

SKILLING THEM SOFTLY

An analysis of the experience of unemployed adult learners who are enhancing their employability skills through a programme of study.

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Abstract

The Moser report to the New Labour Government in 1999 confirmed that up to twenty per cent of adults in England have problems with literacy and/or numeracy skills. Following this report the *Skills for Life* (SfL) strategy was initiated by the New Labour Government in England in March 2001. Its primary purpose was to create learning opportunities to allow adults to advance their language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills, identified as a decisive factor in enabling them to engage fully with society, both socially and economically. The strategy was targeted at a variety of groups which included public sector employees, low skilled people in employment, the unemployed and benefit claimants, those supervised in the community, prisoners and other groups at risk of exclusion. A number of training programmes under the umbrella title *Skills for Life* were made available for these groups however; they suffered from high attrition rates.

This research was conducted using a qualitative study approach and focuses on some learners in one of these groups: namely, long term unemployed adults attending an employability skills training programme (ESP). The research found that the ESP significantly reduced the attrition rates, normally associated with these learners, through its approach to teaching and learning. The thesis gives support to the case that flexible training programmes which are contextually linked to personal interests, whether social or vocational, can provide a better framework to support unemployed non-traditional learners. It concludes with suggestions for both management and pedagogic practice in the development of targeted training provision for this group of learners.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
ABS	Adult Basic Skills
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
BET	Basic Employability Training
DA	Diagnostic Assessment
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation Universities and Skills
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESP	Employability Skills Programme
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
IA	Initial Assessment
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFL	Institute for Learning
LLN	Language Literacy and Numeracy
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QCF	Qualification and Credit Framework
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTLS	Qualified Teacher Lifelong Learning Sector
SJFT	Short Job Focused Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WBLA	Work Based Learning for Adults

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2001, I was asked to undertake a year's secondment with a Jobcentre plus (JCP) District Office to help improve JCP employees' knowledge of the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) requirements of unemployed adults and to help improve its training delivery. I accomplished this through a targeted programme of teaching and learning for JCP staff and managers. After completing the secondment, I was asked to continue in the role of District Skills Manager in order to help develop and support a national training programme for unemployed adults through JCP training providers.

Currently training providers are contracted by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), formally the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) training for Jobcentre Plus customers who are out of work and receiving benefits for more than twenty six weeks. This thesis explores specific learning opportunities namely the Employability Skills Programme which is delivered by training providers contracted to JCP. This became the only programme offered, under the umbrella title *Skills for life*, by JCP to unemployed adults who lacked qualifications or have been perceived, as Kambouri and Francis (1996) describe, to have 'poor' language, literacy or numeracy skills.

Prior to the introduction of the ESP the long-term unemployed had been able to access Short Job Focused Training (SJFT) which prioritised job seeking skills, job application and interview techniques in an effort to empower and make independent the long-term unemployed, but did not include tackling any language, literacy or numeracy (LLN)

deficiencies. Hamilton (1998) identified that attendees spent most of their time on the SJFT looking at job adverts and making job applications but failed in to tackle the ideal of them becoming empowered and independent learners. The programme also suffered from attrition rates often greater than 50% (DWP, 2002). The weaknesses of this approach were recognised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the SJFT was quickly replaced by The Basic Employability Programme (BET) which acknowledged the need to address low levels of literacy and numeracy (Moser, 1999) found in the long term unemployed. This programme also had erratic results and was reported by DWP (2001) as being viewed by those attending as 'going back to school'. Eventually this programme was re-developed to incorporate work based literacy and numeracy training becoming known as Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA).

The language of empowerment and independence was being put forward by the DfEE (2001) in an attempt to legitimate and justify the actions described above which impacted upon the welfare of long-term unemployed in this effort to help them into employment. Daly (2003) argues that using language in this way is characteristic of attempts to legitimate the vision where paid work is seen as 'the' route out of poverty. The economic assumption that paid work lifts everyone out of poverty was also being used by DfES (2002b) in an attempt to justify further attempts to reduce both unemployment and welfare dependency through education.

Organisations delivering the WBLA training were required to employ teachers with a minimum City and Guilds qualification in adult teaching and learning in order to start

addressing learner's literacy and numeracy needs. However, it too received criticism from DWP/JCP (2001) as still failing to address both LLN needs and the identified severe socialization requirements of attendees. A further criticism related to class sizes which usually had a ratio of 30 plus learners to 1 teacher.

In order to tackle the criticisms and identified weaknesses of the previous courses a new programme of learning was developed in 2005 by the LSC (now the Skills Funding Agency) in association with JCP, Tribal and the University of Warwick. The notion of empowerment and independence were again utilised combined with an objective to address the severe social problems frequently associated with long term unemployment. These objectives were articulated by the DWP (2007) as a need:

- *To provide basic employability training for unemployed people with severe social, language, literacy and numeracy problems and to remove these barriers to employment.*
- *To help adults without work and 'poor' employability skills become independent and move into sustained employment.*
- *To empower long-term unemployed people to achieve vocational skills which are needed to fill local skill shortage vacancies.*

(DBIS, 2007: 6)

Wolf (2002) found learners regularly perceived themselves as failures, failing at school, failing to find work and failing in personal relationships. She suggested that this perception needed to be quickly reversed and an expectation created within the learners of opportunity for success through achievement and challenge within a supportive environment in order for them to widen their perception of what is possible. Bynner (2006) and colleagues from the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning published a report identifying a range of benefits, which they described as social capital

indicators, namely the development of friendship groups plus awareness in personal health and self-esteem. The latter often needed to be addressed prior to any LLN teaching and were seen as important socialization elements to include in the new Programme of learning for unemployed adults who often exhibited a deficiency in these areas. In order to achieve this the Providers tendering for the new Programme were required to create a positive social network, or culture that the learner would inhabit which would contribute significantly to a positive experience of learning, achieved within a supportive but challenging approach to teaching and learning. Parsons (2002) identified there is always the danger this can weaken the learner's position within their existing friendship and social group and challenge their sense of identity, which without the opportunity to create new ones will not only disrupt their present position but could also hinder them from subsequently moving on to employment or further education.

Other requirements asked of provider organisations were that they offered a weekly roll-on roll-off programme of study allowing new starters to commence every Monday. Class sizes were contractually set at a maximum of 12 learners per teacher. Further to this teaching and learning based on andragogy techniques was adopted that encouraged the process of socialization, whereby the individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behaviour and social skills necessary for participation within the learning programme. The LSC and JCP by this time also required all teaching staff to either have Qualified Teacher Life-Long Learning Sector status (QTLLS) and be registered with the Institute for Learning (IfL) or alternatively teachers were to have a minimum qualification of a Certificate (CTLLS) to teach in this sector and be working

towards a Diploma (DTLLS) qualification and subject specialism in LLN leading to Qualified Teacher Status.

In 2007 the New Labour Government changed their strategy towards the unemployed and began mandating attendance for the Employability Skills Programme of LLN training (DBIS, 2007). At the same time the DWP removed the need to be unemployed for twenty six weeks in order to become eligible to attend and any unemployed person found to have what Kambouri and Francis (1996) described as 'poor' LLN skills had to access it at any time during their benefit claim period. This was described by Freud (2007) as a response to criticism from Government that a voluntary approach which seeks to remake and regulate society through the discipline of the market and the fabric of an empowered and independent active citizenry was not being seen as entirely successful.

Changes were also made in the way that funding occurred. For programmes prior to the ESP 80% of the funding for an individual had been paid within the first two weeks of attendance, with the final 20% being paid for a positive outcome; that is employment or further training. Joyce *et al.*, (2006) reported this method of funding as not encouraging high attrition rates; they however, suggested it did not incentivise organisations to keep individuals on a programme to completion. For the ESP the DWP in 2007 reversed this funding stream with only 20% being paid at the programme outset and differing amounts paid as the individual learner completes set milestones, which included attendance rates, time completed on the programme and a positive outcome such as a qualification or job. It was suggested by Joyce *et al.*, (2006) that the use of qualified

teachers when linked to the other changes detailed above can be seen as an attempt by the SFA to instil within private training providers the professional structure found within FE colleges, incentivising them to help individual learners achieve a positive outcome.

