

**OLDER ADULTS IN FURTHER
EDUCATION
RE-DEFINING CAREERS IN A
RECESSION**

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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I don't say he's a great man. Willie Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person.

(Arthur Miller, 1949)

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is an exploration of the impact of the current recession on the older adults' decision to re-define their career path through further education (FE). I perceived a need for this research as I am concerned that the guidance needs of older professionally qualified, unemployed adults may be overlooked. I began with the assumption that '*second recession*' adults in FE are pursuing a new career identity because of unemployment caused by the current economic recession. The methodological framework of the investigation involved narrative inquiry based around interviews of four older adults who were participating in FE. A basic grounded theory approach and thematic analysis of the data led to the emergence of key themes for discussion which were, life stage; power; opportunity and emigration; meaning making and resolution; and the relevance of the recession in the lives of the respondents. Through the narratives, it was demonstrated that the recession in isolation has not impacted on the career decisions of the participants but it has facilitated an opportunity for them to engage in FE, rather than any conscious decision by them to re-train or up-skill because of unemployment. In addition to the general conclusion, I have advocated for the use of narrative inquiry in guidance as a lens to identify the vocational needs of the older adults, to assist their transition to a new career. This is an issue which is of relevance to all adult guidance counsellors and policy makers in an era when the emphasis of employment re-activation policy is on the national skills shortages.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this research is an exploration of the impact of the current recession on the older adults' decision to re-define their career path through further education (FE).

This research has relevance for the work of all adult guidance counsellors who are providing career guidance and counselling services for older adults. Although it is a small scale, interpretative piece of work it has relevance for policy makers in the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI), the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), as it highlights an issue in the provision appropriate lifelong guidance for older, educated and well skilled adults who now find themselves unemployed. In this recessionary era of high, sustained unemployment, this research yields evidence of the need for quality career guidance to assist older unemployed adults to up-skill and re-train and may be of significance to those providing National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) assessments for the unemployed. This research demonstrates that current re-activation policies in favour of the existing economic skills shortages has little relevance for the older adults featured in this narrative inquiry. This issue is addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

In this chapter I have begun by explaining the contextual background of the FE college and policy as it pertains to the older unemployed adult who may choose FE. I then go on to describe the discrepancy between the national skills shortages in a

time of recession and the career choices made by older clients in FE. This is followed by a comprehensive discussion of the challenges of providing a career guidance service for a new cohort of older, educated and skilled adult in a system equipped to deal with school leavers and individuals with low educational attainment. Finally, in this chapter I have given an account of the development of my rationale for choosing narrative research as a medium to explore the motivation of older adults who have chosen FE to re-define their career path.

1.2 Contextual Background – The Further Education College

Amongst the main providers of formal education in Ireland is the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) which is the local education authority for Dublin City and its inner suburbs. It operates 22 schools of which 16 have a college of FE component. Colleges of FE began to emerge in 1985 with the assistance of European Union Structural Funding. Changing demographics in Dublin city led to radical transformations of secondary schools and the development of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. In 2001 the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was established as the national awarding body for FE. Currently FETAC validates a range of awards in diverse career areas from Level 3 to Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications and it is these courses which are offered in FE colleges. As most participants in FE have traditionally been school leavers (ESRI, 2006), below I have briefly outlined policy as it pertains to the older adults who are the focus of this research.

1.2.1. Policy

In the *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (2000), recommendations for FE colleges and centres included provision for a 'comprehensive framework for second-chance education for those with less than upper secondary education' (p. 15). The *White Paper* was written in an era which perhaps did not anticipate another recession. While the economy grew all through the 1990s there was no reason to suspect that well into the future a recession and unemployment of such a scale would revisit Ireland. The targeted beneficiaries of the *White Paper* included children in the upper education system, early school leavers, adults with literacy difficulties or low educational attainment and there was recognition of the challenges of providing lifelong education for a multi-cultural society.

At the time of writing the *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* in the late 1990s, the target population of this research was already on route to the culmination of their educational or entrepreneurial efforts. They were people who completed their secondary education, followed by third level education or an apprenticeship or trade. This was generally succeeded by prosperous self-employment or engagement in jobs with attractive advancement opportunities.

In the recent unemployment crisis, development of policy related to adult learning within a lifelong learning framework is now moving in favour of current economic skills shortages. The *FÁS Vacancy Overview* (2011) indicates prevailing vacancies in sales, marketing and customer service; ICT; engineering and utilities; accounting and financial services; manufacturing, which were higher in 2011 than in 2010. Third level qualifications and industrial experience are quoted as being required

for the majority of these jobs. Job vacancies at the lower end of the skill scale have continued to rise in just a few occupations. Labour market interventions recommended by FÁS indicate career guidance should be used to highlight employment opportunities in these areas. It is these recent radical changes to the labour market and the social organisation of work in Ireland that have that have led me to question the motivations of older adults who are choosing to re-define their careers in FE and I have explored this issue in more detail below.

1.2.2. The Dilemma Defined

Many older adults who worked for the last 20 to 30 years in professions or trades have lost their jobs in the recent recession. As I have indicated above, some of them are participating in FE courses. While there is awareness by the government that this profile of unemployed adult exists there is little recognition of the limitations of guidance for this cohort in FE as will be discussed later in the thesis. *Supports and Services for Unemployed Jobseekers: Challenges and Opportunities in a Time of Recession*, a 2011 report gives an account of the Government's response to the unemployment crisis to date and acknowledges the existence of this profile of unemployed adult.

Despite the heavier incidence of the recession on the lower-skilled, the recession has spared no one. A large proportion of those now unemployed are well educated, while a further significant number were skilled workers in sectors that, even after economic recovery, will not need them again.

(NESC, 2011, p. x)

The report advocates guidance in FE and training as a mechanism to assist transition to a new career. 'Quality career guidance can assist people to career-switch and embark on longer, but well-grounded, routes back to employment'

(NESC, 2011, p. xv). This suggests an implicit assumption that people will 'career switch' because the recession has forced them out of their chosen career. It has been my experience that older adults in FE are less concerned with 'well grounded routes back to employment' and are more interested in meaning making in their future career regardless of the skills shortages in the economy. I believe their choice of course and career area in FE is not driven by economic indicators to gainful employment but instead may be motivated by their own passion to engage in work that is personally fulfilling. The delivery of guidance for this relatively new cohort in FE has been a challenge for guidance counsellors in the PLC sector, where the provision of guidance services is regulated under legislation for secondary schools. This problem is addressed below as it provides a lens to guidance environment in which the older adult in FE is situated.

1.3 Guidance in Further Education

1.3.1. Statutory Obligations

The provision of guidance is a statutory requirement for schools and colleges of FE. Under Section 9(c) of the *Education Act* (1998) schools are required to 'Ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their career choices...' (p.13). In order to fulfil our obligations under this act I believe the definition of 'appropriate guidance' for this particular client group needs to be considered. The document *Planning the School Guidance Programme* by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE, 2004) is regarded as an essential definitive document on guidelines for the provision of guidance and counselling in schools. In it counselling is defined as,

Helping students to explore their thoughts and feelings, and the choices open to them; giving care and support to students learning to cope with the many aspects of growing up.

(NCGE, 2004, p. 12)

This statement provides some evidence that this document was not formulated with consideration of the older adult in FE colleges. This emphasis on the practice of counselling adolescents in post primary schools is apparent in for example the most recent research by Hayes and Morgan (2011) where counselling in FE is unmentioned despite the differences in approach required to counsel adult students. Modern career theories underpin second level school guidance and counselling but they do not appear to be relevant when working with mature clients in FE who are often trying to make sense of how they have found themselves '*back in school*'.

1.3.2. The Limits of Guidance in Further Education

I am concerned that the guidance needs of these older professionally qualified adults may be overlooked given that FE in Ireland continues to be regulated by the second level system. Clancy (2008) suggests that one of the major concerns for those working in FE is that it is considered by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to be part of the post-primary sector. With regard to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes while the operation and control of PLC courses remains within the second-level sector: 'the administrative, management, staffing and ancillary support structures for the PLC sector have continued to be those of a second level school' (McIver, 2003, cited in Watson, McCoy & Gorby, 2006, p. 1). This presents a difficult scenario for providers of FE as they offer courses and career guidance which operate under structures and systems designed for

teenagers in the compulsory second level education. More significantly, there appears to be a lack of acknowledgement by policy makers for the guidance needs of this small cohort in FE. Next, I have addressed the development of my own awareness of the guidance needs of older clients in FE and my rationale for choosing a narrative approach to investigate the research statement. Occasionally in this research I have referred to the notion of the '*second recession*' adult and this is also briefly defined below.

1.4 Contextual Background - 'I' the Narrator

Since the commencement of the economic recession of 2007, in my capacity as a guidance counsellor I have worked with increasing numbers of qualified and professional adults who are participating in FE. I noticed that these older adults came to guidance with a considerable degree of career exploration already accomplished and they told me stories about their lives often intimate in detail. This led me to question my quantitative approach to managing the guidance service of a large FE college where a measure of the most economical delivery of the service for me was the number of student appointments concluded in a day. My training in school guidance counselling focused on the delivery of traditional modern career approaches to investigate the career exploration of young people and adults who have or have had few opportunities; young people engaged in school to work transition and adults deemed disadvantaged by virtue of low educational attainment and/or history of long term unemployment. The approach was satisfactory but it did not challenge me and it had limited uses with older clients. Therefore the arrival in large numbers of educated and professionally

skilled older clients confounded me initially as I did not see how my current way of working would assist them.

I sat with these adults and listened to their stories. I realised that I found their career stories fascinating as I heard recurring themes about the notion of surviving ones 'second recession' and how opportunities and chances unfolded for them in their past. Their stories stirred many emotions within me as I found myself enthralled, angry, sad, moved and excited and I realised after some time that I even felt guilt for having a job. I connected with these people as my peers and I recognised many of the experiences and emotions they were going through.

This sense of connectedness was unusual and unsettling to me and when I saw some of their names on my appointment sheet I often wanted to go and 'hide in a cupboard' because I felt like a fraud. I questioned my reticence at engaging with them and brought this to supervision where I discovered some of my fellow guidance counsellors shared my concerns. Supervision revealed our concerns about the support we could give to older clients because of the perception that there are limited career options for them (Bassot & Shottin, 2011). As our guidance sessions continued, stories unfolded into life stories and I began to find some confidence in engaging in discussion about experiences of the '*old fashioned dads' idea of a career*' for example in nursing, the civil service or a bank; experience of recession in the 1970s and 1980s; the unemployment exchange and even illness and loss. I began to realise that I was finding confidence in just listening to them, as they used their stories to build a narrative about their current career identity and future career goals.

1.4.1. 'Second Recession' Adults

The recession of the 1970s and 1980s was a common source of reminiscence with older clients and the expression '*this is my second recession*' was used in my guidance sessions several times in recent years. I thought their demeanour and tone of voice when using this expression, conveyed more than just a reference to their age or personal history. Charmaz (2006) refers to the codes of participants' special terms as 'in vivo' codes. She says 'In vivo codes serve as symbolic markers of participants' speech and meanings' (p. 55). It appeared to me as if my clients used this term to convey a *survival skill* and inferred that that they wanted to say more about the recession of the 1970s and 1980s. Communicated within this term was the suggestion that they would get through this recession because they had negotiated one before. I have adopted this 'insider shorthand' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55), in referring to *second recession* adults, as I think this term embodies the individuals who are depicted in this research. In their first recession they were adolescents embarking upon their working lives and now in their second recession they are back in education attempting to re-define their career path. They form part of a population of only five percent in the FE college and this research sets out to explore the role of the current recession in causing the older adult to choose FE to re-define their careers at this time in their lives.

