (2006:46) separated the concepts of cultural capital and cultural wealth, and says 'cultural capital is accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but cultural wealth is meant to be shared'. This conceptualization sets out the framework for an understanding of the significance of CCW in understanding community assets. This challenges the narrative about deficits and counters the underlying assumption that students are blank slates and somehow need to be taught the knowledge and culture of the dominant group they are joining in HE *(ibid).*

Yosso has further developed ideas around social capital to argue that individuals are agentic and demonstrate qualities of self-efficacy, and they are not simply occupying a place of deficits. Yosso (2005:76) says that Bourdieu's 'theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor' and so cultural wealth is measured against the norms of the more powerful in society. In addition, Yosso (2005:75) suggests that a basic flaw in thinking about education is that educators 'most often assume that schools work and that students, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system'. Yosso (2005) suggests expanding the range of capitals available to recognise that capitals are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth. A brief summary of these capitals follows below.

Aspirational Capital

This is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of real and perceived barriers. Yosso's model explores the experiences, talents, and strengths that students of colour and minority groups bring with them to their HE environment. It also illuminates the wishes of parents and wider family have for their family members.

Resistant Capital

This form of capital has its foundations in the experiences of communities of colour in securing equal rights and collective freedom. According to Yosso, the sources of this form of capital come from parents, community members and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice. Yosso (2005) says that parents have to teach their family members to value themselves and to be ready to respond to racist stereotyping. This historical legacy of resistance leaves students of colour and from minority groups particularly well-positioned to leverage their higher education training to enter society prepared to solve challenging problems regarding equitable health, educational and other social outcomes.

Familial Capital

Familial capital refers to the social and personal human resources students have in their pre-college environment, drawn from their extended familial and community networks. Yosso explains that students' pre-college experiences within a communal environment come with knowledge that campuses can help students leverage into positive experiences in college.

Navigational Capital

These are the skills students have and use in navigating social spaces, which include educational spaces. Yosso further explains that students' navigational capital empowers them to manoeuvre within unsupportive or hostile environments that do not take account of minority groups.

Linguistic Capital

This is the ability for students to develop communication skills through various experiences. This may include, 'memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme' (Yosso 2005:79).

Social Capital

Social capital includes family connections including extended family, and wider social networks that are willing to provide instrumental support (for example money or time), or emotional support (including love, care or empathy).

Leaning on some of Yosso's ideas can, according to Hiraldo (2010:54), help in thinking about 'when higher education institutions work towards becoming more diverse and inclusive', and so, creating

a space for different groups of people. Bourdieu and Yosso's ideas have been widely used as separate methods of analysis in academic research and are seen as distinct approaches which can be used to interrogate and unpack inequalities in education (Tichavakunda, 2019; Yosso, 2005). McKnight & Chandler (2012:77) suggest that Bourdieu's 'powerful meta-theoretical framework' used alongside other theories lends itself to generating better understandings when used in this way. Yosso's theory of CCW suggests that many types of capital have value and that they can be activated, including social capital. Yosso also suggests that people have navigational capital to help the move into and through educational spaces and resistant capital that help them to challenge inequality. By employing Yosso's theory and focusing on it as a strengths-based model, this allows a complementary lens to Bourdieu's framework to illuminate the data. This approach allows me here to scratch beneath the surface of what is happening in HE to explore '…whose interests are being served and how' (Tripp, 1998:37). Tichavakunda's suggestion is to focus on the congruencies between the theories so that they can be used for this purpose. There are few examples in the research in higher education of using ideas from the frameworks together in order to better illuminate student experiences (Tichavakunda, 2019), and this study is adding to this body. I am also acknowledging here that borrowing from Yosso's (2005) model needs careful and sensitive treatment as I am aware that CCW was theorised for studies of first-generation students from Hispanic and Communities of Colour in the United States. However,

there is scope for the framework to be applied to studies of other under-represented groups in other societies.

LeBouef & Dworkin (2021) suggest that the application of a critical race lens with other theories may be an initial step towards an understanding of the strengths and supports of families for first-generation students. Although this study does not use CRT as a main framework, because the participants in the study belong to a non-traditional group in HE, CRT provides a lens to view their experiential knowledge, and a brief overview of CRT is developed below.

3.5 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become one of the main theoretical frameworks for theorising racism and it was first used in the USA to address the endemic presence of racism within society. Rooted in the work of US legal scholars, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Derek Bell (1980), CRT has been embraced in many areas of research, including in education (Warmington, 2020). Leonardo (2009:5) describes CRT as 'critical of race' and 'race critical of theory' and its conceptual tools allow an understanding for what Leonardo (2005:405) describes as 'the complete racialization of daily life'. Hylton (2005:81) says that the 'outcome of using a CRT perspective is likely to lead towards a resistance to a passive reproduction of the established practices,

knowledge and resources, that make up the social conditions that marginalize 'race''. Yosso's (2005:74) work on racism in education describes CRT as a 'theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways 'race' and racism impact educational structures, practices and discourses'. Yosso & Garcia (2007:147) suggest that using critical race theory in research allows the research lens to focus on 'the perspectives of those at the margins of society, and mobilizing toward positive social change'. In this study, a CRT lens lends itself to understanding how forms of oppression in educational settings occur (Bañuelos & Flores, 2021) and that experiential knowledge is essential for understanding these experiences.

A number of different tenets (or characteristics) of CRT have emerged to give structure to the theory and assist its use in research, particularly because CRT is built on intersectionality in exploring 'how racism works with, against and through additional axes of differentiation including class, gender, sexuality and disability' (Gillborn, 2008:36). The variability of these tenets give CRT its flexibility and researchers chose the most relevant, or important tenets for a particular study Hiraldo (2010). The tenets I argue are the most relevant to informing this study are: (a) the endemic nature of racism; (b) commitment to social justice; (c) White privilege; (d) Othering; (e) the normalising discourses of meritocracy; (f) interest convergence; and (g) the

importance of experiential knowledge. This last tenet is important because this study gives voice to its participants.

(a) The endemic nature of racism

Bell (1992:x) refers to the pervasive social antipathy of racism as 'permanently embedded in the psychology, economy, society, and culture of the modern world'. Warmington (2020:24) says CRT challenges the notion that hatred is only a product of extremist groups because 'by equating racism with overt racial hatred, structural and institutional racism are often rendered invisible' and that racism is 'reproduced within institutions such as law and education'. Kitching & Curtin (2012: 2) suggest that racism persists 'because it manifests through social practices, and structured relationships between different social groups within and outside of state institutions'. Not only are constructs of race varied over history, these

constructs also change in response to economic and political conditions (*ibid*). Institutional racism, which can be intentional or unintentional, can become so normalised that it becomes unremarkable and is therefore never challenged, or changed.

Bourdieu's early work on 'race' focussed mainly on the application of power by colonisers over the countries they had taken over, and for some researchers this lack of engagement with 'race' is seen as a

limitation of his theory. However, McKnight & Chandler (2012) see Bourdieu's framing of 'race' as part of his concept of cultural capital which suggests that individuals rarely disrupt stable structures and so are unlikely to yield up benefits such as privilege. This lack of questioning about structure is underpinned by unconscious '*practice*', where a person does not reflect on their circumstances or social actions because people do not want to have to think out every decision or act they embark on. This unconscious thought process can also extend to 'race', because it is socially constructed and there is no rational reason for its existence (*ibid*).

From a CRT perspective, racism works through crude methods and unconcealed discriminations and also through commonplace suppositions about what is the norm in a given social situation. Micro-aggressions are often present in acts of racism and these acts can be gestures, or words, which mark some people out as 'others' and which according to Warmington (2020:24) are often small and unremarked. Dabiri (2020) suggests that in Ireland the reaction to racist incidents is so often sensationalist that it 'reinforces the belief that racism only exists in its most explicit manifestations, so those who haven't physically attacked a black person, or shouted racial slurs at us, can congratulate themselves on not being racist. All of the structural ways racism impacts upon black life go unchecked'.

(b) Commitment to social justice

CRT has a deeply ingrained commitment to creating a link between practice and theoretical concepts (Stovall, 2006) in order to bring about social justice. The tenets of CRT have been applied to the context of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998), as well as to give a structure to research in education (Yosso, 2005). This is achieved by recognising that racism exists in education and intersects with various forms of oppression. One of the ways in which a roadmap is provided is through the use of tenets to provide a vigorous conception of racism and how it validates its dismantling.

(c) White privilege

How one group experiences privilege over others is key to understanding where racism originates from and how it perseveres. Examining White privilege illuminates how it functions and provides an explanation for its existence. Benefits that accrue to White people include social, economic and ideological advantages, and as long as White people enjoy gratuitous privilege they will reinforce systemic racism. This is enabled not only by the system that provides what Fine (1997:245) describes as the 'protective pillows of resources and second chances' of whiteness, but also through the language used in so called cultural awareness. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), has emerged as 'an intellectual space for Scholars of Color to critically interrogate issues of racism' traditionally focuses on how White people

perpetuate endemic racism and it has a different epistemological standpoint from CRT (CWS has a focus on Whiteness as opposed to ethnicity and race in CRT), however, there are overlaps in their shared aims of defeating racism (Cabrera et al, 2017:19).

According to Cabrera et al., (2017), it is essential to examine the source of the problem of privilege held by a dominant group and to say that its name is Whiteness. Cabrera (*ibid*) suggests that 'it does not take intentionally racist actions to perpetuate racism, as the normality of Whiteness will do. This normality is precisely why engaging issues of race and racism is so difficult'. Effectively, Whiteness becomes normalised, thus making it seem neutral. This in turn, leads to Whiteness being seen as a reference point leading Gillborn (2008:229) to suggest that Whiteness is 'a fundamental driver of social policy'. However, Lopez (2015:10) warns against treating all 'whites' as a uniform group as not everyone experiences race in the same way, however, 'white' identity is a potent social force that 'can only be understood by naming and discussing it'.

Chang (2014) explains race as the interactions that occur in the gap between appearance and the perception of difference. It is about what we see and what we think we see and what we think about when we see. Cabrera et al., (2017) also suggest that a critical lens with a

radical approach is needed to investigate Whiteness, but that the original Latin meaning of '*radix'* = '*root*' should be used to examine the structures in higher education that 'contribute to systemic racisms and can be vehicles for social change' (p. iv) in order to identify the root causes of racism.

The reality is that Whiteness operates through what McGuire (2015:33) and Mills (1997) refer to as an 'epistemology of ignorance', and which, according to Sullivan and Tuana (2007:1) does not result from a 'gap in knowledge' or 'a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known', rather it is 'actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation'. Whiteness is not a historic product – it has come about as a product of modern times (Frederickson 2000, cited in Mills, 2007) and according to Fine (1997: 246) 'is being manufactured in part through educational arrangements'. Because of the centring of Euro and Euro-American as the white norm of ethnocentrism which came about as a result of Europe's rise to global domination, this European variant has become 'entrenched as an overarching, virtually unassailable framework' (Mills, 2007:25).

Whiteness is described in the literature as operating as an oppressive structure of society. It is normative in that much of what goes on in

society, including in education, is judged against white standards (Cabrera et al., 2017) and Whiteness also presents itself as being neutral, although Di Angelo (2018) says that this is not possible. Yosso & Lopez (2010) argue that when the experiences of White middle-class students are used as the standard, meaningful discourse about diversity in HE cannot happen. Within education, Fine (1997:246) describes this normalising of White experiences as a process which 'at once creates an organizational discourse about and an institutional denial of race(ism)' … 'enabling racial "identities"' and by using Bourdieu's concept of 'institution', Fine (*ibid*) suggests that this reproduction is at once ambivalent and embodied. This seeming norming and neutrality can extend to the physical environment too, for example, Muñoz (2009:57) suggests that a feature such as the bolted-down furniture of college classrooms is rarely designed for collaborative conversations, thus these spaces are 'locations that frequently perpetuate and reward White normative behavior'.

(d) 'Othering'

The process of 'Othering'

The theoretical concept of 'othering' grew out of post-colonial social theory and its origins have been based on structures of power and privilege (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). According to Powell (2017) in recent times it has also come to mean a conscious or unconscious perception of threat from the 'other' group to a favoured group. In

addition, Powell (*ibid*) also suggests that 'Othering' is driven by 'politicians and the media, as opposed to personal contact. Overwhelmingly, people don't "know" those they are 'Othering'.

Social construction of 'Others', which is based on fear, is promoted by institutions including media which use a 'dominant racial ontology, social policy…through discursive and structural practices' (Quaylan & Metcalf, 2019:28). In the United States, Chang (2014) refers to this irrational fear of demographic changes as 'demographobia'. Here in Ireland, Breen et al., (2005) reported similar media reporting to that described by Boyce & Chunnu (2020) of negative attitudes towards migrants in Ireland based on newspaper coverage of migrants in Ireland. When social actors see their domination 'as a natural state of affairs' (Bryan, 2009:299), this contributes to racial inequality which is characterised as symbolic violence because it is 'a mode of domination that is exercised upon individuals in a subtle and symbolic (as opposed to physical) manner' (*ibid*). At the structural level of educational policy, failing to address the rapidly changing demographic nature of students in Ireland fails to acknowledge the vulnerability of students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013).

(e) The normalising discourse of the myths of meritocracy and colour-blindness

Critical Race Theorists use CRT concepts to address the narratives of meritocracy and colour-blindness in society, and in education. A belief in meritocracy (a system of recognising achievements based on merit) allows a false account of equal opportunity to pervade the discourse about success in education to the extent that all achievement is attributed to individual natural ability and hard work (i.e. merit), a belief which lies at the heart of neo-liberal discourse of personal responsibility. Schools and colleges are part of broader economic and social relationships and by their very organisation are set up to support capitalism and the reproduction of wealth. Learners are seen as rational and self-determining and independent of systemic imbalances of power or societal processes; this approach entirely fails to address how the decisions made in educational organisations advantage some students and disadvantage others. Meritocracy fails to address the influence of White privilege (Zamudio et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Zamudio et al., (2011:85) suggest that recognising 'such privileges is as important, if not more so, as recognising discrimination'. Failing to be successful is the fault of individuals, or even their families, and this is sometimes explained away by terms such as 'laziness' or 'poor decisions' and leads to a discourse of deficits. This is an important point because in societies where education is seen as being an equaliser and available to all people, the myth of meritocracy is not just an ideological position but one which

allows blame to be attributed to those who do not succeed, and thus reinforces the notion of a level playing field for all. The significance of not challenging the myth of meritocracy is that legitimacy and justification is provided to the ways in which education is structured, which means it is based on the ways of being and knowing of one (privileged) group over other groups.

Colour-blindness is a notion that claims that because society is colour-blind, race no longer exists (Zamudio et al., 2011). Brooks (2008) maintains that due to power differentials, colour-blindness implicitly values whiteness and devalues all that is not white. Zamudio et al., (2011 xviii) say that 'when society proceeds in a color-blind fashion, it does not see monochrome: it sees white. Whiteness is the default cultural standard, and, this, it is easy to view even the positive features of black culture as morally questionable'. Politically, in the USA, the concept of colour-blindness was largely popularised by the Reagan presidency (1981-9189) through its suggestion that by avoiding the concept of race, racial problems evaporate (Lopez, 2015). Colour-blindness is a product of a liberal rights agenda that says that all people enjoy equal treatment and that political rights are the same as social rights regardless of colour without any acceptance of the myriad of ways that race and racism replicate ongoing social inequality (Zamudio et al., 2011). López (2015:4) posits that an acceptance of colour-blindness by some has resulted in an increase in what he terms

'dog whistle politics', where the coded language of surreptitious communication has increasingly evolved to centre on race in order to allow some to indicate tacit support of certain groups that are not available to others. Lawrence (1987) suggests that race and racism is so deeply embedded in the human psyche and our culture that stereotypes and discrimination are pervasive even when people do not realize it, to the extent that it fuses with the hyperbole of colour-blindness to preserve racial hierarchy. At an educational level, Cabrera et al., (2017: 38) say that colour-blindness can not only have negative effects on Students of Colour, but can also extend to delimiting some students as 'non-racial beings (i.e. not the targets of racism)' with the result that some groups can become the focus of racial stereotypes and feeding into myths about certain minorities. This perceived lack of the existence of racism is further augmented by discourses of 'successful minority groups', Wing (2007) claims that Asian students are often seen as model students. Baba (2018), suggests that this false perception that all students from Asian backgrounds are academically advanced ignores firstly, that there is much cultural diversity in being Asian, and secondly, because of this stereotyping, there is a resultant lack of investment in supports for students from Asian backgrounds who might need them.

CRT exposes how policies and discourses that ignore inequality result in a lack of recognition of how people are disadvantaged, therefore

preventing them from experiencing equality. Lawrence (1987) suggests that many of us are unconscious of our discriminatory beliefs and until this primary source is addressed, then meaningful change is unlikely.

(f) Interest convergence

Derek Bell's (1980) 'interest convergence' theory proposes that advancing equality for minority groups occurs only when it is an advantage to the White majority. He argued in *Brown v Brown* that improved rights for Black people only came about because there was a gain for White people too. Bell argued that by improving civil rights in the 1960s the US framed itself internationally as an attractive democratic country (Gillborn, 2008). In education, higher education institutions project themselves as welcoming diversity as this has a direct impact on its attractiveness for high fee-paying international students.

(g) Importance of experiential knowledge

Critical Race theory is an essential tool in highlighting the experiential knowledge of marginalized students (Bañuelos & Flores, 2021). Their reported experiences of oppression of whatever nature are authentic, fitting, and essential to comprehending and examining their

predicament. CRT reflects people's lived experiences because it includes methods such as biographies, narratives, storytelling and biographies (Smith et al., 2007; Yosso & García, 2007) in common with the qualitative approach taken here, and which Ladson-Billings (2006) says emerges from the political, socio-cultural, and historical realities of people's lives. Delgado (1989) claims that to 'name one's own reality' allows a different understanding of the world based as it is on assumptions that serve to sustain and hide injustices.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of field, habitus, and capital, or his 'thinking tools' as a principal feature of the conceptual framework that underpins this study. Fields are an 'arbitrary social construct' (Bourdieu,1990a:67) and are the sites of contest in which actors aim to acquire capital. Fields can also be understood as liminal spaces (Willey, 2016). These sites are social spaces and are determined by structures known as 'systems of power and relations of meaning (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:7). Some actors in the 'game' can be unaware of the rules of the game and so experience disadvantage and inequality. Yosso's (2005) ideas refine Bourdieu's concepts to provide insights that other forms of capitals are available to individuals, which are asset based. I have argued here that this refinement which Yosso's alternative ideas about cultural capital and familial capital can offer, is accomplished by using the lens of a critical

race perspective, and CRT reminds us of the invisibility of many oppressions that can be experienced on a personal as well as at institutional levels. Utilizing a theoretical framework that is focused on the wealth that first-generation students have, moves attention away from a deficit-based approach towards research that can inform the educational system and promote equity and diversity in HE.

Three more people, **John**, **Hazel**, and **Molly** are introduced next, and Chapter 4, which follows, will outline the methodological decisions and approach I have taken in this study, along with details of the methods I used to explore the experiences of first-generation migrants in HE.

John

John, who comes from Albanian, is in his late thirties and has been living in Ireland for twelve years. When he first came to Ireland, he sought international protection and lived in Direct Provision for a number of years until he was granted residency. While John was living in DP, he made plans for his future, '*So, in mean time, I spent in asylum seekers there in centre, and I discussed those options with the higher education centre, and I saw that if I could do, I was able to continue it if I would like to*'. He has a strong family identity and lives with his wife and two school-going children, one of whom was born in Ireland. He had previously lived in another town but describes his present location as their home and feels his children would find it difficult to move away from their schools and friends. His mother lives in Albania but does not come to visit Ireland as there are visa challenges for her because Albania is not a member of the European Union. As a result, John goes back to Albania each year to visit her. She takes a keen interest in John's education and is very encouraging of his studies. John made the decision to further his studies as he felt that he would never have a well-paid job without a qualification, '*without higher education, I couldn't go to the jobs here in Ireland, and I find it very difficult for me*'. In common with other participants in this study, John found that his secondary education qualifications from his country were not

accepted by HEs in Ireland, '*This is very, very long way to come here* (HE) *because my study in my country didn't count here in Ireland. So, my secondary school didn't count at all'.* John joined an ETB programme to study in preparation for college and he then completed an Access course at the college he is studying in now. He is studying Network Engineering and is in the second year of his undergraduate programme. When he graduated from the Access programme, he said the sense of achievement was wonderful and it was something he could not have imagined being able to do in Albania, '*it was like a dream for me to come back to third level'.* He regularly encourages his son to study hard so that he too can go to college. Initially, John wanted to study Accounting but was unsuccessful in his application. John describes his own ability with English as having peaked at the level he is at now and that trying to do another course with more demand on language accuracy would not have been suitable for him. He chose his course of studies based on his own assessment of how he felt his level of English would affect his studies, '*Like myself for English. I might do better, but I can't do it, you know? This is my level of English. But for something like I knew already, I could study like for me it's like for maths'.*

Hazel

Hazel's family, which consists of her parents and a younger sibling, moved to Ireland from Zimbabwe and the family have lived in Direct Provision until recently. She came to Ireland as a teenager and was living in Direct Provision while she studied in secondary school; she is now in her early twenties. In secondary school, although she was personally motivated to do well academically, she noticed that other similarly aged residents of the Direct Provision centre did not seem to her to exert themselves at their studies. Hazel said that they felt it was pointless to work hard at their studies as they felt they were unlikely to progress to third level education because of their residency status, and that some of these students did not achieve a Leaving Certificate[1] that was a true reflection of their real academic abilities, *'there are certain people ... who don't have the means to actually further their education or to carry on and jump straight to second year or wherever, (they should) have some kind of sponsorship provided for them... I feel like that would make ... It would really motivate people to actually further ... to literally study really well...I did really, really well for my Leaving Cert compared to how other people from the (DP) centre would have done'*. In Ireland, secondary level education is available to all students in Direct Provision, but third level education is only available where students who are in Direct Provision can fund their courses themselves, and they may also be charged the higher rate for international students. This barrier to accessing HE was a concern for Hazel, *'I feel like when it comes to immigrants, actually specifically for them, when it comes to immigrants, I feel like there should be ... there should be an exception within ... I feel like if you're past that phase of secondary school and obviously if you have, you know, the edge to actually go into college, I feel you*

shouldn't be restricted in terms of finances and everything like that'. When Hazel started college, she was not eligible for a SUSI[1] grant to pay for her fees, and as her father was not working, finding the funding for the fees by the family was stressful and difficult but was finally achieved through personal loans, and later grant aid, 'My parents had to pay for my fees from the first second of the course, as well, but then during the first two years it was really hard for them 'cause none of them were working, so literally it was just from savings'. Although initially she did not get her first choice of Accounting, she studied for a Higher Certificate in Business after which she transferred into Accounting. She is currently in the third year of her undergraduate programme in the IoT. She is very involved in the African Students' society in college and meets regularly with the group for games' evenings. Hazel loves her current course and describes education as being everything for her family and her extended family.

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[1] SUSI – Student Universal Support Ireland is the largest awarding authority for further education and higher education grants in Ireland. Grants are means tested and can cover fees and maintenance.

Molly

Molly, who is in her mid-twenties is from Poland, has been living in Ireland for six years. She completed her level seven studies (primary degree) in Culinary Arts in 2018. Her parents are divorced, and she has an older sister, who is working, and a younger brother who is in primary school. She completed her secondary education in Poland. Her original plan when she lived in Poland was to become a teacher but, immediately after finishing her secondary level education, she followed her heart to join her boyfriend, who was moving to Ireland. She initially lived in a small rural town where most of her social network were from Poland. After arriving in Ireland, she was advised that her Polish academic qualifications were not sufficient to enter third level and she then enrolled on a Post Leaving Certificate[1] (PLC) programme. She completed the modules she was advised to take by the PLC centre staff but later discovered that she had been misinformed and had to take one more module to gain admission to college. She had to wait until the following year to complete the missing module to satisfy the entry requirements for her chosen college course, '*I just skipped one module because they said, "Oh, it's going to be fine because you're still going to have the points because I think it marked them as 400 instead of 600. You're still going to get points so you can skip this*"'. Similar to some other participants, funding her studies was a big worry and initially there was a delay for her in getting her SUSI grant, which was only resolved after she had begun her course. Molly chose her third level course of study based on her personal interests, but it was also because she felt her standard of English was not good enough then to pursue other courses. She says that since she started her studies, she meets very few Polish people now, '*before I was hanging out more with Polish people but now*

I don't really have Polish friends at all' and now, Molly tends to spend time with her co-workers as they have similar shifts and schedules. She spends much of her day speaking English now and when calling home, she struggles sometimes to find words in Polish. Currently she is working in a position that she very much enjoys but she is contemplating returning to education to complete her studies to level eight (honours degree level), however, she is reluctant to go back to education and having little money, *'I don't want to go back to where I have €50 until like next month or something. No'.* In the future she would like to travel to work in other countries to develop her professional experience and is considering becoming an educator in the future.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 introduced the theoretical assumptions which underpin this study. I argued that by taking insight from Yosso's (2005) ideas about social capital, and combining her approach with Bourdieu's thinking tools and using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens, a strong framework for analysing the agency of migrant students as they navigate higher education can be created. The conceptualisation for the research evolved from an interpretivist perspective, which draws on social constructivism and is qualitative in approach.

In this chapter, I will present details of the research process taken in this research. I will outline the methodological decisions I made by addressing the approach I took, the methods and their theoretical underpinnings that I employed, and the tools I used. The chapter opens with a reminder of the research problem and question. I then outline my epistemological and ontological positioning and offer details about the reflexive nature of my research process. The chapter goes on to discuss the methodological approach and tools I employed in this study along with details about the selection of the participants. Following a description of the analytical considerations underpinning this inquiry, I give a summative account of the choices and dilemmas I faced while analysing and managing the data, and I address the ethical considerations underpinning this inquiry. This provides

signposting for the ensuing chapters which present the research findings.

When I began this study, I was not sure about what to anticipate before the interview findings emerged. However, I was certain that I wanted to discover and describe how the participants viewed the 'context specific meanings' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013) of their experiences and how they constructed their personal realities. So, my overall aim was to 'describe, understand and interpret' (Merriman, 2009:9), and this informed how I chose the research design and method. Based on the research question, this study was conceived to seek better understanding of migrants' experiences of Higher Education (HE). As my thinking around what kind of information it was that I was searching for, my methodological journey took me along the continuum of research approaches towards qualitative methods and further away from the quantitative methods I had once been so comfortable with.

4.2 The research problem for this study

In the true sense of working 'from 'knowing less' towards 'knowing more' (Payne & Payne 2004:114), I approached this study with some certainty about the area I was interested in exploring but with less

certainty initially over what exactly it was that I wanted to focus on. One influence on my thinking process was that I wanted to talk to people about their personal experiences and this led to the decisions I made about what I chose to identify and select, and how, I carried out the research. While this was a starting point, I quickly realised that the research approach could only be addressed through the framing of the research question. The research question, Crotty (1998) says, begins with questions, concerns, and dilemmas, which need to be addressed. In teasing out these issues and articulating them, I began to develop a clearer sense of the overarching research question.

Based on a review of the literature, I developed the following overarching research question:

In what way can the experiences of self-selected first-generation migrants inform wider practice within higher education in Ireland?

4.3 My positioning

As with all social research, this question is interpreted through how I understand my reality of being or, ontology (Crotty, 1998), and how I understand epistemology, or how knowledge is created (Cohen et al., 2007). My personal ontology and epistemology, separately, and together, have impacted on the various strands of this research study because, as Crotty (1998) reminds us, it is important to be able to justify the choice of methodology and methods we utilise because

these are closely associated with our own theoretical perspectives. The choices I have made include what I am exploring in the research topic, the theoretical framework that underpins it, along with how I chose the participants, how I carried out the data analysis, and the ethical commitments which guided the research.

What this means for me, is that over time, I have come to view reality as a co-construction between individuals who are actively engaged in making meaning of their worlds and this impacts on how I go about my research study. As a researcher, I believe that I can approach this hunt for truth in people's lived experiences by means of careful interpretation.

In order to locate myself in this research, I have infused part of my own story and some personal background which have influenced me and helped shape my positioning. How I come to the research is informed by my cultural, historical, and philosophical influences and they need to be addressed explicitly so that the premises and arguments which I base this research on can justify my research process and the findings this research presents.