Rationale and aims of the research

I commenced this research because I observed first-hand the positive reaction of learners attending an employability skills programme (ESP). Attrition rates on the ESP were reported by DWP (2007) to be 5% to 8%, and learners were motivated and engaged, often expressing a wish to continue with their learning episode rather than leave the course upon its completion. This positive engagement went against the prior reported non-engagement by Hasluck and Green (2007) and attrition rates of 25% to 45% associated with the provision of LLN training for long-term unemployed non-traditional learners.

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of some unemployed adults attending Employability Skills Programmes (ESP's) and attempt to discover how useful or material they feel the learning experience has been for them. In order to investigate this more fully I undertook a study of the New Labour Government interventionist strategy approach towards the long-term unemployed (DWP, 2007) and through their voice (Ward and Edwards, 2002) its impact on this group of vulnerable and disadvantaged people. This strategy, in practice, forces unemployed adults to attend an employability skills programme of learning by threatening the removal of unemployment and welfare benefits

for non-attendance. In analysing of some participants' experiences during their programme of learning I attempted to answer the following questions:

- *To what extent the learner research participants' forced participation on the course impacted upon their engagement with the programme of study?*
- *Whether this participation created any change in expectancies, capital or self-identity by the research participants over the duration of the programme of study?*
- *How did the research participants' understand their existing language, literacy or numeracy skills and was this perception altered during the programme of study?*
- *If their perception altered did it lead them to seek more interesting and personally fulfilling work?*

The target study group that make up this research are unemployed adults who have all been assessed using the Basic Skills Agency (2002) initial assessment tool and have recorded LLN skills below level 1, making them vulnerable to JCP compulsory LLN training (DIUS, 2007). The levels at which adult LLN are assessed, and teaching and learning opportunities are provided are shown in row two of appendix 13: 301. Row three acts as an indicator of age; that is the age at which, according to Ofqual (2011) individuals are most likely to complete each level. This table demonstrates an expected achievement to a minimum of Level 1 in LLN competence between the ages of 11-14 and Level 2 by the age of 16. These expectations of achievement identified by Ananiadou *et al.*, (2004) are grounded in the compulsory schooling system, in England.

It is suggested, by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), that many adults who have been assessed, and found to have entry level LLN skills (appendix 13: 301), when asked about their skills level still over estimate their ability in this area. Parsons and Bynner

(1998) report that adult learners often believe themselves to have adequate LLN skills and seem particularly opposed to new learning episodes. Consequently, as Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) propose they do not see the necessity to improve their LLN skills, as they feel their current level is enough to meet their daily needs. I explore this theme in more depth during the literature review when discussing literacy and its impact on social networks and in the findings through what Ward and Edwards (2002) describe as the voice of the learner.

Definition of terms

There are some recurring words used throughout this thesis. The phrase *Skills for life* is used in the context of the New Labour Government strategy towards unemployed adults and was defined by the Learning Skills Council (2010) as:

“A national strategy for improving the literacy, language and numeracy of adults aged 16 and upwards, through the delivery of literacy, language (English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)) and numeracy provision”. (LSC 2010: 5).

The term ‘Level’ is used in this study to refer to the range of criterion of LLN that has been developed to meet qualification standards, comparable with others on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), within England (National Literacy Trust, 2006). A comparison of LLN levels in relation to qualifications in England is shown in appendix 13: 301. The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy in England are specified at three levels: Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 (QCA, 2000). Entry Level is the foundation level of the National Qualifications Framework in England, Northern Ireland and Wales and is further divided into three sub-levels, Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 and Entry Level 3 (ibid).

Thesis structure

This chapter has begun to position the research within the field of learning for employment, which provided the research focus and the research questions. The specific training programme has been introduced.

Chapter Two investigates the skills for life strategy and its impact on the long-term unemployed along with selected literature that has been explored to shape and inform the study. The literature reviewed considers the prospect of compulsion within the employability skills training programme for unemployed adults which have been developed specifically for Jobcentre Plus and delivered by their training providers. Crucially, a broad literature on human and social capital is brought to bear from authors such as Putnam *et al.*, (1993); Inglehart (1996); Bourdieu (1997); Coleman (1998); Putnam (2000); Schuller (2000) Jenkins (2002); and Field (2005: 2008). Their differing interpretations of capital are explored to inform the discussions.

Chapter Three describes, critically evaluates and justifies the methodological approach adopted for the study and the research design. The chapter includes a presentation of the data collection methods used and the various research tools designed to support the compilation of data, as well as the system used for analysis of the data. Within this section, there is a description of the research sample and the creation of the research design to allow for reliability, validity, triangulation and ethical considerations.

An overview of the population residing in the study area and the findings resulting from the investigation are presented in Chapter Four. These findings are analysed and discussed, using the voice of the research participants (Ward and Edwards, 2002) if appropriate to provide legitimacy to the study, and are analysed using the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five draws together the research, providing a summary of the key emergent themes from the findings. These are then used to inform the final conclusions drawn from this study and their contribution to the body of knowledge in this field of teaching and learning. Recommendations are then made for strategy and curriculum managers and teachers from the conclusions of the findings. In closing the thesis I have identified areas for further research.

Chapter Two: The literature review

Introduction

This chapter reviews a selection of the existing literature relevant to the research themes outlined above linked to the Employability Skills Programme of study offered by Jobcentre plus to long term unemployed adults. I examine the development of government strategies associated with this group and include a synopsis of the strategy context in which the research is situated and perceptions around choices associated with training opportunities. In this way, I will place this study within the existing body of knowledge relating to LLN for employability and also consider how this study may provide additional insight through its findings for the field.

Identifying the strategy context

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published “Literacy for a Knowledge Society” in 1997. This report was the second in a series of three commissioned by the OECD, used to compare the standards of adult literacy across 11 industrialised countries. The conclusions indicated that the literacy skills within the workforces of all the countries involved in the study were limited.

Specifically, the OECD (1997) report emphasised the need for countries to increase the LLN skills of their adult population in order for them to compete effectively in the global economic market. They further recommended that a lifelong approach to learning be adopted by countries, supported by Governments through strategy interventions.

Also in 1997 the incoming New Labour Government commissioned a thorough review of adult basic education (DfEE, 1999) as the first action in a series of significant strategy developments that aimed to ensure the UK's continued participation in the global economic market. In fact, a key manifesto motto during the election campaign (Labour Party, 1997) was 'Education, Education, Education'.

Throughout the subsequent series of strategy introductions, which aimed to ensure a strong economic market, the New Labour Government remained committed to developing adult basic education as part of a wider social strategy (Papen, 2005) and continued during its term in office to consider education as one of its biggest economic strategies (Leitch, 2006) and human capital investments.

Following receipt of the OECD report in 1997 the New Labour Government, appointed a Working Group, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, to provide an independent review of literacy and numeracy capabilities of the workforce in England. The rest of the United Kingdom responded independently to the OECD report. The main findings of the review: *A Fresh Start*, were published in 1999 by the DfEE and reflected those of the OECD (1997) report, stating that "one in five adults in England was considered to be functionally illiterate" with considerably more facing problems with numeracy (DfEE 1999: 7); they had below average ability and did not meet the Working Group applied definition:

... "The ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general".
(DfEE, 1999: 2)

The New Labour Government suggested there was now significant evidence and justification for the development and implementation of a national strategy which would work to eliminate low levels of LLN from the population (DfEE, 2001a). Evidence from a series of reports including that of the Working Group showed that the population was likely to be able to participate more easily and more completely economically and in society more effectively if it was able to increase LLN standards (ALBSU, 1993; Parsons and Bynner, 1998, 1999; DfEE, 1999, 2001a).

The Moser report, (DfEE, 1999) also confirmed this lack of functional LLN was especially high in the part of the population which is made up of the long-term unemployed; the focus of this study. Further to this the report suggested that it was likely to have a material bearing on the ability of the economy to increase its productivity (DfEE, 1999). However, there was criticism of the Moser report and how Government proposed to tackle the issue of high unemployment through increasing the skills of the unemployed by Keep (2000) and Wilson and Hogarth (2003), who suggested that this approach would be too simplistic and insufficient on its own to address persistent high levels of unemployment. There were suggestions by Keep and Mayhew, (1999), Keep, (2000) and Wilson and Hogarth, (2003) that without a corresponding focus on employer demand and their utilization of skills high levels of unemployment would continue.