1.5 Conclusions

In the chapter above, I have described the FE context and policy which underpins current government policy in favour of re-activating the unemployed and questioned the usefulness of traditional career guidance approaches to working

with the older adult in FE. I have outlined the limitations of providing of career guidance for older clients in a system which focuses on the guidance needs of predominantly younger cohorts of students and I have speculated that older adults have different vocational needs which have been under-researched in the past. Having listened to the narratives of older clients for several years, I have presented a rationale for the use of narrative inquiry in this research as a medium to explore their career paths through FE. The nature of the individual to whom this research applies has been defined as the '*second recession*' adult.

The use of narrative research will reveal key themes for analysis and discussion in later chapters in the thesis. The specific research statement is an examination of the extent to which the current recession has impacted on the older adults' decision to re-define their career path through further education.

Chapter 2: Methodological Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and explains the methodological framework I have chosen for this research. In order to address the research question I chose narrative inquiry which is situated within a post modern frame and my theoretical understanding and reasons for choosing this method are addressed below. I have chosen not to do a traditional literature review, selecting instead to pursue basic grounded theory guidelines (Charmaz, 2006) allowing the literature to converse with the analyses and findings throughout the following chapters. My theoretical interpretation and rationale for the use of a grounded theory technique is also attended to in this chapter. The use of thematic analysis of the narrative data is addressed with reference to relevant literature below.

This is followed by a description of the research methods undertaken and a discussion of the research issues including ethics, researcher reflexivity and limitations pertaining to this research. Finally, I conclude with a description of the thematic analysis and emergence of themes for discursive and analytical purposes in the following chapters.

2.2 Research Rationale

2.2.1. Narrative Research

Narrative research is a tradition rooted in psychology. I have noted it in the work of Freud, Piaget and Erikson although they did not describe themselves as

narrative researchers. Wertz *et al.* (2011) give a comprehensive account of the historical antecedents of this methodological tradition which is interpretative in its philosophy. According to Bruner (1986, cited in Wertz *et al.*, 2011, p. 65), narrative research is not situated within any paradigm as he claimed paradigmatic knowing is based on classification and categorisation whereas narrative thinking creates rich and multilayered meanings of historical and personal events. Savickas (2011) assigns the narrative to its own paradigm and states 'The narrative paradigm rests on a single principle for making connections among the client's experiences, expectations, and explanations' (p. 31). This implies the inductive role of the researcher in the narrative where reality and meaning is constructed by the participant.

My choice of narrative was led by my recognition of the tendency for my older clients to use story telling in guidance sessions. The use of narrative research is popular in educational practice and experience as according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990 cited in Moen, 2006, p. 2) 'teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives'. As a guidance counsellor I listen to stories daily and often exchange anecdotes to demonstrate an idea. I use them as my knowledge and I recognise this in the way clients tell me narratives from their lives.

2.2.2. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methods emerged from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Charmaz, 2006) and focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content. It consists of quite specific methods which are not used in this research but as a novice grounded theorist I have delayed the

review of literature as they advocate. The intended purpose of delaying the literature review is to avoid importing preconceived ideas and imposing them on my work (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 9-10). This approach from within grounded theory in this research is used to extend the use of narrative inquiry to work with older adults in further education. In Chapter 1, I have alluded to the fact that research on guidance counselling in further education in Ireland is conspicuous in its absence. The contemporary nature of the issue under exploration, lends itself well to the grounded theory technique of delaying literature. As the research topic is very current and new, it was not possible to anticipate in a traditional literature review, themes which might have meaning in the lives of the interviewees.

2.2.3. Thematic Analysis

'Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Braun and Clarke also say a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and is in some way representative of a pattern that is occurring in the data. Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 4). I have addressed emerging themes in the final section of this chapter.

Riessman (2005) says thematic analysis puts emphasis on 'the content of the text, "what" is said more than "how" it is said' (p. 2), where language is the clear cut route to meaning. I have adopted Riessman's interpretation of the grounded theorist approach to thematic analysis whereby throughout the following chapters, I have presented a typology of narratives organised by theme with vignettes providing illustration.

2.3 The Research Process

2.3.1. Interviewees

Sampling of interviewees in this research was both *purposive* and for *convenience*. 'Purposive sampling' (Silverman, 2005, p. 129) involved selecting participants because they possessed features in which I am interested and this method required that I think critically about the parameters of the population I am studying. This research is based around a small opportunistic sample of four interviewees. Cohen *et al.* (2000, p. 143) refer to this type of sample as 'convenience sampling'. The interviewees were all enrolled as full-time students of a CDVEC college. I identified potential participants from the college enrolment on the basis that they left full-time secondary education in Ireland in the recessionary era of the 1970s to 1980s. In total there were 23 potential interviewees in this age group who were resident in Ireland at that time and had worked for the last 20 to 30 years. Having explained my research purpose to many of these older adults, I invited them to participate. It was willingness, enthusiasm and availability to participate which formed the essential qualities that led to the selection of the four interviewees in this research.

2.3.2. Prompts

I gave each of the interviewees a letter of consent (see appendix A) and the prompts (see appendix B) several days before their interview. I suggested that they would take time to think about the prompts to reflect upon historical episodes in their lives. The prompts were a list of *story crafting questions* as Savickas (2011) states 'Storying is the essence of identity work, particularly crafting stories to tell about a gap in life' (p. 23).

2.3.4. *The Interviews*

The interviews were conducted in the guidance counsellor's office by agreement with each interviewee. It is a large, bright pleasant space upon which students often comment favourably. The participants were informed in the letter of consent that the interview would last up to one and a half hours and would be digitally recorded.

2.4 Research Issues

2.4.1. *Ethical Issues*

With regard to the *Research Code of Ethics* (NCGE, 2008), my duty of care as a researcher is to protect the *rights* and *dignity* of the participants, with *competence*, *responsibility* and *integrity*. I obtained *informed consent* from the college principal and interviewees using the letter of consent, and I fulfilled this obligation by assigning pseudonyms and removing details such as school and college names, small employers' names, place names and specific dates which could reveal their identity.

2.4.2. *Researcher Reflexivity*

Etherington (2004) says researcher reflexivity in narrative research,

Encourages the inclusion of the researchers story, thus making transparent the values and beliefs that are held, which almost certainly influence the research process and its outcomes. (p. 27)

While this research is not autoethnographical, a level of personal disclosure is required by me to illuminate the reasons for my interpretations. Bassey (1999, p. 43) claims that interpretive researchers recognise themselves as potential

variables in their inquiries and demonstrate this awareness in their writing. Josselson (2011, p. 224) says narratives are performed for particular audiences and it is with this in mind that I am conscious of my roles as researcher, guidance counsellor, teacher, and a woman in the peer group of the interviewees within the college.

With regard to choosing themes for interpretation, Ely *et al.* (1997) say,

The language of themes emerging can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.

(Cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80)

It is my intention to stay true to meaning of the narratives and to avoid *over-interpretation* of the themes. Reflexivity assists me in negotiating a balance between my own subjectivity and the protection of the participants in my writing.

2.4.3. Limitations of this Research

This is a small scale research project which is limited to the study of the narratives of four older adults in a CDVEC college. It is not possible to generalise to the broader community of older adults in further education because of the small sample and the uniqueness of the stories which were told. Generalisability is a standard aim in quantitative research (Silverman, 2001, p. 248) but unfeasible in narrative inquiry. Analysis of the data which is then discussed with my supervisor allows for consistency in method but fails to provide multiple perspectives from people with differing expertise (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 9). The value of this interpretivist research is in what can be learned about the meaning making *second recession* adults give to this recession in their pathway through further education.

2.5 Thematic Analysis and Emergence of Themes

I began by listening to and transcribing all of the interviews as recommended by Josselson (2011, p. 228). I read and re-read the transcribed interviewees several times to get a feeling for general meanings and themes. As suggested by Riessman (2005, pp. 2-3), I have studied the sequence of stories and the thematic and linguistic connections between them. I completed a basic coding of each interview to manage the data and enable categorisation of themes. The result of this approach was to bring into the open, the connections between the interviewees and I then identified and named these links as themes for discussion. Next, I address how I manage the themes.

In Chapter 3, I have chosen to name the narrative summaries using King's (2011) label of '*occupational portraits*', which he defines as the use of a simple form of 'extracted artefact' (p. 84). He suggests using this strategy to avoid over-layering his interviewee's stories with unnecessary levels of interpretation and it serves to highlight the main occupational issues and themes for further consideration.

In Chapter 3, Narratives as Knowledge, I have presented the *Occupational Portraits*, which guided my decision to devote Chapter 4 to Stories of Power; Chapter 5 to Tales of Opportunity and finally, Chapter 6 to Reflections on the Narratives.

CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES AS KNOWLEDGE

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to tell the narratives in order to explore the impact of the current recession on second recession adults' decisions to re-define their career path through further education. The first part of this chapter is devoted to telling the career stories of the participants through the lens of the narrative summaries.

As explained in the previous chapter, narrative research was conducted to capture the lived experience of the interviewees in terms of their own meaning making of their current circumstances. As noted in Chapter 1, I held an underlying assumption that the recent increase of participation by older well qualified adults was due to the recession. This chapter demonstrates that it is not because of unemployment in a time of recession that they have sought further education but that the recession has facilitated an opportunity for these four adults to engage in further education at this time rather than any conscious decision by them to re-train or up-skill because of unemployment. The life circumstances in which they found themselves coupled with the effects of the recession have conspired to produce the conditions which enabled them to choose further education at this time in their lives. The use of basic grounded theory allows me to present the evidence for this argument which is demonstrated below through the narrative summaries as referred to by King (2011) as 'occupational portraits' (p. 84).

In the second part of this chapter I have described the *Individual Differences in Telling* to contextualise *how* the respondents told their narrative in the actual

interview. This section reveals the differences in the volume of data collected in the interviews and a rationale for the focus on Sarah's narrative later in the thesis. The first and *Opening Theme* is *Life Stage* which has emerged through the lens of *Causality*. I have included it in this chapter as I believe it has emerged as a *global* theme, which is supported by persuasive evidence (Riessman, 1993, p. 65) from all of the informants' narratives.

3.2 The Occupational Portraits

3.2.1. Sarah's Story

Sarah told an eloquent story of her life in a chronological narrative. She began with her childhood and growing up in a rural town in the midlands. Significantly, Sarah spoke of the strong influence of the role of her father on family life. She mentioned her mother to a much lesser extent but implicit in her narrative are the comparisons of her father's comfortable early educational experience with her own testing one. Later in the interview, Sarah reveals her personal journey in further education where she resolves the battle with the ghost of her childhood educational experience of corporal punishment.

As people did in the 1970s and 1980s, Sarah took a job as a means to an end. She volunteered in a local psychiatric hospital, worked as a secretary, dispensed medicines in a chemist and worked for Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE) just to keep her going. Later after college she describes taking '*bits and pieces*' as she had no money. Sarah pursued a Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) course working with the '*laundry women*', where her role was '*to up skill them so that they could live on their*

own'. She emigrated to the UK and recalls '*that was tough cause I didn't want to leave*'.

Sarah returned to *Celtic Tiger* Ireland from the UK, when her mother was ill and as she explained, '*I left in the last recession and came back in time for this one so I was really unfortunate*'. Her mother passed away after a prolonged illness so she decided to stay and pursue her hobby of costume for theatre which began in a theatre in the UK. '*I thought, you know what, I'd love to be able to do this properly*'.