My position is influenced by a number of attributes I can claim, such as, gender, familial attachments, and the life experiences I have had including my social class, to name just a few. I am a white middle-aged woman in the mature stage of my career, and I am lucky to have a happy family life, of which there are four generations. I have also lived abroad during my twenties in an exciting city, where I felt welcome, and that my work was valued. I have learned over many experiences and situations, that this is far removed from many people's experiences. My ontological position has been influenced by these attributes, and this influences what I want to know about, and what I value as knowledge. My ontology reflects my belief that it is not possible for there to be just one single reality, or that an overarching 'truth' is discoverable. For me, multiple lenses are needed to examine the concept of reality, which is mediated though other people's and my own experiences, beliefs and our personal circumstances. All of this has had an impact on what I have come to view as knowledge – this is what Crotty (1998:7) says is epistemology, or a 'way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know'. Because epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how we come to know this knowledge, this has relevance for the relationship between researcher and what is being researched.

DeLyser et al., (2009) argue that all researchers and practitioners should account for their personal 'position' in the context of any

research they are engaged in. My personal beliefs and values impact on decisions I have made in the research process. I do not believe that knowledge exists independently of my interpretation of it, therefore I am rejecting the idea that knowledge can be gathered objectively and, as such, I take a perspective that is not guided by the positivist tradition, where truth is seen as transcending personal bias and opinion (Denzin et al., 2017). I also believe that it is important that I reflect here on the fact that my initial introduction to research was through the field of psychology which was heavily influenced by empiricism through positivist methodology, and psychology was seen, alongside the sciences at one stage, as the 'crowning achievement of Western civilization' (Denzin et al., 2017:4). I position myself as searching for truths which are located in personal experiences and, epistemologically, I focus on individuals and interactions with, and between them.

4.4 Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, I kept a reflexive diary (to be honest, the diary was made up of sticky notes that I carried everywhere, and I would jot down notes when ideas occurred to me and stick them in their hundreds in a notebook for review later), and from these notes I wrote up some of my thoughts and ideas as the research progressed, creating what I came to realise is an audit trail. 'Because we are so totally immersed in a particular world view or paradigm, perhaps one

of the most difficult things is to recognise one's own bias' (Cooper & White 2012:16). The role of reflexivity in qualitative research has been explored widely in the literature. Attia & Edge (2017:33) see reflexivity as 'the ongoing shaping between researcher and research'. Bourdieu calls for researchers to strive 'to make reflexive use of the findings of social science' (1998:608). As we become immersed in the research process, according to Attia & Edge (2017:35) we engage in '*prospective* and *retrospective* reflexivity' – this can be understood as the effect of the researcher on the inquiry and the effect of the inquiry on the research (Smith et al., 2009). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), observe that reflexivity is 'an aspect of all social research' (p.22), and Denzin (1997:223), points to the importance of reflexivity in saying that 'reflexivity is not an option'.

According to Merriman (2009), without reflexive tools such as reflective diaries or field notes, there could be a lack of meaningful engagement with what is occurring, and without this, I might not have had a proper awareness of how my approach could be affecting the research. This was particularly true in my personal case as I needed the grounding of my research notes, (see extracts below) to support and guide not only the research process that I was engaged in, but also to reinforce my own personal bumpy journey as a researcher who was well-versed in quantitative approaches, as I moved to less familiar qualitative approaches.

I was, for a long time, an unquestioning and willing student of, and a participant in research that was dominated by all the certainties that positivism brought and still brings to much research in psychology. I can see now that I loved the idea of 'absolutes' that the field seemed to bring to me. This positivistic research security I grasped at was based on taking a view that there can be a single truth or reality which can be known and this in turn can be measured by reliable research tools. Taking such an epistemological approach leads to methodological choices which are, according to Sikes (2004), a reflection of positionality. Like all positivist researchers, I thought I was employing controlled experimental design using, for example, sampling, measurement, or statistical analysis to record results from questionnaires and experiments in order to deliver replicable results.

As I participated as a 'subject' in the many student projects based on questionnaires and experiments that were carried out by my peers, I began to wonder what learning, if any, our research could validly contribute to. Despite all the emphasis on objective research, it seemed to me, and still does, that knowledge and how it is discovered is subjective. I began to believe that there was another, perhaps even emotional, dimension to learning that can be precipitated by a number of experiences including unease about what, and who, and is at the centre of the investigation. Later, when I tried, and failed, to find more person-centred research in psychology, I assumed that my

perspective was wrong and, as no alternative was ever suggested it seemed that, by default, those personal experiences could not have value. This was one of the first times I began to question which kind of knowledge was valued, and why. I was asking myself about my relationship between myself as a researcher and what I could know (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Clearly, by then I was not as secure in my research approach as I imagined my psychology studies would give me. I know now that Wolcott (1995), suggests that only an interest in people could create the conditions for a research activity. On reflection, I can see that I did not have the critical research skills to pursue my doubts further at that time. Positivism in psychology is a dominant paradigm and as an undergraduate student it was very difficult to question the stance taken in my department regarding their ontological approach to the nature of reality, the resulting epistemological and methodological approaches, and above all, the hegemonic weight of opinion in psychology. I also now believe that such an objective quantitative view is not always possible or appropriate when studying real lives. For me, knowledge is not objective or value free. With recent experience, I have come now to view a positivist approach as essentially a subjective activity which begins with the researcher's choices of what to study and what statistical measure to apply. By being prescriptive, positivist researchers can, as Pring (2000:89) suggests, miss the true meanings

of how they carry out research and what they say about it. However, Ladson-Billing (2003) says there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a positivist perspective as long as it is recognised for what it is – a mode of research that is grounded in the enlightenment tradition. The challenge I had on approaching this research study was that I had little practical knowledge of any other approaches.

4.5 Taking a leap into the unknown

Rejecting positivism was a significant paradigmatic move for me as a researcher. In many ways, this change of approach created an initial internal tension for me, and I felt that my identity as an educator and as a researcher was challenged. I had to engage with the 'messiness' of a qualitative research approach and leave aside what I perceived to be the (reassuring) absolutes that a quantitative approach had previously offered me in previous research activity. I leaned on, and was encouraged by Kuhn's (1977) belief, that paradigm shifts are inescapable and arise irregularly through switching a way of thinking about inquiry and knowledge with new-found differing thought. This made sense to me as I knew that talking to the participants would be the only way I felt I could find meaningful information based on my changing ontological commitments. Guba and Lincoln (2005) also recognized that paradigms are human constructions and consequently liable to alteration. This ability to move paradigm, Kuhn suggests, occurs because of 'changed...view of the field, its methods, and its

goals' (p. 84). I was changing as a researcher because my views were changing but I was not entirely sure if I would be comfortable to be so enmeshed in the research. For me, I was moving from the outside to an unfamiliar place located within the research process. As I began to accept myself as part of the research process, and to think about the doing of research in a more critical, person-centred fashion, this led to new opportunities for thinking about this research, and research in general, to open up for me.

4.5.1 The slow awakening continues

The journey towards my positionality has been challenging. I knew that I would not uncover 'the truth', or even an objective view of 'reality', because these notions were, on the one hand, in conflict with a qualitative approach, and on the other hand, I was very much still learning to be a qualitative researcher. As I experienced my researcher awakening, I realised I was also finding my voice. My own experience of the research process in this inquiry has been cyclical and certainly not linear. It eventually reflected more Lincoln & Guba's (1985) description of the type of research that could 'unfold, roll, and emerge' (p. 210), or on a personal level what Fox & Allan (2014) suggest is a 'becoming and unbecoming' (p.101). This has happened by way of a process that has forced me to untangle, isolate and reconnect those elements of myself that had not always been vocal or visible. As I became more aware of my evolving sense of my own ways

of knowing, I felt more secure in seeing the participants' perceptions as the most important feature of the data collection. In my own student journey of making these connections about knowing, I am also attempting to apply this learning process in order to shed light on the participants' educational journeys. My basic epistemological position now is that I value knowledge that is constructed socially and that there can be a multitude of complex constructed realities.

When a researcher is deciding on which research approach to adopt, Guba & Lincoln (1998:108) point to three main questions that must be addressed in planning the research: the ontological question 'what is the nature of reality?'; the epistemological question (what is the relationship between the 'knower and what can be known'), and the methodological question (how can a researcher find out what they believe can be known?). Framing the research in this way leads to a research strategy, however, regardless of the paradigmatic stance a researcher takes, Guba & Lincoln (*ibid*) assert that 'all the sets of answers given are in all cases human constructions; that is, they are all inventions of the human mind and hence subject to human error. No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right; advocates of any particular construction must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing their position' (p.108). Maxwell (2013:3) says that in designing a qualitative study, it is not possible to adapt a pre-existing

approach, but rather 'to a substantial extent, to *construct* and *reconstruct* your research design'.

The idea of 'selecting' a research paradigm and approach can suggest that there is a neat order to the research process, however, the reality of the research process is that this is not always the case. The two main approaches which have dominated research for the natural and social sciences, and which have contributed to most debate about their use in recent research, are the quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative approaches rely on the collection of numerical data, whereas qualitative approaches focus on data that is non-numerical and includes images and words. Mixed methods studies, which meld qualitative and quantitative approaches (Silverman, 2005), are increasingly used in research (Fitzsimons, 2017b). Guba & Lincoln (1998) believe that either quantitative or qualitative approaches can be used with any research paradigm. It is not so much a case that one approach has more merit than another but rather an approach is chosen based on the focus of the study. Research is never straight-forward, and I had to engage with and adapt to the inherent messiness, (Ryan, 2015; Schon, 1983), that is a natural part of the process.

In the field of education, there are many studies which have drawn on qualitative data and an interpretive view of experience. These studies

take from rich resources to explore and develop new meanings, to interpret the significance for practice, and to offer different theoretical perspectives (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Cooley, 2013). Through focusing on experience as the phenomena I studied, I located myself in an interpretive worldview to investigate the experiences of migrants in higher education. Interpretivism offers an appropriate framework from which to investigate the lived experiences of migrants in higher education. Guba & Lincoln (1998) suggest that ontologically, the view of reality is subjective and individually constructed. According to Silverman (2016), epistemologically, interpretivism is based on real-world phenomena and cannot exist independently of our knowledge of it, and so by locating my research in interpretivism, I was taking my epistemological stance.

4.6 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a process orientated towards the world, and according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), it explores a range of phenomena including human thought and behaviour in a social context. Silverman (2005) suggests that researchers should focus their research within familiar territory so this current study is centred on my deep interest in the lived experiences of the migrant students in higher education that I meet through my work as a lecturer. Their experiences are what Miles & Huberman (1994:10) refer to as

'naturally occurring, ordinary events in ordinary settings', and a qualitative approach is appropriate because it 'tries to illuminate aspects of people's everyday lives' (Ryan, 2015:32). As sources of information, the interviewees' records of their experiences offer an understanding of how they give meaning to their experiences and how they connect them to the social world they live in. I hoped that the participants would share their experiences and understandings with me and that insights might emerge (Ryan, 2015).

I concur with Silverman (2005), who suggests that qualitative inquiry is appropriate for smaller numbers of cases, where breadth is less important than detail. Hesse-Biber (2014) also suggests that qualitative research is concerned with small samples. The detail of a qualitative inquiry rests in the understandings and meanings that participants give to the phenomena they experience.

The wording of the research question here provides another justification for the focus of this enquiry on qualitative data which is orientated towards the 'how' of research inquiry, rather than the 'what' or the 'why' (Silverman, 2005). Such a question is appropriate for qualitative research because it focuses on getting an insight into perceptions, opinions, beliefs and feelings, which is what I hoped would emerge from the interviews. The framing of the research

question in this study also demonstrates the attributes of a qualitative approach. The questions, such as, 'Can you tell me about…?', or, 'How did you feel about…?' are orientated towards eliciting responses that reflect the participants' views and aim to be '…interpretive, material practices that make the world visible' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:3).

Because I believe that reality is socially constructed, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) say that as a result of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, there is a social influence on what is studied, and how it is studied. I chose an interpretative qualitative approach because I wanted to gain a shared view of the group of learners who participated in my research. According to Guba & Lincoln (1998), I became an 'instrument of data collection' because I am engaged in all aspects of the research process and my engagement encompasses not only my knowledge of the study but also my own experiences and learning.

The implications of my research methodology and research design choices mean that my study is firmly located in a qualitative approach where knowledge is being sought about lived experiences. The approach I adopted lends itself well to exploring the social, human world of learners in higher education because it emphasises words

rather than numbers. Although criticisms can be levelled at qualitative methodologies, because insight is being sought, it was the most appropriate approach to take.

4.7 Evolving research design

My conceptualisation for this research study evolved from an interpretivist perspective, which draws on social constructivism and was qualitative in approach. I adopted this approach because I wanted to gain an understanding of the real, lived experiences of the ten participants in the study. In my initial planning for the study, I had expected that the participants might come from a range of different third-level institutions, but this turned out not to be the situation. In addition, so that the study could be inclusive I included self-selected migrants of all language backgrounds, including people who only spoke English.

I conducted an exploratory qualitative study on the phenomenon of the experiences of ten students who were current, or past students in higher education, and who self-selected themselves as migrants so that I could shed light on the experiences of this group of participants. This study here is an example of what Stake (2011) suggests is an intrinsic study, which can be used to understand more about issues

that people experience. I am using this so that it provides insight into issues the participants experienced, and the study provides a variety of lenses through which to explore the phenomena. The focus of this study is on the particular experiences of a small group of individuals, and so I felt that an approach that gave a voice to each participant through interview was preferable. This focus on individual voices led me to amend some of the earlier choices around the study's design, which will be explained in more detail in 4.7.2 below. Because I chose this approach, I was able to listen to, and learn, from the participants as they talked about, and made sense of, their own experiences in higher education.

The methodological approach I adopted for this study was a qualitative interpretive inquiry based on semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews use a set of questions which are asked of multiple interviewees and allow a researcher to examine their subjective viewpoints (Flick, 2009). Other emergent themes can evolve from the initial questions because the interviewees can discuss topics and issues which are important to them (Bearman, 2019). The field work for this study came from the ten face-to-face interviews with the participants. All through the thinking and designing process, I had to consider my own personal and professional positionality because my personal beliefs and my thinking have an impact on my worldview and influence my epistemological, ontological choices and then the

methodological actions I might take (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Professionally, I had to consider also that I am influenced by not only social, but also organisational influences (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014). This awareness of my positionality in my research has been detailed above. Some of the design decisions I made are explained further below.

4.7.1 Interpretivism as research method in interviewing

Personal experiences and perceptions are phenomena which are problematic to categorise and explain precisely. There is, according to Cooper & White (2012:121), an inherent 'messy' characteristic associated with these experiences which qualitative research is more adept at capturing. Cooper & White (2012) capture this blurring succinctly – it 'is now more difficult to compartmentalize research into neat, mutually exclusive domains. Perhaps it was always thus, and we are only now beginning to recognize that the messy, descriptive nature of qualitative research is the norm' (p. 121).

According to Creswell (2015), interviews are one of the most important strategies available to qualitative researchers. Kvale (1996), describes interviewing as 'the favourite digging tool' of the social sciences. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me as a researcher, and ultimately the reader, to engage with the perspectives which individuals have of their world. Participants engaged in the one-to-one interviews can

explain in their own ways how their personal experiences relate to the research question. For participants, there was an opportunity to relate information on their own terms and for me the researcher to expand on some of the topics the learner raised that merited more investigation. The obligation on me, as researcher, therefore, was to create the conditions to permit these meaningful exchanges of information to happen. By taking an interpretivist approach to this research, I am accepting that there is no one single route or method that leads to knowledge and that it is the product of interpretation or understanding the meanings people attach to their actions. Therefore, in carrying out semi-structured interviews, as a researcher I could, according to Myers & Newman (2007), access information through language and shared meanings and develop knowledge.

4.7.2 Planning the research

At the initial stages of planning this research, I had considered interviewing both groups and individuals. As I considered how I would go about planning for group interviews, I spent some time reflecting on the possible outcomes of carrying this out. In particular, I was concerned that all people who volunteered to participate in my research would have an equal opportunity to share their thoughts. During my regular lecturing work with students, I engage in a variety of learning activities with groups and individuals, and to help me decide on whether to use groups for interviews, I made a conscious decision

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to observe, over a period of time, the interactions between participants in various group activities in my English language classroom. In my journal, I noted that there were different amounts of contributions by different individuals, sometimes this seemed to be because of personal communication styles, sometimes this seemed to be because some individuals had more to say, and at other times some individuals' contributions were not forthcoming and it was not easy to discern why. I recorded my reflections on a class activity:

'I tried a group activity in one of my English classes today, which was a discussion activity – not everyone participated, and some students had more to say than others. In fact, some students did not speak at all. I am now re-thinking my initial plan to have group discussions as it may mean some participants might never say anything and I am concerned that they will not have a voice'.

In addition to group dynamics, I also had to consider that there might have been a mixture in levels of ability of English language use between the participants if they were placed in groups as the study was open to all migrants of any language background including first language users of English. Therefore, the participants could also have included people who used English as their only language, and who would presumably have a high level of competence in the language, which some others might not have had. This might have discouraged

an individual who was not as confident in their use of English from speaking in a group setting. As the premise of my research was that all individuals should have the opportunity to express their ideas freely, I then decided that one-to-one interviewing was more appropriate.

Another decision I made was not to employ a pilot study. Pilot studies are used extensively in quantitative studies, and they also have a role in qualitative research (Lees et al., 2022). I opted not to use a pilot study for a number of reasons. Firstly, I chose a semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews. This approach allows other questions and prompts to be introduced during the interview process, and indeed I had prepared a range of additional questions to supplement the main questions if the original questions did not elicit as much information as I hoped (see Appendix 3). I had prepared questions that I believed would be as broad as possible because I did not want to direct the interviewees' thoughts because, in the spirit of the research, I was looking for information which was important to the participants, to unfold as spontaneously as possible.

In addition, as an experienced educator of over 35 years with students of many different nationalities in group and one-to-one settings, I was confident I had communication skills that would be applicable to the interview process. I was also aware that the first interview would be an indicator of how well the questions engaged or resonated with the

interviewees and I deliberately left some time free after that interview so that I could reflect on, and consider, if I needed to reassess my research design, or change any questions before carrying out the next interview. The quality and quantity of the information that the first interview yielded was reassuring and I was confident to continue the interviews based on the questions I had chosen. Alongside carrying out the interviews, I kept notes and journaled my thoughts about the process.

4.8 Research participants

As I introduced in Chapter 1, the research participants were current students and graduate students, (a total of ten), from a range of disciplines. While two had completed postgraduate studies, seven of the others were at various stages of their undergraduate studies, and one had recently graduated but was still in contact with her course lecturers. The names used to represent the participants in this research were chosen by the participants themselves. This addressed the requirements to keep the participants' identities anonymous in line with the ethical approval I was given, and this also reflected how I believe that protecting the anonymity of participants is important in order to reduce risk of harm. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that the participants self-selected themselves as migrants and had either migrated to Ireland in person, or their family had migrated to Ireland in the previous twenty-five years. The time frame for moving to

Ireland had been chosen as the parameters of the research focus as it corresponds with the period when various groups of people arrived in Ireland in significant numbers during the economic growth years of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger'[22] (CSO, 2016b), and in the subsequent years. The study was open to migrants of any language background, and the criteria for inclusion in the study did not exclude migrants for whom English was an only/first language, so as a consequence, a direct question on language was not included in the list of questions prepared. Characteristics of the participants are detailed in the table below by name, country of origin, area of study, stage of study, gender, and age.

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[22] Celtic Tiger refers to the economic boom period experiences in Ireland from the late 1990's until the recession of 2008.

Table 4.1: Participant Characteristics

Name	Country of origin	Ethnicity	Area of study	Stage of study	Gender	Age	Parent
John	Albania	White European	Engineering	Undergraduate	M	> 40	Y
Angie	Romania	White European	Business	Postgraduate	F	< 30	Y
Mera	Egypt	Asian (Arabic)	Engineering	Undergraduate	F	< 30	Y
Anne	Kenya	Black African	Engineering	Undergraduate	F	> 40	Y
Hazel	Zimbabwe	Black African	Business	Undergraduate	F	< 20	N
Princess	Pakistan	Asian (Arabic)	Engineering	Undergraduate	F	> 20	N
Tia	China	Asian (Chinese)	Business	Postgraduate	F	> 30	N
Tek-kwo	South Sudan	Black African	Engineering	Undergraduate	M	< 30	N
Molly	Poland	White European	Hospitality	Graduate	F	< 30	N
Liz	Slovakia	White European	Business	Undergraduate	F	> 40	Y

As can be seen in the table above:

- The participants indicated that they were from ten different countries of origin

- Eight participants were female

- Two participants were male

- Seven were studying on an undergraduate course

- Two had completed a Masters

- One was a graduate

- Five of the participants were parents

4.8.1 Sampling

Recruitment of the participants was as a result of sampling which was purposive in that I targeted the people I felt were most likely to help me reach participants (staff members), or who were potential participants in themselves (Etikan et al., 2016). I approached people with direct experience of the phenomena at the heart of this study because they were the people that I believed had most knowledge of it. Until I spoke directly to individuals with personal experiences, I would only have an academic sense of the phenomena. I also planned to use snowball sampling to ask participants to invite people they knew to participate in the study. The individuals who participated in this study were a non-representative sample. One student was recruited via snowballing. Because the response to the information leaflets, which

a staff member made available to students they met, was so good and I was contacted by seven willing participants, I did not ask other participants to forward details of the research to any other potential participants. In addition, the timing of the interviews took place in the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019 so that any potential first-year participants would have had some time to experience college life.

4.8.2 Recruiting the research participants

All of the participants in this research self-selected themselves as migrants. Initially, I aimed to raise awareness of my research in the following ways:

a) through posters placed in areas that students accessed (student social spaces, and noticeboards),

b) by leaving information leaflets with staff and others who had high levels of interaction with students who might be part of the group I was interested in; and,

c) to approach students directly with information leaflets to tell them about my study and to invite them to participate, or to give the information to anyone they thought might be interested in participating.

I had prepared 50 leaflets, (see Appendix 1), looking for research participants because I thought it would take some time to recruit participants and I placed some of these on notice boards in student social spaces following approval by Maynooth University Ethics committee (see Appendix 2). I also left leaflets with details of the study and my contact details with a non-lecturing staff member who met students as part of their work, and who had a notice board for students. In the end, I distributed 12 leaflets and received 7 offers to participate based on the distribution of those leaflets. Of this group of seven, I had met one student in a language support class when they were an Access student some years before. One other interviewee contacted me directly because they had heard about my study from one of my lecturing colleagues. Of the remaining two, both were former students who had attended my language support class. I had given an information leaflet to one of them in person to ask if they might know anyone who would participate, and they subsequently contacted me and volunteered to participate. This student also contacted another former student who also wanted to participate. I set up a time and place to meet based on the participants' wishes and emailed them to confirm the time and date of the meetings. The unexpected ease at which it was to recruit participants was very welcome, however, it also was an early indication to me of an interest by the participants in talking about their experiences. This interest in talking to me reminded me of a comment made by another former student some years before that

no one had ever asked them for their views about being in higher education and I wrote about this in my journal:

'I'm thinking now about a conversation that took place before a class with a past student who seemed surprised that I asked her about her experiences of being a third level student. Why don't we engage with our students more?'

4.8.3 Research site

The time and location of the interviews for the study were determined by the participants because I wanted to address Herzog's (2012) assertion that most interview conditions are chosen by the interviewer and reflect institutionalised and hierarchical relationships. To address this possibility, I asked the participants to choose a location where they would be comfortable to meet at, and I told them that I was willing to travel to any place of their choosing. Nine out of the ten respondents chose to meet at their place of study. For these interviews, I booked a room and made sure to position the interview seating so that the interviewees could not be observed through the panel of glass on the door. I met one participant, who was not in a position to travel, in a coffee shop of their choice in their hometown, which was located more than one and a half hours from my home. I was interested in the participants' choices of venue for the interviews as Herzog (2012) suggests that this is one of the most neglected aspects of the interview

process. For me, the location of the interview was not just a matter of logistics, and I was guided by Seidman (1991) who said that private and familiar places make participants feel secure. In choosing their places of study, the participants seemed to be indicating a level of ease with their college surroundings, which may have helped their conversational journeys with me (Kvale, 1996).

4.8.4 The interviews

Ten, in person, one-to-one interviews were carried out to gather information about the learners' beliefs and opinions about their experiences in higher education. Based on a search of the methodological and research literature, I prepared a list of broad questions, (see Appendix 3), to begin the conversations and printed it so that the participants could read the questions as well as hear me ask the questions at the actual time of the interview. This was to ensure that if they had any difficulty understanding my accent, or if they felt unsure about any vocabulary that they would be able to read, check meaning, and then give their replies. These questions were only made available to the participants at the time of the interviews but time was made available so that they could check their understanding before the interview began. I also told them that they could talk about anything else that they felt was important to them and that sometimes I might ask additional questions based on what they told me. Because it was possible that first language users of English might participate in

the interviews, no direct question on English language was included in the list of questions (see Appendix 3).

The interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 1 hour and ten minutes, and the average length was one hour. On arrival at the interview location, I welcomed each participant, introduced myself, and explained the nature of the interview that would take place and gave them time to read the participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and consent form (see Appendix 4), and to ask any questions they might have had. I note in my journal that:

'The interviewees seemed comfortable and keen to begin talking but they spent time reading the forms I gave to them. One person mentions that they have lots to talk to me about. During the interview they talk about their home life as well as their studies, and I am conscious that I have been invited into their world outside of college. They also asked me questions about my life, which I was glad to answer – at times, the conversation felt very relaxed and spontaneous to me. Two of the participants mentioned that they had felt nervous before the interviews started but that the time had gone very quickly'.

Before each interview commenced, I asked participants to sign the consent form after they had read the participant information sheet, and on completion of the interviews, I asked them to re-sign the interview consent form after the interview finished so that they knew they could immediately withdraw their consent if they chose to. All of the

participants indicated their consent for a second time after the interviews concluded. At this point, I checked with the interviewees if they wanted to ask me any questions or if there was anything they wanted to add, or to remove. In addition, I explained that I would be sending the transcript of the interview to them by email and they could change any information in it that they wished. I reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and I made sure to point out contact addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for support organisations which were on the information sheet I gave them at the beginning of the interview. This information about support organisations was a requirement of the ethics approval from Maynooth University. Each interview was audio recorded and was saved onto a password protected computer in a locked location. I was the only person who listened to the recordings.

I struggled somewhat initially with the notion of my role as 'the primary instrument for data collection and analysis' (Merriman, 2009:15), partly because I was a novice to this, and partly because I felt a great deal of responsibility to the participants. I began to see some clarity in Finlay (2002), who proposes that researchers should look through the context and process of an interview with a critical lens to interrogate the construction of knowledge and this gave me more insight into the collaborative nature of the interviewing, and I reflected more on the dialogic nature of what was taking place. Kvale (1996, cited in Herzog

2012:205) sees interviews as negotiated events which are socially constructed, and that an "inter-view" is an interchanging of views between people on a shared topic. My aim was to 'obtain rich, nuanced, descriptive material that reflects the interviewee's understanding of her/his life-world' (Ryan (2015:124).

Following each interview, I made notes of my thoughts and reflections about the interview. This aligned with the suggestion made by Mortari (2015:1) that reflection 'is a crucial cognitive practice in the research field', and that it has a role in a range of research schools including feminist, race-based and critical traditions. In addition, Guillemin & Gillam (2004) also say that reflexivity can allow appropriate ethical choices in research to be made through paying attention to the ethical stances that are needed for unexpected critical situations that emerge. This cognitive awareness allows a researcher to perform reflective practice and not just thinking about practice (Parker, 1997:30).

After the interviews finished, I immediately transcribed each audio recording. To be true to the spirit of the research and the assurances of confidentiality and personal accountability I had given the participants, I decided that I would transcribe the interviews in person. There were two main reasons why I wanted to do this: on the one hand I wanted to do the transcription because, as Herzog (2012) points out, interviewing in itself is a social process, and on the other hand, this

study is about giving space to the participants' voices and I wanted to listen to, and re-listen to what each of the participants said. Transcribing the interviews was a lengthy yet invaluable process. I used different playback devices for each separate time I completed the listenings and I felt this helped me to hear and identify any small errors I had made. I made any necessary corrections to the transcripts as I went along following each listening. I kept in mind Brinkman & Kvale's (2008) advice that an interview is a two-way conversation, not only during the time the interview takes place but also before and after when analysing data. To that end, when I was satisfied that I had accurately transcribed the interviews, I sent each participant a copy of their transcript by email for comment, which is process known as 'member checking' (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I invited them to read and make their own decisions on whether they felt the transcript reflected what they had said and reminded them that they were welcome to make any changes or redactions they liked. At the research level, I was aspiring to a level of trustworthiness by following this process of checking back with the participants (Madill & Sullivan, 2017).