In response to the Moser report recommendations, the New Labour Government published on 1st March 2001 “*Skills for Life: a national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*” (DfEE, 2001a) which included a framework for cross-departmental working in an effort to establish a collaborative approach in working to

support the development of LLN skills within the adult workforce. *Skills for Life*: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills mission was:

...“to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first-century society” (DfEE, 2001a: Foreword).

Whilst the strategy had a focus on economic goals it was also seen, and supported suggests Papen (2005) by the New Labour Government as part of a wider social strategy focussed on inclusion. The rationale underpinning the strategy was to tackle and eradicate the “financial burden of adults with low levels of LLN” (Ibid 11) through the introduction of a series of interventions which included:

- *“Making radical changes to the education and training programme for those learning language, literacy and numeracy skills in order to raise standards and increase levels of achievement”.*
- *“The introduction of new national standards, new materials and a common core curriculum leading to national tests to make sure that the same approach to teaching and learning, based on the most effective practice, was adopted across the country”.*
- *“The introduction of new, more effective ways of assessing need, and improving teacher training through setting up a new research centre, combined with rigorous national inspections to monitor standards” (DfEE, 2001a: 6-7).*

The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy were published in 2001 by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), through the Department for Education and Skills (DfEE), to ensure a uniform move toward LLN teaching and learning (DfEE, 2001). These standards formed the basis on which the other initiatives identified above, were built. The *Skills for Life* strategy was reported by Crawley (2005) as the biggest

overarching strategy approach that had ever taken place in post-compulsory education, supported by significant funding from the New Labour Government.

Adult national curricula for literacy and numeracy were constructed in line with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and underpinned by the national standards developed by the QCA through the Basic Skills Agency (2002) to provide a structure in which teaching and learning of LLN could take place. The curricula provides teachers with a wide-ranging structure helping them to identify and address an individual's learning needs, and includes examples of teaching schemes, and lesson plans (ibid). For teachers and learners alike, the introduction of core curricula and proposed lesson plans reinforce the controlled nature of some adult LLN training.

To further support the development of LLN skills, national tests for adult literacy and numeracy were launched in September 2001 (DfEE, 2001). These tests reflect national standards and enable all stakeholders to have a clear knowledge of what competency has been tested and the significance attributed to the resulting qualification. The tests for both literacy and numeracy consist of 40 questions developed by the Basic Skills Agency (2002) and can be undertaken at Level 1 or Level 2.

A further aim of the DfEE (2001) strategy was to raise teaching standards amongst adult literacy and numeracy teachers who had previously had little opportunity to acquire accredited qualifications in the teaching of their subject. Since September 2002, a new professional programme has been developed and put in place to allow

both existing and new teachers wishing to specialise in teaching adult LLN to meet the requirements of the national standards by undertaking a subject specialist qualification, leading to Qualified Teacher Lifelong Learning Sector (QTLS) status.

It was suggested by the New Labour Government through the DfEE, (2001) that this professional suite of qualifications would assist in raising the professional profile of the post compulsory sector, aligning it more closely with teaching in the primary and secondary sectors. Quality assurance mechanisms, through national auditing and monitoring, were also implemented through the strategy. The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit was renamed the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit and the Institute for Learning (IfL), was created to oversee the professional register of teachers in the adult learning sector. In addition, all teaching became eligible for inspection in April 2001 by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) which became part of Ofsted in 2007 (DIUS, 2007).

Alongside these changes the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) was created as a centre dedicated to research and development in this field. Established by the DfES in 2002, and initially funded for five years, it included an expert experienced consortium of partners, largely drawn from the university sector, which were identified as having specialist academics working in the fields of adult LLN (DfES, 2002a). The aim of the NRDC was to develop professional teaching practice through the creation of a strong research culture and generation of knowledge, allowing it to give support and advice to the New Labour Government on adult learning strategy (NRDC, 2003).

In order to attract adults into education programmes a national media campaign was launched namely, 'The Gremlins' campaign, which was identified, by the New Labour Government, and reported by Papen (2005) as being the most recognisable and successful media campaign ever launched by a Government department. The campaign aim, suggest Casey and Mellows (2005), was to encourage adults to overcome their fears of learning by presenting a variety of real life examples of where improved LLN skills would prove useful. An example of an image used in the campaign, along with a description of its aims, is illustrated in appendix 1: 289.

Further campaigns, reported as significantly raising awareness of adult education opportunities in the post-compulsory sector in England, include 'Your future in your hands' (Crawley, 2005) and 'Beryl', (Freud 2007) a face made from hands (appendix 2: 290). Combined with the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published an Employment Green Paper entitled "Towards full employment in a modern society" (DfEE, 2001). In doing so, the New Labour Government confirmed through the DfES (2002b) its intention to focus on raising the level of LLN amongst adults of working age, in order to avoid any adverse impact on economic growth. The reports main objective required work-focused support for all those of working age receiving unemployment benefits, whether unemployed or economically inactive (Ibid). Interestingly, it was estimated by the DfEE (2001: 13) that "at least 32% of all unemployed people, in contrast to the reported 20% of the population in general, have LLN needs, which hinder them from increasing their employability and finding secure employment".

The publication, in July 2003 of “21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential” (DfES, 2003c) reconfirmed the existence of shortfalls in broad foundation skills within the adult population, which were considered essential for sustainable employment. This report set out a National Skills Strategy aimed at employers (DfES, 2003c), ensuring that they had the right skills available for them to support the success of their businesses, and ensure individuals had the skills they needed to be both employable and personally fulfilled.

In 2004 a working group chaired by Mike Tomlinson reported to government on the 18th October 2004, detailing criticism of the present education system for 14-19 year olds (DfES 2004) pointing out it put pressure on students and schools to meet government targets, while seeing them only through their potential to hit the magical 5 A*-C grade GCSEs. The working group proposed that GCSEs and A levels should evolve over the next decade into a Diploma system comprising fewer exams and offering work related learning and basic skills for the less academic, in line with systems in Europe, USA and Canada. The report suggested that the proposed vocational element would be a panacea for the 41 per cent of students who were either only partially engaged or disengaged within the present system (ibid).

The report had been widely leaked prior to its presentation to government and on the 19th October 2004, it was dismissed in an article by Charles Clarke, then Education Secretary, in the Guardian who commented “My approach will be to build on all that is good in the current system, including the real and great strengths of A levels and

GCSEs". While in the same article the Prime Minister Tony Blair was reported as saying "The purpose of reform will be to improve upon the existing system, not replace it... GCSEs and A levels will stay, so will externally marked exams" (Chitty, 2004: 191). In response employers were widely reported as disagreeing with government when stating that the existing courses do not produce the potential employees with the skills they need to function effectively in the work place (Guardian 24th February, 2005). However, the CBI and Russell Group of Universities defended the existing regime of GCSEs and A levels and were fully behind Clarke and Blaire in rejecting the report (DfES, 2005).

High levels of unemployment continued and in 2009, UKCES, in support of employers, suggested that the present education offerings were still proving insufficient in building an internationally competitive economy and that:

"The future employment and skills system will need to invest as much effort on raising employer ambition, on stimulating demand, as it does on enhancing skills supply" (UKCES, 2009: 10).

Payne (2010) also suggested that after a decade of strategy intervention by New Labour the publicly-funded skills strategy was still not fully addressing its aim of reducing unemployment and that it required a more integrated approach linked to other strategy areas, including economic development and industrial strategy, innovation plus R & D and business improvement for it to be successful.

Summary of the continuing strategy context

The *Skills for Life* strategy at its launch had a core aim to support adults in developing their LLN skills in order that they may not only be able to contribute to the economy

more effectively (DfEE, 2001a), but also crucially to strengthen social cohesion and social justice. Measures of success for the strategy require evidence of an adult's increase in LLN skill which is gathered through the collection of data from learners' undertaking the recently introduced National Test's for literacy and numeracy (ibid). The first target identified by the New Labour Government was to see 750,000 adults achieve a National Test Level 1 by 2004.