Sarah makes no references to the possibility of barriers to the realisation of a career in costume despite the decline in funding for theatre since the economic downturn. Later, however in her interview Sarah reveals her openness to return to work in the mental health area after pursuing her hobby of costume construction through further education. She gives a frank account of her arrival at a resolution about where her life is heading.

I think I am going back to working with people and mental health problems. It just felt so right and I think all that's happened really is that wardrobe was my hobby and I wanted to develop that [...] I also really did need a break from working with people for so long. [...] I worked really, really hard in some very difficult circumstances with some very difficult people [...] I think I was burned out and I needed the break. I also needed to fill my mind with what else is in the universe, I mean art and beauty to balance it... I've basically given myself some choices here. I do feel like I'm free. I'm free from the sense of I haven't done what I wanted to do, I have done it and now I'm free to go in whatever direction.

There is no sense of urgency or compulsion by Sarah to take just any job. Her anxiety at a brief period of unemployment before commencing her course led her to surmise about the experience of her clients with mental illness that '*It's sometimes very good to stand in their shoes even if it's only for a very short space of time*'.

3.2.2. Pat's Story

Pat left school in the 1980s and followed his father's footsteps into construction, declaring *'so that's what I stuck at for 28 years'*. He describes working in the construction boom as *'mental'* and speculates about the *'end'* of the boom,

Everyone knew, particularly in construction that this was going to end, and it was going to end spectacularly, badly because we all knew there wasn't the money to build these places.

Pat spent years commuting to Dublin which he humorously illustrated, *'It was sort of like I was almost drawn; you'd see it in a film, like a death ray back to Dublin because that's where the work was'*. In later years he took a sabbatical with his partner to pursue holistic interests but when she fell ill he returned to construction as they *'just didn't have the capital backing'*. When he lost his partner two years ago he was *'tipping away at the roofing'*, confident that work would continue because *'there's a lot of work that was done during the Celtic Tiger that would need to be repaired and that's where we were getting our main work'*. Soon afterwards his career in construction was cut short by a serious accident at work and a lengthy spell in hospital. He was always interested in health and is now determined to extend this into a career in nursing as *'I want to show some kind of care for people where they feel somebody gives a damn about them no matter how bad it is'*.

Pat reveals evidence of an ability to reframe life shattering events into positive personal growth. He sees his accident rather than the recession as giving him the opportunity to slow down and reconsider his future. Pat narrates very graphically the unfolding of events after his partner's death that has led to the career change in his life.

I didn't really know what to do with myself because I lost everything. So this day last year I had an accident where I fell off a roof and em...I broke eleven bones. I fell thirty five feet, I'm actually lucky I'm alive. I'm lucky I didn't break my neck. I'd fourteen weeks in hospital so I'd a lot of time to think about what the hell am I going to do next? And before my partner died I nursed her, so that gave me an insight. I was in hospital every day for six weeks with her. Before that I was nursing her about two months back home. So my experience has probably been 'life just through this up', in one sense.

Several times during his interview Pat claimed very positively '*my accident, it was probably the best thing that's ever happened to me*'. He is currently testing this theory with a very concrete set of plans for his future.

3.2.3. Janet's Story

Janet liked art in school but under parental pressure to get a job, she started a secretarial course, and then left when she got a job in administration. She concedes that she stayed in that job for '*far too long*', but acknowledges '*It was a grand job. It wasn't civil service but it was a well enough paid job*'. When Janet decided after ten years to move on, she lost both of her parents in quick succession and before long realised that she had '*stuck it out for 19 years*'.

Janet took redundancy and she accessed further education to qualify in holistic therapies. Janet always had an interest in science but in secondary school she explained '*I wouldn't have minded trying a few science subjects but girls didn't do that*'. Janet happily combined contractual administrative jobs with part-time holistic work for about ten years until as a result of the recession she found her employment opportunities drastically reduced. After an opportune chat with a friend who was doing a writing course, she sought the help of an adult guidance counsellor who assisted her application for a creative writing course. Janet

recalled *'I'd always been picking away at writing. I had a little list in my head, you know. I'm going to die some day so I want to try them all'*.

Janet's refers to her parents' experience of the 1950s recession as *'desperate'*, and seems to combine this with her past experience which gives her the confidence to compare her current situation to *'riding out the storm'*. She claims very positively *'It's about doing things instead of thinking of doing things'*. Janet described an important transition in her working life.

I realised that when I had that other job for 19 years [...] it was grand but I wasn't happy. I transferred to being very happy in my work but not so much money so that is like more successful to me. I was miserable as opposed to being very happy now.

Janet's aspirations in writing are ambitious.

I'd love to be published but a play or a TV drama or something like that. I'd find that really exciting to have an actor interpret it, someone else to bring it to life. I like ordinary everyday life [...] I find people are fascinating.

Once again, Janet depicts an older adult in further education who is redefining her career in terms of what stimulates her and she hopes to continue to do so in university next year.

3.2.4. Alan's Story

Alan, the son of a *'panel beater'*, wanted to be a mechanic but *'my dad didn't think that was a good idea back then'*. So he was buoyed along in his metalwork business by the growth in the economy since the mid 1990s. With the encouragement of his father, Alan took advantage of trends in home décor to manufacture and sell hand built crafts for the market. This was quite successful for him until *'In the boom the workshop I was working out of was sold. Rents were so expensive seven or eight*

years ago, I couldn't contemplate renting premises'. The loss of his business was devastating as he recalls,

At the time winding up my business was something that really hit me way harder than anything that's ever happened to me. My Dad's death was tough but that was ok. But winding up your business...it's just traumatic.

As a result of this loss Alan described wrestling with the diagnosis of mental illness and the consequences of it for his career and family life until quite recently when,

Being diagnosed as being bipolar and then being undiagnosed is one thing that's happened to me in the last ten years that has made me look at me as someone with a mental health illness and then six months ago for the doctor to say 'ok you're not bipolar', and it's about perception. A lot of stuff in life is about how you are perceived and how you are perceived by others.

Alan chose to pursue an art course in further education because *'I kind of felt having had a craft business, I never really did art in school but always kind of felt I missed out doing art'*. His tone is optimistic when he describes the need to find a *'niche'* in the economy for his trade and he theorises that *'At my age it would be better if I spent some money and did a printmaking course or did an enamelling course under somebody where I can tell them the stuff I want to know'*. He rationalises his decision to stay in the business of crafts despite the well documented depletion of disposable income in the market.

As far as me getting back into doing what I do in some shape or form, people always have to get out and buy birthday, wedding, Christmas presents. There is a market there.

Alan refers to opportunities he has availed of in his life but also acknowledges that *'research', 'preparing',* and asking for help are essential components to making opportunities successful.

3.3 Individual Differences in Telling

As a student in the college, Sarah was known to me prior to the interview. As an interviewee she illustrated her stories with obvious preparation and tremendous detail and her interview produced the longest narrative which lasted for an hour and twenty five minutes. I think several factors influenced the contribution of Sarah's narrative including our previous counselling relationship which was well established; she had already told me elements of her story on different occasions; and she was a talented storyteller. I found I was drawn into visual aspects of her stories, for example, in her father's school, the *'little country school and he went across the field and Mrs Fallon, treated him like a pet so he lit the fire'*. Speedy (2001) observes that when people re-tell stories, previous stories might be elaborated upon. As Sarah's interview progressed, it became apparent that she wanted to elaborate on a previously told story, about the resolution of her experiences of power, as a mature student in further education. I have discussed Sarah's narrative in detail in Chapter 4 because of her lengthy contribution to the theme of *'Power'*.

Alan and Pat's interviews lasted approximately an hour. They told me several stories about the 'Celtic Tiger' era which made clear their incredulity at the economy and market forces that were in operation at the time. They, however, worked closely with the prompts (see appendix B) which produced narratives and data that were more easily categorised for analysis.

Janet's interview was the shortest and the most challenging from which to extract data for use in the thesis. On listening to her recording several times I discovered

that I frequently had to ask questions in order to obtain more detail and that she often left sentences incomplete, either moving on too quickly to the next point or her assumption that I understood what she meant. In transcribing her interview, the extent of the problem became apparent, an issue to which Etherington (2004) refers. With the consent of her clients, she suggests 'minor alterations' (p. 80) to the removal of words like 'um' and 'you know', and other small adjustments that will contribute to the flow of the reading and protects the interests of the participants who are concerned about how they will come across. In the case of Janet's narrative, incomplete sentences could reflect incomplete thoughts on a topic and any changes by me could change meaning. Rather than risk changing meaning by adding or altering anything, I decided to incorporate her spoken narrative, as well as I could.

3.4 Opening Theme

I have begun by examining the narratives from the perspective of 'causality'. The question I asked of the narratives was 'if the recession has not caused the interviewees to re-define their careers, then what has?'

Below, I have rationalised my decision to use a '*causality*' approach. One definitive psychological theme of '*life stage*' emerged and below I have explored this theme with reference to the narratives and theoretical literature.

3.4.1. Causality

Labov (1997, p. 9) claims there are intricate and difficult issues in reducing a narrative statement to a causal one and that there are 'wide variations' in such

acts. He says the essential construction is a proposed chain of events which link the orientation to what is reported by the narrator. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state the hallmark of causality is 'its ensuing certainty' (p. 31) but suggest reflexivity in avoiding a 'cause-and-effect relationship that appears to exist when narrating events in a temporal sequence' (p. 185). This led me to question if there was a common feature around the chain of events unfolding in the respondents lives. Savickas (2011, p. 24) refers to the 'occupational plot' in career construction theory where he reveals that the story becomes a plot when there is causality. As outlined above in the interviewees' narratives, their occupational plot reveals change caused by bereavement and loss, an accident, hobbies and interests and experiences of the *Celtic Tiger* era. This is indicative of their *life stage*, which can be construed as a cause of the interviewees' decision to re-define their careers at this time in their lives. It would appear that their *life stage* has had a greater impact on their decisions to change direction or up-skill than the recession, as they have chosen to pursue careers which have meaning for *them*. This theme is discussed briefly below in the context of Erikson's seventh psychological stage of development 'Generativity vs. Stagnation', with reference to the narratives.

3.4.2. Life Stage

The respondents age, experiences of loss and change, decisions to pursue education and current career choices are all suggestive of Erik Erikson's seventh developmental stage of life referred to as 'middle age: Generativity vs. stagnation' (Corey, 2001, p. 76) or 'self-absorption' (Harder, 2002, cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 251). This theory comes from a traditional epistemology that focuses on development as propelled by inner biological maturing of individuals (Moen, 2006,

p. 2). In his theory, Erikson proposes that a successful outcome of production *and care* occurs when the conflict between *generativity* and *stagnation* is resolved. For Erikson the unwanted outcome is self absorption. Anxiety may be created during this stage by fear of inactivity, lack of productivity and a sense of meaninglessness in our lives (Etherington, 2004, p. 251).

At this time of life the individual tends to be pre-occupied with family, and with creative and meaningful work. In addition people may also expect to be 'in charge' (Etherington, 2004, p. 252) of something which has meaning or value for the individual. As I reflect on my participants' narratives it is clear that they have all been *in charge* in some form or another but this has been taken from them by their individual circumstances. Sarah reflects that after promotion in her UK job '*I got the exact position that I wanted and I was very happy in it*'. Janet, Pat and Alan were all self-employed, so in effect they were their own bosses. All of them now aspire to pass on values of their culture through caring and the arts.