I was surprised at how worried I was about what the participants' responses would be, and when I look back through my notes in my journal, I see I have written:

'What if they don't think this is what they said? I might have got this wrong… or they might not be happy with what they have said…'

I realised that I was questioning the use of this checking back process as I was struggling with the notion that epistemologically, the truth status of the interviews could be debated (Forbat & Henderson, 2005). None of the participants removed any information from the transcripts and one participant added some notes to expand and explain two pieces of information they had spoken about during the interview. I had sent back the transcripts to the participants by email for review within two days of the interviews and all of the interviewees replied to me within another week of receiving the transcript.

4.9 Data analysis and coding

As a novice researcher, the area of analysis and coding was a concern for me. I read extensively to learn how to code 'the right way' and I discovered that there was a wide range of approaches available. The first question I grappled with was how much and what I should code. Richards & Morse (2012:162) suggest that 'if it moves, code it' and this provided me with some indication of the extent of how expansive codable data could be.

Data analysis of the transcribed texts and the voice recordings began immediately after the first interview took place. I did this by taking an

ideographic approach to identify themes and meanings (Smith et al., 2009). I used Smith et al.,'s (2009) 'abductive research strategy' to develop a dialectical process by returning to the analysis a number of times as it was important for me to engage with the data. While I was carrying out these actions, I also kept notes on the transcripts of my observations, reflections and thoughts. In addition, I also kept track of any emerging interpretations in my reflective diary. I noted at this point that recurrent information seemed to be emerging:

'I am noticing that money worries seem to be a serious concern for many interviewees. To what extent are the participants' choices being restricted by these concerns?'

Following on from that I looked for links between the themes and began to develop category hierarchies. The stages of analysis are outlined below.

4.9.1 Coding

While some decisions I made in the research process were considered, other decisions evolved later from the research phenomena and the emergent data as the study developed. One example of this was in my decision to manually code rather than use software, which I had initially thought I would use. I opted for manual coding as I was by then completely immersed in the transcription of

the interviews and, as the size of the group I had interviewed was relatively small, Basit (2003) says that this is an appropriate decision. Despite the bulky nature of coding, it became as exciting over time as Linneberg et al., (2019) suggested it would. Running parallel to this excitement in coding the data, I also experienced a certain level of tension in that I questioned whether I was doing justice to the participants' contributions because I was making decisions about which quotes to include. I return to this thought in the section on limitations below.

As qualitative data analysis is more focused on inductive rather than deductive analysis (Silverman 2016), I used thematic open coding to 'expose the meaning, idea and thoughts' so that the concepts in the transcripts could be built (Khandkar, 2009). As a method, Saldaña (2016:3) suggests that coding is 'just *one* way of analysing qualitative data, not *the* way'. By interacting with the research data, my aim was to elicit meaning which would allow me to address the research question.

The main question for me at this point was how I was going to organise and make meaning of the data I had gathered. As I sat down with the interview transcripts, I realised as I passed through them for the first time that I had already begun the process of coding through my

reflective diary comments and the other notes I had physically written on the transcripts. This initial engagement with the data through marking the text was an example of Layder's (1998) idea of pre-coding. I had noted words or phrases that were reoccurring in the early transcripts and had begun to anticipate some similar comments in later interviews. The approach I took to the analysis is based on Braun & Clarke's (2006) phases for data analysis.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of the initial analysis of the data involved numerous readings of the interview transcripts and this was, according to Saldaña (2016) and Braun & Clarke (2006), the first step in the coding process. I was initially coding on an individual level, and this then developed into collective coding across all the participants' transcripts (Saldaña, 2016). This was the opening stage of analysis I completed on the data. Table 4.2 below shows an example of the initial coding which began the process of sorting the data.

Table 4.2: Example of Initial Coding

Initial codes	Data from interview
Having family responsibilities	*... I was not aware of many activities. Like I knew, I received emails about the basket team. I like playing, I knew, I wouldn't have time at all… and I would have to be in [Town] at five-thirty to pick up my baby.*
Being misunderstood	*… when I'm trying to express myself, even with some pictures or colleagues sometimes, I see the look that they don't understand – not so easily.*
Realising that studying in higher education was a possibility	*… at first, I never thought about, like, I did think about … college but I didn't really have courage even to start, kind of plan for it. But when we came here and [Name] was telling us about the Access course and everything. So I kind of said, "Let's give it a try." And then it all started.*
Experiencing money pressures	*… I don't want to go back to where I have €50 until like next month or something. No.*
Feeling different to others	*… my studying there is different with other students. Okay, yeah. Definitely, so, 'cause I had a long time work experience, so I'm so independent.*
Making plans for the future	*That's the main thing. That's why we are here: to learn something to get a job.*

Phase 2

At this point then, I acquired an extensive collection of highlighter pens in pastel and neon shades and began to read through each transcript using a separate colour to indicate each code I identified. I had expected this phase might be laborious and although it took up a lot of time to complete, I found it utterly compelling. As I read through the transcripts, I labelled each code and wrote an explanation of its meaning in the context of the research in my set of accompanying notes. These memos and notes were becoming what Clarke (2005:202) suggests were "sites of conversation with ourselves about our data". I was also mindful that 'coding depends on your individual value, attitude, and belief system about qualitative inquiry' (Saldaña, 2016:2). An example of a memo I made can be found in Appendix 6.

Through working with the data in this way, I eventually ended up with a codebook (see Appendix 7), although initially I had not known that this was where the process would lead me. While on the one hand, the codebook seemed to emerge naturally out of the coding process, on the other hand, it seemed to me that it was an artificial construct because I was making the decisions about what it was that I chose to highlight and code, and then attach meaning to. These codes were what Vogt et al., (2014:13) claim are 'a researcher-generated construct that symbolises or 'translates' data'. To address this concern, I found that I kept returning to the research question to guide

me through this process. I also became aware that coding was not just about labelling data but it was also about the links I was making between the data (Richards & Morse, 2012). Table 4.3 on the next page provides an example of how textual data from the transcripts were initially coded on a line-by-line basis.

Through line-by-line coding (see Table 4.3 below), I created a large number of codes and, guided by Saldaña's (2016) advice, I began to look for as many similarities as possible and then began to organise and group the codes into the most frequent and significant ones. This process yielded a large number of codes. Saldaña (2016:5) suggests looking for 'repetitive or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice'. To do this, I then grouped codes of similar type. In doing this, I was coding for patterns which Stenner (2014:143) suggests are 'indicators of humans' ways of living and working'. At this stage, some codes were discarded based on the lack of connection to the study focus.

Table 4.3: Example of Initial Line-by-Line Coding

Line	Interview Transcript	Codes
1	*And for the first week, I just, I*	New beginnings
2	*thought, I was thinking how*	Contrast and change
3	*everything's so totally different with*	Age differences
4	*all the students, they were too*	Not belonging to group
5	*young, and sometimes they liked to*	and interested in
6	*talk about some like computer*	different things.
7	*games, or some people's gossip. I*	Time is valuable
8	*found that was just a waste of my*	Others' general
9	*time. I didn't know a lot of like*	interests are less
10	*fashionable things, like they*	important
11	*thought. So, they like to talk about*	Fixating on trivial
12	*small things, and small emotion with*	things by others
	others. So, even the people talk	considered a waste of
	about, say someone's peculiar	time and effort
	sentence. They would think about	Contrast situation
	whole day. So, I couldn't understand	
	for that.	

At this point in the process, I became quite uneasy about the decisions I was making (my earlier positivist experiences were trying to speak too loudly to me), but after taking a break from coding and delving into this new world a little more through reading and reflection, I returned to the process with renewed enthusiasm.

I realised that I needed to remind myself that I was part of the process and that my analytic lens affects how I interpreted the data, and that 'all coding is a judgement call' (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). In addition, Locke et al (2015) point out that having doubts in the research process is productive and legitimate. Saldaña (2016:11) offered me reassurance in that 'rarely will anyone get coding right the first time'. Glesne (2011:191) advises that researchers should 'learn to be content…with your early, simple coding schemes, knowing that with use they will become appropriately complex'. As I went back through the data in the transcripts, I began to see that I had initially 'split' the data in the initial line-by-line coding but on subsequent readings I 'lumped' or subsumed the data into main codes which allowed me to see common patterns (Saldaña 2016: 79).   These resultant main codes can be seen in Appendix 7. Charmaz (2014:127) describes this process as coding the codes, which makes the information more manageable when it is lumped together. I was then able to develop a more nuanced reading and interpretation of the data (Saldaña 2016:24).

Phase 3

Phase 3 of the analysis focused on the search for themes. All through the building of codes and themes I found I was jumping forward and backward through the transcripts and began to realise that this was a normal part of the coding process, (Saldaña 2016:212), and the aim was to 'cycle back to … first coding efforts so you can strategically cycle forward to additional coding and qualitative analytic methods. It is the subsequent interpretation of the interview research data that yields both benefits and drawbacks to the research. A memo I made after the first three interviews is an example of the material I was cycling back and forward through during this stage (see Appendix 8).

Phase 4 and phase 5

These phases focused on firstly, reviewing the themes, and then defining and naming the themes. This resulted in four key themes and sub-themes emerging, which were:

Theme 1: Long journeys to higher education

　　　Waiting for acceptance

　　　Information and progression routes

　　　Recognised prior learning (RPL)

Theme 2: Insights about family relationships

    Motivations

    Support networks

Theme 3: Pressures

    Finances

    Language needs

Theme 4: Engagement with learning

    Learning and teaching culture

    Role of Access programmes

4.9.2 Management of data, storage, and retention

All of the research data from this study are stored in a secure form that is encrypted and accessible. The data will be retained for the appropriate length of time as required by Maynooth University policies.

4.10 Limitations

All studies have limitations, and it is important to recognize the challenges around interpretative research (Clandinin & Connelly 2004). In carrying out this study I have focused on its limitations by unravelling the actual methodological approach which is interpretative,

and the challenges I experienced in using an interpretive approach. In justifying why this approach is useful, I am suggesting that the specific context of the research is key because all meanings are created at specific times by people. In addition, through naming the limitations around issues of power and status, and my relationship with the participants, I am signalling that there are no universal truths that can be claimed out of this research.

While I cannot claim that the results of this study are replicable, generalisable, valid, or reliable as indicated for a quantitative methodological approach (Hoy & Adams 2015), I have focused on the quality of the research to invoke authenticity and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba 1985). This is because as a qualitative researcher I have to take responsibility for creating trustworthiness through using integral and self-correcting strategies, for example, through member checking (Madill & Sullivan, 2017; Birt et al., 2016), and leaning on reflection during the conduct of inquiry itself. This has the effect of moving the responsibility for integrating and preserving the trustworthiness of the research from external commentators' opinions onto myself as researcher.

This study presents a solid approach to qualitative research because of the transparency in the research process and the audit trail that I kept. In addition, quotes from the recorded interviews are presented in

the findings section which enable a reader to evaluate the analytic interpretations that I have attributed to them. However, I also recognise that I alone chose these quotes and that in doing so I am framing the research agenda through how I collected and used this data.

While only a small number of people, (10), participated in this study, according to Denzin (1989:83), this is not necessarily a limitation of a qualitative interpretivist study because the aim is to foreground explanatory power and 'thick description', over issues of those of generalisability. One important consideration that emerged in my discussions with a number of the participants was that there were other people who were not in effect 'in the room' – people who they knew and who they reported had wanted to study at higher education but for a variety of reasons, could not. Their voices are only heard through the actions of the participants in this study.

There is also an absence of focus on race in this research. In my initial reading and preparation for this study, I had anticipated that racism could be a topic of concern for some of the participants in this study (not all of whom might have been racialised). Work by Darby (2020), and Ní Dhuinn & Keane (2021) point to the many layered incidents of racism that students in higher education experience. While I was asking the participants about their experiences, and in an attempt to

draw some of this information out, I used additional questions to probe their relationships with staff and students. Their responses described positive experiences. Their lack of engagement with me on the topic of racism may have been as a result of the power imbalance because I am a staff member and am located within the research.

4.11 Ethics

There were ethical considerations in all stages of planning, designing and reporting on this research. Formal approval was sought from and given by Maynooth University Ethics Committees (see Appendix 2). The main considerations included anonymity, which was preserved by anonymising all names of participants and the college where the study took place. I also asked for the participant's informed consent after they read the Information sheet (see Appendix 5) and they were given time to ask me any questions. The participants were given a Consent form (see Appendix 4) which they signed before and after each interview. Confidentiality was also assured and no one apart from me was given access to any data, which was kept on a password protected computer in a locked office and will be held according to Maynooth University guidelines and policies for research in Maynooth University Research Ethics Policies and the *British Educational Research Ethics Guidelines* (BERA, 2012). I also considered how the research could have had unanticipated impacts on the participants, and on the Information sheet, participants were supplied with phone

numbers and addresses of support organisations. In order to prepare my study, I had to consider power relations between myself and the participants as I had a position that located me within the research. To address some of these concerns, I chose participants who were not, or who were no longer students I taught. I took care in protecting the identity of interviewees who agreed to participate in my research. Because I would be enquiring into their thoughts, hopes and concerns, I was aware that some of the participants could have faced challenges and difficulties in either their college experiences and/or their journey to admission at third level. I worried that my questioning might add to these negative experiences, but I had no way of knowing prior to beginning the interviews if any of the potential participants could have been vulnerable, or if there would have been any impacts on them from the questions I asked. In my diary I noted:

"I am so nervous about starting the interviews – what if I ask a question that makes the interviewee upset?"

It was also important for me to be aware of the impact of my questions on the participants and, in order to minimise the risk of harm, I used a reflexive approach.

While I did not anticipate any particular difficulty to emerge, in advance of the interviews I wanted to be prepared and to be able to address those worries I had about creating unintended upset. I believed it was essential to build ethical standards to protect the participants into the

research process from the start, especially in order to protect their anonymity and to safeguard them. Research on the participation of minority groups in higher education indicates that they face enough challenges in their daily lives without the risk of identification and the embarrassment of being 'othered' as people not belonging to a particular place, or situation (Stevenson & Baker, 2019). To address this, I asked students to select a name they would like to be referred to in the research, and I also told them that the college they were, or had been students of, would not be named in order to further increase their anonymity. I also made available to them the name of my supervisor should they wish to express any concerns, and in addition, I provided the participants with the contact details of college counselling, as well as the names and details of various support organisations.

In addition to providing written information about the background to the study in advance of the interviews, I also handed the participants copies of the interview questions to read before we began as I wanted to ensure that they had an opportunity to see the questions in advance and to ask for information if there was anything they needed clarification on (Appendix 3).

4.11.1 Power and status

From the beginning of the study, I realised that power and status that I could claim would be important concerns. Unlike some of the participants, I have never had to worry about my residency status in Ireland. Although I can claim to having had concerns about my residency status when I lived abroad, I always felt I could make independent choices. Some of the other issues had to do with the fact that I knew three of the students from previous classroom experiences. Another of the anxieties I experienced was that in asking the participants to share their experiences with me that a power imbalance would happen. I sought to mitigate this by ensuring the participants knew they could withdraw their consent at a number of points of their choosing - before, during, or after the interviews. In addition, copies of the transcripts were forwarded promptly to each participant so that they could decide on what material to be included, or not. Some of those decisions about material that the participants excluded, for example, possible experiences of racism, may have had less to do with what the interviewees did not want to talk about and perhaps more to do with not wishing to share that with me. This may have been as a result of them not feeling that they could/should share this information based on my perceived status in the interviews. These concerns about power and status followed me through the interviewing stage, the analysis, and the presentation of the results. I was very aware of the fact that the participants in this study had to be centred at the study's heart and that they had to be afforded every respect in order that

meaningful understandings emerging from my findings could occur.

This research that I carried out was not a study to only exercise my

brain but rather it called on my sense of my own pedagogical

professionalism to extend every aspect of care and empathy that I

could towards the participants. This clearly demonstrated to me that

there was an inherent relationship between the ethics of this research

and the interpretivist approach I took.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical perspective of this study as it

relates to my personal assumptions and values, and I described my

positionality. In this study, I adopted a methodological approach of

qualitative research employing semi-structured interviews. As my

research is focusing on people's perceptions and beliefs, an inductive

qualitative approach based on the relationship between the research

data gathered and theory was considered to be the most appropriate.

While I was able to identify the area of research I was interested in

from the beginning, it took some time through thinking and reflection

before I arrived at my final research question. The various challenges

and practical issues around carrying out the research have been

outlined along with information about how the participants were

recruited, the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations

that were taken. The following two chapters will present the findings of

the study.

The final three people are now introduced: **Princess**, **Mera**, and **Tia**.

These pen-pictures are then followed by Chapter 5 which is the first of

two chapters which present the findings of this study.

Princess

Princess came to Ireland from Pakistan in 2009 with her family which consists of her parents and two brothers and two sisters. She is in her mid-twenties and is the eldest and the first in her family to go to college. She attended secondary school in Ireland and completed her Leaving Certificate in 2012. She did not have enough points in her final examinations to enter college so she joined a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) programme, *'before I came to Access course I went to VYOS and I learned about business administration.'* Because her initial plan was to study medicine, a tutor at the VTOS centre recommended entering an Access programme in an institute of higher education to her as the tutor felt that other courses would then be possible for her. She subsequently realised that she was uncomfortable with other people's pain. *'I realized no, I'm not a, I'm not a person who do some injections and things... No, I feel pain when I see someone in pain'.* Princess then changed her focus from medicine to computer engineering. Princess believes that education is extremely important not only for knowledge about subjects but also to give people an awareness of right and wrong and to help develop each person's confidence and independence. She feels very strongly that women should be educated and that one educated woman can educate a whole generation, *'one educated woman educate whole generation'.*

Princess is very appreciative of the help and support her parents have given to her and continue to give her. She is a self-taught musician through following YouTube™ videos and sings and plays at family gatherings.

Mera

Mera was born and raised in Egypt and moved to Ireland in 2009 to marry her husband. Her parents are both professionals who went to college, and her two siblings have also graduated from college. Mera's husband, who was also born in Egypt, had already been living in Ireland for over ten years before she joined him after their marriage. Neither Mera nor her husband have any extended family living in Ireland. *'I came here. I started from scratch'.* Initially, she found everyday communication challenging as she felt her English was poor. *'I just speak Arabis. I don't know any English'.* Before coming to Ireland, Mera had studied for a degree in accountancy at university. Despite having a third level qualification, she found that her education was not recognised in Ireland. Mera's husband works late hours as a chef and she found the time alone difficult when she moved here first. *'I was alone, I didn't have friends. Even at this time, there was no a lot of community here like Egyptian or Arab people'.* At the beginning she did not drive or speak English, but her husband encouraged her to learn to do both as he would not be available to help her with everything every day, *'He told me, "you can't sit in the house, just cool and do with the kids because it's hard here. Don't push me to do everything" – because when I came , I can't drive. When I came, I can't speak English. I can't go to the doctors, so everything he do with me.'*

Her husband was also supportive of her being independent and encouraged her to go to college. She told me he said, "I can't so everything. I have to work, I have to work. I have to go there. So, you have to learn". Although initially they thought she might not pass the selection process for a place on an Access course, he had told her that they would find her find a private English course if necessary to improve her chances in applying the following year. Mera, however, was successful in her interview and joined the Access programme. She then progressed to a degree in Computer Engineering and is currently studying for a Masters. During her time as a student she has also become a mother to three children, one of whom was born just five days after her second-year examinations. She took some time off her Masters studies for the birth of her youngest child and she is now back in college and is currently completing her thesis.

Tia

Tia came to Ireland from China to study for a Postgraduate Diploma in Business and then completed a Masters in Business. She has decided to live in Ireland for the foreseeable future and self-selected herself as a migrant according to the criteria for participation outlined above. She is in her late thirties and has extensive work experience in education in China and is active in online educational delivery to China. While her work experience prior to entering her courses of study was very valuable to her, she mentions more than once the disconnect she felt from some of her Chinese classmates as they were younger than her and were more focused on their peer relationships than she was. *'My behaviours, or my studying there is different with other students … I had a lot of experience for managing my like. So, what time for study? What time for working? … they like to talk about small things, and small emotion with others'.* Tia also felt some of the younger students were not prepared for studying abroad as they did not, in her opinion, always work hard enough. According to Tia, the reason for this lack of effort is that Chinese students work very hard to get into third level education but then are almost assured of being awarded a degree barring some catastrophic event, '*when they start, (Chinese) students work very hard to study Leaving Certificate (sic). And after that they don't*

work very hard like secondary school, 'cause they know they already into the college, but definitely they will finish, they will graduate from university. If they have big, big, big, trouble, so, maybe they failed. But if they don't have big, big, big, trouble, so can everyone graduate. *So, they spend a lot … they don't have intensive study time. So, they spend a lot of time playing computer games'.* She describes her role while studying here as being similar to a mentor and often felt torn between helping younger students to cope with their problems and her own need to the focus on her work and studies. She is a very sociable person and has made friends with a range of people in many different parts of Ireland. While completing her courses here, Tia continued to work with her online students in China to help fund her studies. She currently tutors Chinese to primary and secondary level pupils in Ireland and has published an educational book for English language examination preparation in China.

Chapter 5: Accessing the Fort.

5.1 Approaching the data

This chapter presents the emerging insights from the participants of their lived experiences of, access to, and barriers to higher education (HE). The participants in this study came from ten different countries of origin and were composed of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

5.2 Reminder of the participants

I introduced the participants for this study in pen pictures interspersed between earlier chapters and I am providing a brief reminder of them here. Ten participants, Angie, Liz, Tek-kwo, Anne, John, Hazel, Molly Princess, Mera, and Tia, shared their experiences of HE. Eight of the participants were female and two were male. The ten participants were from across a range of disciplines and seven were undergraduate and ten were post graduate students. They were a diverse group of participants from ten different geographic locations, (Romania, Slovakia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Poland, Pakistan, Egypt, China, South Sudan, and Albania). Of the group, four had experience of the Direct Provision (DP) system in Ireland. Two had completed their primary degrees abroad before studying for postgraduate qualifications in Ireland, however, all of the remaining participants had not entered

higher education prior to coming to Ireland. Seven of the group had gained admission to higher education via an Access programme.

This first of two findings chapters uncovers the main themes of: Waiting for New Beginnings, Barriers, the Role of ETBs[23], and Language Needs. While each of the participants' accounts of their lived realities illuminated their different experiences, there were shared themes which revealed commonality between the self-selected migrant participants of this study who entered higher education. Main findings about the themes of support networks, being a role model, pressures, and organisational culture of teaching and learning, are presented in Chapter 6.

During our research conversations, I was fortunate that people shared vibrant accounts of their experiences both before and while they were students in higher education. Many of them reported being happy in their studies and enthusiastic about their futures. In those descriptions of their experiences, they shared some of their joys and achievements. For example, Mera described the college experience as '*a very, very good experience for me'*. In another example Princess said this, '…*everyone* [in the college] *are very nice. Like, all are like genuine people and very smiley. All the time. Early morning when your, when*

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[23] Education and Training Boards provide education across communities in Ireland for primary, secondary/post primary, further education and training, music education, outdoor education and youth services. ETBs referred to in this study are the ETB Further Education Training Centres.

your day started from a smile, the whole day goes very good'. But it was also the case that there had been moments of great doubt and uncertainty, both before entering higher education, and also while they were students. For example, Liz said that, *'even though I got the courage to come to* [Name of College]*, I still didn't know what to go for or what I'm capable of… I was like, like not good.... I was not good, technically-wise'.* Anne also commented on the pressures of being a student, *'there's a lot of pressure… and unexpected things that just come up on the way. You just don't know how to cope with them'*.

As I listened to the participants, both in our face-to-face meetings, and later when I listened back various times to the audio recordings, I searched for a metaphor to use to bring together their many responses about trying to, and ultimately gaining access to higher education. While I was thinking about their responses, I realised that some of the challenges the participants were describing seemed to be the result of not having the tacit, taken-for-granted knowledge, and shared access to information that many people in Ireland have, and yet other people for a variety of reasons, do not. Eventually, I found inspiration in the writing of Donald (2012:92) who described the fort-like nature of educational spaces which he claims 'naturalize assumed divides', and this idea to me reflected the challenges that some participants experienced in their efforts to engage in higher education. I am

borrowing Donald's idea here in my choice of subheading for this chapter – *Accessing the Fort*.

5.3 Waiting for new beginnings

The beginning of any journey is an important marker of an experience. While the process of applying and gaining admission to higher education went relatively smoothly for some, a number of participants had to endure long waits for college acceptance and confirmation of grants. For example, Angie talked about how she did not know if she could attend HE until one week before her course started as she was waiting for confirmation of her grant, *'I was waiting for a while for* [grant] *assistance, which come one week before the course started, so I didn't know if I would go or not'*. Residency status and permission to remain in Ireland determined whether some of the participants could apply for a place, and for funding for their fees, in Hazel's experience *'I didn't get grant because I still didn't have my refugee status at that point in time'*. This uncertainty about being able to satisfy eligibility criteria in turn, impacted on when, and how, they could continue their education at third level.

Migrants from European Union (EU) states who have not spent the required period of residency in Ireland do not qualify for any fee supports but they can pay fees charged at the rate for EU citizens. However, for migrants who come from outside of the EU, there are

additional difficulties because if they do not qualify according to the criteria set out by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for fee supports, they can be liable for full fees at international student rates[24], regardless of how long they have been resident in the state. In this study, three people who had lived in Direct Provision said that they waited until after they had secured their residency status before they applied to HE because they could not afford to pay fees. Hazel said that because she did not have refugee status, which would enable her to apply for grant assistance, '*it was really, really hard for me to actually get into a course or do anything really without any funding'*.

While speaking with the three participants who were no longer in Direct Provision (described in Chapter 2), they told me that this period of their lives while they waited for decisions on their residency rights, was extremely difficult and exasperating, Anne said, *'I came through the asylum process. So, at that time, there's nothing I could do'.* It was a time when everything they dreamed of hung in the balance and over which they believed they had, at times, little control, for example, Hazel said, *'you always had that stress in the back of your mind thinking: "Okay, if I don't get enough money to pay my fees, obviously I really can't do anything furthermore*'. Although the term 'applicant for international protection' has replaced the earlier terms 'refugee' and

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[24] Tuition fees for International Students are typically twice the fee paid by an EU student for the same course. Fees for courses are set by institutions.

'asylum seeker' in Ireland, in the following accounts I have echoed in places the original choice of words (refugee, asylum) which the participants used to describe their own residency status.

5.4 Motivations for entering higher education

People reported many reasons for entering higher education, some of these included: a personal desire to develop themselves and their education, to improve their future job and financial prospects, and to be a role model for their children.

Coming to higher education was often an opportunity to improve their possibilities in the job market and to contribute more to their family finances. Some of the participants had worked in the service industry, which has seen a disproportionate number of migrant workers within this industry, and which traditionally pays wages that are considerably below the national average (Loyal, 2018). Liz, Anne and Molly all mentioned working as cleaners and both Liz and Anne also mentioned the physicality of the work. In Liz's case, the physicality of the work became impossible for her to continue as a result of an illness, and she said she approached further education with a view to *'finding a job in which I could physically do because of the illness'*. Anne also felt the need to improve her job prospects as she had been working in unskilled jobs that were physically demanding,

I was working in a bed and breakfast where I was just … did cleaning of rooms and all that. And I kind of thought to myself, and I said to myself, "How long am I going to do the job?" Like, I'm gonna break my back.

It was evident that they were aware of the limitations this type of work had on themselves as individuals, and on their families' futures. John felt his future job possibilities before coming to college were very limited,

I saw like the options for jobs are very, very limited for me, so without higher education, I couldn't go to the jobs here in Ireland, and I find it very difficult for me… Without a proper job, you can't do much… That's the main thing. That's why we are here: to learn something to get a job.

Liz hadn't originally considered higher education as a probable option and was thinking of improving her job prospects by taking Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC now Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)) courses at a public adult education centre (an Education and Training Board centre). As she reflected on her working life and her recent diagnosis for an illness, she began to reappraise why she was studying courses that would lead her into other similarly paid jobs that would place additional physical demands on her,

I was hoping that I can get some skills or some benefits from the FETAC 5 which I could use for getting ... finding a job in which I could physically do because of the illness, ah…of my diagnosis… And I started like a cleaner and the kitchen

assistant. And I saw these chaotic systems around. And I wanted to do something more meaningful, what I found more fulfilling, I guess… So, for getting a care assistant job, I needed to do at least one more [for] job from care for elderly, [a] FETAC five course. So, I done that in Galway after work. It was quite all right. I didn't find it really complicated or hard. So, I started like a care assistant. And then, I started to have the health issues after a few years. And I kind of got burned out as well… So, I said I'll go for a FETAC. I did FETAC 5, but this time, the full time. Like the full modules. But it didn't look for me, really, like a great opportunity for finding the different job. I don't know. I didn't find it really good. But it gave me the step stone.