The targets set by the New Labour Government were considered optimistic at best (Papen, 2005); however, whilst this goal was achieved it has since become evident that the majority of people who achieved these outcomes were largely 16-19 year olds undertaking re-sit examinations, rather than the priority target groups (see p: 2) identified in the strategy (ibid). The subsequent target of a further 1.5 million learners by 2007 was announced as achieved in February 2007 by skills minister Phil Hope, who stated that 1.6 million people had gained qualifications as a result of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DIUS, 2007)

It appears that all measures put in place to evaluate the success of this strategy focus on economic influences rather than societal and social developments (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006); however, successful employment outcomes after training are not routinely collected by JCP. It would also be challenging to establish for example, from the collected data on the *Skills for Life* strategy, whether there has been a resultant reduction in crime, or an increase in local community activities or political activity.

Since 2010 the current Coalition Government strategy has continued to reflect that of the last New Labour Government (DBIS, 2010) and initially clearly identified that by improving adults LLN through investment in education and training is the foundation upon which individuals can improve their employability and contribute to the creation of a competitive economic market. Clegg (2009) reports that consecutive Governments have identified education and training as necessary concepts in the development of social justice and as such, there has been recognition by them [i.e. Government] that the changing labour market is expected to further marginalise and exclude individuals who lack basic LLN skills (Leitch, 2006; Freud, 2007; Hodgson *et al.*, 2011).

The Coalition Government in publishing a white paper “Skills for Sustainable Growth” placed emphasis on the outlined measures contained within it that are designed to “fuel opportunity and power prosperity” (DBIS, 2010: 3). However, the Comprehensive Spending Review by HM Treasury (2010) recommended a cut to the budget of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills leading to what DBIS (2010) describe as a reduction of some 25 per cent to further education funding. While the Chancellor, George Osborne in his budget speech (2011: 11) identifies the importance of workforce skills as “probably the biggest problem facing our economy in the future”. Indeed, just as New Labour proposed, the Coalition continues to put forward skills and apprenticeships as a key strategy lever to enable it to deliver both economic performance and social mobility (Keep, 2011; Osborne, 2011).

The Literacy Study Group (2008) describe learning providers as delivering business orientated provision through a quasi-marketization of education for JCP learners who are long-term unemployed. They criticise them for being more interested in meeting the financial needs of the organization, rather than the student need. However too fully gain their financial outcome learning providers need to encourage learners to complete the course, where possible, complete a qualification outcome and gain employment. While Wolf (2011: 13) criticises the present offering of Key Skills, Functional Skills and by implication the National Tests which are a key outcome of the ESP as being “very easy to pass qualifications that only serve the funding requirements of learning providers”.

The Wolf report (2011) commissioned by Michael Gove, Minister for Education also criticises the rejection of the Tomlinson report in 2004 and the missed opportunity she saw of radically reforming the education system to align it with the rest of Europe, the USA and Canada. In response to Wolf (2011) Michael Gove, minister for education, censures funding systems that encourage teaching towards qualifications which attract the most funding as not always giving the qualification that supports progression to further education (DfE, 2012). Ewens (2012) suggests that a number of courses, requested by employers, are designed to meet the needs of adults’ already in employment and offer no route to further education or entry into employment for those still in education.

In reforming the welfare state to meet both economic and social cohesion objectives, the new Coalition Government has focussed on a ‘Welfare to Work’ strategy (Payne and

Keep, 2011: 8); which has become a central pillar of their overall political approach.

This strategy, is “designed to address the issue of long-term unemployment, stop the spiral of escalating spending on social security and end the dependency culture” (Ibid: 9). Whilst the system, incorporating various strands, is primarily designed to assist people off welfare benefits by raising their education levels and helping them to gain sustainable employment, it takes a hands off approach, placing emphasis on personal responsibility for education and employability on individuals so they can enter and progress within flexible labour markets (ibid).

To accomplish this during a period of austerity the Coalition Government is changing funding priorities. There will be continuing support to those aged 18 - 24 undertaking a first level 2 qualification and adults who left school without a qualification but, for learners over 24 there will be limited co-funding linked to a system of government backed loans, where success will depend on individuals and employers willingness to undertake and pay for their training (DfE, 2012). Something that New Labour attempted, but failed to get employers to buy into, through its “Train 2 Gain” programme (LSC: 2009: 34). Also greater emphasis is to be placed on demand led needs at a local level rather than on central targets. This in turn will be linked to the threat of FE establishments being given over to the private sector if they fail to perform (ibid). The Leitch (2006) targets no longer apply but there is still an “ambition of developing a world-class skills base” which government intends to accomplish through its hands off approach using a combination of “voluntarism, markets and private investment” (DBIS 2010: 13) during a period of fragile economic recovery.

A consideration of adult language, literacy and numeracy

Within this study, I consider the progress of training for adults undertaking an employability skills programme of study developed in response to the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a). I believe it is necessary to consider such provision prior to its introduction to understand how current developments have been influenced by past practices and strategy.

Prior to recent changes in strategy Hamilton and Merrifield (2000) provided an overview of adult basic education (ABE) in England; the umbrella term regularly used to refer to adults undertaking training programmes associated with the development of LLN skills. This started with the launch of the '*Right to Read*' literacy campaign in 1973 considered "the first adult literacy campaign to take place in a Western European country" (Ibid: 249) and was the most significant demonstration that adult literacy within developed countries may be a problem for concern.

After the introduction of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), ABE became a permanent feature within the further education sector of England and Wales, a strategy which focussed on qualification outcomes and related functionality, linked to economic wellbeing (McClelland. 2000). Hamilton and Merrifield (2000) portray the development of adult LLN provision during this time as taking a substantial shift in the approach and ethos of adult LLN teaching and learning from one which was largely perceived as liberal, and having an emphasis on self-development to one which included a discussion of human resource investment and performance linked to individual

empowerment and independence. They further considered LLN skills as being related to functionality and associated with employment opportunities and economic success rather than academic pursuits (ibid).

UNESCO has for a number of years promoted literacy as a human right, and a means of liberation and development; global discussions around literacy are often associated with overcoming illiteracy (Rogers, 1992). This is clearly illustrated by the work of the United Nations in the presentation of the eight *Millennium Development Goals* (appendix 9: 297), drawn up in September 2000, and six *Education for All goals* (appendix 10: 298) reaffirmed in Dakar in 2000, following their launch in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All (UNESCO, 2006).

Both these sets of goals incorporate the aim to eradicate adult 'illiteracy'. In its Global Monitoring Report (2006: 42); *Literacy for Life*, UNESCO identify literacy as being "essential for economic, social and political participation and development and also as the key to enhancing human capabilities with wide ranging benefits". These include "critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship which they describe as the promotion of a civil society" (ibid: 42).

Cook-Gumperz (1986) comments that the term 'literacy' originates from the word 'illiteracy' and has historically been used pejoratively to describe an individual who is unable to read or write. This view has been hard to shake off, and there is often a

stigma felt by individuals who find themselves unable to exercise the practices of language, literacy and numerical ability at an independent level (ibid). This is further compounded by adult literacy programmes being commonly constructed on formal models of teaching and learning programmes built for children; with the inclusion of formal measures of progress and assessment and generally being frequently de-contextualised from learners' life experiences (ibid).

This tendency veers significantly from the option of contextualised and meaningful learning proposed by Dewey (1997a; 1997b) and significantly denies the experiences that adults bring with them to the teaching and learning environment. Dewey (1997a: 340) stressed that the "business of education could be defined as an emancipation and expansion of experience", which is often reflected in today's normal way of describing practices as "learning from experience". Rogers (2002, 2003) also argues that what differentiates an adult learner from a child learner are experiences, expectations and personal agendas, and these will instrumentally inform and shape the development of teacher-learner relationships in which learning as an adult takes place.

The characteristics of literacy communication

Written language, a component of literacy is one of the most universal mediums through which communication is undertaken and is used in various ways, but commonly initiates a discourse or talk around the written text (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Gee, 1996).

However, literacy communication can take an array of forms, including visual signing, written, spoken, performance of the body, pictorially, technologically and via music to name a few (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). These various media use markedly

different genres, both within and between them to ‘talk’ or interact with their audience. It is these diversities that come together under the umbrella term of literacy. What is common among them is the desire to engage with, or be engaged by an audience (ibid).