Etherington (2004, p. 251) says that at this time the transmission of the values of our culture, of our family or our profession, and working to establish stability in our environments is central to the tasks to be accomplished in this stage. All of the interviewees are actively engaged in seeking to do something else. Establishing stability is a motivating force which may be achieved by eventually earning an income from their endeavours but stability can also be achieved by finding identity in a new career. Singer (2004) asserts that 'Narrative identity emerges from and remains sensitive to developmental crises throughout our lives' (p. 445).

There are strong indications from the narratives about their desires to contribute something meaningful to society and we see this in Pat who is moving from

construction to nursing; Sarah who may go back to work with the mentally ill; Janet and Alan's contributions may be in the form of the arts. Life stage is alluded to again in Chapter 6, where *Meaning Making* in the context of career identity is addressed in more detail.

3.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have established through the *occupational portraits* that the recession in itself has not caused older adults to redefine their career in further education but that the recession has facilitated an opportunity for these four adults to engage in further education. There were individual differences in the telling of their narratives which led to different volumes of data being obtained. The *life stage* in which they are situated coupled with the effects of the recession have conspired to produce the conditions which enabled them to choose further education at this time in their lives and there is evidence that each of the respondents is preparing to move on with their career in a constructive way.

CHAPTER 4: STORIES OF POWER

4.1 Introduction

The narratives and subsequent analysis portrayed in this research have given rise to a cogent theme of power which is addressed in this chapter within a contextual and theoretical framework. Below, I have begun by exploring the role of my power in my relationship as researcher with the interviewees. I have gone on to discuss the effect of the power of the further education college as an institution in itself. This is followed by an exploration of the role of the power of parental expectation on the early career decisions of the interviewees. Finally, under the heading *Power and the Further Educational Experience*, I have examined the interviewees' comments which arose from the prompt about their '*voice in further education*' (see appendix B). In response to this prompt, Janet, Alan and Pat told short stories which led to the theme of *transition stress*. In contrast, Sarah provided a comprehensive narrative about educational discipline in her childhood and the reverberations of this for her in further education. Her narrative features prominently in this chapter because she spoke at length on this theme and as I have explained below; her narrative opened a 'pathway to compassion' (Martin, 2003, cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 230).

4.2 Power of the Interviewer

In my role as a researcher, I believe the effect of my power was somewhat depleted by my guidance and counselling training which was underpinned by the humanist

psychology of Carl Rogers. My relationship with clients in individual work is grounded in the three personal attitudes of Rogers's approach which are 'congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding' (Corey, 2001, p. 172). This dynamic approach used in previous guidance interviews enhanced my relationship with the interviewees and while not used in the interviews, it contributed to the success of the interview process.

Throughout the research process I became aware of different power issues. Etherington (2004) states that as researchers, 'If we accept that we are powerful when we write about other people's lives, we can constantly monitor the ethical issues that emerge as the research unfolds' (p. 226). The effects of my power in this research led me to reflect on several questions; what are the informants' perceptions of my influence in college life?; do they believe their narratives will be used to effect change; to what extent did they tell a positive story to *beat the recession* and please the researcher? I have analysed and discussed the emergent themes with these questions in mind.

I am conscious of my work environment as a place where I have power; as a place of relative safety; and as a place where I obtain a significant number of rewarding social interactions on a daily basis. The disparity between my *comfort* in the college and one interviewee's discomfort opened a 'pathway to compassion' (Martin, 2003, cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 230). For this reason, I have discussed Sarah's experience of power at length, later in this chapter.

4.3 Power of the Further Education College

In undertaking this narrative research I was acutely aware that having worked in the college for 22 years, I take rules and regulations for granted. There is a policy for everything outlined succinctly in both student and staff handbooks, and CDVEC policy documents abound. When considering a location for my interviews I began to question the unintended effects of the institution on my interviewees.

Jeremy Bentham's (1791, cited in Hope, 2005) *Panopticon* was a design for a prison which intended to make the prisoner a subject of permanent display. Bentham believed that the design principles of the panopticon could be expanded and he drew up plans for a circular nursery and designed several schools, often favouring a crescent shaped arrangement to facilitate the influence of the teacher (Markus, 1993, cited in Hope, 2005, p. 68). The design of the college of further education enhances visibility. Located in the nucleus of the building are the management, administration and porters office, spatially arranged to observe everyone who traverses the building through the light filled hallway with glass panelled doors, broad windows and expansive counter tops. Located around the college are more observational outposts including the staffroom, the guidance counsellor's office, several tutors and support staff offices. In addition there are several cameras for surveillance of public areas which are monitored in the porters' office. The intention of this is ensure that students in the college are visible at all times.

Foucault (1977) drew upon the work of Bentham in considering the emergence of his 'disciplinary technologies'. Foucault affirms that while 'visibility is a trap' (p. 200) the panopticon 'produces homogeneous effects of power' (p. 202).

Individuals who are not totally sure if they are being observed must act as if they are under constant surveillance to avoid punishment. Hope (2005, p. 361) says for Foucault, surveillance is merely one aspect of panopticism and he adds that in schools, the practice of wearing uniforms, the strict use of timetables, the observance of rules and visible punishments can all be seen as creating a discourse of control, while encouraging self-policing.

The effects of the power of the institution entered my awareness because of Sarah's narrative. I realised that while we advocate an *Adult Education Ethos* the effects of the secondary school building remain the same, and reinforce a sense of surveillance. My assumptions of safety and comfort led to my own discernment of the guidance office as a *safe space* in the college, but I began to question if I was accurate. It is often used as a space for re-negotiation and mediation, and in times of personal distress students seek its refuge. When I asked each participant about a location to conduct their interview, they chose to complete it in the guidance office which affirmed my perception of it as a positive space.

4.4 Power of Parental Expectation

The career narratives of the four adults in this research begin like my own and many of my peers. In school we all aspired to do something meaningful with our lives but in a time of recession in the 1970s and 1980s and under the influence of our parents, we availed of any job opportunities that we could. Janet mentioned a consultation with a guidance counsellor in the 1970s in the pursuit of her ambition to be an artist. Alan disparagingly mentioned a brief guidance encounter in

secondary school in the 1980s. Sarah and Pat never mentioned guidance at all. Unprompted, all of their narratives began with reference to their parents' role and in particular the 'voice' of their father.

4.4.1. Compromise of Aspirations

Greene (1994) writes that 'Despite the evidence of increasing flexibility in the definition of what it means to be male or female, sex roles are prescribed and may constrain the ultimate potential of boys and girls alike' (p. 365). For Janet and Sarah parental expectations clearly influenced their early decisions to take any job opportunity, without consideration of potential.

There was pressure on me to just get a job, get a job and I did a secretarial course and I actually left that early because there was a job and that was the main focus, get a job. (Janet)

When I came to leave school like you were going to get a job and type or something, you know? I couldn't imagine anything worse. I nearly cracked up at the idea so I did the typing course and nearly went bananas. (Sarah)

Although written in 1994, Greene noted that girls growing up in Ireland can expect to earn substantially less than male counterparts and are less likely to attain power and public prominence (p. 365). Administration and secretarial jobs were easily accessed by girls leaving school but pay scales, promotional prospects and job security were dependant on the business of the employer. Janet's reference to her first job '*It wasn't civil service*', is a value, indicative of the stereotypes of security and better pay surrounding public service jobs that prevailed then. Even though Sarah eventually attained a public service job she was aware of the glass ceiling for working women in Ireland and as she says '*Clerical officer grade 3, no women were appointed to that grade. You only could go so far and it was very much a feeling for women in many, many areas*'. Local availability and restrictive hiring practices

(including discrimination) would have affected many Irish people in the recession of the 1970s and 1980s, causing parents to encourage their children to take any job opportunity.

Clare (2001) says,

So much is written about the importance of the mother, and understandably so. But our fears and fantasies, expectations and idealisations of fathers are rich, complex and formative too. (p. 215)

This is evident in Pat's rendition of events leading to his early school leaving,

I hated school. When I did my Inter. Cert. in 1984 my mother basically said to me if you stay on in school your father will have a heart attack, coz he used to get wound up with me.

His mother uses his father to guilt Pat into making a decision to leave school to go to work. It was a trusted decision and a logical move for Pat and Alan to follow in the footsteps of their father's trade.

My father was a contractor in roofing and I went in as a summer job, and I just didn't want to go back [to school]. (Pat)

I was working for my dad as a panel beater and things were very quiet. My dad said did I want to work and I thought he meant for the day. (Alan)

Traditional sex role expectations were at play in all of their early careers and while the 'men's' trades would seem to be more promising, Alan was disappointed as '*I kind of wanted to be a mechanic but my dad didn't think that was a good idea back then*'. Gottfredson (2002) calls this *compromise of aspirations* or an adjustment to external reality. There is a subtle hint of acceptance of the factors that led his father to disapprove but now there is regret that it is an aspiration he failed to achieve.

With hind sight it probably would have been something that would have been good for me because I'm now X years and very much into mechanical stuff but I don't have a huge mechanical knowledge.

This contrasts with Sarah who went against her father's wishes as she always wanted to go to university and did so at great personal cost.

But I had to make my own way there. My dad was quite set against it when I said I was going to go to university. He [...] wanted me to be a secretary, to stay in town and to marry somebody local and have a safe life.

Here Sarah defines the notion of a 'safe life', and as her narrative progresses it becomes apparent that she didn't choose the safe life she believed her father expected. Her father's fear may be reminiscent of the early 1800s masculine perception of the woman.

The young woman who spent her vital energies in intellectual activities would divert vital strength from the achievement of true womanhood and would become weak, nervous, sickly and possibly sterile.

(Clare, 2001, p. 71)

Whilst this may be an extreme interpretation, reverberations in the 1970s Ireland were common for young women whose parents commonly believed that education was wasted on daughters who were expected to marry and have children. Education of a daughter was certain to continue the financial burden and possibly make them un-marriageable in the same social class.

Janet expressed more of this compromise in implementing her aspirations as she acknowledges she stayed in a job she disliked due to her parents fears that jobs were hard enough to be found. Again she demonstrates an opportunistic attitude of her generation in the 1980s as she states '*So I think that I stayed in that job for far too long because they [parents] were always saying, 'will you get a job as good as*

that now?' Here there is evidence of regret at spending too much time in a job because she absorbed her parents' apprehension about finding another job.

My interpretation of the role of parental expectation in the narratives is of a potent influence on career development. In addition, in the next chapters I have explained how job seeking skills and an opportunistic attitude learned in those years may have served as an important protective factor in lifelong career development.

4.5 Power and the Further Educational Experience

4.5.1. Transition Stress

Zimbardo (2007) asserts that you have to be 'embedded within a situation to appreciate its transformative impact on you and others who are similarly situated. Looking in from the outside won't do' (p. 322). I have observed and counselled many older adults in the transition period of settling in to the further education college and it can cause considerable stress in their lives (McNamara, 1998). Janet, Alan and Pat were witness to this temporary period of adjustment and when they were prompted about their *voice in further education* (see appendix B), Janet said *'I found it very strange because most of our class are young'*; Alan revealed *'I think I was a bit overwhelmed, you know. It was 30 years since I'd been in education and I didn't know if I'd be able for it'*; Pat admitted *'Sometimes I suppose I find it a bit daunting, the last time I was in formal education was 1984'*. Doubt about age, ability and the scale of the task being undertaken prevail, but for Sarah, being embedded in a similar educational experience had an entirely different transformative impact on her because of her early national school experience of punitive discipline.

4.5.2. Sarah's Story of Power

In the past, Greene (1994, p. 361) suggested that the influence of school on a child's life may be stronger in Ireland because of its role in moral and religious education, the effect of exceptionally early school starting age, and the high value placed on education. A child who is happy at home may be undermined by negative experiences at school (Greene, 1994, p. 361) and this seems to have unfolded for Sarah in her later life as she narrates an incident around an encounter with a tutor on her new course.