Angie also saw the importance of education as a stepping-stone to a future career and to leave the uncertainty of her then work situation behind. While working as a sales assistant she felt that she was capable of more in her working life and decided to return to higher education to complete a masters. Being made redundant gave her the determination to reimagine her future,

Well, I wanted a better job. That was my main motivation because I was just a sales assistant here ……. but after I remember … I can do more. After I lost my job, so I say, I will use this time to prepare for college.

5.5 Barriers – knocking on the doors

Many participants in this study experienced obstacles and delays in accessing higher education. For some of the participants, the main obstacle was their ineligibility to apply for financial assistance because of their residency status, which prevented them from meeting the criteria for being considered for grant assistance, without which they

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could not afford to apply to HE. For others, financial pressures, likely exacerbated by the low-paid nature of the work they were doing, contributed to challenges they faced. Additional obstacles included lack of recognition of previous educational qualifications, for example, John said, *'my study in my country didn't count here in Ireland. So, my secondary school didn't count at all'*, and Anne mentioned, *'I didn't have any level of education in Ireland, apart from my level of education in Kenya ... so I had to go down to the Access course. The only option I was given was the Access course'*. Each of these themes will now be discussed in detail.

5.5.1 Residency status

Hazel's situation is a good example of the impact a migrant's residency status can have on their capacity to enter into Higher Education. She was 20 years when I interviewed her, and she had arrived in Ireland as a teenager. She spent two years in the senior cycle in secondary school and completed the Irish Leaving Certificate[25] examinations with strong results. At that time, she and her family were living in a Direct Provision centre. Her application to, and entrance into, higher education, was challenging as both she and her family were still waiting for their refugee status at the time that she completed secondary school. As a result, she was deemed to be an 'international

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[25] Irish Leaving Certificate is available at the end of 5 or 6 years of secondary school and is used for the purposes of selection into further education, training, employment, and higher education.

student' for assessment of fees. She explains *"when I first started, in first year, I wasn't able to get a grant for my fees'*. Irish State grant aid for fees was not available to her and this meant that she was not initially in a position to apply to college without some other means of financial support. At that time neither of her parents was allowed to work[26], which meant that finding fees at the international student rate would have been impossible, and at the European Union student rate, very difficult. This restriction on access to higher education based on residency can also extend to the Irish-born children of parents who do not hold residency status, yet those children may have completed all of their education up to the end of secondary school in Ireland. For Hazel, this meant that without refugee status,

> *… it was really, really hard for me to actually get into a course or do anything really without any funding… Now, for me to actually get into the course itself was a bit of a ... It was really, really hard, but actually I managed to do it.*

Hazel wasn't the only person impacted by these inconsistencies. Anne's aspiration to enter higher education was also governed by her wait to exit the asylum process and, as there was no finite date around when decisions would be made about her status, she had to wait until that happened,

> *I wasn't in a position to go back to education because I hadn't even gotten my status in the country. So, I was still in limbo…I*

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[26] Applicants for international protection previously were not allowed to work in Ireland while waiting for decisions about their status. Since 2018, applicants for international protection have the right to work and to apply for work permits if they have been waiting longer than 6 months for a decision on their application.

came through the asylum process. So, at that time, there's nothing I could do. I could just do bits and bobs out there at that time, that's it, because I lived in the accommodation centre [DP]. There was nothing for me to do. I just had to stay there. It was something always there but I just couldn't get myself to.

Even when some of the participants left DP and were granted international protection, further delays occurred in applying to higher education as their previous educational records were not recognised by the college they applied to. Anne and John both found that their educational records from their home countries of Kenya and Albania were not accepted. This lack of recognition of educational attainment was also experienced by other participants in the study who had not been in DP and will be presented in the section on Recognition of Prior Learning below.

5.6 The people not in the room

One of the interesting turns that some participants' conversations took was to discuss with me their acquaintances who had aspired to study in higher education. Some other people in their lives were not successful in their applications. Others had begun their studies and dropped out because the participants said that their friends felt that the time it would take to complete their studies was too long. For Mera, she realised that her friend who had unsuccessfully applied to the Access programme did not have a good enough standard of English,

Even after a while some people came and said, "Oh, Mera, you have success in that" so they try to go for interview for Foundation. But [Name] told me, "Mera, they're not like you. You can understand, … but they can't understand even the question". This was very bad, so they were refused.

Tek-kwo talked initially about the successes of getting into college and finding jobs which he saw amongst his friends and the wider migrant community. The excerpts which follow open with a positive account but then move on to give Tek-kwo's voice to what he saw as an emerging problem,

I know sometime when I used to have time, free time, I used to go and sit in the town centre… I could see different type of people, I mean kind of people, especially of the black community, that are born here and some who have come when they're already old. I see there's a gap in education… and then actually this year I met a lot of people, a lot of, actually kids who were born here and those who come when they're young, they are in education. I am really, really happy to see of course some of them I've never seen and I asked them, "Where have you been?" They say, "Oh, I'm in Dublin, I'm in Cork ...," I said, "Oh, you're studying?" "Yeah." Then there's certain group that you'll find in the same area, even you can hear, they speak, somebody has gone to school but then it's between college and then work.

Tek-kwo also described the despondency and lack of engagement he observed in some of the people he knew in DP and whose lives were not turning out in the way he said they had imagined,

Some, they have good foundation when they came and then joining that level of education, most of them, they just, I don't know what happened to them, they don't, they just stop and then you'll find a lot of people… but this is also another thing, that why are they not coming to college or looking for something

> *to do? … Not only black community, but even other community as well.*

Tek-kwo's account became more sombre as he described his worries about associating with former acquaintances whose friendship he had lost, and his concerns for his former friends,

> *That is also another thing because it is very hard. These people, some of them, they are really, really dangerous. Because you find they're not working but they're dealing in drugs. So, you find them seated. Approaching them is a problem. But then when you approach them, it mean you're also putting your life into danger. So, some time to associate with them, you find that in your doorstep. What are they doing with this person? Are you trying to be recruited for these people who are doing this?*

Tek-kwo described how his friend in the DP centre began his studies on an Access programme but eventually dropped out as he become involved in selling drugs and how he felt his friend was ashamed to continue their friendship,

> *So, like I had my roommate, he's moved now, he's actually living across the road here. He started Access course before me but then he could not finish because of this lifestyle. He joined those guys selling drugs, smoking, drugs, drinking and then even when he came out of the [DP] centre he continued to do the same. So, such a person, even me, myself is you feel ashamed to come to ... because we used to be roommates. He could not come to me because for me I'm always quiet and doing my things and he feels like I am different from him and yet we used to be like brothers. But because of his way of living now, his life completely change…*

Tek-kwo felt that his friend was trying to change his life but that his friend seemed to find the commitment of time that was needed to complete a college degree as difficult,

> *As for him, he's trying, this one, he's trying to get back. But I don't know whether he will ever come back because right at the moment I don't think he see himself going back because he come up to college he say, "Ah. Four years. How will I finish four years? Five years? How will I finish five years?" So, the time also gives them another problem.*

Tek-kwo made a suggestion about what should be done to make changes for this group of people. His suggestion was for earlier interventions for educational and work opportunities,

> *That could be early, especially those who just want to come to college. So, it's good for going back to lower level and start speaking to them and giving them the direction and then the options where they can work. Because here in Ireland there are many options that a person can take. There's a shortcut to work, there is long way to work, and then ... There are many, many options that they can take. But if you come out and then you stopped.*

5.7 Financial worries

Of all of the topics that the participants discussed, financial worries was the concern that the participants were most expressive about. I noticed during the conversations with some of those who were still in HE when we spoke that they were still anxious about their financial situations. They talked extensively about how much pressure they felt they were under. As they recounted their experiences, it was clear to

me from the tone of their voices and their serious expressions that this was a significant worry in their lives.

Worries about money caused some to consider whether they could, or should, begin college. For others, financial pressures were a reason for them to consider giving up their studies. For example, Anne talked about how her financial worries could have made continuing as a student impossible, '*There's a time when it got to a point, and I was ready to quit. I thought, I can't meet ... my ends can't meet'.* Some of the concerns the participants had before entering college were caused by being ineligible for grant assistance for fees and maintenance. For others, asking for a loan from family, or friends was difficult, or impossible. Managing the day-to-day realities of the cost of an education was another concern. For some participants, it was a short-term concern, but for others, it would follow them through their college years.

In Ireland, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is the most important financial assistance fund for applicants to Higher Education. Applications are means tested and students may be able to access funding for their fees and/or a maintenance grant (SUSI, 2021). One area that contributed to financial worries before the participants entered college resulted from what seemed to the participants to be arbitrary decisions made by Student Universal Support Ireland. SUSI,

the grant authority, decides on whom, how much, and when, grants are paid. For example, Molly was only deemed eligible for payment of fees, and not maintenance by SUSI, for her first two years of study even though she lived some distance away from college, *'the first year when I used to live in* [Name of town] *for two years, I didn't get anything* [maintenance grant]. *Like they only pay for my fees'*. In her final year, she moved to the urban area where her college is located and was then awarded some maintenance money as well as her fees, *'and then I got maintenance as well'*. Molly also experienced difficulties with her SUSI grant as it was paid late after she had already started her course[27]. Molly knew that once she had made the decision to enter college, that she would have to find funding if her fees were not paid by SUSI,

> *But I had to wait for SUSI,… and I was scared because I think I got it in October. So, I had to interview here with one of the guys [IoT staff] and all like, "Are you going to get the SUSI award? What's going to happen? Do you have any plan B or whatever?" And they made sure actually like because I was studying already but I haven't paid yet, so ...*

Her alternative plan to pay for her fees was to ask her father for a loan, which she was reluctant to do. '*Otherwise, I would have to ask my father, I'd probably have to like be grateful for rest of my life. But I'd rather be independent, you know?'* This constant uncertainty about her finances meant that while she was on her course, she worked through

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[27] IoT undergraduate courses begin in September.

her studies in the hospitality industry, including in her final year, and she found this challenging,

> *I was studying full-time for two years and working part-time like weekends. Even in third year, like first few months, I think first semester, I was studying full-time and then I'd finish college at 5pm and got to work at six. So, I'll do some 35 hours on top of college and then you have college work or whatever. I was just exhausted.*

Angie also experienced a delay in her final acceptance for a SUSI grant, which was as a result of insufficient documentation she submitted because she was unaware of what was required of her. She explains,

> *I was waiting for a while for assistance, which come one week before the course started, so I didn't know if I would go or not… Because I was depending, relying 100% on the grant. That's what I had to, borrow money… Because I'm self-employed, and I didn't know that I should include in the letter [application to SUSI], my accounts.*

Hazel's account of her experiences of trying to go to college was particularly memorable – many times during the interview, she returned to the topic of how stressful this period of time was for her and her family. The stress she described seemed to follow her even when she finally was able to start her third-level studies as she, and her family, did not know from year to year how they would finance her business course. In addition, she knew that certain college services

would be removed from her if her fees were paid late, or not paid in full,

> *My dad was not working. My mom wasn't working at the time, and obviously I didn't get SUSI, I didn't get [a] grant because I still didn't have my refugee status at that point in time, so it was really, really hard for me to actually get into a course or do anything really without any funding, but for some reason we actually managed to get me through the first year of college… it was just that you always had that stress in the back of your mind thinking - Okay, if I don't get enough money to pay my fees, obviously I really can't do anything.*

This can have significant and stressful implications as she goes on to describe,

> *I can't get my exam results, I can't access any of my IT 'cause usually business is literally mainly IT, most especially first year, there's a lot of IT work that needs to be done[28]. Obviously, that's the one thing that really strained and literally stressed me 99% of my time in college in first and second year… My parents had to pay for my fees from the first second of second year as well, but then during the first two years it was really hard for them 'cause none of them were working, so literally it was just from savings that they got from previous years … and then also from sponsors as well, and from family friends as well, borrowing money and all that, so it was really hard on both of them.*

The challenges of planning and budgeting for college and family life were also mentioned by Anne. Students who have children face additional financial costs, which are borne by the parent(s). Anne reflected on the security that comes from having a reliable income and how important this was for her overall self-fulfilment as a person and

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[28] The college Hazel attended suspends IT services for students with unpaid fees.

as a parent, for her family's financial security, and for her own general

mental health.

> *If you're financially stable, or you don't have a lot of things bothering your head, it's kind of, you find it easy to get along, to move on. If you have a lot of things in your head, it kind of puts you off. You start thinking "If I was working, I'd be able to sort this," or, "If I'm doing this, I would sort this," but when you are able to sort things and mix things up, you are at ease. You concentrate more… and unexpected things that just come up on the way. You just don't know how to cope with them… There are times when you just sit there, especially the times you take a book and you want to read, and you go on the computer, and you open the computer, but you're not even reading. Your mind is preoccupied and you're thinking loads… My first year was really difficult because I couldn't afford to pay after school for the kids. The only after school was [Name], which is the closest to me. The prices, I couldn't afford to do that.*

For Anne as a lone parent, there was no other income to pay for the

costs of family life, whether for herself, or her children, and she had to

consider if continuing her studies was feasible. In particular, she was

concerned about making sure her children had their needs and their

educational costs covered too,

> *I've got to pay the school bus for the kids because I can't drop them to school, so I have to pay the school bus, which is an extra expense. And I have to pay, get them an after school, which I can't afford, and I still can't cope with my own bills… Usually, what really puts you off is if you can't meet ... you can't cope with the kids. If you have kids, kids have a lot of needs, the school needs this, they're having a school trip. And if you're not working ... because you can't juggle kids, work, school. You can't. You have to pick one or two. Kids and school, or kids and work. Because you can't drop the kids.*

Many of the participants in the study spoke about their financial pressures as a significant stressor in their lives. Even though some were able to financially plan for their studies, the reality of the amount of time the assignments for coursework needed, or the scheduling of classes meant that there were sometimes unforeseen expenses, such as additional childcare costs. For Angie, the extra costs were for more childcare to allow her to study at the weekends,

> *Well, I prepared because I knew I might need to borrow money, so I saved a little bit. The rest to the credit union, so I knew if I would need to have it, because I wouldn't stay one more year at home… I was more borrowing money for the Visa* [credit card], *and for crèche, from my parents. So, it was in the last few months, I also had to pay the babysitter because I wanted to do very good with my assignments. So, at the weekends, Saturday, five or six hours, I would have to pay her.*

In Anne's case, there was no budget for additional childcare costs to help her look after her children while she attended late afternoon classes in college when her children had already finished their school day. A reciprocal childminding arrangement with a neighbour came at a high price for Anne and her family life,

> *I had to get a friend ... to mind them two days... My kids could leave school. The school bus drops them, and they could go to her house because it was just … next door. They would go to her house. That became ... If they would go there for two days, and I would have her daughter for the Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday. I got all my time, from her having just an hour with my kids on a Monday and a Tuesday, I could have her daughter on Friday evening, the whole of Saturday she would be in [Anne's home], and then the whole of Sunday she would be in, so I would be paying a really dear price for that. It didn't work right.*

Mera had had one child before she started college and then, while she was a student, she gave birth to two more children. For her, in common with Anne, finding affordable childcare was a significant challenge,

> *In the beginning, it [affordable childcare] was hard to find. Even the crèche because sometimes they said you have to put in the waiting list and even the money was very bad. Crèche here was very, very expensive.*

For some participants, there was a lack of knowledge about some available supports for parents in education. For both Mera and Anne, there was the eventual welcome discovery in their second years of study of the Community Childcare Subvention Programme, which supports parents who return to education (there are other eligible categories of applicants). There is a range of childcare rates available depending on the number of hours that are needed per child. This is only paid for children attending an approved registered private childcare facility, or in an approved registered community creche[29]. Neither Anne nor Mera, was aware of the support before they started college. Anne explained, *'I came to realize about the community creche, which I just realized on my second year'*. Mera said that initially the creche costs for her family were very high but that, '*after a while we found how can we manage that'*.

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[29] Approval of childcare facilities by Tusla, the Irish State's Child and Family Agency.

5.8 No privacy here

In addition to the concerns about finding money for college fees and living expenses, there were moments when the participants had to trust strangers with private family financial information in order to ask for help in completing application forms. Some participants were not overly concerned about this, but for some, it meant having to make requests of their families to divulge personal details to complete strangers. In addition, one student had to ask her divorced parents to provide private financial information to her as part of her grant application and means test, even though they had divorced six years before she applied to college, and she had been completely self-sufficient since arriving in Ireland.

Princess needed assistance in completing application forms and had to ask her parents' permission so that she could divulge information about them and their finances to the college and to the grant authority,

> *Because I was new in the college and it was my first time to fill my application forms, and I just don't know what to do, and how to fill these all forms and new questions and things, which I hadn't, I haven't seen before. So, I just contacted my career officer, [Name], and she's really nice and she explained me all the time, and my parents knows that I consider her as a family member. So yeah, they also very happy if I shared my information with her. So, at that time she filled all my forms and she support me. She tells me what we are doing. So, I just give her all my information.*

In Molly's case, because she was under 23 years of age and was applying for SUSI grant assistance, she had to ask her parents in Poland, who were divorced, to provide evidence of their separate incomes as part of the application process. This was not an easy situation for her as she commented,

> *My parents got divorced when I was 13… Because I had to like get papers from my parents that they divorced and translate them. And they [SUSI] sent back that it wasn't correct or something, so, it was lots of paperwork like.*

5.9 Recognition of prior learning

For a number of participants, gaining Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification was a necessary first step to prepare to apply to higher education colleges as these participants either had no previous secondary qualifications, or those qualifications that they did possess were not recognised in Ireland. A number of the participants expressed concern about the lack of recognition of their prior learning by the admissions office of the college they applied to. In addition to having completed secondary/post primary-school education in either Ireland, or another country, some participants also attended Education and Training Board (ETB) courses to augment their qualifications, and/or to improve their English. Molly explained that she had finished school in Poland and had received her end of secondary/post-primary school results in three specialist subjects. '*in Poland, you can do only three or four, but it's higher, for example, science. But, if you go into, like,*

science course, they only look for the three: maths, science, and physics maybe'. She could have entered higher education to study language and philosophy with these results in Poland and was surprised to find that in Ireland, her educational qualifications were not accepted,

> *I finished high school in Poland. I finished the* [Polish] *Leaving Cert. But it's kind of different than here. So, when I came here, I had to do PLC[30] course to get points because here you need to do loads of different modules or whatever to get as much points.*

Princess completed her secondary school education in Ireland and passed her Leaving Certificate examinations. She subsequently attended a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)[31] programme, before then moving on to study on an Access course,

> *I came in Ireland 2009, so then I did Leaving Certificate in here in* [Year] *… before I came to Access course I went to VTOS and I learned about business administration. I completed that with the distinction… because I need*[ed] *some points to my, my point wasn't enough[32].*

Mera had completed a primary degree in Egypt but found it was not recognised in Ireland, and because of that she decided to start her education again via the Access programme. When she was being

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[30] PLC – Post Leaving Certificate courses are delivered by ETBs.
[31] VTOS programmes are aimed at unemployed people who are early school leavers over the age of 21 years.
[32] Princess is talking about points needed for direct access to a college course. Students can be accepted onto the Access programme in this college without any Leaving Certificate points if they can demonstrate ability.

interviewed, she was told that it was unusual for someone to want to go back to an Access level,

> I … have a Bachelor degree in Commercial Accounting. So, in the beginning, [Name] told me, 'you have a higher certificate than what we are doing' [Access course].

Mera was able to plead her case to be accepted on the Access course by pointing out that her educational qualification was not recognised when she applied to college and that she needed to start her education through English again in Ireland, 'I said okay, I know everything but in Arabic, not in English. So, even if I want to go to work to cleaning, I can't understand'.

John also found his educational qualifications were not recognised and while he was in DP he made plans to attend more courses at the ETB centre so that he would be in a position to eventually apply to an Access programme,

> This is very, very long way to come here [to be able to enter college] because my study in my country didn't count here in Ireland. So, my secondary school didn't count at all.

The participants' experiences of support from their tutors, or the centre principals at the ETBs varied, but on the whole, their comments were positive. Liz was grateful that she was introduced to the idea of continuing her education by participating in a field trip from her ETB centre to an IoT,

Fortunately, they were doing this trip to [the] IoT. And, at first, I never thought about, like, I did think about the IoT college, but I didn't really have courage even to start, kind of plan for it.

John also felt he benefitted by having first attended ETB courses,

Through ETB because as I said, the studies without the steps, you couldn't come here [to college].

The support and encouragement of ETB staff to continue to higher education was important for other participants as it helped them to re-imagine their academic futures. Tek-kwo initially planned to train in manual work but was dissuaded from doing this by his centre coordinator,

So that time I started to get up and then getting myself and seeing myself that I'm getting into somewhere. When the coordinator told me that, "I've been looking at your record and then see that you can progress". Because I wanted it to go on and do some handwork and then she said no. "I'm seeing you. You're going to the right direction that I want. It's different from the people that you came with in the same group you're doing so". She actually made me to see the way I was going.

Angie attended an ETB centre in her local area before she applied to college to complete a masters. Her main aim was to improve her English, but the centre did not offer classes at the level she needed in order to have a satisfactory English level to apply for her chosen course in higher education. She studied English alone for the IELTS

(English) examination and was greatly assisted by her former tutor who offered her feedback and suggestions for improvement for free,

> *So, first I learn IELTS[33] by myself, and I got just a seven[34], but it was good for college… I went to my adult learning centre [to ask for help]... Because I did some English here, so they helped me.*

Not all of the participants who attended ETBs felt encouraged initially by their tutors to proceed to higher education although pathways from Further Education and Training (FET) to HE are outlined in the *Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021* (HEA, 2018). In some situations, it seemed that the speed at which the participant wanted to pass through the ETB programmes was quicker than the tutors were accustomed to, and in other cases, the participants felt that their tutor may not have evaluated their learning needs in the same way that they themselves viewed those needs.

John reported that moving on from the ETB centre to higher education was not seen by the course co-ordinator as a likely progression for him and on his first visit there he observed a higher-level group than the one he was assigned to taking a class,

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[33] IELTS – International English Language Testing System
[34] Applicants to third level colleges who are required to show evidence of English language proficiency can choose from a number of different recognised examinations. A score is assigned by each college to represent the minimum standard on a particular examination that the intending student should achieve in order to be eligible to apply for a given course.

And I said to the lady there, who is in the centre, I said "What are they doing?" "Maths" she told me. I said "Maths. Let me see and try". [John joined the class and found the maths easy]. She said "Wow! You just came here". I said "No, no, no. I didn't come here to stay here. I came here to get qualified to go to different level".

Later, when he was discussing his future plans for higher education, he felt his interest in applying to the Access programme was not fully supported by his tutor,

"What you want to do …?", I said "Why not [the] IoT?... I said "Listen, at the end of the year, I got the cert, I got the IoT". "Oh no," she said to me "You should go through, what's it called….? VTOS, yes". She says, "You need two years' experience and blah, blah, blah". I said "Oh, no, no. I'm going to college".

Anne felt thwarted by the centre head of her ETB course despite feeling that the courses she was attending at the ETB were easy. Of concern to Anne was the lack of encouragement to study at a suitable level that could deliver results that were needed for a higher education place. She also had concerns that the subjects she was being encouraged to study would not lead to further education opportunities. Anne felt she was able to study well, so she began to consider applying to an IoT,

She [name] was the head. I kept saying to her, "I want to apply to go to [an] IoT," which was very funny, because she said to me, "You won't get yourself in [an] IoT". And that got to me… I say to her, "I'd love to do computer engineering or something to do with computers". And she's like, "I don't see you getting to the IoT". And I thought to myself, all right. Now that me put me

in the mood, that really triggered my head. And I was like, I'll really prove a point.

Anne also felt that her individual learning needs were not being addressed at that time,

> *Every other African who joined there was only doing something like woodwork or cookery. All the ladies were doing a cookery course, and all that. I think that was something that she couldn't understand, what I am doing in that class [the class preparing for examinations].*

Later, Anne met her centre head to let her know that her application to college was successful,

> *I had to go and rub it in…. I just said, "I just wanted to let you know that I got my place in it [IoT]"… And every time I met her in town, she'd always say "hi". But after I said I was in the Access course, she kind of pulled back and never said hello to me again.*

Molly had a delay in her application to college because she had not completed the requisite number of modules at the ETB, as she had been misinformed about how many modules she needed to complete. This meant she spent another year studying and had to work as a cleaner to support herself,

> *I missed ... I just skipped one module because they [ETB tutor] said, "Oh, it's going to be fine because you're still going to have the points because I think it marked them as 400 instead of 600. You're still going to get points so you can skip this." But turns out that I still have to do it. So, I just, …. next year, I just came to do one module.*

5.10 Language needs

Prior to admission to a college, intending students who indicate that English is not their first, or main, language, are usually required to provide competence in English either by providing evidence of a pass or higher in English in the Irish Leaving Certificate examination, an accepted grade in an approved internationally recognised test[35], or in some cases, through direct interview with the higher education institute. All of the participants in this study said that they spoke more than one language, and only one of the ten participants did not introduce the topic of English as a concern into the discussions. This particular participant, (Hazel), had completed her secondary schooling in Ireland and did not need to provide evidence of English competence as part of her application to Higher Education because she met the entry requirements. I had not included a question about language in the list of questions I had prepared, so the fact that nine people introduced the topic spontaneously was of note. The topic of English was introduced by both the participants who described learning English as adults, and also by the participants who described themselves as bilingual or trilingual.

Adapting to the need to use English in an academic setting was a worry for many. The participants also stressed the importance of being

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[35] Approved tests can be for example, IELTS; Cambridge University, TIE, and others.

able to use English well outside of the classroom so they could make friends, choose courses to study, and ultimately to find work. Some had arrived in Ireland with no English, a small number had strong competence in English on arrival, some were multilingual, while others struggled to understand the unfamiliar Irish accent around them. There was a keen sense of awareness for some of the participants that they were being judged because of their perceived English level. Tia said that having a good level of English was very important for her and had been prepared for challenges with the language. She also felt that it was essential for any future work prospects to have a good level of English and that this also led to improved contact with others,

> *So, the most impressive thing for me was the English language. So, I thought I had some language barrier before I came in Ireland.*
>
> *Open lots of doors for me if I have good English and I can talk to others and make lots of friends and if you want to do, to apply some jobs … if you have good English, people would give you a chance.*
>
> *But for the EU international students, they have better English. And they are not Irish. So they thought they were not Irish group, they were not Chinese group. So if you have some similar level English, they will be good friend… they should go to English class 'cause their English varies.*

Angie also mentioned the importance of English and while studying for her masters, she had attended Academic English class, which was in addition to her main subjects,

> *It's something that's more harder because we need to first to attend the English class which are necessary but they are good for us… we don't speak English, and we need more time.*

She felt that some students who did not have a particularly high level of English should have made more effort to improve their level,

> *I would give them [other students] advice to ... before going, learn English as good as they can, and to come here before because I hear that many Chinese people, they go, come to Ireland just one week, or one month before. That is not enough time with the language.*

Liz was one of the study participants who spoke no English when she first arrived in Ireland,

> *I came [to Ireland] without English. So, at first, I needed to learn the language. At least the basic ... basics of it. I am still conscious about grammar and how I put the sentences together. And when I talk, it's not as smooth as I ... when I write. Written is a little bit easier because I can see it. So that was it. I first started, of course, learning the language in my work place.*

John also discussed his language skills as being one of his primary concerns about being able to apply to higher education,

> *I didn't know the English language as well, so I had to learn the English language first.*

Mera also did not speak English when she first arrived in Ireland and her husband was very supportive about her learning English and becoming independent,

> *Because when I came, I can't drive. When I came, I can't speak English. I can't go to doctors, so everything he [husband] do with me. So, he said, "I can't do everything. I have to work, I have to go there. So, you have to learn".*

Even though Liz had a good standard of English by the second year of her course, she was aware of the impact of needing more time to process the language both for written work and for learning, and she was also aware that her accent marked her out,

> *I need more time also for sure. Because of the language barrier. Because of the speed I'm typing or thinking in English.*

> *So, because of the accent, that makes it more visible that I am not ... that English is not my first language.*

Tek-kwo talked about the impact of trying to understand the accent of the local community he moved to. Despite feeling that he was a good user of English he had to spend some time familiarising himself with the speech patterns around him,

> *I asked my friend, "Are these people speaking English or not?" He said, "No, they're speaking English. And I said, "I cannot hear anything. Then he said, no, just take your time. With time you will learn, and you'll hear what they were saying. So that's really improved, my listening and then knowing what's all the words that ... and what could I say again.*

Anne was conscious of how others sometimes misunderstood her use of her own language when she was in social situations with friends.