Language, when written, spoken or signed provides a framework of construction in which a person’s existence, or culture and society is created (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Baynham (1995) also describes literacy as communication using:

...“the web of relations with other people through which meanings are negotiated and changed in spoken and written language”.(Baynham, 1995: 263)

In taking this approach as a starting point for his discussions of literacy, Barton (2007:151) describes literacy as a “social activity which operates in a variety of discourses or speech acts across a variety of domains involving literacy events and literacy practices: social practices”. The term ‘literacy practice’ he explains as the socially acceptable or unacceptable ways in which a literacy action can or cannot take place. Such practices he argues are closely associated with ‘literacy events’ and are explained as ‘venues’ or points of interaction (ibid: 158).

Barton’s (2007) research explores how the pursuit of literacy, which he argues is part of an environment, influences and is influenced by that environment. He proposes that literacy is ecological in nature, and can only be understood in social practice terms as it deals with the complexity of people’s lives as they lead them, and cannot be isolated from them. This is an idea originally developed by Vygotsky (1978: 74) who used an ecological approach to compare his theoretical framework, in which he stated that

“social interaction plays a crucial role in the development of cognition by tracing how children’s internal thinking develops out of external social interactions with other people”. This ecological approach to language and literacy development is supported through the work of several authors (Gee, 1992; Rogers, 1992; Street, 1995; Hamilton, 2000), who refer to it as a radical literacies approach or new literacy studies.

The term ‘literacy’ is used by Barton (2007) to define a variable that encompasses aspects of reading, writing, literacy and language and he argues that literacy has social significance, with social constructions emerging from individual or social networks of attitudes, actions, and learning. He discusses language through a constructivist approach that considers language across domains as it has been; is being and continues to be used and evolve; seeing language as a dynamic social activity that serves the purpose of the person or people using it (ibid). For Barton (2007) literacy is rooted in the contexts of people’s socio-economic status, their culture and ethnicity and is policed within the social networks of these realities. This is in direct conflict to the more traditional view of language that considers it solely in terms of its structure as seen in a statement made by UNESCO in 1962 where a literate person is one whom:

...“has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function in his group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community’s developments” (Cited in Oxenham, 1980: 87)

This is a ‘functional’ view of literacy, which contrasts to the view of the ‘new literacy’ studies, that describe functional literacy as typically associated with a ‘skill set’ which has universal applicability, underpinned by the idea that there is one literacy, which

everyone should learn in the same way (Mayor and Pugh, 1987: 201). Gray, (cited in Stubbs, 1980: 14) first used the term “functional literacy” in 1956 to describe literacy in relation to “the requirements of an individual relative to a particular society; the degree of literacy required for effective functioning in a particular community”. Such an approach is closely linked to an economic model of employment, rather than social networks and is often associated with imposing literacy on individuals, rather than for them to start from their own perceptions of need (Baynham, 1995). However, if individuals maintain a constructivist approach (Barton, 2007) it becomes apparent that literacy practices will derive from the context in which lives are constructed and lived. These activities are influenced by the ways, in which individuals organise their ‘social network’ (Putnam, 2000: 296).

Literacy and its impact on social networks

Social networks are informed and framed by similar current experiences of individuals who share values, faiths, and belief systems; such as extended families, school peer groups, work colleagues and other groups with whom they may be attached (Vygotsky, 1978). Nevertheless, as Foucault (1980) points out such experiences and influences are also likely to be affected by the governance and contested issues of power and social hierarchy and through processes of self-policing of the state and society. Hamilton’s (1998) account of how power is exercised through society and how individuals ‘circulate between the threads’ places emphasis on an image of a system in which we all share. This carries with it the implication of equality and involvement in a

society rather than the more general possibility of control of the majority by the few (ibid).

Foucault's (1995: 151) re-conceptualization of power as a positive, as well as a negative force, is a fundamental reformulation of the theory of power. He extends the idea that power is a positive force to the idea that all power relations are potentially reversible and unpredictable and that wherever power is imposed resistances will inevitably arise. Power he theorises, does not only work through techniques of repression or inculcation, but through strategies of normalisation. Foucault (2001: 246) suggests education seeks 'to impose, in a universal form, a morality that will prevail from within upon those who were strangers to it'. However, his analysis of power relations within the education system considers only how power is installed within institutions, not how power is experienced by subjects (ibid); a fundamental aspect of this study.

Street (2004) describes how power penetrates all literacy events and practices and if one considers literacy to be a social activity, then as Barton, (2007) suggests it must be acknowledged that it functions within the framework of power. Willis (1981, 59) when talking of non-conformist individuals, who are struggling to find some modification of their institutional opposition into a more resonant form of acceptance, described how in becoming conformist they are insulated from their class values, and are freed from its processes. He also argues that some will see education as a way out of their situation a game to be played while others have a different sense of social status and continue with non-conformist ways (ibid).

Freire (1996) in recognising this problem asserts that most social relations are relations of oppression with the poorest in society evidencing the poorest skills, being the least powerful and being the most oppressed. Freire (ibid) popularises this radical view of literacy in response to the decade of functionalist literacy programmes provided by UNESCO during the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, Olson (1977) challenged the dominant claims for literacy for adults being made by UNESCO, stating:

...“the use of literacy skills as a metric against which personal and social competence can be assessed is vastly oversimplified. Functional literacy, the form of competence required for one’s daily life, far from being a universal commodity turns out on analysis to depend critically on the particular activities of the individual for whom literacy is to be functional. What is functional for an automated-factory worker may not be for a parent who wants to read to a child” (Olson, 1977: 12).

Fairclough (1989: 92) extended this hypothesis further, exploring the relationship between language use and unequal relations of power when considering how language contributes to the domination of some people by others “the literacy event”. Power was described and understood by Fairclough (1989) as parts, or domains, separate from each other, which form a hierarchical relationship of domination and subordination. Such power relations, he suggests, stem from ideological assumptions that embed conventions such as the pedagogical approaches and practices used for adult literacy programmes. These include, for example, the de-contextualization of literacy teaching being ‘done’ to adults using a traditional school-type approach. These conventions suggests Fairclough (1992: 78) are significantly dependent on the political power relations that underpin them and act as “a means of legitimising existing social relations and differences of power simply through the existence of typical everyday ways of behaving, which take these relations and power differences for granted”.

Debate continues regarding the extent to which language can sit outside literacy and whether literacy informs language or is informed by language or both (Tuijnman *et al.*, 1997). Criticism is routinely voiced regarding how such literacy's or languages can be suitably or effectively measured and assessed; with different approaches only acting to highlight the on-going debate (OECD, 1997). (Goodman, (1987) suggests the issue of who needs to be literate, for what purposes and in what functions has become a matter of social and political strategy, rather than just a curricular decision.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982: 9) argue “that literacy is not concerned with preparing people for life, but rather with helping people to live life more successfully”. They further suggest literacy has a primary function, which is “to assist adults to increase competence, or negotiate transitions in their social roles, to achieve greater fulfilment in their personal lives”, and to encourage them in solving personal and community problems (ibid: 11). In reality, it can be said that society often represses itself through social reproduction. The truly oppressed are those who have lived in poverty and degradation and consider what has been good enough for them, will be good enough for their children (Tressell, 2004). This can be evidenced in the intergenerational dependence on benefits and support from society by some learners, rather than any drive on their part to improve their situation.

In a similar way, numeracy is also a deeply contested concept (Coben *et al.*, 2003) with a number of interpretations of what elements of knowledge, skills and numerate

behaviours make up 'numeracy'. Currently, in England, according to Coben *et al.*, (2003)

... "numeracy covers the ability to: understand and use mathematical information; calculate and manipulate mathematical information; interpret results and communicate mathematical information – all of these at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general". (Coben et al., 2003: 3)

The establishment of the components of this concept is further complicated by the inherent difficulties adults may have with language and literacy skills in relation to the meaning of presented material (ibid). The contextualization of numeric concepts, both in terms of the environment in which numeracy activity is met, and the location adds extra levels of complexity in attempting to understand the elements of this term. Coben *et al.*, (2003) conclude that whilst there is an emerging consensus in England of the importance of numeracy, there is as yet little consensus on what it actually is. What is clear, however, is that an economically driven functionalist approach of the concept has been developed (ibid).