I can remember meeting a teacher in the corridor and wanting to ask them something and they were quite offhand with me [...] I thought this was very strange. For me that was quite a shock.

Her emotional response triggered feelings 'like I'd landed back in school' and created a cascade of fear reactions, 'I was quite scared then and I was very nervous em... and I had nightmares and I really did suffer in the first term'. Sarah recollects further proof which suggests a prolonging and maintenance of her unease such as 'the tone of voice and the approach', and 'seeing a couple of other older looking people here looking quite shell shocked as well', and her anxiety around rules of the course, 'You have to be on time. I used to be awake half the night worrying about being late'.

Sarah's fears become generalised as she connects with the origins of her fears.

I was afraid of the teachers and I was afraid of doing the wrong thing, and I was afraid of being late and was afraid of all the things I was afraid of in national school even more so than secondary school. It kind of threw me back very much into my childhood and my school experience then which was during the years of corporal punishment and everybody had the right to hit you basically. Laughs.

Rules, discipline and punishment enforced by the hierarchical structure create a 'pure community', in the school and 'a disciplined society' (Foucault, 1977). The possibility of the social contagion of unruliness in the national school and the subsequent loss of power led to control by corporal punishment in schools in Ireland until 1982 when it was banned, and its use became a criminal offence in 1996. The notion that unwanted behavior can be corrected by suffering became fundamental to institutional design and has been written about extensively by Foucault (1977). Humiliation as an educational tool was designed through slapping, whipping, caning, wearing of the dunce cap and a commonly held philosophy was 'To spare the rod, is to spoil the child'. Sarah recollects this humiliation of childhood when a tutor on her current further education course raises their voice in the classroom.

There were times when I was in class I could feel my hands sore, from maybe the memory or something maybe if somebody gave out, my hands would feel strange and I can remember that being difficult.

The predominant effect of this experience for Sarah is one of 'the Panopticon' (Bentham, 1791, cited in Hope, 2005). It induced in Sarah 'a state of conscious permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). In the absence of the cane the resurgence of these memories which were evoked by her experience in a further education classroom, have the power to make Sarah remember her pain and humiliation and consequently, conform. Sarah never challenged her tutor nor complained, maintaining her sense of powerlessness.

4.5.3 Power in Telling the Tale

Sarah's experience of rules and corporal punishment in her childhood contrasts with the simplicity of her father's early educational experience which leads her to reflect upon his parenting style. Sarah suggests that her own '*free spirit*' is negated by her own early educational experience.

It was great because he had a great free spirit, he didn't ever run into the Christian brothers or the nuns or anybody like that. He had Mrs Fallon who used to raise hounds, they did a bit of poetry, he learned to read and write, you know that was school.

So we weren't reared in the strict sense of everybody went to school and there was all these rules [...] he never understood that people would be slapped in school or that there would be that kind of discipline.

It is not clear to me if Sarah told her father about the cane as a child as she refers above to his awareness of the discipline but later claims, '*You know he would have abhorred all that kind of thing*'. Curtin and Varley (1984, cited in O'Donnell, 1998) surmise in research conducted from County Clare in the 1930s to County Kerry in the 1970s that 'silence and passivity continue to be the most desired qualities in young farm children' (p. 43). It is apparent that as both a child and as an adult, Sarah was silent in accepting the teacher's power to discipline her.

Frank (1995, as cited in Etherington, 2004, p.151) explains, 'When we give testimony to experience through writing our stories, we bear witness to the past and challenge the idea that terrible experiences are too awful to be told'. I found the narrative raised my awareness that in further education, Sarah suffered because it awakened emotional scars of her early educational experience. Giving voice to this through her narrative creates the possibility for me as a guidance counsellor to recognise symptoms of fear and assist students in the future.

4.6 Conclusions

Power is often interpreted as a distasteful word but in this chapter its effects are both positive and negative. The effects of power within this research are told from the reflexive perspective of the researcher. My awareness of its effects is noted. Within the further education college, 'the panopticon' effect of power is not always obvious because 'surveillance' does not seem conducive to a positive adult educational ethos.

The potent effect of parental influence in the career decision making of the interviewees as adolescents is referred to again in Chapter 5. Finally, Sarah's story of her experience of the rules and regulations in a further education college brings to my awareness the impact corporal punishment can have, in shaping an adults attitude to their return to education. The value of telling her story as a form of resolution is considered in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5: TALES OF OPPORTUNITY

‘My dream is to live in Sligo, drink down the pub with the old men, and still work for NASA at home over some massive virtual-reality type link’.

(Anonymous, cited in *Garavan, Doherty & Moran, 1994, p. 314*)

5.1 Introduction

The quote above appears in an Irish Journal of Psychology article about the experiences of the Irish diaspora, and is described by the authors as ‘melancholy, yet hopeful words’ (p. 314). Later in this chapter I have referred to the prospect of emigration as a theme which emerged in the narratives, but the quote struck me because although written in the 1990s, changes in the nature of work and the advancement of technology has presented us with unlimited opportunities. Essentially, it conveys the sense that we do not know what career opportunities will unfold in the future, just as the interviewees do not know what their future career holds in store for them.

This chapter explores the theme of opportunity and its connotations in the narratives of the four interviewees with reference to the literature. Below I have begun by clarifying my rationale for devoting a chapter to this theme. I have explored the narratives for evidence of attitudes to job opportunities in the interviewees’ early careers followed by their more recent opportunities. Finally, I have examined the theme of emigration as an opportunity as it affects the lives of Sarah and Pat.

5.2 A Rationale for Opportunity

I have been conscious of the role of opportunity, luck and serendipity since early in my own career when I believe a series of fortuitous events led to my job as a teacher. It is in recent years that I have acknowledged that the real fortune lies in what we make of opportunities as we encounter them in our lives. In essence, I think that embracing opportunity is a career *survival skill*, which may be characteristic of the *second recession* adults' approach to career construction.

In Chapter 1, I refer to my interpretation of *second recession* adults and the use of this 'in vivo' code (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55), as a symbolic marker of a *survival skill*. As I reflected on the notion of *survival* of their first recession, I began to think in terms of the skills required to survive a recession. This led me to include the prompt 'Is there *anything our generation learned from the '70s/80's that has helped us now?*' (See appendix B). This prepared the respondents in advance of the interview to give direct consideration to the skills they feel are assisting them now. The use of the word *survival* also conveys the notion that they have *lived to tell the tale*. Reid and West (2011, p. 177) refers to the idea of the 'suspect version of truth', that is evoked in the use of a term like *tell the tale*, but she argues that when the interviewee is asked to re-call in the guidance interview, they are giving a 're-interpretation' of a factual memory. Savickas claims 'The life story allows individuals to meet the uncertainties of transition with comforts recalled from the past' (2011, p. 38). Drawing on the interviewees to '*tell the tale*', enables them to name, understand and consciously carry forward strategies that will facilitate them in shaping their future career identity.

Threaded throughout the narratives is the theme of *parental power* which is illustrated in Chapter 4. Pryor and Bright (2011) comment on the underdevelopment of research into contextual variables such as socio-economic status, parental education, support structures and parental influence compared with the prolific volume of research on person variables 'such as cognitive abilities or vocational interests' (p. 70). They identify parental influence as a variable which influences the career-making decision process. I referred to *parental power* as a potent influence on the career development of their children in the context of the recessionary times of 1970s and 1980s in Ireland. I propose that *seizing of opportunity* is an attitude learned from parents in adolescence which may have motivated the interviewees in their approach to obtaining work in the past and re-training in the recent period of employment uncertainty. Some parents in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged their sons and daughters to avail of any employment opportunity to avoid the prospect of emigration. Sarah was the only economic emigrant of the interviewees in the 1980s but now Pat finds himself considering emigration to further his new career. Below, I address these two issues of *opportunity*, and *emigration*, as they feature in the narratives.

5.3 Opportunity

5.3.1 Opportunity in Early Career

Opportunism was a behaviour learned early in the interviewees working lives. In late adolescence we find the respondents consciously taking into account the expectations of those around them because belonging to their family was probably more important to them than independent decision making (Shottin, 2010, p. 59).

They took whatever jobs were available to them at a time when all of the interviewees were aware of the economic hardship of the era. For example, Sarah who opened her interview with *'The 70's were a really tough time'*, Alan who said of his father's business *'things were very quiet'*, and Pat again reflects this in *'I remember things were very, very tight'*. Janet recalls the protection afforded by her parents in *'When you're that young you don't feel the real impact as such, your parents take it'*. I recognise a subtle acknowledgement of the forces at work in causing a *'compromise'*, an attitude to accept any opportunity of work that would ensure an income to the household. Gottfredson (2002) says of this behaviour,

Individuals who just sit and wait for opportunity to knock are less likely to ever get the knock, and they abdicate much opportunity for directing their own development. (p. 21)

As described in Chapter 3, Sarah took a range of jobs just to get by. *'I kinda just took whatever was going coz I had no idea what I wanted to do'*. She volunteered in a local psychiatric hospital, worked as a secretary, dispensed medicines in a chemist and worked for CIE. Alan crafted artefacts for niches in the home décor market adjusting to changes in styles, and as demand declined he switched to home decorating in the upper end of the market because as he says *'the work that I did would be very high quality'*. Janet claimed *'I don't think I realised how few jobs there were'*, when she took her secretarial job which would be her employer for the next 19 years. Pat went into roofing a *'as a summer job'*, staying for the next 28 years. Janet and Alan alluded to vocational aspirations in school but the impression from all of the narratives is one of acceptance that opportunities were just not available to them.

Vocational guidance in secondary school in the 1970s and 1980s would generally have been applied through the lens of Super's (1957, cited in Brown, 2002) model

of vocational development and influenced by Holland's (1959) theory of vocational choice. It is beyond the scope of this research to relate the theories to the participants, particularly since guidance in school was only briefly mentioned in the narratives.

The developmental career of Gottfredson (2002) suggests that adolescents are generally free to make vocational choices. She acknowledges availability of choices may be limited by economic and social factors, but in Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s, vocational choice was further constrained by the small scale of our economy and the scale of the unemployment crisis which rose to 17 percent. In applying Gottfredson's (2002) 'Theory of Compromise' it is possible to explain why the interviewees in this research settled for the jobs they found. She says people look for compatible jobs from among those that seem accessible, or could be made so. 'Compatibility rests on people finding jobs that provide a good match with the sex type, level, and field of work they prefer' (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 21). The interviewees in this research found '*good enough*' matches that were sufficient to meet their needs and practicable in location.

5.3.2 Opportunity Now

Direct responses to the prompt about the role of luck, chance, opportunity and serendipity (see appendix B) in the interviewees' career yielded varied responses. Their narratives contained reflections about the culmination of experiences and their impact on their current life. The 'Happenstance Learning Theory' (Krumboltz, 2009) posits that 'human behaviour is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves' (p. 135). Krumboltz states

'Situations in which individuals find themselves are partly a function of factors over which they have no control and partly a function of actions that the individuals have initiated themselves' (p. 136). Below, I have presented evidence from the narratives which I think reflects a balance in the respondents' awareness of the roles of fate and personal control in their lives.

Sarah spoke at length about her personal ontology and I have included some brief extracts here.

I do believe that things are the way they are supposed to be, I don't know why I believe that. I think that you are the master of your own destiny, you have to take responsibility for yourself, you have to make decisions and have plans.