She felt this suggested to others around her that her English was not strong,

> *English is not my first language, it's actually my third language, but I can speak English… Assuming I can't speak English, I would probably not fit in. I would feel like I don't fit in. It would pull me back if I was to come out and ... If I got an email to come and meet you, and in my head I know very well I can't speak English, or I won't be able to communicate, or even if it's not perfect English I can still communicate, you can still understand me.*

She recognised that for some users of English, there are inherent challenges in expressing themselves well,

> *There's people who, it's also their third language, but they can't speak English, and they feel like they even can't express themselves… It's only that they can't get it out in English… most of them have a lot to share, but they feel they can't share. They feel they'd be judged for how they're going to talk, like, no one will understand them*

Anne was particularly concerned about those acquaintances who said to her, *"They [users of English as a main language] think we don't know anything because we don't speak English,"* although, as Anne said*, 'they [her acquaintances] have the knowledge in their heads'.*

When Mera arrived in Ireland, she spoke no English and at first her husband did most of the communicating for her, so Mera's initial concerns about getting into the Access course in college were focused on her level of English,

Because, actually,... because before the interview [for the Access course], because my husband he always speaking, speaking. Every time I went to [Name], he was speaking. So, they thought I can't speak or understand… I have a little experience in English. I just try to hear movies… The first time I did interview [for place on Access course], ever, in English. It was very hard.

John felt he had to take a pragmatic approach to how he made his course choice after he completed the Access course. He felt his best option would be to find a course that would not have an overly literary focus and his initial hope was to study Accounting. John also talks about not getting his first choice of study, accounting, after completing his Access course,

So, like, I wanted to do accounting. And I don't know for what reason, they didn't accept me. It was my age or something that I should score different level, different something… So it was like they said me "You can't do that". And I said "Okay. I quit [trying for Accounting]. I can't do"… So, you see what you can't do. You see what you can do, and you see what's available for you.

When his application for Accounting was unsuccessful, this resulted in him turning his attention to another area that interested him: computer engineering,

And even my speaking language, or learning the English language wasn't, I didn't know the English language as well, so I had to learn the English language first… Like myself for English. I might do better, but I can't do it, you know? This is my level of English… And even when my English, it's okay for me, from my point of view. But I found it hard to pick a study that did not need too much attention in writing or discussion or some stuff like that.

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In addition to the strains of waiting to know if she could actually go to college, Hazel also was frustrated in not accessing her first choice of course,

> *I actually wanted to do Accounting firstly, but because I didn't get enough points to [go to] my accounting course.*

After completing a Higher Certificate business qualification which lasted two years, Hazel's results were strong enough for her to be offered a place on the Accounting programme she had aspired to join from first year.

5.11 Stepping-stones through the Access programme

Not all students began their course of study at degree level. Seven of the participants, (Liz, Anne, Tek-kwo, John, Mera, Princess, and Mera), gained admission to their degree courses through the IoT's Access programme. In common with the topic of language needs presented above, I had not prepared a question about Access as an entry point to college, so I found it interesting that many of the students had brought it up. It was clear that the Access programme prepared the students for many aspects of college life, such as relevant academic skills, as well as giving them time to find the course that they felt best suited their needs.

Access courses are offered in Irish Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and universities as a means for so-called non-traditional students to enter higher education. The programmes are aimed at intending students from lower income socio-economic backgrounds, students whose educational histories are not aligned with the entry requirements for college entry, or those students who have a disability. The programmes offer a range of subject areas and are intended to give participants a sense of the options they can pursue if they choose to remain in college. The aim of the Access programme is to place the students who complete it on an equal educational footing with other first years when they begin their degree courses. The programme may be delivered full time, or part-time.

Some knew in advance that they wanted to complete a degree, but for others, there was a sense of trying out higher education first and then exploring their options for courses, either within the college they attended, or by moving to another college. The participants in the study who came to college through Access valued the preparation it gave them in helping them to make choices. John and Tek-kwo spoke about how useful it was, not only in completing the course in preparation for their studies, but also they valued the advice given to them on the course and the sharing of personal learning stories by the invited speakers. They also grew in confidence as a result of taking this route.

John outlines how this incremental approach was beneficial to him and to his classmates,

> *I saw the difference when I came, when first year started, if I came, it's true straight in the first year, I wouldn't cope with the studies… All the skills you need to do... So, we knew everything. We knew how to use the computer, we knew how to go into the programmes we need here, and all these things like, as I said, for communication, everything. It was very, very good… and then [by] the end of Access course, we felt like we had ability to cope.*

Tek-kwo also commented on the value of the Access programme to his current studies. He also found the invited speakers who shared information about their educational journeys inspired him to realise his educational dreams,

> *Even [Name of course organiser] has her own experience how she came back to be where she is. She came to the class and told us her experience and thing that she should do and she should do and thing that she decided to do to make her life and family life to match. And then I say why not me also? I could do this. And that's why you see me now. I'm now happy; I am happy.*

Tek-kwo also spoke of classmates who he felt underestimated the value of the Access programme, and he found that the input of career guidance lecturers was a distinct advantage for Access students who were trying to make course choices,

> *Not only that, I've seen people who come, like a classmate we had in Access course before. Most of them came with a high expectation, and then they see themselves like Access course. "Oh, we're doing this one? Algebra? English? We're doing a letter? Communications, I mean presentation and spelling? This thing we did." So, with the high expectation, then you find you say, "I know. I know it all." But then when it come to write this was another thing. You know it, actually, coming to writing,*

> *you don't write. And then that's, because you set your goal high, and then you just find yourself dropping out.*

For Tek-kwo, the Access programme was very helpful in his decisions about what to study in his future, however, he also recognised that for some other students, the realities of studying do not always match up to expectations,

> *So that is also another thing, that those ones who are joining … Access as well, most of them they drop out because they are saying, okay, I'm going for Access. I want to do mechatronic, I want to do science, I want to do this, I want to do this… But then when bring, career guidance, lecturers who come and talk to you, which subject you want to go, which course you want to do, and then they tailor the time and then they break down for you. You see people saying, "No, this is not for me. This is not for me. This is not for ... So, that is also another thing that I saw when I was in access course. People came with high expectation and then the morale just drop.*

Princess was an example of one participant on the Access programme who changed her mind about what she was planning to study. Originally, she was interested in the medical field but gradually came to realise that her true interests lay in computer engineering,

> *Like every sector they introduced in Access course and then I realized, okay, now I have to go to computer engineering. ICT engineering… No... I … once, I completed my Access course. I know what I have to do.*

Advisors from the Access programme not only offered educational advice, they were also an important point of contact when students were in need of guidance or a listening ear. For Anne, having this person available to her reinforced her sense of belonging,

Sometimes you could drown in your own stuff. I come in and pour my heart out to [Name]… *walk off. It makes you feel like, all right, I'm part of the college, I'm part of it. I can go in sometimes* [to see Name] *and just blab out, and go.*

While the Access programme was a valuable experience for many of the participants, it is important to note that many of the participants felt that it was their only route into higher education, particularly if their educational qualifications from their country of origin were not accepted by the college they were applying to. Anne recalled,

With that, I tried to apply for the computer engineering, but there was points that you needed to have to go into that. Since I didn't have any level of education in Ireland, apart from my level of education in Kenya ... so I had to go down to the Access course. The only option I was given was the Access course. I said, "Well, I don't mind. I'll just go and start the Access course."

For Mera, initially her main concern was whether she would be able to study in a new language, but she also felt that the Access programme was her only route into higher education,

They said there was an interview and they told me if you didn't success in the interview, you can't do it because you can't understand there... So, I was afraid to fail from the interview.

The completion of the Access programmes was celebrated with a graduation ceremony. For most of the participants who completed this programme, this was their first award in higher education. Most of the

participants' families attended the ceremony. John's memories of the day were very positive,

> *The Access graduation - I have loads of memories. Good, good times with the, I, we had, you know, big celebration and pictures, and time out from all the Access course activity. So that's, as it was, a big day for me as well.*

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the study into the experiences of ten self-selected migrants as they navigated their journeys into and through their higher education. The findings here are organised under the themes of: Waiting for New Beginnings, Barriers, the Role of ETBs, and Language Needs. Seven of the participants entered higher education via an Access programme and there seem to be links between their positive transitional experiences of the Access programme into the mainstream programmes in terms of learning, self-efficacy, academic success and their sense of belonging at college. Although the themes were presented in separate sections and reflect in general how they emerged during the interviews, the themes did not emerge in isolation from each other. Rather, they at times overlapped and melded with each other. Related subthemes were presented to permit more extensive analysis of each of the main themes to be carried out. Through the use of extensive quotations which supported the main themes, the voices of the participants are foregrounded here as it is their experiences that are at the core of this

study. This enabled a rich meaningful presentation of their experiences of accessing higher education.

Findings suggest that the participants experienced specific challenges relating to their application to higher education based on their residency status, and eligibility for student grants or supports. They also experience occasional difficulties in accessing appropriate information. Migrants who have indeterminate residency rights are not in a position to avail of the same rights that other members of the communities they live in have. As a consequence, they are marginalised and excluded. These barriers to accessing higher education are interconnected and were experienced to a greater or lesser extent by the various participants in the study. Many of the participants reported significant challenges in arranging their financial situations, to the extent that some borrowed from lending agencies, support networks, and from family. Another example of this interconnectedness of barriers can be seen in the participants' accounts of their English language level being a pre-determiner of whether they could apply to higher education, as well as it being instrumental in their future searches for jobs, and in their relationships with their college community and the wider community they live in.

Chapter 6 will extend the presentation of findings from the research under the themes of waiting to join college, support networks, being a

role model, pressures, organisational culture of teaching and learning,

mature student experiences, and personal fulfilment.

Chapter 6: Getting into College

6.1 Introduction

This chapter, in common with the previous chapter, is structured around a number of sections which present the main themes that emerged from the participants' accounts, many of which are inter-related. As with the previous findings' chapter, each theme emerged from the interview data and is presented under its subheading. The themes are: themes of waiting to join college, support networks, being a role model, pressures, organisational culture of teaching and learning, mature student experiences, and personal fulfilment.

6.2 Joining college – waiting to transition into higher education

Transitioning into higher education can be challenging for any student but it is likely to be a particular challenge for some students who do not come from a so-called traditional cohort. One of the biggest challenges that this group of students can encounter is that they are transitioning into spaces that are underpinned by the academic cultural hegemony of a society that has created a system of higher education that reflects an image of itself. In addition to the experiences of transition to higher education, students who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face additional challenges of access and eligibility to enter higher education, which students from the main resident population may not, such as eligibility to apply and language

competence. Entering higher education can be a period of time that can be joyful, but also a cause for worry and stress.

For most of the participants in this study, becoming a student was a choice that had been deliberated over for quite some time, and was therefore carefully thought through. Some embraced the opportunity to become a student with enthusiasm, however, some gave themselves time to reflect on their personal needs, obligations, and wishes before making the final commitment to enter higher education. These barriers as indicated in the previous chapter include: financial pressures, eligibility to apply for grant assistance for fees and maintenance, recognition of prior learning, and English language needs for some. The results from the findings point to the awareness the participants had of leaving familiar spaces to refashion themselves in new ways.

Even though going to college was a long-wished for dream, some of the interviewees, such as Liz, spent time deciding on whether to go to college after receiving an offer of a place. It was clear from Liz, that in common with others in the study, there were other people to be considered in her decision-making about how she should proceed, '*So, I needed to decide whether to stay at home or go after what I always wanted to go for, a full education. So, I said, I'm not staying at home'.* Another participant, Anne, reported that she initially had

misgivings about risking her family finances by giving up her job to go to college. She said that she spent a lot of time making sure it was a good decision, '*Kept saying to myself, "Well, I have a job." And I then I just think, "Let me just work." You know, it skips, going in your head'*.

Hazel had been particularly vocal in her excitement about going to college and how enthused her parents were about this. Again, this moment of being offered a place to study was balanced against her realisation that she was now responsible for making her own dreams for her future come true. She was conflicted in her thoughts about her abilities despite her good Leaving Certificate results and experienced worry when her letter of offer from the college arrived, '*I was actually really scared at first when I got the letter 'cause I thought "What if I actually don't make it?".'* To 'make it' for Hazel represented the shift away from the circumstances she and her family had lived through in Direct Provision (DP) and a move to independence and autonomy.

Finally getting to college was a significant moment for the participants and a realisation of themselves as being students. Anne described her thoughts about entering higher education after she had made her decision to accept her place on an Access programme, '*Brilliant. I think when I started the Access Programme is when I really felt like, "Now, I'm studying." I felt I'm enjoying it'.* John's path into higher education had taken some time too and he had spent a number of years in Direct

Provision. While he was there waiting for his residency application to be finalised, he had laid out a plan of study to enable him to be ready to apply as soon as he was eligible. Like Anne, John was ready for his moment in college, '*But in my mind was, if I had the chance to do something, I would do it. But I came here. I said "Okay there's a chance. Don't miss it. Do it".'* The realisation of being accepted into higher education was memorable for Princess, who was the first in her family to enter higher education, and her whole family was pleased to see her success in her application being accepted. She described her happiness at receiving her offer of a place on the Access programme, '*But it was an interview first and after that I received a letter I think… I was excited. Best word is excited, yeah'.* Tia expressed her sense of identity when she started her studies as '*I felt I was real a student'.* Some of the participants paused in their conversations after describing their happiness at being accepted to college as if they were savouring that moment again.

As I spoke to the participants while it seemed many of them were animated when they described the moment they received their acceptance to college, there were some who needed more time to adjust to the new experiences. During the transition phase into college life, some were aware that they were leaving their pasts behind. In common with Liz, Tia mentioned that leaving her familiar world of work to return to being a student was not easy. Her first week in college was

a period when she reflected on the changing circumstances of her personal world. She reflected on the personal impact of leaving her old life behind to begin a new one, '*I remember, the first week when I came here, there was a big difference between, between the life I worked, and I worked a long time, and then transferred to a student… Because even though I got the courage to come to* [Name of college], *I still didn't know what to go for or what I'm capable of'.'*

Despite John planning for some time to study in college, he also addressed the challenges of new beginnings as a student, '*At the start it was a bit hard because still everything new is hard. But in time … you get there'.* Hazel's experience of finally making it to college was framed by her feelings of responsibility to her parents. Her concerns were that she would not be able to do well on her course and let them down, '*But it was when I first came into college, I was like I really need to put my head down 'cause my parents are literally going through the moves trying to get money for me to actually be in college'.* Although Angie was enrolled as a postgraduate student and had had experience of studying in higher education, the transition to being a student was not simple, '*It was so hard at the beginning…'.* This narrative strand points to the essence of the participants' first year in higher education as being a time of adjustment and at times overwhelming.

For two of the participants, starting college arrived at a time when they had imagined it might never happen. Tek-kwo reports that getting into higher education was an important life event, '*I never thought that I would be at this stage where I am right now'.* John talked about how entering higher education was also the realisation of a major life goal. He was married with children in post-primary and primary school and felt his moment to study could have eluded him,

> *… it was like a dream for me to come to third level, so it was a good chance for me as I said, it was never late to do that… If I was in my country, I wouldn't do this college. To tell you the truth, yeah. So, that's why I'm saying so: here are all the options. Whatever wants, there you go. You can come back, knock on the door, and start studying, do something.*

6.3 Support networks

Support networks were identified by all of the participants as important for their success. This section will explore this theme through the following headings: Family and their encouragement, Organisational Culture of Teaching and Learning, and Peer Relationships. The first theme will begin immediately below, and the remaining two themes are interwoven into the remainder of the chapter.

6.3.1 Importance of family and their encouragement

The role of families and their support to the participants was especially clear in the participants' accounts. Families provided emotional and

practical support regardless of whether they were in Ireland, or in another country. During interviews, participants often turned in their conversations to express their gratitude to their families for the support they received. Tek-kwo talked about how his family in South Sudan encourage him to study hard. Like Tek-kwo, his father had also studied engineering,

> *When I called him* [his father] *and I told him I'm going to study civil engineering and he was really happy. And then whenever I call him, he'll say, "Oh, how is your study going?" Then he ask me how long then I always tell him this, and he say, "Ah, I know it is long, but you make sure you study hard"… It's* [study] *really, really hard. You need somebody to pull you, to drag you along, but if you don't have somebody…. It could be a friend, could be a family, but especially family.*

Going to higher education affected not only the person who was studying but also had an impact on their families. Of the ten participants in this study, five were the first in their families to go to college. In Princess' family, none of her brothers or sisters chose to go to college and she commented that initially they did not understand her choice. Later they changed their minds and said to her *'you were right'.* Princess explains how although her parents found her choice to go to college a new experience for them, they wholeheartedly encouraged and supported her, *'My parents are proud at me. Very proud… my parents are very, very nice and they are very supportive'.* Princess started her day in college each day at 9am and stayed until 9.30pm as her home was too far to reach and then return to the library to study in

the evenings. As well as preparing lunch for her to take to college, her mother and father would regularly drive to the college to bring her hot meals, *'my mum prepared all my food for me… to take to college. Even my mum and dad bring food for me here. Many times, when the lunchtime, they know that I would be hungry'*. John was also the first in his family to go to college and quoted his mother, who had never visited him in Ireland because of visa obstacles, as being very encouraging and he said she reminded him frequently of her life-long advice to him,

> [John's mother] *"Ah, all my life I said to keep studying." So, I* [John] *said "Ah, you'll get something of that. Don't worry. Don't worry. You're gonna get something of that, you know?"*

Like John, Hazel was also the first in her family to go to college and it was not only the realisation of her dreams, but also the realisation of her parents' dreams. A recurring comment made by the participants was how important it was to them to not let their families down. Hazel spoke a number of times about how important being in college was for her and her family and how often her parents reminded her of this,

> *That's the key thing really, literally that's the ... If you could get a dollar or a euro every single time my parents said "Education is the key to everything". In every statement they make, whether it be dating boys, be doing this, be going out partying, doing this, there's always gonna be education literally put in somewhere within a sentence. So, if I had to get a euro with every single time they said the word education, I'd probably be like the richest person in Ireland, honestly. It is the most important thing for them and for me as well. I feel like that's the main key factor, 'cause I feel ... They grew up in a system where*

they believed with education you can go anywhere, which is true, so obviously they just wanna ... How do I say? They just want their kids to progress way better than they did, do you know what I mean? They just want them to have a better life and a future.

This sense of responsibility was also addressed by John, whose children and wife were very supportive of his studies, '*They support it, yeah. They support it, so they, you know, like I don't let them down. So, I am close here. I am not far from, all the time, but they support me so like, to tell the truth, I have good support'*.

6.4 Being a role model – the importance of children and wider family

Another of the themes that emerged was that these migrant students were pursuing higher level education for their families, as well as for themselves (Angie, Liz, Anne, John, Tek-kwo, Hazel, Mera). Many talked about being a role model or setting good examples (Anne and Mera). As a result of their attending college, some parents described conversations with their respective children, who were of a variety of different ages, about their educational futures. For some, they knew they were setting a precedence within their families (John, Liz, and Mera). Others who did not have children also described how their choices to go to higher education were received by their families (Princess and Tek-kwo). Although families were in general very encouraging, some reported the added weight of a sense of duty and

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responsibility they felt to their families as a result of their choice to go to college (Hazel and Anne).

Anne, who is a lone parent, felt that her decision to go to college, and how she tried to do everything she could to improve her family's future, was important for her primary aged children to see. She discussed being a role model for her children and felt she was setting them a good example,

> I've got to do something with my life, not just sit and do nothing. Then I thought, I just want to set a good example to my kids as well. Yeah. I think motivate them, the fact that I go to school. I find it so motivating for them to, because they say, "If Mommy is doing her homework, we should do our homework too"… My daughter wants to go to Trinity. She has been talking about Trinity and she's only in primary school.

Liz also expressed her hope that she provided a good example, and she mentioned her children's admiration for her and how it affirmed her decision,

> I hope I am a positive role model for them, I hope … My older one, she's 22. She will be 23. And now she was ... I remember her saying that she's looking up to me that I came back to college. And that she admires that …So I was very pleased with that.

Tek-kwo's father and most of his siblings had all studied in higher education in South Sudan. He felt that any student who grew up in a family that had access to education was likely to be easily motivated

but he also felt that it would be important for someone who grew up in a family that did not have an education to take the opportunity if it presented,

> *If you have family, if you come from a family that they're all going to school and they're doing well in their life, of course that will give you motivation. But if you have a family that at least not, let's say no one has gone to school, and then you want to be the pillar of that, then that's also another thing that will also motivate you…. So there are three ways, family, family and then maybe family as well.*

6.4.1 Putting down roots in education

Now that they were students, many of the participants who were themselves parents wanted their children to have the same third level experiences as they did. John was keen for his teenage son to follow in his footsteps and to keep trying various possibilities to study at third level in the future. '*So, it's 100%. I keep pushing him like "Keep on your studies to get the higher level, to get the higher points," and to get as good options as he can, you know'.* Mera would also like her children to follow her to college although she recognised that as her eldest son was so young (he was six years at the time of the interview), other interests may claim him too, although she was able to offer him a pragmatic solution,

> *Yes, I want them to finish college before do anything because it's very good to have a Cert if you want to work. Okay, my son, he is crazy about football.[laughter] He said, 'I'll be football player, I'll get a lot of money, I'll be fine, why I have to study?'. I told him you can do a Masters in Software in sport stuff so at least you can understand your muscles.*

6.5 Pressures

Students in higher education can experience not only the financial burden of trying to afford their education, but they can also encounter other stressors that are unique to themselves. Everyone reported at least one pressure of varying types including: family, financial, other work commitments, learning skills and language needs. There were different pressures for the older students (which were mostly financial) than for the younger students (which were mostly the pressure of parental expectation). Some of the actions they had to take in order to continue their studies were in making compromises between the needs of their families and their own needs (Anne), and for some of the women in the study, there were moments when they recognised their own particular roles as students and as members of families had specific consequences for them (Mera, Anne, and Liz).

6.5.1 Living up to family expectations – the culture of education at home

Section 6.3.1 reported on the importance of family. One connecting and often less talked about theme was the feelings of pressure and responsibility that the participants experienced with their immediate and wider families. It was apparent from some of the participants' accounts that there were clear cultures of learning and education in their homes, regardless of whether their parents had attended higher

education, or not. Education was seen as significant in the participants' home.

Hazel, whose parents did not go to college, talked about how important higher education is for her wider family and that sometimes there is pressure in living up to expectations. Hazel said that not only were her parents vested in her educational and future success but that there was a whole community of people around them that took an interest too. Sometimes the pressure to continue a course even when the individual has lost interest in it. She also described friends who completed courses they hated in order to please their parents,

> *She* [a student relative] *didn't like what she was doing and she told the parents that she didn't like it. The parents were really, really disappointed, and then obviously the parents feel disappointed and they think that the relatives would think that they didn't do a good job of child raising, making the person choose what they want in life ... So, then it becomes a cycle, and cycle, and cycle of this person saying this and this person saying this and then them thinking "That's not a good thing" and then they pressure you and you put more pressure on you trying to get yourself back into college… for [the students] it's a case of most of them don't really like the course that they're doing, but because their parents are really ...*

Hazel continues by sharing her own sense that this is especially strong 'in African households' continuing,

> *…it's always like ... Well, most people that choose science it's only because "Doctors this, doctors that"… but they eventually when they progress further and then they realize "This is actually really difficult for me", it's hard for them to actually say "Okay, I'm really going to just quit and go" because at the back of their mind they're thinking "What if I disappoint my parents, what if this ...",*

*so it becomes much of a strain for them to actually further on ...
try and study, and they just, oh God, they just go haywire,
literally… There's always an influence from parents, I feel like it's
always a pressure… Or they will tell you, it's always the phrase
of "I'm not doing this for me, I'm doing it for you", that's always a
main phrase.*

Hazel went on to give an example of a friend who was aiming to
complete a college course he did not like in order to please his parents
because this is important for them.

*Take for example now, one guy that I know actually, he's doing
... He's in third year, he's doing I think engineering or something,
but because his parents live all the way down in ... Where was
it? I think they live down in Dublin or something, I really can't
remember, but he literally hates his course, he just doesn't like it
at all. At this stage, he's just going there just so he can just go
and graduate and leave college, even straight after college he's
not going to do anything related to what he's doing now. So,
because he just wants to make his parents proud, he's just gonna
push through, get it done, and then that's it.*

Although she knows that she would find it difficult to study something
she didn't like, Hazel is also aware that if she dropped out, she would
also be creating upset not only within her own family, but also in her
wider family,

*At the back of my head … "I know it's for me, but if I don't like it,
I don't like it", do you know what I mean? But then in a sense that
you feel like "Oh God, they went through this to do this ..." If I just
say "Mom, Dad, I'm dropping out, college is not for me" it would
be like a backlash - the whole family like "Why would you drop
out of college?... it's the only ... That would be the main line,
education is the key to everything.*

Apart from feeling responsibility to not disappoint her parents because
of the efforts they were making for her, Hazel's ambition was to pass

all her modules, partly to make them proud of her, but also so that they

did not incur additional expense if she had to repeat a failed module,

> *Yeah. See for them it wasn't a case of ... How can I put this? They wanted me to come into college, they want ... 'cause obviously I did really, really well for my Leaving Cert compared to how other people from the centre [Direct Provision Centre] would have done. So, they were really proud of that and obviously I'd always wanted to go to college as well, but for them it was a case ... if I fail any modules, that was the main pressure on me because I felt like I need to actually get the right grades in every single module that I do.*

Anne also explained the influence of her parents' attitude to having an

education and how it was a precondition of good family participation,

> *My parents gave us a good education from the start. My dad was a civil engineer, my mom was a secretary. So, we had no other way… "You have to go to school, you have to study, or else you can't live in the house"…Yeah, there was an expectation, and we always got gifts if you got a good grade, so that boosted us up.*

6.5.2 Balancing family life and studies

For some participants, studying in higher education was made more

complex by the need to balance their family lives and their own

personal study objectives. It was clear that the participants who

reported on their family responsibilities grappled with decision-making

on a constant basis and while most did not name 'guilt' as an emotional

feeling they had experienced, there was a sense of it in their reflections

on themselves and in how they explained their choices. At various

points, those participants with families reflected on their multiple

identities as parents, students, and as partners. The intersections of these identities were at times challenging for them and for their families. Five of the participants were parents whose children lived with them; two of the participant parents were parenting alone. For some of the participants, running a home, a family, and studying was especially challenging as there were demands on their time, and in some cases, there were financial pressures because they were not earning an income while they were studying.