What emerges from the literature is a serious debate around the purpose and content of the terms 'literacy' and 'numeracy'. However, for the purposes of clarity I have chosen to frame the discussion in this thesis using the functional definition of basic skills, provided by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE 1999) *Skills for Life* strategy, which is still largely drawn upon by those involved in the delivery of LLN, that is:

"The ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general". (DfEE, 1999: 2)

Papen (2005) defines a number of differing functional, critical and liberal approaches to LLN which can be positioned to create a practical model of LLN and which are now described.

Functional literacy within an economic context

Functional literacy has been defined by Gray (1956) as:

"A person is literate when he [sic] has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills toward his own and the community's development" (Gray, 1956: 24)

The above quote makes it clear that the term 'literacy' is used to describe a person's reading, writing and numeracy practices and associates this practice with an ability to provide for themselves economically and for their community socially. However, missing from this description is speaking and listening. Additionally, this definition could easily be misinterpreted to suggest that individuals without the identified skills-sets are less able or even unable to contribute to their community in any meaningful or useful way, either economically or socially.

This type of definition is closely allied with quantifiable outcomes that can be measured through testing and evaluation activities (McClelland, 2000). Literacy using a functionalist model is according to Papen (2005: 15) considered as "a set of discrete technical skills that exist independently of the culture and society in which they are constructed". Underpinning this approach is a perceived responsibility to ensure the

development of such skills; any deficits should be identified by the individual and rectified by them in order that they are able to function effectively within the economic market (ibid).

Critical literacy and power relations

Critical literacy often referred to as 'radical literacy' (Hamilton, 2000: 138) is used to describe a pedagogical approach to literacy. Rather than associating literacy with the functions of reading and writing, it associates reading with the operation and functioning of the world, and particularly the development of an understanding of world constructs, focussing on dualistic concepts such as justice and injustice, power and oppression (Cowley, 2002).

This approach was popularised particularly through the work of Freire (1996), who viewed literacy as a tool through which learners could develop a critical reflective action in relation to the environment that they inhabit, enabling a thorough consideration of domination through the existence of power relations between groups. The focus here, however, is much less about the technical components that contribute towards or encompass 'literacy' and much more about literacy as a tool for empowerment and emancipation (Papen, 2005).

Liberal literacy and self development

A third model associated with literacy is a liberal literacy practice, regularly referred to as 'new literacy studies' (Street, 2004), which connects literacy with welfare provided for

the disadvantaged sectors of society by the middle classes. Informed by a humanistic view, it embraces literacy as an activity linked to self-development and leisure pursuits, such as creative writing available across age groups, regardless of economic potential (Papen, 2005). Once again this approach does not consider components of literacy which may impact or influence economic activity, but is more closely allied with an individual's personal and social development, contextually linked to personal interests and goals.

The dominant model in use

The model, which dominates today's LLN practices and services, is undoubtedly linked to a functionalist model (Gray, 1956), which is often described as the most deficient of three models (Barton 2007). This model holds the individual accountable, not only for their successes, but equally for their failures, for example, failure to achieve the minimum level of LLN, which theoretically should allow them to function satisfactorily within both the economy and also socially (ibid: 189). Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) suggest this is not usually a view shared by those who have been deemed to have insufficient LLN skills.

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), carried out in the United Kingdom in 1996, used a functional definition of literacy provided by the United States of America (USA) namely:

... "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Carey et al. 1997: 13).

As noted previously in 1999 the Moser Group (DfEE, 1999: 2) defined basic skills as:

“The ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and use mathematics, at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general”.

This definition of adult LLN is readily identifiable as a functional one regarded as comprehensive because it considers literacy, oracy and numeracy implicitly applying to native and non-native speakers of English (Brooks *et al.*, 2001). However, this is not to say it is without its problems. As Brooks *et al.*, (ibid) point out; this definition does not evaluate Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning of basic skills. In constructing this definition Brooks, *et al.*, (ibid) break down each component of literacy, oracy and numeracy, identifying literacy as a term used to describe both reading and writing; oracy as a term used to describe speaking and listening and numeracy as a component of mathematics with an emphasis on the practical application and use of mathematics.

This emphasis on numeracy is illustrated in the work of Willis (1998: 32) who states that “to be numerate is to function effectively mathematically in one’s daily life, at home and work”. This has been further developed within the United Kingdom to combine “arithmetical and number skills with elements of geometry and statistics” (Foxman, 1998: 1). Brooks *et al.*, (2001a) infer that such an approach affords a truly functional, mechanistic understanding of LLN as it is based on skills competence within a given context; establishing standards and levels of functionality. Adults on an ESP when self-reporting their LLN skills, provide significant discrepancies between what constitutes ‘functional’ for Government and what constitutes ‘functionality’ for the individual adult:

...“whether a literacy or numeracy problem is perceived as important probably has more to do with its centrality to individuals in their daily lives than the objective level of performance reached” (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994: 23).

This is the fundamental tension between the self-assessment of an adult's LLN competence and the assessment through formulated tools linked to an externally constructed and imposed framework of standards (Tuijnman *et al*, 1997). An adult in this country is considered to have achieved LLN functionality when they can evidence competence at an identified minimum level as noted in the previous chapter (Level 1, appendix 13: 301).

Whilst Barton (2007) suggests a functionalist approach has predominantly been adopted in England, an alternative does exist and has a growing body of support. This approach is seen as an alternative vision to the dominant economic focus of LLN strategies aptly described by Hamilton (1998) as literacy as a social practice. This view of literacy argues that LLN programmes should be about much more than just a desire to ensure individuals are better able to enter the economic market and be effective agents, in that field. They should incorporate a much wider agenda concerned with active citizenship, political participation and individual development leading to empowerment (Coleman, 1998).

This thesis considers both a functionalist approach and a social practice approach to the development of adult LLN, arguing that the dominant approach to strategy development is based on assumed need, rather than on needs expressed by learners. A social practice approach starts from recognising the diverse range of literacy that exists, acknowledging an individual's contribution to society can be of equal value to that of a functionalist approach (Barton, 2007). Indeed, each approach could possibly

complement and usefully inform the other and do not need to be seen as directly opposing, or polarised views.

These approaches argue Parsons and Bynner (1999) are linked to employment, and especially unemployment, where both are seen as strongly related to levels of literacy proficiency. They suggested that “those who are more literate are more likely to have better jobs, higher levels of productivity and earnings and be less vulnerable to long term unemployment” (ibid: 133). They also suggested that those with low skills, had a greater chance of being unemployed and were more likely to experience longer durations of unemployment (Table 6, p 169). Additionally, adults with low-level skills are also identified as being seriously disadvantaged with respect to accessing the labour market. The IALS study (OECD, 1997) concluded that whilst:

“Literacy is not the only determinant of service levels; strong literacy rates write a task party more productive and employable over the long run, providing incentives to attract capital investment and job creation. Continuously upgrading the skills of the populations and workforces through strategies for lifelong learning should be part of the strategy response to question poor, low-wage jobs and persistent unemployment”. (OECD, 1997: 12)

Throughout the OECD report, the term ‘knowledge society’ is used to indicate the impression that literacy is an essential requirement for the effective and equal participation of all citizens in the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life, with participation being the premise upon which social stability and economic development are based (OECD, 1997). The report was also critical of how the UK Government allowed the high and enduring number of long-term unemployed to continue, and its failure to create enough new employment. The core of the OECD's

proposals to revitalise the UK economy suggested more workforce flexibility, lower employment costs and less Government intervention. Following publication of this study and its criticisms, the then Conservative Government withdrew its co-operation to participate in the final survey (Chitty, 2004).

The promotion of lifelong learning linked to economic growth

Lifelong learning is the key to the development of a society that is economically successful within a global market according to Hodgson and Spours (1999) and is also inclusive and just. Lifelong learning as a concept has at its core the perception that learning takes place throughout an individual's life. The concept has acquired global awareness with 1996 being declared the "European Year of Lifelong Learning by the European Union" (Coffield, 1997: 71). Lifelong learning is portrayed as the key to survival, being the foundation of learning organisations a learning society and a learning culture (Kerka, 2000).