Sarah reveals an 'internal locus of control' (Lefcourt, 1966, cited in Pryor, & Bright, 2011, p. 77) which according to the authors indicates she is less likely to state, chance or serendipity have any role in her career, and more likely to claim personal control over her environment. She acknowledges her personal responsibility in her choices and goes on to apply this to her decision to discontinue in another course she is doing concurrently.

I also think when you are trying very hard and it's not working, that's fate, that's where destiny and fate comes in. Like I'm trying very hard with this other course and I pushed myself and pushed myself before Christmas and almost ended up ill and I thought you know what, when you have to work this hard at something, life has taught me that maybe that's not for you when you shouldn't be straining against something [...] that's like the world telling you ease off and let life come your way.

Sarah believes in testing an opportunity to the limits of her ability, demonstrating great perseverance but also wisdom to realise when to stop. She sees her motivation to accept chance or opportunity as an internal force that keeps her moving forward as she says '*I also think that there is something inside you that's pushing you in a direction that makes you accept the chance, go with the decision*'.

Below Sarah refers to her earlier career in the UK where she worked with people with mental illness and she uses her knowledge as evidence of her belief in affording people the opportunity to identify and test their skills and talents. The tone is one of positivity and her optimism in human nature.

I think that everybody is made to be very good at something. Everybody has a talent, I do believe that and I saw it when I was managing people[...]It's very much about identifying the skills that people have, also what they're happy doing and it's almost like that push inside them is leading them in that direction.

Alan reflects on the role of opportunity more 'as a matter of fact', as he describes the assumption that he would go to work for his father.

It was just an automatic thing. From the age of 4 in low babies I went across the road to my Dad's garage after school. So every summer I didn't get the choice of whether I went to work in my Dads garage. My wife was the same; she went to work in her father's scrap yard. It was an opportunity that was there.

He uses evidence of his wife's similar circumstances to reaffirm his theory. Below, Alan refers to his expectation when starting the course that he was going to be 'taught how to be an artist', but despite his realisation that he has not 'got it' in some specific artistic techniques, he has persevered with the course. Alan may have discovered another 'niche', as he did in his past and asserts the benefits of asking for help, which he has done through his course as he says, 'It's about finding your niche in the world. If you don't know how to do it you go and find someone who can show you'.

Now Alan has switched to 'enamelling and jewellery making' as he says 'people always have to get out and buy birthday, wedding, Christmas presents. There is a

market there'. Like Sarah, Alan exudes a sense of optimism in his future employment opportunities.

Janet experienced a series of transitions in her working life once she decided to leave her long-term secretarial job. She declares that her lack of confidence around her education was a factor in her decision to stay there so long.

I always would be thinking of moving on but without a bit of education it was very hard to know where you would go and I don't think I had the courage to give it up completely.

That job ended a bit nasty because they were pushing people out without redundancies so that was a bit of a bad period because I just jumped ship because I couldn't take the nastiness any more.

Her reference to '*the nastiness*', which she found so unpleasant, is in sharp contrast to the nature of the course she chose in '*massage, reflexology and rekki*', which Janet claims '*I picked the first thing on instinct*'. Although she implies an instinctive move into holistic health, the evidence of interest in the science of anatomy and physiology is there when she reveals '*I wouldn't have minded trying a few science subjects*', a reference to the lack of options in her secondary school. As Janet outlines her most recent decision to go back to further education, she infers that the decision was a more conscious one when she says '*This time around, something awoke*'. She refers directly to the prompt about opportunity with,

Opportunities come round and you just grab them. Probably back then there weren't the opportunities or I was inclined to let them slip away as well.

Here Janet reveals that she is much more open to opportunity than she was in her past.

Pat's story was unique in that it was an actual industrial accident that led to his career change. Pryor and Bright (2011) say that those who work in vocational

rehabilitation readily acknowledge the role and impact which accident has on people's ability to work yet traditional career development theories show little recognition. Through necessity, Pat is an active agent of change in his life as a result of unplanned events (Krumboltz & Levin, 2004, cited in Bright, Pryor & Harpham, 2005). Having left school in 1984 he describes his reaction to returning to education as *'I'm delighted with the opportunity, I'm absolutely loving it'*. He is undeterred by the scale of the work he has to accomplish to meet his goals.

There's a lot of different subjects, I can't get enough of. I know there's a lot of stuff to learn and memorise and that'll have its own challenges for me.

'Challenges', he brushes away with *'I'll just do it. If I **** it up it's my responsibility, I know that'*. He underestimates his wealth of life experience, when comparing himself to the predominance of school leavers in his class.

I've got a bit more experience, I know what it's like to go out and get a job, I know what it's like to be unemployed, I know that it's like to have to get up at the crack of dawn and work all day, come home, commute long distances, I know what it's like to do all that. That's probably the only edge that I would have on them, I've a little bit more experience in that sense.

Pat makes numerous positive references to the opportunity his accident has afforded him as I have listed below to demonstrate.

I know there's a heap of people out there that want this opportunity and may not get it.

Pat perceives the social value of his opportunity to pursue nursing as a mature student.

My accident, I do think it's the best thing that ever happened to me because I'm being facilitated in making a change in my life, a complete change in direction. Like to go from roofing to nursing is fantastic.

He has transformed his interpretation of his accident from misfortune in his narrative to one of an incredible opportunity.

I think the accident facilitated me looking at my life in many different ways and also stopping because I had a huge amount of work on.

In the above quote, he questions if he would still be working in industry and elsewhere in his narrative if his accident had not happened.

This was one way of me stopping and allowing someone to nurture me, because men are useless, absolutely brutal, we soldier on, we go out and get hammered and usually alcohol is the way we deal with our pain.

Pat hints at his personal difficulty managing grief in the time between the loss of his partner and his accident.

The boat is going that direction and someone changes the rudder direction and now I'm going somewhere else.

Here, Pat uses a metaphor shared by Neault (2000, p. 6) of his career as a 'canoe' being manoeuvred down a river. Pat ascribes the control of the boat to an external source where agency (McMahon *et al.*, 2012, p. 135) is attributed to 'someone' else. In Pat's narrative however, I have heard evidence of 'strong skills and a prepared mind' (Neault, 2000, p. 6) in his management of unexpected events in his career.

The impression I have formed of the interviewees through their narratives is one of optimism, persistence and flexibility in their stance on educational and career opportunities that they have chosen to pursue. Shottin (2010, p. 62) says these traits are characteristic of Planned Happenstance approach and relevant in a time of recession.

5.4 Emigration

The interviewees' parents may have experienced the recession of the 1950s, witnessing and experiencing tried and tested strategies for managing in times of economic hardship. O'Donnell (1998) describes comprehensively the economic forces at work in Ireland prior to the 1970s and 1980s. In particular he remarks that the period 1980 to 1987 was one of 'prolonged recession, falling living standards, a dramatic increase in unemployment and[...]the prospect of emigration as the best option for the young'(p. 5). As my own parents emigrated to London in the 1950s, I was an immigrant to Ireland in the 1970s and was always aware of emigration. There was an awareness of emigration as a solution to the prospect of unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s and this is revealed in the interviewees' narratives.

In the recession a lot of my friends left. Lads that I went to school with went over to England. (Alan)

I remember things were very, very tight. Friends at school were going to London and this was normal at the time. (Pat)

...then I just couldn't afford to be so poor anymore, so I thought there's nothing for it but emigrate, so I moved to England. (Sarah)

Janet never mentioned emigration throughout her narrative. Sarah on the other hand, gives a detailed account of her emigration which provides a sense of the precariousness of the risk she was willing to take.

I had an address in the UK and none of my family previously had emigrated to the UK, they had all gone to the states, but you couldn't get a VISA to the states very easily then so em...I flew over did the interview and at the end of the interview they asked me would I take the job so I knew before I got back on the plane so then I just packed up and went. I had an address with somebody to stay with for a week. (Sarah)

It is apparent Sarah may have preferred to go to family in the USA, but went alone to the UK, knew nobody there and had a very short term living arrangement prepared in advance.

Alan sees emigration as something for other people but he is not prepared to emigrate now. He reflects a sense of connectedness because of his family business ties to Ireland that he will not relinquish.

As a nation we've always emigrated. It's a thing Irish people have always done. It's a small country particularly for people outside the cities. That's part of our culture and our history of emigrating. Myself and my wife, because we both worked in a family business, emigration never came into it for us back then and now. It'd be nice to go and travel but you wouldn't be leaving forever. (Alan)

This sense of connectedness is also reflected in Sarah's narrative. Curtin (1986, cited in O'Donnell, 1998, p. 365) claimed that at that time kinship ties were still strong in urban and rural communities in Ireland and that many people still gained much support from their neighbours. Sarah describes farming life as a 'very different mentality', where there was 'a kind of a team effort philosophy going on' and of 'how difficult it can be for people to suddenly go off living on their own or be outside of that circle'. This may be a reference to Sarah's recollection of the difficulty of growing up in rural Ireland in the face of emigration. Greene (1994) said of the time that young people in Ireland grew up with the knowledge that emigration might be in store for them.

Garavan *et al.* (1994) found evidence that those who see emigration as at least partly positive do so in relation to career opportunities and on the broadening effects of seeing other cultures. At this time of his life, Pat sees emigration for education as a plan which he will settle for if he has to.

I have a few contingency plans if this goes all arse ways. I will go to England if it takes it. I don't particularly want to.

Pat indicates he doesn't want to go, like Sarah who didn't want to go in the 1980s but as a last resort he may take the opportunity to pursue his new career opportunity in the UK.

5.5 Conclusions

The role of parental influence and the economic forces at work may have contributed to an *opportunistic attitude* in the participants approach to job seeking in their early careers. This attitude may be perceived as a possible *survival skill* in the current recession as the interviewees reflect flexibility in their approach to their current career development. They are willing to consider a variety of roles within individual parameters and none of them has expressed any thoughts about future unemployment.

The possibility of emigration in the 1970s and 1980s was in the awareness of the participants. Sarah was the only one to experience it in the past, but Pat is actively considering it as an option to pursue his new career identity in nursing.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVES

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I have reflected on other themes which emerged from the respondents' narratives. They were themes which made 'sensible patterns' and entered into a 'coherent unity' (Josselson, 2011, p. 224), but were not shared by all of the interviewees. They did not justify a chapter individually but they have importance for the individual respondent and in the role of my future guidance work with older adults. I have begun the chapter with an examination of *meaning making* as a theme for all of the interviewees; however I have explained Alan and Sarah's stories of meaning making from the perspective of the *resolution of individual issues*.

Finally, I discuss the theme of *the relevance of recession* as it portends to the participants in this research who are re-defining their careers through further education. In addition *The Shift from Serving Policy to Serving People* reflects issues arising from the narratives which have resonated with me in my broader experience of career counselling with older adults. While the focus of the research remains clear, I believe it is appropriate to address this theme here because these findings contribute to the current debate on the need for continued provision of appropriate guidance in further education. It is clear to me from this research that the use of narrative in career guidance in further education can contribute positively, to the provision of appropriate guidance.

6.2 Meaning Making

Meaning making is a prominent theme in the narratives. Josselson (2011) says,

That the stories people tell about their lives represent their meaning making; how they connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experience are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives. (p. 224)

This is very evident in the narratives of the respondents in this research and can be witnessed in the *occupational portraits* (King, 2011), in Chapter 3 and under the theme of *opportunity* in Chapter 5. What is told about the past by the interviewees in their stories only matters when the stories are connected to what they are telling now. Their past vocational stories are brief life stories, which are told in a few minutes but represent long periods of their career history. What they chose to tell me was selected, very carefully, to support a current self construction about their new career identity. Bujold (2002) says narrative 'Consists of the meaning making of one's experiences and is a form of self-construction or fluid self-awareness' (p. 472). Furthermore, he says 'Plot, an important aspect of narrative theory, is the organising theme of a story' (p. 472). Through this lens, I have explored each of the interviewees' narratives for a *plot* and I address each of them below.