6.5.3 Parenting

The role of parenting, which mostly impacted women in the study was evident in the information which was shared by some of the participants. While some made choices to go to college independently, others had to factor in partners and children before coming to a decision. One participant who wanted to have children knew that she would also have to include her future family plans in her thinking about becoming a student. Being a lone parent presented additional time-management problems and other challenges. For both Anne and Angie, there was a sense of very careful management of their time so that after they finished their college day, their children's needs were met first. Only then could they feel they should engage with their own evening study. Anne referred to the pressures of balancing family schedules and college while coping alone. Because there was no

flexibility in the hours of care at her children's after-school care, she regularly had to leave class early to pick them up on time,

> *They have to go to an after school, and I have to pick them up by 5:30 because the afterschool, they're always the last ones. I'm supposed to pick them up 5:15. I leave the class half an hour early, or even 45 minutes early so I can meet up to pick them, go home, do their dinner, check their homework. They have a bath. You have to chit chat and listen to what they did all day. They get to bed, I do all my cleaning up, and then that's when I have [time] to go through what I've studied… What I do on Friday, I don't let them go to the after school because I finish at 2 o'clock, so immediately I'm finished here, I go straight to the school, pick them from the school, then I'll take them to McDonald's or I'll take them somewhere. You know, kids are kids. They'll always have a birthday on Saturday they'll always have something to do on Saturdays, so I'll just have to balance in between my cleaning, my laundry, my cooking and everything on the Saturday. On Sunday morning, they want to go to Mass.*

Angie talked about the isolation of being a lone parent of a small child while being a student. Although her father and brother lived in a nearby town to her home, she did not rely on them for childcare as they were both working. Any free time she could find was spent on her studies, *I live far away, I have a small kid and I didn't have time for any extracurricular activities at all.* Angie also had to leave class early to be back in her hometown in time to collect her baby from childcare,

> *I knew, I wouldn't have time at all. Because I had to go at 4:30 maximum. Even though from any class that would finish at five, I would ask permission, and I would have to be in [Place] at five-thirty to pick up my baby.*

For those participants sharing their family lives with a partner, the realities of managing their home life and college life was also a challenge. Liz described the amount of organisation that took place for her studies and family life. She shared a family car with her husband and had to organise her travel to and from college around that. One example of her role in the family not changing, which she mentioned, was squeezing the grocery shopping, which she did weekly for the family throughout her studies, into the free time in her college timetable,

> *I guess the whole thing that I have family is a big thing that people make a person not to be so careless about the time. My schedule is really tight. After ... before 5:00, I ... if I don't have a class, I go and get my husband to ... I ... to pick him up from work. If I have a class after 5:00, what happens once a week, that time he has to get somebody to give him a lift. Otherwise, I'll go and pick him up. So, I quite, kind of, tight around some things throughout the day. Sometimes it's grocery shopping for family.*

Liz spoke about the imbalance in roles in her family even though she was away from the home for much of each day. It was clear that her family did not see that her shifting identity to being a student was anything that could impinge on their family life. Liz also referred to the difficulties for women who had traditional family roles in accessing education for themselves. For Liz, living in a remote area resulted in problems of accessing education and a lack of choice because of family obligations,

And the gender thing, that we women always care of the family, even though they come home and sit with the feet up. I'm not saying who… [Liz then mouthed the word 'husband'] … And my husband, he's a human being who knows how to cook as well. And I cared for him and I supported him when he needed it. Why can't I take, now, the time when I need it? I deserve it… There's not really much choice if you are not really in the capital city or in the big cities. And especially if you have kids... So, there is not really much to go for, for a woman with children.

Mera reflected that in order to realise her ambition of being a mother and being a student, she knew she would have to combine these roles, even if it meant being pregnant while she was a student,

I can't stop ten years until I get another baby. Specially for me because I love kids. So, every time I was pregnant, and doing the course… I was pregnant. I remember my daughter, I was in second year Engineering, it's the last Bachelor degree, and my daughter she came after [the] exam in five days.

6.5.4 The hum of family life – 'Because you can't drop the kids'

Despite that fact that going to college when would-be students have family means that changes happen for not only the student but to an extent for the wider family too, it was interesting to hear how family life went on as usual for many. A number of students highlighted how difficult it could be to find quiet time to get anything done at home. For John, family life came with an inherent noise level and while he says he would have liked to use YouTube videos to help him in his study and revision, he found that impossible,

> *… you need to be quiet on your own… But in my busy family home, you can't listen, to tell you the truth, so that's why I think one reason why [I'm] avoiding YouTube, so I better, I can't listen while my kids doing something, but I can read.*

Anne commented about how she had to wait for her children to fall asleep so that she could use the quiet time to study,

> *I read when they are asleep. That's the only way I can read. Cos, when they are awake, either one is on the TV, or one is shouting. You know, kids are young and they're always shouting, and "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!*

John described the constant concern about his family and managing his time and the impact of these on him and his studies. Occasionally, the pressures of trying to make everything happen in his family meant that he experienced stress about his studies, and even when there was time off during the summer, he had other responsibilities to his children,

> *… it is a bit difficult because it seems like, life as you know has all ups and downs, and all you know, everything has to be done, and the search for family life, and programmes you know, everything has to be done… Too much. Too much yeah, it ... You see, at the moment, I am too much pressurized with the studies… You have your family, you have the kids all summer.*

Anne was particularly clear about how she made choices all the time to balance all the conflicting demands on her time and for her children's needs,

Usually, what really puts you off is if you can't meet ... you can't cope with the kids. If you have kids, kids have a lot of needs, the school needs this, they're having a school trip. And if you're not working ... because you can't juggle kids, work, school. You can't. You have to pick one or two. Kids and school, or kids and work. Because you can't drop the kids.

6.6 Organisational culture of teaching and learning

The range of support and access to facilities offered by the IoT they attended, was another area which was mentioned by many of the participants. The findings here suggest that the organisational culture of teaching and learning was one factor in their progression through, and success in their studies.

6.6.1 'It's my home!'

Fitting in at college was expressed by four of the participants in terms of belonging to a family and being at home. It was clear that relationships among students, and also with staff contributed significantly to these reports. The words 'family' and 'home' were used by a number of students to describe their attachment to their college. For John, this feeling of being in a family strengthened his feeling of belonging,

Look, you can see it in every aspect, because everything happens in college and you, you're a part of it… the college as well because you know like, like a family.

Princess made a distinction between her relationships with people outside of college and inside of college, where she felt she had more confidence in people and commented on how happy being in college made her feel,

> *I think it's really good to someone in the college because outside of college you cannot trust the people. But when you find that people in the college, whom I consider like your family members… Yeah, everyone are very nice. Like, all are like genuine people and very smiley. All the time. Early morning when you're, when your day started from a smile, whole day goes very good… I never found that I am outside of my family. Like once I am in college I feel very happy and feel very relaxed.*

Mera reported that her sense of integration into the college made it feel like a second home to her,

> *It's my second home… It's my home! I know everything here!*

Anne also talked about college being a home from home for her,

> *It makes you feel all right. I'm part of a society. I find* [Name of college] *like a society, not only a college. It's like a home, like a family home.*

6.6.2 Lecturers as supporters

There are a multitude of ways of identifying the types of collaborative process that can engage educators, students, and institutions of education. These can range from activities *for* the curriculum, *in* the curriculum, to course evaluation, and peer review. From a student's

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perspective, and especially when whole-class approaches to collaborative practices are engaged, the most immediate experience of active collaboration is when educators and students work together to negotiate facets of the learning process. Many of the participants described how well they got on with their lecturers and mentioned how these positive experiences helped them to progress in their studies. Some talked warmly of their encounters with their lecturers. John felt that his lecturers were available to them and were involved in the group,

> *… from my point of view ... But I saw that in the Access course, there were, all the help we needed was there, and especially for lecturers. Every lecturer gave us the max they could do for us.*

Anne appreciated the guidance and advice which her lecturers gave her when she was feeling challenged by her studies,

> *All the lecturers are really good, like they really helped a lot. Sometimes, I do meet a lecturer and talk. It makes you feel ... You pick something from them to give you advice or talk to you about something. It's not the end of the world. Like, "You're going through a lot of stuff but it's not the end of the world," and, "Just focus on this way."*

Tek-kwo commented on the fairness with which he felt he was treated in class,

> *It's only how you feel and how you work to integrate into the college. Because some people might say that you're not welcome, but it is only on your side. But when you sit in the classes, your contribution and somebody's contributions,*

unless there's a mistake and if there's a mistake, the lecturer will correct you and all of you will be in the same level. And then I don't see a different between international student and then the local student.

Some of these first-generation migrant students had very positive relationships with both their lecturers and classmates. Molly, however, reported that while she had good experiences with her lecturers, she was less engaged with her classmates as she felt that they saw her as overly successful. Molly had won some culinary arts competitions and was congratulated in class which she said her classmates did not acknowledge.

> *The lecturers are like very, very helpful, very nice, like… Every lecturer was very helpful because they all want us to succeed because our success is their success… I got along with lecturers and everyone else [staff], but [did I] like my classmates?... no! And I think they were mad at me or I don't know, jealous or something, but I actually came back from competition at the [Place]. I was representing the college. I was kind of the best culinary student in college. And the lecturer came into the class and he goes, "Oh congratulations champ." And everyone just looked at me. But, nobody said anything. Just like nothing'.*

Molly was also supported by her lecturers to remain in college when she felt she would not be able to cope the study load as well as supporting herself through work,

> *… because that two years my head was fried proper. The second year was like, "Oh Jesus." Every two days, like the third year, probably from February to like April, I wanted to drop out of college every two days… Everyone was like, "Okay now. Just*

stop panicking." I actually, I don't like failing so I was afraid I'm going to fail.

Princess noted how supportive her lecturers were for her learning and felt that they understood her as a learner so well, that they could pre-empt some of her questions,

> *… I'm very lucky that I found my lecturers like, and yeah, and even they understand what I'm going to say. And even if I'm not asking a question, they know that there is a question, but I am not asking that, they know me a lot'… they always answer to my question, sometimes I found that because of English I couldn't ask a question related with the topic but they understand my questions and answers to my enquiries. But the answer they give, that is very related… what I wanted to know.*

Hazel also commented on the high level of support, both personal, and academic she felt she and her classmates received from their lecturers,

> *…the lecturers are amazing. They literally really help you… so it was much easier to settle in and just understand everything… but once you come into college, lecturers are really helpful, they actually do worry about you. If you're not in class, they'll say the next day you see them like "Well, you weren't in my class yesterday, were you?" "No" "Okay, just try catch up". Do you know what I mean? It's all like "Try catch up"… But then here, they don't really do a follow up on you but they just check on you and see how you're holding up…The lecturer is just here so he knows who's who in the class,*

The support from lecturers helped some of the participants to continue their studies past the level they had originally thought they would

complete. Mera explained how she approached her learning one programme level at a time. Her initial thoughts were that she would complete the Access programme and see how it went. Soon she found that her lecturers had noticed her ability and encouraged her to keep going to complete, firstly, a level 7 degree, followed by a level 8 degree[36], and then to study for a masters. Despite her initial hesitancy, she followed their advice,

> *Every time I said I will finish this course and I'll try to find a job. But every time I finish something, my lecturer or anybody told me, "Oh, Mera, why you not complete this one. You will be very good if you finish this one and you will find a better job." So, I do it, I do it. But actually every time I say, after a while I found they were right. I have to do it. It's better for me.*

Students were not only encouraged to continue their studies by lecturers, they were also seen as co-sharers of knowledge. The following extract describes a learning and teaching interaction that took place between Anne and her maths lecturer in class and sums up the mutual respect the lecturer and Anne had for each other and the emergence of a shared sense of learning,

> *Yes. Every time my lecturer would teach, when we're doing maths, and I'd always say, "But do you think there's another way we can get that?" I always used to say it in class. And he'd always say, "Come on up. Show us which other way." And we always used to have the board. He always used to do that in class. He used to have Anne's side and his side. He always taught that side [Anne pointed to one side of a whiteboard to demonstrate] and I would help... He actually developed that [other side of whiteboard] and he always kept us thinking,*

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[36] In Institutes of Technology, students have the option on some courses to develop their qualifications incrementally.

"Anne, do you know another way of doing it?" I would say, "Yeah, I will show you how to do it a different way." And I would do it. And finally, I would come to the same answer… Other students in class apparently came to him, to ask my way; was probably much easier or much understandable compared to what he taught them. But he was okay with it, said, "As long as you finally come to your answer, and you show me how you are doing your work. That's grand with me."

6.6.3 Challenges with the curriculum

While some of the students here commented favourably about their experiences of learning in college, there were others who had difficulty with adjusting to the nature of a west-centric curriculum and to working in groups that were made up of mainly Irish students. The two students who spoke most of these challenges were postgraduate students with experiences of studying in their home countries and in Ireland. Tia explained the differences she had to adapt to in order to study for her Masters,

> … for Masters study, we did have some textbooks, but some books are really deep, deep culture, it's deep. So, we need a lot of time to study that…. So, we learned different styles of lectures here, and for life. The experience of studying life, it was so different within China. We needed to look after our study, and our life overseas… the lecturer taught something in class, which referred to the Irish something. So, for the international students, they were confused about that…. So, it's different, the thinking way between Irish and the Chinese. So, for Chinese, they might be more humble. So, or for Irish, the different thinking way. I don't know, the barriers. The culture shock, I think so…

Angie also found the experiences challenging and felt that some

classmates tried to be strategic about who they did groupwork with,

> at the beginning, it was a little to adapt because all the
> teachers, they was speaking very, very fast… Like most of
> Irish people didn't like to be in the same people as Chinese.
> Because they would have to proofread and explain it more.

6.6.4 Relationships with other students

Developing positive relationships with peers in any group situation can

suggest that an individual has adapted to the new environment and is

experiencing a sense of sharing and belonging. In many cases the

relationships these students formed at the beginning of their studies

there were maintained throughout the following years in college and

seemed to provide encouragement and support to those participants

who had taken the programme. Both males and females were pleased

about the friendships they formed and maintained. John described his

experiences,

> *Yeah, and in the first year we had very good, as we were a very*
> *good group. So, we had organized being time out, and I had a*
> *party for people in the course and everything. So, we've been*
> *out for a few drinks, and we enjoy our time out together, so we*
> *have good memories.*

Mera had to make new contacts and friendships without the benefit of

a support group when she first arrived in Ireland. '*In the start it was*

very hard especially [because] *my husband he used to work in hotels*

and restaurants, so he finished at late time. So, I was alone, I didn't have friends. Even at this time, there was not a lot of community here like Egyptian or Arab people'. Mera mentioned the new friendships she developed with other students. '*It was very good experience… And I have friends!'.* Her friendship circle widened as she continued through her studies so that, by the time she reached masters level, she had a supportive circle of friends that she had met through college,

> *We always go out together. We always get dinner together. Actually, we are from several country. From Brazil, from India. Even we have a girl, she's not with us, but she's in … doing Sports Master, and she's from Germany… And we have group and WhatsApp all the time … we text each other.*

John made the point that most other students in his class continued their studies past the initial Access programme and this group of people remained friends after, although they had moved into different degree programmes,

> *Actually, there are, actually, because my group of Access course I think was the most organized, I think. My group of Access course, most of the people who finished the Access course, they are around the college here… Actually, all our group, we still be in touch in the main canteen. All the time we see each other. We're sitting down. We're sharing. We're talking, we're having … laughing… Oh, very, very important. Very important because you know like sharing our thoughts. So, to say "How are you doing? How's progress?" And it seems like everyone is doing something, or you know, it's very good actually, yeah.*

Mera also mentioned that she regularly encountered some of her past classmates in her locality, including one person who worked in the creche her son attended, and another who worked in her local supermarket.

She didn't do with me with Engineering but still around… she is working in my son's crèche. Another one, she was mum for twenty years but after [her] *course, she is working in SuperValu in* [Place], *and I live in* [Place] *area. So, every time I go there, I speak and ok.*

Some of the participants evolved their roles into informal mentor and supporter of other students in their class, for Anne, being as encouraging and supportive as possible was important for her,

I think they'd probably say I'm like a mom to them. I mean, they don't think I'm that old. If you miss class, I kind of get worried and I will always text them, "What happened? Why didn't you come into class? Is everything okay?" I collect the notes, and I keep forwarding the notes to them. I don't know why I do it… I'll always follow up if you miss out. A few always want to drop out, and I just keep telling them, "Keep going. If I can do it, you can still do it." Just giving a push.

6.7 Mature students

A number of participants, (seven), fell into the category of mature students. All of the mature students spoke about the difference in age between themselves and younger students in their classes. Tia had dual roles of being a student and also as an informal mentor for

younger students from her country while she was studying. She struggled initially to understand them,

> *And for the first week, I just, I thought, I was thinking how everything's so totally different with all the students, they were too young, and sometimes they liked to talk about some like computer games, or some people's gossip. I found that was just a waste of my time. I didn't know a lot of like fashionable things, like they thought. So, they like to talk about small things, and small emotion with others… I don't know how to get on well with the students, like five or six, seven years younger than me. I like to make friends with people around my age or over my age, so sometimes um you kind of understand what they think, you know.. So, I can't go inside their life so yeah sometimes when I talk to some students or some younger students in college so they couldn't have been the same level so it's hard to understand them, why they like this or ... And so sometimes I don't get any much more information from it 'cause I don't like to talk.*

Angie missed out on opportunities to socialise with her classmates as she had less free time than the other students in her group. Her main responsibility after her college day was to her baby, and because she lived some distance from the college, she could not join the group in the evenings,

> *I would like to have more time maybe to spend with my colleagues, to have better relationship, but I don't know how I could have that… after exams, they were going out, but I couldn't because, no time, and I had to be home by six or seven… Yeah, but you know, people have their own habits, and they would love more the night. Cos, I think we said something about the day, but they would be fine, but most of the people wanted the night. To go in the club, to dance. I don't feel I have that age any more… It was five years [age gap], but of mentality it was big.*

Liz regretted the age gap between her and younger classmates as she felt it was challenging for her to befriend younger students, some of whom were approximately the same age as her own children,

> *But it is very hard to get any connection with them because of the age gap. Yeah. And I have that feeling that they may have such a big respect to my age that they do not dare, maybe, to be more personal. You know?... They are all very nice young people. Very nice. I didn't experience nothing negative with them, like when we are talking that it would be rude or wrong… when I meet the mature students from some classes, it's much more easier for me to find ... to make connection… Like, yes, I do feel supported, but at times, I feel lonely because of the way it is. Just that's life.*

Tek-kwo, on the other hand, did not find the difference in age an impediment to friendships,

> *It help, because there's that different that make you all come together. So there's no much different between the young adults and then ... I believe it's fine.*

For Tia, a lack of other mature classmates with similar interests to her was a drawback for her. Part of her reservations had to do with the different cultural experiences she was having, and partly because she felt the younger students presumed they knew more than she thought they did. She also felt the students from Ireland did not understand that Tia and other students from China do not have all the background information to Irish business and so they asked for help and

confirmation from their classmates. Sometimes, she felt that she was looked on as lazy, or not participating well by her project group,

> *And sometimes… um… I like to talk to the mature students of the same age and we can have something to communicate well. And for younger students, yeah it's a problem for them. Another thing, when I do some homework with… ah… some younger students or some um Irish students, yeah so, some cultural things shocked me, or they'll make me troubled. When I discuss something with younger, younger students, they like to be in control. They want to control everything. They thought they were ambitious, maybe they were arrogant, but they didn't know… say for the research. It's researching work study, and for Chinese they like ... some Chinese, they just look to the Irish people to help them, to check the information, if they're okay or not. Sometimes they were not confident. But for Irish, they thought they were lazy. So, they need to check by themselves. So, just look for Chinese people, they just want to [be] approved by somebody. But I just, I think is the study, learning culture. Yeah.*

Seven of the participants in this study were mature students when they began their studies. One interesting topic that a number of them brought up in conversation was their perception of themselves as learners in comparison to younger classmates. To compensate for what they believed were personal shortcomings influenced by their age and responsibilities, this group of participants described their strategies to address this. John used his summer to revise and work on material for the upcoming academic year. He bought the equipment he used in class in order to practice on at home,

> *So first of all, as I said, because I'm a mature student I, it feels like in a way, a young one can catch the studies more easy than me. So, for myself, so to finish a lab, to finish, I need like, if*

young one need half an hour, I for sure need two, three hours myself… So, like I see them, like my kids, you know, like many options because they are like, they have more like, well they are very advanced actually, to tell the truth, in front of being compared to my catching the things. But they are catching the things, but they are not motivated too much… Similar is one point, but another is a fresh memory. Fresh brain, you know, that you can't forget that. Can't avoid that… You know, the brain of a young one is not the same as my brain, you know, to tell the truth…Yeah. Just I'm saying like I see like even today, at the end of the studies I am learning, but if I study 20 hours, he needs only two hours to study, you know, so I need to spend 18 more hours just to study to catch [up with] his studies. But anything for this year coming up, I have some projects like I am doing now, and I have studies. So, through the summer time I see like I might stress a bit more about the project because this project's coming due next year. So that's been something like to keep going, so it's, I will have my equipment at home. I bought them online, so I have them.

Tia compared herself to the younger students and commented on the differences in energy level,

So, for studying way, I thought sometimes they were better than me. So, they were more energetic than me. So, they were young, so sometimes they stayed up late, overnight. So, they were just very fine for the following day

John also reflected on the fact that for all mature students they were likely to have their own personal challenges,

I see a lot of people who are struggling to tell the truth because as a mature student, you have all the responsibilities, and you have all problems… So, one of our group, he's disabled, like. So, this means every single person has his problems, you know. But at the end of the day, if you keep studying and get in the course, that's a big achievement for everyone.

6.8 Personal fulfilment

As the participants moved though their descriptions of their experiences of being students, their emerging self-efficacy and agency was becoming apparent. While their decision around going to college was often enmeshed in their family responsibilities, it was clear that for many of the participants, the long-term aspiration was for better jobs and lives. However, a better job was not only about financial security, it was also about a representation of the person as they envisioned themselves.

Anne felt her future personal development lay in changing her career direction,

> *I just sat down and I was thinking. It was before I decided to come back to education. Not that it's a bad job [cleaning job], but I was thinking of, in terms of growing, not just being where I am in the same position.*

For Liz, talking about her decision to go on to higher education caused her to reflect on not only the pressures of being the main homemaker in her family but also to reflect on her changing view of herself and her role in her family. As her identity as a student emerged and she became more immersed in her studies, it was apparent to her that some of the roles in the family need to change and expand. She begins "*And I kept trying to keep my care about people in the house the same level as it was before when I wasn't studying. But I found myself so stressed out. And nobody gave a 'beep' how I feel. And I didn't see too*

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much appreciation anyhow". She then explains how being in college has empowered her to act differently,

> *So, I just told them that I am not able anymore to maintain the care I had done before. They are able, all of them, to cook for themselves if they want to. And I cannot cook during the week, they have to do their self when they want to. And I don't care because if I am studying, nobody gives me a dinner. I am on toast and coffee and that's it. So I said, "Why am I doing this extra?"…*

Making these changes wasn't always easy, she continues,

> *And the feeling of the guilt at first. But then, as I got accustomed to this, I realized, like, whoever cared for me? I was always the one who cared for them. Don't I deserve some time when I am cared for? Or at least, taking some chores off my hands? So now I don't feel that guilt… And it wasn't easy. And it's still a process… It was very hard for me to let go and just not take responsibility anymore… at first, I never thought about, like, I did think about the college but I didn't really have courage even to start, kind of plan for it. But when we came here and [Name] was telling us about the Access Course and everything. So, I kind of said, "Let's give it a try."*

Angie felt she had overcome some of her fears by returning to study. Some of the tasks she had to complete were new and unfamiliar to her, but she felt by doing them she overcame her reservations,

> *I had to do about four focus groups, and that was very challenging for me in the first day I heard that, because I discussed it with my supervisor. I was a little bit afraid, but I after I see, well, I wanted Master, I have to do it. No more fear. A little bit shy, but I overcome, because ... and I don't hear that, what you have to do, you have to do, you have no choice.*

Molly discovered through her study that she enjoyed instructing and teaching and has begun to consider a career in education as part of her future,

> *I love teaching people, even now at work, even that one of the guys. He is there like from November, but I feel like I'm showing him stuff how to do… When I started, I kept seeing ... he kept doing stuff and then I couldn't say anything because I was new, but now I told him. Or like, teach him how to make shortbread. And then I see him actually listen to me from the side and I'm actually proud of it. It makes me happy, so I think I'll be a good lecturer… because like I work hard to learn what I know now. So, I love to save time when people listen and just teach them, you know? What I've found out for like years or whatever.*

Others too were considering their future options. Anne had seen how being in college had allowed her to explore her growth as a person and in her role amongst others. Like Molly, she was also considering a career in education in the future although for the immediate future she was planning on applying to a particular firm and mentioned that *'I have a jacket I have bought to work in* [Name of company]*'.*

Hazel's plans for her future included the likelihood of leaving her family and moving away, possibly to another country,

> *… obviously I'd like to get the big, really big crazy experience like working a big firm or something like that, so I think I'd like… I'll probably need to move Dublin, or further. We'll see how it goes. For now, it's still ... How do I say? how do I say? ... Thinking process, it's a little thinking process.*

Anne felt it was important to encourage other mature friends to come back to education as she knew from her own experience how much it contributed to a sense of well-being and it had developed her confidence,

> I really encourage. I've encouraged a few people who've come back to college, mature students who think, "When I get there, what am I going to do? I probably won't be understanding." I said, "No. You'll be surprised." What I always say is, "It boosts your confidence. It brings a different person out of you. You become so confident and focused, and you feel like you're somewhere, and you're heading somewhere. If you start picking the confidence now when you're in college, that's how you're going to ...

Of the eight students who were current students at the time of the study, many of them referred to their plans for after leaving higher education. The main focus was on entering the employment market, but for some, such as Anne, thinking about the moment of leaving had an emotional tone,

> I feel like when I finish college it's like I'm moving from one family and I'm going to another family. It's like I'll be going to a new home, or joining another new family because it's a job. You have to start adjusting to the new family. I'll be a bit sad.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings under the themes of witing to join college, support networks, being a role model, pressures, organisational culture of teaching and learning, mature student

experiences, and personal fulfilment. Overall, the participants indicated satisfaction with their experiences of being students of higher education. Despite a range of challenges which the participants faced, they developed resources of self-efficacy and agency over the course of their studies.

In Chapter 7, the key findings from this study will be discussed through the theoretical framework of Bourdieu with additional insight from Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth and social capital.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The previous two findings chapters presented the experiences shared by first-generation, self-selected migrant participants in order to add to our understanding of their experiences of Higher Education (HE) in an Institute of Technology in Ireland. This study aimed to explore and to give voice to the experiences of this group of first-generation migrant students in HE in Ireland. The first three chapters of this study frame the social and theoretical context in which this study is located.

Chapter 1 documented how Ireland has one of the highest rates of HE participation in Europe with more than 62% of people in the 25 to 34-year-old age group having gained a qualification at HE level (Wilson, 2021). While the percentage of non-traditional students entering HE is also increasing (Department of Education and Science, 2016), there is still considerable under-representation of some groups, including migrants, in HE (HEAR, 2021; HEA, 2019a; Keane, 2013). In response, the Irish State has created a number of pathways, for example, widening participation (WP) policy, further education and training (FET) pathways and through bespoke Access programmes (Fleming et al., 2017) to address some of these issues. However, participation by some, including first-generation migrant students continues to be at a stubbornly lower rate (HEA, 2019; Keane, 2013).

It is argued here that first-generation migrant students in HE in Ireland experience a range of structural barriers to accessing and progressing through HE which were documented in the findings chapters.

This current discussion chapter links the literature and the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 with the data from the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The findings emerged from ten one-to-one semi-structured interviews that aimed to generate practitioner-based knowledge, with the possibility to enlighten research and practice in education. As discussed in Chapter 3, this study is guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework (Bourdieu, 1986) and his concepts of habitus, field, and capital. I employed Bourdieu's concepts, together with Tara Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) which develop Bourdieu's framework in relation to familial capital. I also drew from aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to contextualise the experiential knowledge shared by the participants in the study and to question the values placed on cultural capital by dominant classes. The different frameworks are interspersed throughout the themes presented below. These frameworks allow a deeper understanding of how first-generation migrant students experience HE in Ireland.

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss the findings through these lenses of Bourdieu's (1986) concepts around habitus, field, and capital, and

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). I argue that cultural capital, in particular in the home, is an important marker of success in entering and completing studies in higher education (HE). There are various influences on successful outcomes in HE for students from first generation migrant backgrounds such as long journeys to higher education, family relationships, and engagement with learning. The analysis here argues that first-generation migrant students are often framed in research and by HEIs by a deficit approach in which this group are seen to be lacking in various capitals needed to advance in academic studies (Patfield et al., 2020; Engle & Tinto, 2008). This viewpoint does not take into account the many other resources that this group of students can have. The individuals in this study overcame many challenges at a personal and structural level to accomplish their dreams for a higher education. They do this 'agentically' as they draw on forms of cultural and social capital available to them through community and culture. Employing an asset-based model like Yosso's model to explore student persistence in accessing and navigating HE offers practitioners and HEIs an improved understanding of how first-generation migrant students can be better supported in HE.

Bourdieu (1986) has foregrounded the nature of structure in his theoretical approach and as a result this limits the impact of agency for individuals. This position by Bourdieu (*ibid*) suggests that

individuals cannot control structural effects and hence they are perceived as powerless to bring about change. Yosso (2005) through her ideas around Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) posits an alternative approach so that the traditional assumptions around male, white Eurocentric privilege seen as underpinning Bourdieu's conceptual approach can be challenged through bringing the diversity of people's experiential knowledge from their communities to the fore (O'Shea, 2015; Yosso & García, 2007). Yosso (2006:46) separated the concepts of cultural capital and cultural wealth, emphasising how 'cultural capital is accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but cultural wealth is meant to be shared'. In doing this, Yosso's approach and CCW delegitimises cultural practices that have become dominant. These assertions do not dismiss the very real experiences of structural, often invisible barriers, rather they widen our understanding to infuse perspectives from other cultures.