It had become a subject discussed widely during the 1970s with influential debates being undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the publication of the Faure report in 1972. This provided a largely humanistic view of learning suggests Field (2002) that recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning for all people throughout their lifetime. The OECD, however, developed a much more human capital theory approach, conceptualising lifelong learning as 'recurrent education' (OECD, 1973) which enabled individuals to experience periods of paid employment, leisure and learning. While Field, (2001: 8) identified

lifelong learning “as a concept rooted on an economy of full employment, due to the changing nature of the global economic market”. However, its relationship with economic outcome has received criticism (Coffield, 1999), including turning education from public good into a private commodity. By shifting responsibility to the individual, ignoring the socially constructed nature of learning and overemphasising active and vocational learning, only those activities that demonstrate a transparent and quick return can be rewarded (Ibid).

Following the ‘European Year of Lifelong learning in 1996’, it again became a part of public strategy debates, and has supported and legitimised a wide range of strategy activity (Field, 2001). Field (ibid) argues that lifelong learning has increasingly become “a tool for the reform and modernisation of aspects of public education and training systems” (Ibid: 3) and hence “is likely to become one among many factors that are transforming the governance of late modern societies” (Ibid: 4).

Over three decades, it has been transformed from a humanistic radical approach to education to one with a focus on economy, skills and vocational competence (ibid). Field (2001: 13) contends that by “individualising the characteristics that justify employees and others in treating people differently, the trend towards lifelong learning also helps fragment the excluded and encourages a search for individual solutions”. Also suggesting this relationship is replicated throughout areas of public life, particularly as the welfare state switches its focus from “passive support” to “active strategies of insertion” (ibid: 14). These strategies focus on training adults so that they can gain the

skills and knowledge needed in order to be responsible for their own welfare. Field (2001: 14) comments that lifelong learning does not merely serve to duplicate existing hierarchies and inequalities, but may potentially develop and legitimate new ones.

Whilst there is currently a clear emphasis on the economic benefits associated with the concept of lifelong learning, it also has a corresponding discourse focussing on the development of sustainable communities through an agenda of social justice and a reduction in social exclusion (OECD, 1996). By providing opportunities for lifelong learning authors such as Street (1995) and Freire (1996) have continually argued that, people will be better able to participate in and accept responsibility for their communities. However, as noted by Kerka (2000: 31), contrasts can occur between participants and non-participants, or learners and non-learners, which may work to increase the divide between 'those who can' and 'those who cannot'.

It is clear suggests Schuller *et al.*, (2002) that lifelong learning is an eclectic belief that is broad and multifaceted; it is intertwined with other concepts such as lifelong education, continuing education and adult education. However, it is also evident that a contemporary understanding of lifelong learning is closely linked to economic values that tend to ignore humanitarian aims and has "become a means of achieving significant (economic) values as an end in itself that would increase personal development" (Lee, 2007: 1). It is associated with activities that aim to develop knowledge, skills and competence and has become a strategy objective for supporting economic growth (ibid).

Theories and approaches to lifelong learning

The concept of lifelong learning is problematized by the interchangeable use by writers of the terms lifelong 'learning' and lifelong 'education' (Rogers, 1992; Rogers, 2004) and also by how 'learning' is regarded and defined. What constitutes learning is particularly associated with conventional methods of education; therefore the interchangeable nature of the terms can be understood. Although education can be identified as a process through which learning can be facilitated, other forms of learning termed non-formal suggests Rogers (2004) consist of learning outside the formal learning system and informal (learning from life) he considers to be of equal value to that undertaken through more formal pathways such as traditional teacher-centred environments. The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) is constructed to allow learning of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) only through formal mechanisms of skills acquisition via qualification achievements, limiting the acceptance of the development of LLN via broader informal frameworks.

Coffield, (1997: 89) corroborates this idea in his work as he argues that when the word "learning" is used in strategy documents as part of the term "lifelong learning", the intended use is "planned, purposeful and intended learning" rather than the type of learning people engage in all the time, the on-going "process of change and adaptation to life circumstances", which Rogers (2004) terms informal learning. Coffield (1997: 93) goes on to argue that there is no such thing as a "non-learner", but rather individuals who may be non-participants in formal learning activities.

Adult learning as a voluntary activity is mythical, argues Kerka (2000: 5), who proposes that “learning society rhetoric, financial incentives, and employer and social pressures are resulting in a new kind of compulsory learning; learning as a life sentence”, a new form of “social control” a view which is supported in the work of Coffield (1999) and Illeris (2003a). A more inclusive vision of lifelong learning was proposed by Atkin (2000) who maintains that learning, which involves the enhancement of human capacity should be seen as ‘an intrinsically worthwhile endeavour,’ (ibid: 5) and one worthy of investment in its own right without a direct relationship with economic values.

What is different about this approach put forward by Atkin (2000: 29) is that it has been “widely accepted as evidenced by the extent of the programmes and initiatives developed in this area and their linkages with LLN teaching strategies, considered being the basic skills for individual independence both economically and socially” and their corresponding relationship with the promotion of social inclusion, as well as market competition (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2003a; NRDC, 2010). In pursuing this agenda New Labour and the present Coalition Government have been prepared to use compulsion with unemployed people in order to bring them, along with the whole population up to a required minimum of LLN skill (DBIS, 2007). This approach was adopted despite evidence that it was regarded sceptically by both:

...“the unemployed and employers who, respectively, see schemes as something you’re forced to go on, with little prospect of a real outcome” (Morgan, 2001: 169).

The ‘minimum’ literacy standard was set by the New Labour Government at Level 2 – equivalent to a grade A*-C in GCSE examinations usually undertaken at the end of

compulsory school education (appendix 1: 289). The appropriateness of setting such a measure as a 'blanket' requirement for the entire population is considered in the work of Bynner and Parsons (2005), and Parsons and Bynner (2006) who have evidenced the fact that it is individuals who hold LLN levels at Entry Level 2 or below, that are generally significantly marginalised when seeking employment .

When the Committee on Widening Participation chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy presented the influential report "Learning Works" through the Further Education Funding Council, (FEFC, 1997), it put forward a radical vision to attract and draw back into education non-traditional learners who had not taken advantage of previous learning opportunities. Particularly, the focus was on those with no or inadequate qualifications, suggesting that a return to learning offered opportunities to break free from cycles of economic disadvantage and social exclusion. In taking on board the recommendations of this report the New Labour Government identified the Further Education sector as being the vehicle to carry forward their vision of social justice (ibid). They suggested this would occur through widening participation in education, which in turn would boost the national economy through improved workforce skills (Orr, 2008: 1) The committee report also argued that the then welfare benefit system was in desperate need of reform; observing that the system inhibited rather than facilitated learning as a progression to employment and noted "people who are unemployed are less likely to study than those in work" (FEFC, 1997: 70).

The report concluded by suggesting that a programme of 'welfare to learning' should be initiated alongside a 'welfare to work' programme (ibid, 81). Implicit in the report is the belief that individuals who find themselves considered as 'inadequately qualified', 'economically deprived' or 'socially excluded' agree with these statements and want to 'break free' from this cycle (ibid), although it was not made clear whether anybody asked them. Hodgson and Spours (1999: 54) advocated what arguably separated this initiative from its predecessors is the emphasis on one-to-one help, high quality education and training with follow-through elements, specifically for long-term unemployed adults. The aim of the initiative was to remove barriers to unemployment, combat employer prejudice, increase motivation, restore self-confidence and where necessary, increase their employability (ibid: 54)

Such interventionist approaches to education, training and learning in all its forms can possibly be seen as an attempt by the dominant group in society [Government] to control the reproduction of society; specifically the power relations (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). As will be explored throughout this thesis, such interventions could lead to a breakdown in historical formations of society, leading ultimately to social fragility as the nature of strategies migrate towards individual accountability and responsibility (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006).

Successive strategy documents presented by the New Labour Government while in power focused heavily on the need to create a learning society, (Hodgson and Spours, 1999), with all individuals having an entitlement to lifelong learning. The development of shared responsibility and shared benefits are key components of such an approach with

the state, employers and individuals all playing a significant role in this approach; implying both expectations and obligations for all parties concerned. The key issue here, however, is whether this is 'opportunity' or 'obligation' (ibid: 87).