I have discussed Alan's narrative theme under the *Resolution of Individual Issues* below as I believe this represents his narrative more accurately.

In Pat's narrative I observed the stories of the stress of working in the construction boom, the subsequent loss of his partner and his own accident and how these significant events have contributed to a personal re-construction of the meaning of

work in his life. The quotes below illustrate Pat's transition from past to future *career construction* (Savickas, 2002),

The pressure that we were being put under, one particular job that I worked on, it was the worst contract I ever worked on in my life, it was just absolutely insane.

For me it's not about the money, I want to get paid obviously [...]but I think it's more now that this opportunity is giving me a something that I can really enjoy where I'll feel a sense of self fulfilment within myself.

Josselson (1995, cited in Bujold, 2002) expresses the view that 'personal narrative describes the road to the present and points the way to the future' (p. 35). Pat has moved from the sense of the '*insane*' in his career to the pursuit of '*self fulfilment*'. Pat told several stories of the chaos of working in construction in the '*boom*' and employed them to rationalise his decision to pursue a career which he perceives as personally fulfilling. McMahon *et al.* (2012) say meaning making is a 'subjective process in which individuals think deeply about their experiences in order to understand or make meaning of them' (p. 134).

6.2.1. *Re-inventive Contribution*

After a lifetime devoted to helping others, Sarah describes choosing a course to make a profession out of a hobby so that she may re-discover '*what else is in the universe, I mean art and beauty to balance it*'. Sarah's meaning making of her current circumstances is the realisation that she has taken an unintentional sabbatical and is now '*free to go in whatever direction*'. The theme of Sarah's narrative was addressed extensively in Chapter 4, under *Sarah's Story of Power* but I have addressed the closure of this story under the *Resolution of Individual Issues* below.

Janet's story of making meaning of her life is very simply conveyed in '*Success for me now would be achieving personal satisfaction in things as well. If people will employ me, if they will value the work I do*'. Janet has derived great satisfaction from her holistic work and enjoys the esteem it brings her. Being published or writing a successful play would perhaps provide fruition of her current aspirations. Both Sarah and Janet present evidence of O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) phenomena of 're-inventive contribution' (p. 184). This describes a phase of development in women's careers between the ages of 45 to 60 as a time where making a meaningful contribution come to the fore in their development, not just in their career but in their family and community.

6.3 Resolution of Individual Issues

As stated above, I have begun here with a discussion of the theme of Alan's resolution of mental illness while in further education, to which he referred in his narrative. I have then returned to Sarah, to finish her story of resolving the theme of power in her narrative. My understanding of these themes is summarised by Singer (2004) in the following,

The progressive momentum is from story making to meaning making to wisdom accumulation that provides individuals with a surer more graceful footing on life's path. (p. 446)

Singer is referring to narrative as an opportunity to determine what takes individuals closer or further away from the goals to which they aspire. The themes of mental illness and power were dominant in the narratives of Alan and Sarah as issues that could potentially inhibit achievement of their goals. For Alan, the resolution of his illness has renewed his confidence to re-start his career and for

Sarah, '*closure*' or resolution of the effects of discipline have freed her to move on with her life.

6.3.1 Resolution of Mental Illness

Alan revealed a diagnosis of mental illness some years ago and his narrative bears evidence of a struggle with coming to terms with his self perception. Alan describes the diagnosis and recovery from mental illness in two stories. One is told as his narrative unfolds, as it happened and the second is told from the perspective of *hindsight*, where he gives an appraisal of the impact that it had on his life. Singer (2004) says our ability to construct narratives evolves and changes over all phases of the lifespan, 'as does our capacity for autobiographical reasoning and the ability to make meaning of the stories we tell' (p. 443). Inherent in the way Alan tells his story is the impression that he was unwell when he started his course, but now as his course draws to a close, almost two years later, he has recovered.

Savickas (2002) maintains that occupations provide a core role and a focus for personality organisation for most men and women and an imbalance in this role causes strain. In Chapter 3, Alan recalls the loss of his business as the cause of his initial '*breakdown*'. Meijers and Lengelle (2012, pp. 159-160) suggest that in situations which overwhelm, people are inclined to base decisions on prejudices and outmoded coping strategies and possibly make their existing stories a default narrative. Alan however, told his narrative in a way that demonstrates his belief that participation in further education has provided an avenue to his recovery from mental illness. He is critical of mental health services in that he says '*There was nobody who wanted to talk about what was going on in your head*'. Choosing an art course was possibly a therapeutic opportunity for self expression for Alan. He

refers to an encounter with a fellow student who suggested doubt about his diagnosis. Although Alan refuted his comment he still told me '*I don't think I am [sick] but if a doctor has diagnosed me with being [sick] well you know, you then take it on*'. He accepted the power of the expert diagnosis and acknowledges that he may have '*used it to my advantage*'. Through his course, Alan has had a prolonged opportunity to engage in the process of 'career construction' (Savickas, 2002, p. 185). Now in his second year in the college he reports '*being undiagnosed*', and is ready to go back to the marketplace with new crafts.

6.3.2. Resolution of Power

In Chapter 4, I have described Sarah's experience of fear in further education provoked by rules and regulations, which reminded her of her childhood experiences of corporal punishment. Sarah suggests below that her interview presented her with an unanticipated opportunity to resolve or provide closure for her concerns and memories of discipline in school and college. This supports Singer's (2004, p. 445) claim that individuals have experiences and then make stories of them in order to extract meaning from their telling.

Visual aspects of the interview cannot be captured by a digital audio recording but it was the observed nuances of Sarah's behaviour that arrested my attention as they added solemnity to her story. Bauman (1986, cited in Riessman, 2000) says 'Tellers intensify words and phrases, they enhance segments with narrative detail, reported speech, appeals to the audience, paralinguistic features ("uhms") and gestures, or body movement' (p. 12). Riessman (2000) says this 'performative element' (p. 11) suggests identity is performed for particular social interactions because informants negotiate how they want to be known by the stories they

develop. As Sarah's posture changed she began to tell me the narrative which was prompted by my question about her 'voice in further education' (see appendix B). She sat back in her chair, crossed her wrists over one another and laughed briefly as she told me of her dream.

I had a dream last night actually because I knew I was coming to talk to you today and I think ...and I was very afraid of the cane.[...] I dreamt last night that I had the cane and I broke it up and it was all in pieces. And it was the whole cane broken into sections and all in a little bundle and I came along and I gave it to [tutor]. Like I dreamt this last night.

I asked Sarah, *What do you think that signified or represented?*

It's finished, it's closure, it's like that memory is dealt with you know. There's the cane, it's all in bits it doesn't work anymore, it's not a functioning cane. It's been handed back to the place of authority, broken, so that it can't be used. That has come with an acceptance of getting to know the people that are in charge [...] That isn't connected with this person's authority at all but it's handed back to the place that it should have gone years ago. So it did resolve all that.

Etherington (2004) indicates that 'when we enable other people to give voice to our experience, those voices create a sense of power and authority' (p. 32). In the above extract we hear Sarah tell a story about taking back her power. Singer (2004) says researchers see potential for individuals to learn and grow from the stories they construct out of their life experiences. Furthermore he adds that building a narrative is an 'evolving work in progress' (p. 445). This was apparent for me in the way Sarah began to tell me elements of her story, soon after she started her course. I think that the narrative interview provided an end or 'closure', to our meetings.

6.4 The Relevance of Recession

My final discussion of the theme of the relevance of the recession to the respondents in this research is more superficial to the focus of this thesis but reflects a real issue for my practice as a guidance counsellor. The theme of relevance or a sense of detachment from the recession is evident in the narratives of Janet and Alan, and to a lesser extent Sarah and Pat. I believe it is appropriate to address this theme here because these findings contribute to the current debate on the need for continued provision of appropriate guidance in further education. In addition, I have explored the relevance for the interviewees, of recent developments in the jobs and skills shortages strategy (FÁS, 2011).

6.4.1. The Shift from Serving Policy to Serving People

What is important about the recession is that it is not relevant in the consideration of the career identities of the older adults who are the focus of this research in further education. I believe that this is illustrated in the narratives of Janet and Alan, who make direct references to the relevance of recession for them. Janet mentions on two occasions that she has casually researched the Irish recession of the 1950s and indicates a sense of reassurance derived from this as she has observed the cyclical nature of recession.

I looked at the cycles of recession because we have come out of them in the past and the fifties were apparently desperate. We need to stand back from it. All that financial stuff; I know it's important but it's not important.

Janet rationalises her belief that she is '*riding out the storm*' and distances herself from the economic reality, indicating that it is not meaningful to her. Alan reflects a feeling of insignificance when he considers the magnitude of Ireland's economic problems when he says '*All this banking business, you can't even start to worry*

about it. The scale of it is just bonkers'. The impression here is of detachment and incredulity at what has happened to the economy. Janet and Alan may well extend this sense of detachment to other aspects of the recession, including the skills shortages which they could feel are irrelevant to them. I found the use of narrative inquiry extremely helpful in the establishment of a clear picture that the interviewees' decisions to re-define their careers were grounded in realistic and well considered plans. It is only in the context of their whole story that their rationale for downplaying the relevance of the recession becomes apparent. Career counselling which provides information and caters for the psychological needs of 'mid-life careers changers' (McNamara, 1998, p. 10) is essential in this time of radical employment upheaval in Ireland.

Career counselling for older adults in further education may face a new challenge in the near future. One effect of the recession is the recent cut to the career guidance allocation to schools and colleges announced in the 2011 Budget which may impact on the future provision of career counselling with older adults. Bimrose (2009) states that in the UK 'funding and provision of guidance services is justified in terms of its contribution to creating and maintaining an efficiently functioning economy' (p. 1), but she argues that contributing to the health and well being of the nation should be an equal consideration. McNamara (1998) acknowledged the individuality of the mature student in further education and the challenge of providing counselling services which rise to their 'diverse and complex needs' (p. 12). The guidance cuts may be perceived as counter-productive when considering the transition needs of the adult student moving in, moving through and moving on from the further education college (Schlossberg, *et al*, 1989, cited in McNamara, 1998, p. 12). Adults who do not receive support at this

re-entry level to the education system of further education may be unlikely to ever gain the confidence to move on to third level colleges and universities where there is the possibility of further up-skilling or re-training.

The current *FÁS Vacancy Overview* (2011) and ensuing job strategy offers little motivation or inspiration to the older adults featured in this research. The recent *Springboard* (IBEC, May 21, 2012) announcement of 6000 course places in science, engineering and higher business management has little or no relevance for the respondents as they have implemented choices where more of their self-concept is expressed in their current life style (McNamara, 1998, p. 10). Janet for example, says that in secondary school she was not encouraged to take science subjects as a female. Sustained study to re-skill in career areas that require subjects like mathematics, engineering, science, business management and foreign languages may be unrealistic at this time in her life. Janet is still allowed to work up to 15 hours a week as a student. *'What they're giving me now is a supplement to what I can't earn'* is a reference to the Department's decision not to sign her on to the unemployment register. Janet says, *'I didn't want to give up what I trained for, I'd spent ten years on, which was great. I've been trying to keep it all ticking along in the hope that [work will increase] you know'*. Janet enjoys her work and continues to seek clients for her holistic practice in the hope that business will improve as time goes by.