This chapter has two parts; the first part analyses the main themes that emerged in a way that included pathways ***into*** Higher Education (HE), their experience ***through*** their courses and finally, with an acknowledgement of their lives ***beyond*** their time in a Higher Education Institution. This is followed by a discussion of the contribution of this study, implications, a reflection, and the study's conclusion.

7.2 Long journeys to higher education

Gaining access to HE is a complex experience and presents a diverse range of potential challenges for all students, however, it can have a disproportionate impact on some student groups such as first-generation migrants (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). While a body of research exists on the gaps between the organisational and cultural demands of HE on intending students, this type of research can perpetuate ideas of applicants needing to adapt into the prevailing structures while failing to recognize or examine the individual and more nuanced experiences of migrants and their efforts to access HE. The challenges to access HE include, the recognition of the importance of prior educational and personal experiences (García & Leibrandt, 2020; Maurer, 2021), and structural barriers that block pathways into HE (Thomas & Quinn, 2006).

The findings reveal that before they could enter HE, many of the first-generation migrant students had long waits for acceptance, visas and permissions, information and progression routes, grant aid, and recognition of prior learning and qualifications. The implications of these challenges experienced by many migrant students are discussed in the following sections.

Waiting for immigration status

Initially, immigration status was the largest barrier to entering HE for this group. You will recall how for some, immigration status had a number of impacts on their lives and aspirations. At the time of writing, one participant was waiting for a decision on leave to remain from the Department of Justice. Of the other nine participants, five had successfully applied for residency permits; a process which had taken them on average four years. The findings reveal the impact of this long process of waiting on their educational journey, as well as the power of these institutional forces of the justice system which curtail the educational opportunities of participants by virtue of their migration status.

According to Bourdieu (1986), the power to make people wait is part of the domination by one group over another, all the more so, as hope is gradually eroded through this process. Less powerful groups in society wait because this is a common experience for such groups because those with power exercise their dominance as a means to control others (Crapazano, 1985). Waiting becomes punitive when a person does not know how long they will have to wait. Many migrants spend long periods of time gathering documentation, making applications, and then waiting for official decisions about their lives and families. Their waiting can be precarious and arbitrary. Getting up at the beginning of the week means new starts for most people, but for

migrants waiting for responses and information, the beginning of the week marks more waiting and can weaken their sense of social function, attachment, and hope. Crapazano (1985:43) refers to this as the 'feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability … and all the rage that these feelings provoke'.

This is evident in the example of the loss of hope shared by one of the participants in this study who expressed concern for his acquaintances who had dropped out of college, or who had become involved in crime because of their sense of hopelessness and marginalization. Participants in this study spoke about the feelings and impact of waiting on them as stressful, worrying and creating uncertainty and leading to a lack of autonomy.

Information and progression routes

First-generation migrant students need access to a variety of different types of information for all aspects of living in a new community not just pathways into education. Educational culture varies between different countries and may be unfamiliar for some participants. A theme which runs through this study is the effect of the lack of cultural capital specific to the host country resulting in a knowledge gap between participants' aspirations to enter HE and their capacity to quickly develop strategies to engage with the application process.

Section 5.3 (Waiting for new beginnings) evidences this through Angie's prior attempt to go to college where there had been an absence of information and through Princess's recollection (section 5.8) of needing assistance in making the application to college because of the unfamiliarity of the application process. This demonstrates that although the students were invested in the game, they lacked knowledge and capacity to navigate HE hierarchies in Ireland which can limit their education success. This lack of what Bourdieu (1986) describes as institutional cultural capital (Reay et al., 2005), is particularly difficult for first-generation migrant students as they attempt to decode the 'rules of the game' for progression to HE in Ireland. You will recall in the discussion from chapter 3, on institutional capital vis-a-vis familial capital in education that even if families hold large amounts of economic capital, this is not sufficient if they do not have the appropriate capital to counter the reinforcing role of higher education in reinforcing social inequality (Bourdieu, 1977b).

Rather than the direct route through secondary schooling to higher education via the CAO system, the main progression route for many of these students to primary degrees was through Further Education and Training (FET) programmes delivered by an Education and Training Board (ETB). These FET qualifications then led to an Access programme, or to direct admission to HE. Participants evidenced varying levels of accuracy in the advice they were given, so much so

that Molly had to add a year of study to her wait to enter HE because she had been mis-informed about the number of modules she needed (see section 5.9). Princess completed and passed her Leaving Certificate in Ireland and then completed a VTOS business skills programme before being advised to join an Access programme in HE, which was an elongated route to being admitted to HE.

This demonstrated the need for stronger bridges and more defined pathways between FET and HE to be created. *The National Access Plan: Consultation Paper 2022-2026* (HEA 2021b) clearly states that pathways to HE should be available to all, and that a diverse student population in HE is essential to the cultural and social development of Ireland. At the moment as this study's findings recount, these pathways are often ad hoc and over-subscribed, with a lack of consistent communication and knowledge about them in different communities. In addition, many access programmes charge fees making their access routes and certifications unaffordable for many migrant students (Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2017). Hence, the findings reveal several blocks and unclear pathways from FET to HE for many students from first-generation migrant backgrounds.

Recognised prior learning (RPL) and qualifications

Participants in this study recounted how prior educational qualifications which people earned in their home countries were often not recognised by the colleges or education centres that they applied to. This showed that little, or no, change had occurred since the Linehan & Hogan report in 2008, which outlined similar findings. Although the European Union (EU) 'europass' website (Europass, 2021), provides means to compare educational qualifications between European countries, non-Europeans often struggle to find open, transparent information about their educational qualifications in the Irish system. This can leave people relying on guidance from key supports known to them such as individual tutors in ETBs. When I showed some of the participants in this study the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) Ireland Foreign Qualifications website (NAIRC, 2021), they were surprised to find out about it as they were unaware of it. This lack of awareness of RPL processes is not just a challenge for students applying to HE in Ireland (Murphy, 2019), students in many other countries have similar experiences of the slow uptake of RPL by the third level sector (Luomi Messerer, 2019; Cooper et al., 2017).

The participants' accounts emerging from this research regarding the non-recognition of their existing education in the Irish system were particularly illuminating. Anne had completed her secondary education

to the same standard as her siblings who were accepted onto HE courses in both their home country of Kenya and in the UK, however, her education was not recognised in Ireland. Others who had secondary level educational qualifications from European countries also had the same experience, even though in the case of Molly, her secondary school results were sufficient for her to go to college in Poland. Some said that they took up the offer of an Access course as they felt it was their only remaining option of getting into HE (Anne, Tek-kwo, Liz, John and Princess).

This struggle for admission and lack of recognition of people's existing experiences can be understood as an instance of experiencing the boundary of the field itself, where being allowed entry to the field of education is at stake. Most applications to higher education in Ireland are based on secondary school results which are managed by the Central Applications Office (CAO). This singular normative process of recognition of results can mean that those applicants who have had different experiences of education, and who take different routes to higher education can find recognition of their educational and life experiences in the face of such a strong boundary marker difficult to achieve. The findings of this study suggest that even with the recognition of RPL in policy, such as the Recognition of Prior Learning in the Community Education Sector (AONTAS, 2021), the National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy (SOLAS, 2020), and

the Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021 (HEA, 2018), and at an institutional level by HEIs, at an individual level there are difficulties in accessing the process which lead to long delays, rejections and lack of recognition of people's educational capacities.

A clearer and well-resourced RPL system underpinned by a national database like NAIRC which is then linked to all HEI websites for a clear and transparent recognition of educational qualifications from abroad, would allow intending students to see in a transparent way how their qualifications are assessed. This would also give greater opportunity for those families who choose to have a role in supporting their family members going to college to engage with the process of their preparation and application for HE. This improved online resource could be facilitated by a centralised multilingual web resource for applicants and their families to use (Cin & Doğan, 2020). The implications of not having a readily available, easy to use resource to check against, may mean that some potential students feel their original degrees and certificates are being devalued and ignored and for families interested in engaging with the information about HE choices, this is a barrier to information that could be lifted.

HEIs also play a role in the promotion of the RPL process at an institutional level, which was highlighted by the participants who tried

to engage with RPL in this study. Some found their educational qualifications were not accepted, or needed to be augmented by further study in Ireland. It is notable that Linehan & Hogan (2008) point out that international companies are often better at recognising the value of international qualifications, which leads to the question why educational organisations seem to have more difficulty understanding their merits. This leads to a suggestion that HEIs are to an extent, engaging in cultural reproduction because they are resistant to changing their institutionalised cultural capital to recognise an individual's personal cultural capital, which consists of their professional or academic qualifications. It may also be the situation that the culture within HE is slow to change and to engage with non-standard admissions. The effect according to Bauder (2003) is that RPL itself can become yet another barrier to HE. Admissions policy should be modified to work with applicants' qualifications and prior learning.

7.3 Familial capital and family relationships

As **relationships** highlighted in Chapter 2, first-generation students belong to a small but increasing cohort of non-traditional students in HE about whom less is known (LeBoeuf & Dworkin, 2021; Wainwright & Watts, 2021). Data from this study points to strong family input into the academic lives of their family members in HE in

complex and diverse ways dependent on the migration shifts and geographical network of the family.

Some of the participants in this study now lived considerable distances from their families and in more than one case, there had been long gaps since they had last been able to see family due to cost, and immigration controls. I had expected the locally based families to be supportive of their family members in HE by virtue of their physical proximity, but I had not anticipated the depth of the encouragement and support that families living abroad gave to the participants as testified by three participants. The reasons for the high level of support included the existing culture of higher education within some families; and the role of aspirational capital and pride at the steps the participants were taking to achieve an education, indicating high levels of cultural capital that was available to the students (Mbiti, 1990). These firm links connect with participants' persistence (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

It is also useful to note here that 'family' was viewed by some in this study as a wider network of people which included close family as well as supportive friendships that supplement or replace family in their current context. For example, Molly reports that her peer group has replaced the support role of her original family in her life currently. Hence, the focus on familial capital reveal that it is far more beneficial

to examine this group from the strengths and skills they have through their extended family and social networks, which help in their successful engagement in and through HE. These support networks are returned to below.

In contrast with the literature that says that there is less engagement by parents from migrant backgrounds in the higher education of their children and a lack of family knowledge about going to college (Patfield et al., 2020; Engle & Tinto, 2008), many of the first-generation migrants who participated in this study recounted how important their family networks were to their efforts to enter, and then persist through their education.

Widening participation studies such as Reay et al., (2005), suggested that without family experience of HE, success in HE for children of this group is difficult because families are often seen as having long-lasting influence through all levels of education (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Families are also seen as providing the knowledge that students employ to navigate educational systems (Jabbar et al., 2019). In addition, Mitchall & Jaeger (2018) point out that students' self-determination can be negatively affected by a lack of parental support. However, while this may true for many families without a history and familiarity with higher education, Reay et al., (2005), also acknowledge the complex intersection of class, race and gender in family decisions

and discourses about educational choice. This is further exemplified by Tumuheki et al., (2016) and the findings of this study, which show the complex and influential role that family and extended family, including those families with no prior experience of HE, played in the motivation of family members to enter HE. This points to the complexity of how migrant status may intersect with a range of other features to impact on how family networks and familial capital influences HE access and engagement. Parental education in HE can support access on a general level through cultural capital in the form of knowledge, values, and experiences about education in many cases (Gorard et al., 2001).

Roksa & Kinsley (2019) see parental encouragement, regardless of educational status, as being important; a finding which was replicated in this study and pointing to significance of Yosso's (2005) argument about the strengths of familial capital. Parents may not have had an opportunity to go to college as in one of the findings here, or in other cases, parents may have chosen a different career path for themselves but wish for their child to go to college. This family encouragement and support, regardless of parental education level, is supported by the findings in this study where two participants, whose parents had not attended HE, reported that their self-determination to access HE was enhanced by their families' interest and support. For Mera, her husband was supportive of her studies. Hazel's parents

wanted a different future for their children. This supportive familial capital, I argue, promotes initial HE ambitions and stimulates aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and reinforces resistance capital leading to 'personal persistence capital' that is key for access to and engagement throughout higher education.

Habitus, aspirational capital and motivations for higher education

Habitus, as described in Chapter 3, portrays the underlying dispositions which shape an individual's actions and practices in a social space (Bourdieu, 1986). The participants in this study made strategic decisions about their education based on the set of circumstances they had and the possibility of achieving their wishes of studying in HE.

Bourdieu (1986) defines 'illusio' as being invested in a game and having an understanding of what the stakes are (although this may be at an unconscious level). Illusio is fundamental to the existence of the field (in this case HE) and integral to the competition between the actors in the game and the reproduction of the game. Illusio affects people whose habitus is adaptable, that is, their existing habitus supports them to achieve their goal, in this case, being HE students.

This points to an individual's habitus being alterable. As they enter HE spaces they develop, or embody, the habitus of a student.

There may be a variety of factors which can shape this including, gaining recognition within the field of education (an example of symbolic capital), which Bourdieu (2000:166) describes this as 'a fascinated pursuit for the approval of others', the enhancing of their social standing, and providing for better futures for their families to name just some. In this study, students were very invested in the game of education, and through their accounts of how they managed their approaches to accessing HE, it was clear that they had an awareness of the stakes at play and this suggests that their own dispositions and context make them value the stakes of the game above all else. This concurs with the findings of other studies where there were high levels of investment in the game of education (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama 2012; Reay, 2002).

For some, the findings here point to the personal gains they expected from graduating from HE which included economic benefits where lifetime earnings would improve because of their qualifications and concurs with the findings of Roksa & Kinsley (2019). This showed that the students in this study had an awareness of how their personal efforts could enhance the habitus of the wider family. Reay's (2002)

suggestion that some students see being in higher education as a signifier of personal completeness was seen in the accounts of Anne and Liz in this study, who had both worked in low-paid jobs that were not meaningful. Another finding pointed to the benefit of having an education for improving social status within the wider family and peer groups, which is also seen in Swain & Hammond (2011). This was based on the importance given to qualifications by these groups and was a key feature of the accounts of three interviewees in this study who were from South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, all of whom mentioned the wider kinship groups that their families were located in. The influence of sociocultural factors by family and kinship (Mbiti, 1990) was noticeably strong in their accounts of their motivations for going to college. This symbolic capital (for example, prestige or reputation) accrues to individuals and this capital is seen as bestowing legitimacy or authority in a given field (Bourdieu, 1986).

Aspirational capital, according to Yosso (2005:78) is a type of resilience that creates the possibilities for families to 'dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals'. During the interviews, the students demonstrated aspirational capital for themselves, but also mentioned their families' dreams. While some of the parents of the participants in this study may have had experience of HE, half of the participants' parents did not. Glick & White (2004) talk of studying in

HE being a tradition for some families and Carey (2016) points to the taken-for-granted nature of parents who had experience of HE in expecting their children to follow in their footsteps. Findings in this study point to high levels of parental encouragement from both parents who had experience of HE and those who did not. The presence of family throughout the length of the students' enrolment on HE programmes echoes the findings of Tumuheki et al., (2016). Kiyama & Harper (2018) and Feinstein et al., (2004) who reported on the long-lasting influence of family through all levels of education.

In at least two cases in this study, the motivation for study in HE came about because the individuals wanted to prove someone wrong which was also reported in Schmidt et al., (2014). This demonstrates Yosso's (2005:80) concept of resistant capital which relates to the development of skills and knowledge that emerge as 'resistance to subordination'. This capital was a strong motivator for engaging and persevering in HE. In one case, Anne, felt underestimated by her ETB centre director who did not think she would be a candidate for HE. Anne subsequently enjoyed telling the centre head that she had been accepted into HE. For another participant, Molly, a lack of close relationships with her classmates spurred her on to win in culinary competitions. This finding here suggests that resistance and navigational capital can be employed at an individual level to achieve goals (Yosso, 2005). The accounts of the students here show that they were able to draw on

their existing capital resources that supported them in the transition to HE. Schmidt et al., (2014) also found similar motivational reasons for perseverance to the findings here.

Aspirational capital and family support in navigating higher education

Family support in this study encompasses a number of areas of a student's life including making cultural and social capital available in the form of learning, financial support, and emotional and practical support. While the existing literature indicates that the greatest influence on whether an individual attends HE is the level of education their parents have achieved (Reay et al., 2005), economic status in combination with first-generation status seems to have a larger influence than other factors such as gender or race on student enrolment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In this study, findings show that the participants, regardless of parental level of education, and in situations where finances were difficult, demonstrated the ability to engage with aspirational and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) in order to access HE. This demonstrates that these students were able to draw on their own, or on their families' social and cultural capitals, similar to findings by Yosso (2005). They did acknowledge that this was not true of all of their contemporaries, indicating the complexity of this issue.

Participants reported that their first weeks in college, a time when many people find the adjustment to a new learning culture, as very challenging. I note that many participants drew support from various friends and family during this period. Where they could, families lent financial, emotional, and practical support, such as childcare and cooking meals. Taking a Bourdieusian approach, the lack of initial familiarity of the field might have suggested a lack of focus on third-level study by those families with no experience of higher education, however, this was not found to be the case, and the opposite was apparent where families built their social capitals to enable progression to HE for their family members using whatever resources and networks they had access to. This again suggests a greater engagement by family in first-generation students than some of the literature, for example, Reay (2018b) and Archer (2007) suggests.

Collegial familial capital across the family network

Wainwright & Watts (2021) say that the impact of family cultures on learning is less recognised by HEIs. This ties in with Yosso's (2005) ideas about the strength of familial capital, which is available to and through members of a family network. Carey (2016:718) refines this idea further by describing this capital as 'college familial capital'. While relationships with family might not always be supportive, the findings here show strong support for most of the participants from their

families and/or close peer network. Being able to find support outside of the immediate family demonstrates self-determination, perseverance, and resilience in operationalising their ambitions (Yosso, 2005).

Bourdieu's work recognised that the family environment is an important location for the 'domestic transmission of cultural capital' of education (Bourdieu, 1986:17), a knowledge sharing which Jabber et al., (2019:261) attribute to a concept they call '*pedagogies of the home*' - a recognition of the family and home in helping their offspring navigate the education system. As students, all the participants demonstrated many positive characteristics of having learnt to navigate higher education, being 'fish in water', and 'playing the game', which they had developed over time, and which was part of the reflexive process they engaged with and then shared with others.

As mentioned above, the habitus and embedded dispositions in the domestic sphere influenced the choices the students in this study made. Most of the students initially did not have sufficient cultural capital to have full freedom over their decisions about what to study and where because their various family responsibilities restricted them to the locality where they lived. However, family also provided an incentive for the students to enter HE and some of the students

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described how their family lives had been enriched by their actions (as reported by John, Ann, Mera).

In the accounts shared by the participants in this study, there is evidence of how they interacted agentically in a way that considered their home and academic environments. Most of the participants' decisions around attending HE were negotiated and mediated within their familial contexts, and these findings are also seen in Jabbar et al., (2019). This family support contributed to participants' sense of self-worth and empowered them to make decisions and choices for, not only themselves, but also for the benefit of their families in terms of enhancing their social capital and creating opportunities for improving their economic capitals in the future (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Hazel's interview, and other interviews in this study, demonstrate that the students drew on existing capitals and applied them in their transition into HE.

The traditional intergenerational model of influence, in this case support for attending HE, was evident in the accounts shared by many of the participants as they spoke about their parents' advice and influence, not only to the younger participants, but also to the mature adults who had their own lives and families. However, there was also the emergence of what Wainwright & Watts (2021), suggest is a

'slipstream' effect, where family members going to HE can influence educational choice at an intergenerational level and help other family members navigate the realm of HE. Connecting with wider family may be the basis of an approach that could be supported by higher education institutions creating a space for a positive collaborative approach to engaging with, and assisting families and individuals, rather than the traditional view of any non-traditional student beginning from a position of deficit.

Support networks

Peer networks can have an impact on educational choices (Rabbe et al., 2019) and also on whether someone stays in college (Gallop & Bastien, 2016). Many of the participants in this study mentioned their families as the main source of support and influence; however, others also included their peer network. For Molly, her peer group had effectively moved into the main position of support for her life in college. The findings show that being a member of a peer support group gave her access to resources that allowed her to continue in college when she had concerns about her fees, and this reflects Schultz et al., (2017) who point to the value of contact groups enabling individuals to access and then continue in HE. Bourdieu's (1986) work indicates that this social capital is only available to people who are linked and in durable networks. An example of the above was seen in the account by Hazel who benefited from peer networks when her

parents were successfully able to borrow money from their social contact so that she could go to college. This was an example of the sharing of community wealth (Yosso, 2005), and the particular forms of capital that are unique to them.

From Yosso's perspective, some of the people in this study can be described as having learnt how to activate their cultural capital through their social networks. Students were often adept at converting different forms of capital in order to access resources they required to gain entry to and to progress in higher education. In doing this they often strengthened relationships in the wider peer group. This use of social capital to access knowledge and experience, in other words the institutionalised cultural capital of their peer group, helped them to convert their capital. As evidenced in Chapter 5, families also used their social capital as well as their feel for the game to find out from their wider social group where relevant capitals could be sourced.

7.4 Pressures on students and their educational choices

First-generation college students encounter many of the same challenges as so-called 'traditional' students, however, they can also have their own unique difficulties, such as: challenging financial circumstances as a result of immigration status, limited support from

family and friends due to distance, and challenging language and cultural transitions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

There were a number of pressures identified in the findings which are specific to the context of these students and key for educators and policy-makers to consider. These included: financial challenges, family life and language needs. Some reported multiple pressures on their lives, and for the five parents in this study there were additional pressures of family life associated with care for children. Johnson (2019) suggests that non-traditional students such as first-generation migrants in HE, are influenced by their personal circumstances and responsibilities, and in the participants' accounts there are details of worry about childcare, finances, when they might have a family, and the impacts of their choices on their families' lives because they had made the choice to go to college which are discussed in the following subsections.

Finances

As evidenced in previous research, access to finance to pay fees, and for personal support, remains a particularly troubling concern for many of the students in this study, especially those who came from countries outside of the EEA and who entered the Direct Provision system on

arrival in Ireland (see Hazel in Chapter 5). There was visible emotion on many of the participants' faces as they described how difficult, time-consuming, and stressful it was to acquire the necessary economic capital to apply to HE, and the continual financial worries some of them carried throughout their studies. Embarking on an educational journey that could take up to five years to complete, placed particular strains on participants whose families were still in the Direct Provision (DP) system, and those who were lone parents. Although Ireland nominally has free fees for HE, students still pay a contribution fee that can be as much as €3,000, (Citizens Information, 2021c), and not everyone was eligible for grant assistance, thus creating a potential cumulative debt they had to address. Even when students qualified for grant assistance, the amount they were paid was insufficient, or varied from year to year. Students who were late paying fees also had the additional stress of not being able to access their examination results, so if they had a failed module, they would not be aware of it until they were in good standing with their college.

Bourdieu (2004) suggests that economic capital is one of the most powerful types of capital available to individuals and through its use domination can be wielded over others. In terms of student experiences, apart from finance being necessary to pay for fees and educational supplies, a lack of economic capital can impact greatly on the overall student experience (Reay, 2018a; Reay, 2018b; Reay

2010; Reay 2002), as was found in this study, because it diminishes their social and cultural capitals creating structural barriers that can be impossible to overcome.

Not only do students from lower income backgrounds experience financial challenges before studying (ESRI, 2021), they are also likely to leave HE with additional financial strains (Houle, 2014) thus indicating that their educational decisions can have impact beyond their time as students. Knowledge about finance, a type of cultural capital, was not always easily available. Financial considerations also guided where the participants chose to study. This also had an impact on the courses they could choose (Archer et al., 2003) and can have lasting impacts on future career choices. Again, in this study regarding where, and what students choose to study, it is clear that not much has changed since Linehan & Hogan's (2008) study. Everyone in this study lived in, or within driving distance of the college they attended because they could not afford to move away from their families. In common with the findings in this study, Callender & Jackson (2008) point to fear of debt as a significant constraint on where students on lower incomes chose to study. In recent years, The Universities and Colleges of Sanctuary (UoSI) initiatives have created some spaces for applicants to HE who have not resolved their residency status, such as one participant in this study. Regional collaborations between HEIs such as College Connect (College Connect, 2021) also provides a

route for migrant students to apply to, however, the places on these programmes are limited and do not address the underlying economic structural inequalities.

Another way in which the participants' economic capital impacted on their lives was in their opportunities to develop social networks through social activities. Two of the participants (Anne and Angie), who were parenting alone, a cohort who are known to face particular barriers in accessing Higher Education, were particularly clear in how their opportunities to have a full extra-curricular student experience were limited by their financial obligations for their families (One Family, 2021). It did not occur to me at the time of the interviews to ask, but now as I discuss the findings here and reflect on them through Bourdieu's ideas around capitals, I wonder how instrumental their potential earning power was on the course choices they made.

Language needs

In common with Barone et al., (2017), this study found varying levels of informational barriers, and situations arose where people did not have sufficient language skills initially to navigate a system that primarily relies on the English language. A particular difficulty for some migrants who are trying to access HE is becoming proficient in the language of instruction. Jungblut et al., (2020) says that the language

barrier is a significant barrier to accessing higher education particularly for migrants who are refugees. Nichols & Stahl (2019) say that language needs are not addressed often enough in research. Although I did not ask a direct question about English language needs during the interviews, nine of the ten participants volunteered information about this topic. However, the significance of English language competency for academic studies and social interaction was clear in their accounts. Some felt their choice of courses was limited by their level of English, demonstrating what Bourdieu (1986), referred to as, 'objective limits' - how people know about their place in the world. In the case of two participants' accounts presented in Chapter 5, they chose courses that they felt would not push them beyond the limits of what they felt their level of English could support.

Despite the fact that many were bi-lingual, or multi-lingual, there was no evidence of their language skills being seen as an asset by their college. Being multi-lingual, according to Yosso (2005), is an example of community cultural wealth that in some educational settings can be valued. In the students' accounts, some mentioned that they had classmates who did not speak because they were uncomfortable using English. This demonstrates that some students had an awareness of the differences between their accents and language use to that of others and the narrowness of the linguistic market they were operating in where English dominated (Bourdieu, 1991). This suggested that

using a different form of language – or linguistic capital - to the 'dominant norm' as Bourdieu describes it, was perceived as being something deficient, unrecognised or problematic (*ibid*). Essentially, the speaker in this situation was experiencing the domination by one group, who was exercising their symbolic power through their dominance of the English language in our higher education system. For the student who did not feel they had the relevant linguistic habitus, which is manifested through cultural capital in the form of linguistic skills, their access to the linguistic market was lessened. The power being held by one group is then normalized and is represented as symbolic violence which is a form of objective violence through the dominant language in academia (Bourdieu, 1991).

7.5 Engagement with learning

Engagement with learning involves students engaging academically, intellectually, and social-emotionally. Lester (2012) suggests that HE institutions recognise the importance of student engagement with faculty, staff, and other students, a finding also reported by Tinto & Pusser (2006). Although Soria & Stebleton (2012) reported lower ratings for sense of belonging on campus and engagement for first-generation students, other researchers point to an openness of this group to engage (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009; Kim & Sax,2009).

This section explores how the organisational culture of teaching and learning on campus is designed and delivered from the perspective of the dominant culture and reflects the curriculum and learning structures it prioritises. Dunwoodie et al., (2020) contend that there is a lack of recognition for the uniqueness of migrant groups in higher education. The individual habitus of each student and their embedded dispositions structure how they interpret their individual experiences of the world including the academic world. Although some of the students reported initial challenges in accessing and adapting to HE, they all reported settling and being able to cope. Some of this adaptation was a result of the strength of their support from their domestic habitus (mentioned in section 7.2) and also of the development of new capital and relationships as students. This next theme explores this in terms of the learning and teaching culture in HE, engagement with lecturers, and other learning environments.

Learning and teaching culture

The experiences of the participants in this study reflect some of the findings in the literature in Chapter 2, but not all. While some reported a type of culture shock in their first weeks in college, this was more to do with their adapting to the rules of college rather than being set apart socially or academically. Research by Soria & Stebleton (2012) found that first-generation students had lower academic engagement in HE. In contrast, Kim & Sax (2009) have found that despite expectations

that students from minority backgrounds who are perceived as having lower levels of cultural capital, and by implication, that there would be a negative effect on them in HE, these students were, on the contrary, open to meaningful contacts with staff.