Pat is cognisant and vocal about the role his accident has had in changing career direction.

It's facilitated me making a massive change, and with my accident I do think it's the best thing that ever happened to me because I'm being facilitated in making a change in my life.

While he is endeavouring to re-skill in a completely new direction, he has not been distracted by the current public service recruitment embargo which might hamper his future employability in nursing in Ireland. Sarah wanted a break after her years of work, helping others. There was an opportunity created in the transition period between her mother's death and her own decision of whether or not to go back to the UK *'so then I thought I'm not actually going to go back now'*. She considered her hobby in constructing costume, and says *'I thought if I wanted to make a change or a break I'd go in that direction'*. Very definitively, Sarah decided not to return to her job in the UK and to stay in Ireland, despite the recession.

The four respondents featured in this research are so individual and unique, and yet typical of the older adults I meet in further education. In his article *'How to give the long-term unemployed the skills necessary to recover employability'*, Brian Mooney (2012) argues that,

The key change we need to make in our approach to date is to respect the individuality and dignity of each person, and build support services – including the education and training offered – that are based on the needs of those seeking work rather than shoehorning them into existing courses and services so as to serve the system's needs first.

An opportunity for the client to 'tell their story' is one skill for employability that may be imparted through career counselling. Reid and Scott (2010) assert that the point of doing this is 'to engage the client, to encourage them to reflect at a deeper level and enable them to gain greater self awareness in their search for a meaningful career' (p. 28). The respondents in this research were engaged to provide illustration of the impact of the current recession on the older adults' decision to re-define their career path through further education, and in doing so

were invited to reflect on their experience of career change from recession to recession. A by-product of the research is that it has given the respondents an opportunity to engage in the formulation of a career narrative which may have beneficial effects for their self awareness and it has raised my awareness as a guidance counsellor of the value of the narrative approach in my work with older adults.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter was dedicated to the discussion of other themes which emerged from the respondents' narratives. The exploration of the theme of meaning making led to the discussion of each of the respondents' general narrative *plot*. This uncovered Pat's re-definition of his career in terms of '*self fulfilment*'; Janet's desire to have people '*value the work I do*'; Pat's resolution of being mentally ill; and finally Sarah's sense of being '*free to go in whatever direction*'.

The theme of *relevance of the recession*, while peripheral to the focus of this research has revealed the irrelevance of the national skills strategy to the respondents in this research; the continued need for career guidance for older adults in further education which incorporates information and career counselling for their needs; and the suitability of narrative work with older adults which I believe has been demonstrated through this research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this research was an exploration of the impact of the current recession on the older adults' decision to re-define their career path through further education. In Chapter 1, I also alluded to the paucity of research and policy on guidance for older adults and the relevance of current government employment strategies for them. The older adult was broadly defined as someone who was experiencing their *second recession*, and had worked for the last 20 to 30 years in a professional or skilled capacity. I held the broad assumption that in the current economic climate, older adults choose to pursue a new career identity in further education because of unemployment caused by the recession. I endeavoured to accomplish this exploration through the use of narrative enquiry and I chose to use the basic grounded theory practice of postponing the literature review until the analysis of the narratives was completed to avoid imposing pre-conceived themes on the analysis of the narratives.

Through the use of thematic analysis of the narratives in this research it has been demonstrated that the recession in isolation has not impacted on the career decisions of the four participants. The recession has facilitated an opportunity for the four interviewees to engage in further education at this time rather than any conscious decision by them to re-train or up-skill because of unemployment.

The analysis of the four narratives led to the emergence of several coherent themes. They included life stage; power; opportunity and emigration; meaning

making and resolution; and the relevance of the recession in the lives of the respondents. The exploration of the themes sheds light on the very distinctive guidance needs of the older adult which are specific to their age, educational experience and developmental stage of life. The conclusions of each of these themes are addressed briefly below. This is followed by a brief discussion of the implications for practice.

7.1.1. Life stage

The interviewees share in common their particular life stage and this was discussed in the context of Erikson's seventh psychological stage of development *Generativity vs. Stagnation* (Erikson, 1959, cited in Corey, 2001). The four respondents are all in the 40 to 55 year age range; they have experiences of loss and change which are typical of this age group; and their decision to choose education in the pursuit of stability in their working lives is a choice which is also indicative of the interviewees' life stage. Stability, which is identified as a motivating force at this time of life (Etherington, 2004), may be achieved by eventually earning an income from their endeavours but stability can also be achieved by finding identity in a new career. Their aspirations to pass on the values of their culture through caring and the arts are also suggestive of this life stage.

7.1.2. Power

The chapter on *Stories of Power* revealed that although power may be interpreted as an objectionable word, its effects are both positive and negative in this research. One of the unintentional effects of power may be found in my role as a researcher and the impact of my influence over the interviewees' participation. Power in this

instance was perceived be a positive influence on the outcome of the research because of the quality of data that was contributed by the respondents. I was mindful however, of the necessity to protect the anonymity of the interviewees as far as possible. In the context of the CDVEC college of further education which espouses an adult educational ethos, the *panopticon* (Bentham, 1791, cited in Hope, 2005) effect of power is constant *surveillance*. As its effect on the student population is generally unquantifiable, its presence requires reflexivity in my approach as a researcher. The potent effect of parental influence in the early career decision making of the interviewees may have forged an attitude of opportunism which has possibly served them as a protective factor in the current recession. Finally, Sarah's story of power brought to my awareness the impact of corporal punishment and the daunting effect this may have on an adults' feelings about their return to education.

7.1.3. Opportunity and Emigration

The embracement of opportunity was portrayed as a career '*survival skill*', and I believe that this was a characteristic of the '*second recession*' adults' attitude which has assisted the formulation of a new career identity. With encouragement from parents, in their early working lives the interviewees in this research found *good enough* (Gottfredson, 2002) jobs that satisfied their career needs for a time. I formed a general impression of the interviewees of optimism, persistence and a sense of flexibility in their approach to their career. In their careers, they have negotiated their way through unpredictable social factors, chance events, and unpredictable economic and market forces for the last 20 to 30 years, demonstrating resilience in their approach to the current recession. Parents of the

1970s and 1980s encouraged an opportunistic attitude to employment to avoid the prospect of emigration for their sons and daughters. While only Sarah has experienced emigration in the past, the prospect is there for Pat as he considers the pursuit of a career in nursing.

7.1.4. Meaning Making and Resolution

The importance of the motivational force of their *life stage* may be witnessed again in *meaning making* for the respondents. Each of their general narrative plots (Bujold, 2002) revealed evidence of a re-definition of their career in terms of *generativity* and making a meaningful contribution in their working lives. Narratives of two of the interviewees yielded evidence that they had resolved issues around mental health and power while they were in further education.

7.1.5. Relevance of the Recession

The theme of *relevance of the recession* was circumstantial to the research but confirmed that the participants in this research are undeterred by the recession in their pursuit of their choice of career despite the national skills strategy. I have argued for continued resourcing of career guidance for older adults in further education which incorporates the provision of information and narrative work in career counselling which I believe, will enhance their transition to a new career.

7.2. Implications for Practice

An assumption I held at the beginning of this research process was that the recession and unemployment was the cause of the upsurge in older adults

entering further education. An assumption about a person is a *best guess* or hypothesis which dominates the way we behave in relation to that person. In a busy guidance service in further education it is economical to start with *what is current* for the client and attempt to move forward with a plan. This research has raised my awareness that some mature students seeking the services of a guidance counsellor may already have a career plan. One way to assist adult students in guidance is to encourage the construction of their personal narrative which will help them to rationalise, affirm and bring to fruition their new career identity.

As a researcher, encouraging the expression of the life stories of the participants in the form of narratives has enabled me to see the complex set of individual circumstances that conspire to motivate older adults to choose further education. The use of prompts provides a structure for the career narrative and encourages clients to keep to the story which is important in a busy careers guidance service. My role as a researcher using narrative research has facilitated a change in the way I will work with some older adults in my guidance practice.

One aspect of adult career guidance in further education that *can* differ from career guidance offered in the Adult Guidance Service or a National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) assessment is that the clients have already identified a career area in which they propose to work by choosing their vocational area of study. My role in career counselling with older adults is one of informed, impartial affirmation of the individual's career aspirations. I am obliged to provide up-to-date information on the job

availability in specific career areas and pathways into such jobs, and assist clients in their exploration of realistic opportunities. Pryor and Bright (2011) affirm that career development in challenging economic employment conditions must confront 'educational institution entry quotas, labour market imperatives and economic fluctuations' (p. 20). My impartiality towards their career choice needs to be reflected in a balanced discussion around the pros and cons of particular career areas as demands for them are reflected in the economy. This discussion is important to respect their intellectual integrity. My reason for seeing my position as one of neutrality is that I have learned that this client group know what they want, have a narrative to tell, and my role is to listen, affirm and support them in achieving realistic career goals. All of this can be more easily achieved by encouraging the older client to craft and develop their career narrative.

I would advocate the use of narrative as a lens to identify the vocational needs of older adults. I believe it is clear from the emerged themes of this research that the impact of the current recession on the careers of the participants is lessened by the extraordinary individuality of the stories that have been told. Their decisions to re-define their career path through further education have had positive outcomes, as the end of their courses and academic year comes to a close.

Janet has achieved a place in university to continue her study of English and Media. Pat has been successful in his application to a nursing degree. Alan has been invited to a thriving national cultural event to engage the public in his craft. Sarah has taken some time out to see where life will take her.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Consent

Interviewer: Linda Dowling,

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Email: linda.dowling@inchicore.cdvec.ie

Tel: 01 4168276

23rd January 2012

Second Chance Career Development for Second Recession Students.

Letter of consent to be interviewed.

Dear _____,

I am a student on the Master of Education in Adult Guidance & Counselling at NUI Maynooth. I am doing thesis research in fulfilment for this qualification. My proposed study is to explore the career narratives of adults who have returned to further education, having left education in the recessionary times of the 1970s to 1980s. In particular I am interested in your account of the factors which have led to your decision to return to further education at this time and I hope to learn more about the impact of the current recession on your decision to re-define your career path.

I would like your permission to interview you. The interview will last approximately one and a half hours and I will record the interview. I may take notes during the interview just to remind me of key points that you bring up or need clarification.

Probably, only I will listen to our interview and transcribe parts of it. The only other person who might listen to a part of the interview will be my Supervisor, Liz O'Byrne of NUIM. Some or all of your interview will be transcribed and segments of it will be used in my thesis.

I do not believe your participation in my research will pose any risks to you. Pseudonyms will be used for all of my interviewees and every effort will be made by me to protect your confidentiality. You will have the opportunity to view the transcribed data that I intend to use and be able to discuss my interpretations with me.

This interview is not a counselling interview; however I am aware that issues may arise for you during the interview process which you may later feel you would like to address in counselling. If this is the case I will assist you with a referral to a CDVEC psychologist.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time before, during or after the interview. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me and I will also provide an opportunity for questions and debriefing after the interview.

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 National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Dowling.

APPENDIX B

Interview Prompts

Tell me about the impact of the recession of the 70'/80's on you when you were leaving school.

Can you tell me about the impact you saw on friends and family back then?

What were career opportunities like in your early working life?

What were your thoughts when you first heard of the current recession beginning in Ireland... did you think it would have any impact on you?

Is there anything our generation learned from the '70s/80's that has helped us now?

How have you felt about your voice in further education?

Who is successful? What is success to you now?

Has luck/chance/opportunity/serendipity played any role in your career so far?

Was there ever one great lifelong career ambition that you've had?

Secrets to life...what are the skills that keep you going?