Kim & Sax's (2009) finding above that students from minority backgrounds were especially open to meaningful interaction with staff also held true in this study. In situations where students' habitus did not align with that of the HE institution, the first-generation students showed evidence of being adaptable, engaged with lecturers in the classroom to create collaborative learning moments not just for themselves, but also for the whole class, an example of what Cook-Sather et al., (2014) describe as engagement between students and faculty. This shows evidence of emerging habitus transformation in their personal roles as students. According to Wolf-Wendel et al., (2009), partnerships between students and educators result in students becoming responsible and active in their own learning. This study shows students responded positively to the possibility to acquire and share cultural or educational capital (Yosso, 2005). For example, Anne actively participated in sharing her mathematics approach in class, and Molly agreed to become a demonstrator and shared her skills and techniques in her free time.

Some had less favourable experiences and two postgraduates were vocal about the challenges and difficulties they experienced with the nature of the Irish-focused curriculum and integrating into group work. Many researchers (Arday, 2018; Fitzsimons et al, 2017: Merryfield & Subedi 2006), have called for curricula that look past European or American constructions of knowledge. According to Crozier et al., (2008:168), notions about integration assume that students from minority groups are expected to integrate 'into the dominant culture: in terms of conforming and knowing their place', which they suggest might not be possible if people cannot see their place in this dominant group. Equally, it is possible that students might find it hard to participate because they are trying 'to maintain their sense of personal and cultural identity and/or because they lack a full understanding of the kinds of academic discourse employed in classroom discussions' (White, 2011: 250).

It was noteworthy that the undergraduates in this study did not raise as many concerns about the curriculum. All of this group had prior experience of the Irish education system as secondary school students, and/or studying at ETBs, so it is possible that they may have become familiar with the approach, focus, and content of the curriculum. There is, however, another possibility and that is that they did not have the capacity and freedom to say what was not working for them within the power relationships of a research project such as this

and weight of the structural oppressions external to their agentic control.

The role of Access programmes and routes to higher education

Everyone had experience of other learning environments both in their home countries and here in Ireland. The majority, (six), entered college as Access students (albeit after attending FET for some), one other completed the Irish Leaving Certificate examinations, and one other came to college through an Education and Training Board programme. The remaining two had studied for their primary degree in their home countries. Their actions to seek out higher education opportunities mirror the findings of Arar et al., (2020) who indicate that despite difficult experiences of migration, people who arrive in destination countries look for opportunities to go to college. For one person in this study, going to HE was one of the main reasons he came to Ireland. Some would have valued better information about accessing HE from their ETB centre indicating the need for more outreach by HEs to the ETB sector.

The Access programme, which was attended by six people added to their 'college knowledge' (Fleming & Murphy, 1997) and allowed them to navigate through the dominant cultural norms of HE. This exposure to college life allowed them to engage with navigational capital and

develop necessary abilities and skills which were needed to navigate an educational social institution in advance of entry into undergraduate study. This navigational capital based on the newly acquired 'college knowledge', which was closely aligned with their resistant capital, was used tactically to move through an educational organisation. Strategically, students were moderating their academic habitus so that they tackled the norms connected to the dominant hegemony of the education structures. Participating in the Access programme also allowed them to develop not only their aspirational capital, but it also allowed them to increase their cultural capital by being prepared for the next phase of their HE experience. Pascarella et al., (2004) say that the link between making positive decisions around higher education and how minoritised students expand their cultural capital is significant.

This final chapter has discussed the contribution to knowledge generated by this research study. To summarise, this study has uncovered four main themes in relation to first-generation migrants in higher education in Ireland. The main themes identified are: long journeys into education; familial capital and family relationships; pressures on students and their educational choices; and engagement with learning. The overall findings in relation to first-generation migrants in higher education in Ireland are that some have experienced lengthy waits to enter HE and that accessing information

and learning about progression routes is challenging, not least because recognition of prior learning is inconsistent. In addition, the significance of habitus, aspirational capital and motivations to enter HE were also explored and the positive impact of aspirational capital and family support in navigating higher education has also been revealed. The impact of collegial family capital across the family network has also been demonstrated, and that in the absence of proximity to close family, some friendship groups became support networks that augmented the role of, and sometimes took the place of family. A range of pressures on students and their educational choices has also been revealed. Financial strains were substantial and existed before and during the student experience. Language needs were highlighted by all but one as important. For most, engagement with learning was positive and the role of Access programmes as a route to accessing HE was significant.

7.6 Revisiting the theoretical framework

This study employed the lenses of Bourdieu's (1986) Theory of Practice along with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework. The following section revisits some of the main insights revealed by the frameworks and concludes with some words on limitations of the approaches.

Bourdieu's theory of practice, in particular the combined use of the concepts of habitus, field and capital has provided a conceptual lens in this study to gain a better understanding of the experiences of first-generation migrants in higher education in Ireland. Bourdieu's work reveals the relationship individuals have with the social world as well as the importance of structure and agency. In Bourdieu's approach, the implication of how economic capital when combined with more tacit capitals such as cultural, social and symbolic capitals is central to understanding how inequality is reproduced. Those who have access to the capitals that are valued in society can more easily adapt to and navigate through systems than those who hold capital that is less valued. This can lead to some having differential access to social capital and resources and thus choices about going to HE can be affected. Cultural capital can be acquired unconsciously and act as symbolic capital ' i.e. to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition …' (Bourdieu, 2004:18). Some examples of embodied cultural capital relevant to this study include, aspirations, language skills and motivation. The concept of habitus illuminates the high levels of commitment in families to accessing higher education, although at times this choice leads to tension and stress. The concepts of field and illusio help to explain why students and their families are committed to entering higher education even when this leads to challenges, for example, financial hardships. Field also provides a theoretical tool to illustrate how students and their families build

pathways to those in the wider social and educational community who are supportive of the educational choices they are making. Bourdieu's work focuses overly on reproduction and this makes change impossible to envisage, particularly at a structural level. Personal agency is thus removed and as a result structural forces outside of a person's control are constraining.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework provides another lens through which to examine the findings of this study and helps to counter aspects of Bourdieu's theory which may see some groups as having more challenges because they do not have access to valued capital. Rather than seeing first-generation migrants in HE as problematic, or lacking certain strengths, Yosso's framework helps to re-imagine some of the first-generation migrant students' perceived weaknesses as strengths. This challenges the value which dominant classes give to certain types of cultural capital, which are 'a very narrow range of assets and characteristics (Yosso, 2005:77). This alternative approach allows a re-imaging of how this group can be better understood and better accommodated in HE. In addition to providing a lens on family capital in this study, Yosso's framework also allows the importance of family influence on first-generation migrant students to be revealed.

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework offers much to research on other under-represented groups in HE. However, gaps exist in Yosso's framework. Her conception of familial capital, especially around forms of persistence and aspirational capital, may explain how and why individuals persevere and succeed in higher education access and retention; but it does not address the wider structural inequalities which lead to them having to battle harder and need more aspirational and persistence capital in the first place.

7.7 Contribution of this study

This study contributes to the limited but growing scholarship about the experiences of first-generation migrants in HE from an Irish viewpoint and the analysis has contributed to an understanding of the importance of considering family support as an important asset to HE access and academic achievement of first-generation migrant students. The findings can not only help us to understand the experiences of this group of students in HE, but also to portray the context and texture of their lives while the participants were completing their studies.

One of the most important aspects of the methodological process was creating trusting spaces where participants' voices could be heard. It

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is clear from the first-generation students' accounts here that the impact of family interactions with staff were important for their engagement with HE and that these relationships enhanced their overall student experience and indicates integration into college life that can encourage persistence in HE (Tinto, 1975). Nevertheless, this study represented the people who managed to access HE, often following difficult and stressful journeys. We must ask ourselves too about the others, who have not been able to join us in this research.

This study has also contributed to a growing area of research that combines the work of Bourdieu and Yosso so that a more holistic view of first-generation migrant students may be taken. Using Yosso's (2005) lens of familial capital in this study demonstrates the depth of influence that family have on students and the importance of the domestic habitus. Being a student in HE allowed new intergenerational conversations about learning to develop across the family network. In addition, through the use of Yosso's (2005) CCW, assumptions about cultural wealth based on the values of dominant social groups are challenged, revealing the strength of familial support for these students' HE journeys.

Limitations of the study

As with any qualitative study, there are limitations which need to be acknowledged and discussed (Saldaña, 2016). The limitations include the impact of sampling a relatively small number of people who had succeeded in accessing HE and that the study does not include the presumably many other people who might have liked to enter HE but could not because of barriers. Such a study would yield deeper and more complex findings about persistence and aspirational capital from those who did not succeed. A second limitation of the study was that in the theoretical frameworks discussed above, Bourdieu's theory seems to position people as trapped in reproduction cycles while Yosso's theory neglects to account for the structural elements. This leads to a concern that policy-makers and educators focus on individuals and their families as the solution (as assumedly the problem rather than questioning the system and societal structure). To explore this issue further, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful framework that provided a lens to examine the structural level and, most importantly, leads to transformative possibilities. This line of exploration could lead to future research.

7.8 Implications of study

I believe that the research has important implications for education, practice, policy and will, I hope, serve as a base for further studies in this emerging area. The widening of participation agenda may have

increased HE participation numerically, however, the lack of meaningful changes in the numbers of students who are from under-represented groups points to the challenges that remain. There is also scope to continue to explore the intersectional load of socio-economic background, gender and other identities that migrant students experience and to engage with CRT as a theoretical framework for research.

The findings have implications for how higher education institutions might engage with families of first-generation migrants. While there may not be a history of HE engaging with families on the basis of student autonomy and independence, this research outlines that there is merit in reaching out as that families hold valuable information and resources that often go unrecognised.

There are also implications for researchers and public policy makers, firstly, because the participants in this study have demonstrated that they have a considerable amount to say about their experiences of living and studying in HE in Ireland. As educators we must listen to the voices of our students. Secondly, the findings show that the information the participants provided could be a source of data for such processes as consultation about HE provision, or policy. There must be a more coordinated approach across institutions and clearer pathways from FET to HE. Programmes such as College Connect

provide supports so that the student population reflects the diversity of communities (HEA, 2019b). The main issue here is that these approaches need to integrate into the everyday business of HEIs. At the moment, the funding for PATH projects into the future is uncertain.

One of the main findings is that the culture of family education is relatively under-utilised in the support of students by HEIs. There is a richness of resources here that could be explored collaboratively through active engagement. I argue that one particular move that HEIs could consider is to recognise the uniqueness of the first-generation group, and to reach out to them in specific information sessions before they begin their studies. This may help in reducing the sometimes lengthy timeframes that applications can take. The role of Access programmes remains valuable for these students as this study reveals. A larger institutional study of this area is also warranted including critical analysis of how the diversity of migrant experiences and cultures are evident in the learning processes, curricula and cultures of our higher education systems.

In addition, a focus on what needs to be built to widen participation and success for first-generation migrants in HE could also be considered, allowing us to question the current hegemonic and dominant knowledge and practice in HE. This could also be valuable for a wider group of students entering HE for the first time.

Another key issue for colleges to consider which arises throughout this research relates to the on-going support that first-generation migrant students may need for English language for social and academic purposes. A more nuanced appreciation and role for the multilingual capacities of students in our education system is required and a lessening of the dominance of the English language in our system.

There is another less visible story located in this study, which further supports calls for future research. Tek-kwo's account of his acquaintances and friends whose dreams of accessing, or completing HE did not materialise, and whose lives were reportedly not turning out well, is concerning. This remains an under-researched topic in the Irish context, because gaining access to this group may be as difficult as Tek-kwo suggests. The reasons why some may not access HE, or drop out, can often be couched in explanations of personal student deficiencies, low academic ability, or poor commitment to studying (Valencia, 2010). HEIs must re-examine their role in terms of the curriculum, their management of student orientation, and their capacities to reach out to the wider community to engage with people who are not yet in a position to begin their studies but who could develop a relationship with them. Recognition by HE of the diversity of first-generation migrant students' needs, based on their heavily intersected lives, should underpin widening participation policy and its implementation.

Many HEIs have taken steps to introduce changes within their own structures and the examples here of Equality Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are a brief representation of actions taken by some colleges, for example, Maynooth University's creation of the 'Excellence in Exile' and 'Scholars at Risk' initiatives (Maynooth, 2021b), the University of Sanctuary Scholarship Project at University of Galway, which awards scholarships to minority groups including undocumented migrants. This project is also available at University College Cork and at TUS. TU Dublin's university-wide approach to strategic policy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion includes funding supports for EDI research on enhancing social supports for minority groups transitioning into HE. While some progress has been made on widening participation, it is not until our schools, colleges and staffing reflects the society we have become that we can say that everyone has an equitable chance (McDaid & Nowlan, 2021).

7.9 Reflection and conclusion

There have been times along the way of this doctoral journey when it has been difficult to remove myself from what I was writing, such was the impact and impression that the voices of the participants left on my mind. I hear their individual voices each time I look back on the transcripts and excerpts. I have learned much from these conversations and it is difficult to overstate the impact of this experience on me personally. I hope that I have had what Bourdieu

(1990:116) describes as, an 'awakening of consciousness'. Stepping back now, I can see how this was an intrinsic part of the overall process of connecting their accounts of the difficulties they experienced with how much resilience and persistence, and self-efficacy which they showed that they needed, and used, in order to achieve their educational dreams. I hope that despite the unexpectedness of the Covid-19 pandemic, that they have realised their dreams.

This research experience reinforces to me now the importance of contesting positivist leanings that suggest a researcher can be objective and detached. My personal journey involved losing my attachment to an ontology that was based on objectivity and supposed facts as I gradually entered a new space where research is 'messy' (Ryan, 2015) and at times circuitous. While there were times when I was all but rudderless in this research process, I now see these experiences as valuable learning spaces. My own experience has also been transformatory, which has led me to a better understanding of myself as a research and educator. If I was asked if I was a better researcher now, I would simply answer that all I am certain of is, that I am a different researcher. I left my safe harbour of a psychology-oriented ontology that was steeped in facts and objectivity and dived into the unfathomable depths of inky, nuanced, uncertainty. It is a better place to be.

In this final chapter, I have discussed the findings of the research, which explored the experiences of first-generation self-selected migrants in the HE setting. This study shows how Bourdieu's theory, used alongside Yosso's (2005) social capital opens up new spaces to explore how first-generation migrants experience HE. These findings have been explored and examined in the context of: social and familial capital in accessing HE. In summary, I have argued that first-generation self-selected migrant students in HE are a less researched group within the cohort usually referred to as 'non-traditional' students and that their cultural capital is significant. A number of factors influence the ease with which they can successfully navigate access to, and success in HE and many of the reasons they experience challenges are as a result of structural barriers.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory can be regarded as quite deterministic in that it is often seen as a 'deficit' model in that individuals are seen from a position of knowledge they lack. Despite this pessimistic view, this research using some of Bourdieu's thinking tools as lenses, has shown that people are more agentic and instrumental in creating their own capitals than Bourdieu allowed for. However, by combining his concepts with Yosso's (2005) capitals, with an acknowledgement of the importance of experiential knowledge allows a more refined way of looking at the participants' achievements is possible. The participants in this study have shown that they occupy distinctive

positions in social space and have used different opportunities to access, activate, and control their social capitals despite the structural barriers often placed in their ways. However, this is not to suggest that the process for them to do this was easy. In fact, the reverse is true, and the question may be, not 'what did they do to succeed?', but rather, 'why did they not fail?'. This suggests that further research is needed to develop and realise the structures that best support this group of HE students.

As adult educators we need to learn more about the less tangible factors which may cause barriers to first-generation migrants' aspirations to access and complete their studies in HE. I believe that examining the first-generation student experiences through an interpretive framework can help in an understanding of these concerns and build on this experiential knowledge. However, it is worth noting that since Linehan & Hogan's (2008) study, some of the same challenges in accessing HE for some students persist. HE policy further exacerbates the marginalisation of first-generation students' educational dreams. This group of students are not well supported by the equity of access and inclusion agenda. There are people who are outside of the door for all of the reasons in terms of social, economic and cultural capital mentioned here.

In terms of a professional doctorate, I hope that this dissertation will permit deeper insights into first-generation self-selected migrants' journeys into and through HE, and the ways in which these journeys are affected, negotiated, navigated, and accomplished.

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Appendix 1: Request for Participants Flyer

Would you like to participate in my research?

I am a postgraduate student at Maynooth University and I would like to meet present or past students, or anyone interested in participating in my research who has moved to Ireland, or whose families have moved to Ireland. I would like to talk about your experiences of higher education in Ireland. Please contact me by email.

Miriam Croke

Miriam Croke
miriam.croke.2017@mumail.ie

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Appendix 2: Research Ethics Committee Approval

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY,
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

19 October 2018

Miriam Croke
Department of Adult & Community Education
Maynooth University

Re: Application for Ethical Approval for a project entitled: An investigation into the experiences of migrants in higher education in Ireland.

Dear Miriam,

The above project has been evaluated under Tier 2 process, Expedited review and we would like to inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

Any deviations from the project details submitted to the ethics committee will require further evaluation. This ethical approval will expire on 31 October 2019.

Kind Regards,

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary,
Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

C.c. Dr Camilla Fitzsimons, Adult & Community Education

Reference Number
SRESC-2018-112

Appendix 3: Questions which guided the interviews

Can you tell me about your experiences of higher education?

In what ways did you feel you were part of the college?

In what ways did you feel you were not part of the college?

How do you believe your learning experiences could be improved or changed?

What clubs, or groups are you involved in?

Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

NB. This form should be read in conjunction with the information leaflet provided.

Title of Project:

"An investigation into the experiences of migrants in higher education in Ireland".

Name of Researcher:

Miriam Croke

	Tick ✓
I confirm that I have read the information sheet about the study and that I understand the purpose and nature of the study.	☐
This has been explained to me in writing, and verbally.	☐
I understand I can ask questions about the study at any time.	☐
I am participating voluntarily in this study and I can withdraw my participation at any time.	☐
I understand that my interview will be kept for the duration of the study and subject to examination regulations for a required period of time following the completion of the study, and that the data will be stored in locked cupboards and/or on computers under password encryption.	☐
I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.	☐

It must be recognized that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

I understand that my responses will be recorded and the data will be entered and used in a thesis as part of this study.

Participant's Name: _____ (please print)

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Contact Details:

Researcher
Miriam Croke
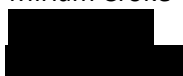
██████████

Supervisor
Dr Camilla Fitzsimons
Maynooth University School of Education,
Room 115,
Dep. Adult & Community Education
camilla.fitzsimons@mu.ie
(01) 708 3951

Appendix 5: Participant Information Form

Dear _____ ,

You have been invited to participate in a research study about student experiences of higher education in Ireland carried out by Miriam Croke, a postgraduate student at Maynooth University. I am a lecturer of English ▮▮▮▮ and I would like to meet present or past students, or anyone interested in participation in my research who have moved to Ireland, or whose families have moved to Ireland in the past 25 years, to talk about your experiences of higher education in Ireland. I hope to use this information to add to knowledge about studying in higher education in Ireland and to make recommendations for practice.

Results of this study will be included in Miriam Croke's Doctorate of Higher and Adult Education dissertation.

1. **The title of the study:** "An investigation into the experiences of migrant learners in higher education in Ireland.

2. **Researcher(s) name, address and contact number:** Miriam Croke, Lecturer, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮

3. **Supervisor(s) name:** Dr Camilla Fitzsimons, Maynooth University School of Education, Room 115, Dep. Adult & Community Education, (01) 708 3951.

4. **Purpose of the study and what will be required of the participant**: Your participation will involve, with your consent, an audio-taped interview as part of a small group during which you will be asked questions about your experiences of higher education in Ireland. The time commitment for the interview will be approximately 45 minutes. Following this small-group interview, you may be invited to participate in a one-to-one follow-up interview, which will also last approximately 45 minutes.

5. **Confidentiality of data –who will have access to the data?** The data collected will only be accessed by the researcher, Miriam Croke.

    a. All data collected will be kept in a locked cabinet/password encrypted on computer at work.
    b. All data collected is available to the participants at their discretion - tapes or transcripts/notes can be accessed at any time.
    c. It must be recognized that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

6. **Withdrawal** – At the end of the group interview, you will be given a consent form that you may sign if you are happy for your responses to be included in my research. A transcript of the recorded group interview and your individual interview will be made available for you to review and comment on. You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you participate in an individual interview after the group interview, your continued consent to be included in the research will be confirmed with you. You may withdraw from the study at any time or you may withdraw your data up until the work is published in a thesis for the Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education. The data will be held in anonymised for a period of ten years and the resulting thesis will be held in Maynooth University Library and will be available to readers.

Thank you for participating in this study

_____
Miriam Croke

If as a result of taking part in this research you feel sensitive issues have been raised and you would like to talk to someone, the following are contact details for counselling and advice services:

All participants:

The Samaritans, jo@samaritans.ie Tel: 116 123 (Freephone)

Maynooth University Counselling Service: Tel 01 708 3554.

If you have questions about your migration status contact:

Migrants Rights Centre (MRCI) info@mrci.ie. Tel: 01 889 7570

Appendix 6: Sample memo notes

Some thoughts after interviews

Change of identity – leaving past behind – searching for new beginnings – new roles – challenges – wanting to be a good example - individual responsibility (Angie/Tia/Molly/John)

Language needs – communication challenges - lack of recognition for bi/multilingual abilities – concern about other less confident users of English in class (Anne) – some say that there can be a presumption that if they do not understand material that it is because of a lack of language when this is not always the case (Liz)

Relationships with lecturers – positive experiences largely – guidance – help – (Mera/Princess/Anne/John/Tek-kwo/Molly)

Relationships with peers – strong interactions – most have continued contact with colleagues from Access class including with people in community who did not continue studies (Mera) – social aspect of HE is important (John/Princess)

Frustrations – largely around waiting to get into college – problems with finances/grants/residency status/RPL/ (Molly/Anne/John)

Family and peer interactions – extremely important for some (Hazel/Anne/Tek-kwo/) – wider significance of family including extended family and peer networks which have supplemented family in some cases (Molly) – is there a greater role here for colleges to reach out to wider network?

Access route important for 7 out of the interviewees – significance of being settled and 'college ready' by the time degree course began – invited speakers on Access made an impact – steppingstone approach worked for some more hesitant students (Mera) – sense of getting an opportunity to attend HE that might have passed them by

Appendix 7: Phase 2 data analysis – list of codes

Appendix 7 contains the open coding exercise which was carried out on the data generated by ten interviews. Thematic coding based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages was carried out on the data. The open coding exercise generated extensive numbers of codes as I had initially coded line-by-line. These open codes were then lumped and developed into the list below and then the codes were further refined. A list of codes from Phase 2 with a brief description can be found below.

Name	Description
Academic differences	Experiences of different educational systems
Academic skills	Range of specific skills needed to complete study in higher education
Access to higher education	Pathways to higher education
Access programme	Specific programme to prepare intending students for study at higher education
Age of peer students	Comparison of self with other students' ages and perceived ease of learning for younger/older students
Assessments	Lack of previous familiarity with continuous assessments
Asylum process	Lengthy process experienced by applicants for international protection in Ireland
Barriers	Challenges to access information and entry into higher education
Belonging to college	Sense of self as a student and member of academic community
Belonging to place	Sense of belonging to individuals' local community
Campus life	Culture and experience of social and academic engagement

Career ambitions	Future plans and influences
Childcare	Scarcity and cost of childcare
Children	Being caregivers and associated responsibilities
Comparing self with peers	Comparison of self with peers both academically and socially
Competitiveness with peers	Academic competitiveness
Communication with peers	Engagement with and maintaining social groups
Course choice	Factors that influence how course choice is made
Cultural differences	Cultural differences in learning
Conflict with family	Meeting family expectations despite personal wishes
Curriculum	Challenges of curriculum
Direct Provision	Living conditions for applicants for international protection
Disadvantage	Disadvantage based on lack of access to and information about higher education
Emotional impacts on self	Personal experiences and self-questioning
English language needs for HE entry	Not easy to access appropriate level English language course in all areas
English language needs for study	Continuing English language needs and supports throughout study in higher education
ETBs	Education and Training Boards
Family engagement in higher education participation	Extent of family input into students' higher education
Family life	The routines of family
Family and quality of relationship	How individuals commented on family links

Family responsibilities	The needs of, and obligations to family
FETAC	The Further Education and Training Awards Council qualifications
Finances	Stresses around sourcing finance to allow individuals pursue studies
Fees	Cost for courses and lack of grant support for non-EU/Irish citizens
Future plans	How higher education can assist in better futures for individuals and their families
Graduation	A sense of belonging and personal achievement
Independence	Personal independence and choice
Isolation	Lonely journey away from family
Learning experiences	Experiences of teaching and learning culture
Life experiences in preparation for higher education	Learning skills and associated personal skills for success in higher education
Life experiences in preparation for living abroad	Self-sufficiency and self-management
Maintaining motivation	Dealing with an extended period of study and the academic and personal challenges that involved
Mature student	Students over 23 at start of course but also a a self-definition of difference some students report
Managing mood	Strategies for coping in difficult times
Mature students' society	A college group that some students searched for but could not contact

Motivations to study	Reasons for choosing to enter higher education
Pastimes	Comparing free time pursuits before and after entering college
People not in the room	Those acquaintances of participants that had expressed a wish to study but for whom college was not accessible
Perseverance	Personal determination to get to the end of the chosen programme of study
Personal role as a student	Self-awareness of being a student
Personal role as a family member	Self-awareness of being a member of a family
Personal role as a parent	Self-awareness of being a parent
Personal fulfilment	
PLC	Post Leaving Cert Courses taken by some participants
Preparation	Preparation and planning for higher education
Pressures	A range of pressures including: family, peers, finances, academic needs
Recognised prior learning (RPL)	Students' RPL not always recognised
Relationships with peers	Strengths and weaknesses
Relationships with lecturers	Strengths and weaknesses
Relationships with family	Strengths and weaknesses
Role model	Influence on family as a student in higher education
Student Assistance Fund (SAF)	Funding stream that some participants accessed
Selfcare	Coping skills

Self-awareness as a learner	Sense of self as a student and learner in higher education
Self-directed learning	Resources, strategies to complement in-class learning at home
Social engagement in college	Relationships and engagement in college life
Stress	Reported levels and sources
Student staff relationships	Quality of relationships with staff
Study challenges	Sources and nature of challenges to study
Study distractions	Sources and nature of distractions to study
Study focus	How study was maintained
Study skills	Academic skills needed to complete study
Supports for college life	College-based supports for all students
Supports for migrants in college	College-based supports for migrant students
Supports for access to college	College-based supports for access to college for students
Support networks	Various social, personal and educational networks students report using
Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI)	Grant system for financial support for students
Time management for study	Strategies to create time for study
Time management for homelife	Strategies to create time for home life
Travel time	Distance and arrangements for travel to higher education
VTOS	Vocational Training Scheme for applicants over 21 years of age

Waiting for admission	Periods of time spent by students waiting to hear if their applications to higher education and /or SUSI were successful
Work commitments	Level of commitments to working to support family/studies

Appendix 8: Memo after first three interviews

Angie	Liz	Tek-kwo
Ten-year break since primary degree completion – post graduate student	Came to college via Access course – had started FET classes and then visited open day Surprised to get the opportunity to go to HE	Entered college via Access after completing FET programme Happy to be able to go to college
Waiting for grant confirmation - lack of knowledge about form completion	Language barrier was a worry – mentions language a number of times	Living in Direct Provision Has not seen family in many years
Cost of going to college – had to buy car	Good advice from staff – good supportive interactions with staff	Good interactions with staff both in FET and in HE
Educational culture very different – more positive experience in Ireland Supportive staff Feels older than other students on course	Physical constraints of an underlying disability – pace of exams difficult at times – but says 'my illness brought a very good chance to study again'	Educational culture is different but is strategic about self-learning
Money pressures – had to borrow money for course and childcare	Positive relationships with other students but feels much older than classmates	Family is extremely happy that he is studying – his father is a qualified engineer Family support very significant
Challenges around language – had to work harder Academic writing was a challenge	Changing identity and role in family – asks why they can't look after her – feelings of guilt	Challenges around studying at the DP centre as its very noisy. Time management is important
Determination to do well – organised study group	Time management is very important	Concerned about peers who have fallen into crime and who have dropped out
No time to socialise – had to be home for baby	Stress of trying to be a fulltime student and running a home	Feels integrated into college
Planned ahead – began course work early to stay ahead – organised – time management	Wants to be a good role model for her teenage/adult children	Cannot work as does not have a work permit – a lot of time on his hands between May and September