This approach to welfare was informed by experiences of reform in other countries, such as Australia and the USA, where 'cycles of dependency' upon welfare had started to break down through the adoption of strategies that had taken a 'work first' approach (Freud, 2007: 102). The Canadian Council on Social Development (1999) put forward proposals linking the receipt of welfare payments to work programs, which were adopted in some parts of the country. Morgan (2001) describes a specific welfare strategy, employed in the American State of Wisconsin, which required benefit recipients to participate in work, or work-related programmes in order to receive welfare benefits. This approach emphasised structured job-search and job placement, combined with time limits for receipt of benefits and penalties for non-compliance. The strategy adopted in Wisconsin was regarded, by them, as largely successful because of the reduction in the number of people receiving welfare benefits recorded (ibid).

Summary

This section of the review of literature offers the reader an overview of the development of adult basic skills education. It has highlighted the change in discourse from one in the 1970s which had placed emphasis on a liberal approach to supporting adults with low levels of LLN skills (Wallis, 1996); to one that considered a lack of LLN skills to be an individual deficit which needed to be re-mediated in order to ensure the adult

population is appropriately skilled to become economically engaged in the 'knowledge society' (OECD; 1997). The OECD approach to LLN development is a much more functionalist approach and considers LLN acquisition solely from a 'skills' perspective, seeing such skills as technical and discreet from any social or cultural background. However, the responsibility for the development of these skills is placed firmly with the individual and their ability to achieve an identified minimum level of LLN competence being associated with personal success or failure (Barton, 2007).

A series of Government interventions identified by Leitch (2006) has been introduced since 1997 to ensure that adults who are identified as holding LLN skills below the defined minimum standard of level 1, (appendix 13: 301) work towards developing them to a higher level. These include an extensive marketing campaign, the removal of financial barriers to accessing training opportunities and a suite of new national tests to support the new curricula for adult LLN, constructed alongside the new set of minimum standards compiled by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (ibid).

Adult learner options

Choice or obligation in undertaking learning episodes

Having reviewed some of the literature surrounding the development of adult LLN provision from the perspective of the individual and from consecutive Government strategy initiatives, I will now explore some of the literature associated with the option of choice for unemployed adult LLN learners and the range of learning opportunities made

available to them. In exploring this documentation I study the motivations of unemployed adults to attend Employability Training Programmes (ESP), and look at how the decisions are made about choosing and attending training programmes by them, or whether the decision is externally assessed and determined by others. Choice is a term that suggests the selection of an item out of a number of options. In reality however, for adults with low levels of LLN there are often very few options available.

I also reflect on consecutive Government strategies reported on by Hasluck and Green (2007) that appear to have been assembled in such a way that they detrimentally affect both choice and decision making for this group of adults. Implicit in this discussion is the likelihood that adults are in a position where they have 'freedom' to choose but only from a limited offering (ibid).

In acknowledging that there is a considerable amount of literature on the subject of choice that can be drawn from a variety of disciplines, including economics, politics, law, philosophy and psychology, this literature review will inevitably focus on literature relating to opportunities of educational choice and models of economic decision associated with educational frameworks.

'Choice' is described by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001: 58) as a social and political battleground wherein tensions exist between the rights of individuals to make choices and explain their own existence and the difference between the rights and obligations of individuals - and the rights and obligations of the communities and societies within

which they live. It can be reasoned that as individuals we are the products of the choices we make. However, choices and decisions that inform our lives are not always in our control. It is this area that is explored in more detail in relation to adult LLN learners.

Within England, since September 2008, the education system has encompassed a period of compulsory education, from around 'rising' 5 to aged 17. Education undertaken following this period is referred to as post-compulsory education. Even though 'compulsion' is said not to occur within the post-compulsory sector examples of current Government strategies can be found which draw on social expectations to ensure attendance at the various *Skills for Life* training programmes (DfES, 2003a).

Opportunities of educational choices, during the 1980s and 1990s and beyond have, arguably, increased (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001) and this approach reflects their argument:

... "not about whether choice does or should exist, but about how far this choice should be constrained or unconstrained by external intervention". (ibid: 3)

In unpicking these dichotomies this study considers what factors influence choice and how choices are understood, undertaken and made. Theories of choice are typically constructed from models of economics with choice identified as a central process for an individual requiring him or her to engage in decision-making processes that involve both the construction and analysis of a variety of options and then subsequently choosing between them (ibid). Such decision-making processes can be described as 'dynamic and incremental' in nature with choice preferences changing over time in response to

external factors, such as media advertising and changing circumstances (ibid: 21). This presented view of choice and decision-making is based on four key suppositions namely that:

- *'Individuals will seek to maximise the benefits they will gain from the choices they make; so-called, utility maximisation'*
- *'Individuals will make choices that are solely based on self-interest'*
- *'Choices will be made after a process of vigilant information collection'*
- *'The process of considering alternatives and making choices will be entirely reasonable'*

(Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 29).

In exploring the choices of potential adult LLN learners it is important for the researcher to recognise:

- *Who makes the choices in this field and when,*
- *How and why these choices have been made,*
- *What influences the decision process and what consequences that decision has on the individual, other participants and on outcomes of training programmes?*

(ibid: 32-33)

The model of choice and decision-making presented by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) is a very powerful one in which individuals are perceived to hold all the knowledge and skills necessary to make considered choices. For many adult learners of LLN however, such a dynamic approach to choosing and decision-making is unrealistic and unreasonable. Adult learners in this study were found to need help and accurate information advice and guidance in order for them to navigate the dense materials available and to enable them to make informed decisions and subsequent choices.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest that choice is the outcome of a way that brings together emotion, personal history, values, ideology and the underlying assumptions and aspirations of an individual's *habitus* (an individual's dispositions). If an individual does not self-identify the existence of a problem (in this case their poor LLN skills) they are unlikely to consider participation in a training programme of study under the *Skills for Life* strategy. Therefore, there is no decision to be made about whether to participate in a training programme, or choice to be made about which training programme might be most effective or appropriate.

The importance of choice and the theory of 'symbolic violence'

In considering the choices available to adults with low levels of LLN in relation to either training or employment it can be seen that influences of power play a pivotal role in determining choices (Foucault, 1995: 149). It is for this reason, that the concept of '*symbolic violence*': described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) as a system of power relations and relations between groups or classes that have been most influential.

The concept of *symbolic violence* is criticised by Coleman (1998) and Putnam (2000) through a consideration of how the reproduction of structures of domination in society are at least in part, dependent on the impositions of cultural values presented as universal. But, whose ideas and context, put forward by Bourdieu and Passeron, were politically and historically determined by the French middle class elite, the subject of their research, and are therefore arbitrary.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) whose foundations of a theory of *symbolic violence* examine “the relationship between education and social reproduction”, attempt to prove that through the system of education, “processes of social class and discrimination are continually (re)produced through indirect cultural mechanisms”. They characterise *symbolic violence* as the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups in such a way that they are likely to be experienced as legitimate. Such ‘legitimacy’, obscures the power relations that allow such impositions to be successful (ibid: 89).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) offer a rationale for a theory of *symbolic violence* which starts from the premise that:

“Every power to exert symbolic violence, e.g. every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations”. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 4)

Bourdieu (1993) explores how power relations within and of societies are maintained by means other than restraint and suggests:

...“every exercise of power is accompanied by a discourse aimed at legitimising the power of the group that exercises it; we can even say that it is characteristic of every power relation that it takes on its full force only in so far as it disguises the fact that it is a power relation”. (Bourdieu, 1993: 150)

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: xxii) argue that ‘Culture’ reinforces such power relations enabling systematic reproduction. This is achieved through a process of misrecognition which they describe as:

...“the processes whereby power and relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder”. (ibid, xxii)

The original socially constructed process for the operationalization of *symbolic violence* is, Bourdieu asserts, undertaken through ‘pedagogic action’: an undertaking which enables the establishment of a ‘cultural arbitrary’ (Bourdieu 1993). Pedagogic action reproduces power relations, the social reproduction role of cultural reproduction. In turn the interests of the dominant groups or classes in society exist and are reproduced.

Pedagogic action is articulated in three forms suggests Jenkins (2002: 93):

- *Diffuse education* (interaction with members of a social formation)
- *Family education* (undertaken through interaction with family members)
- *Institutionalised education* (undertaken through schooling or training)

Pedagogic action acts to recreate the power relations that support its own performance, reflecting the interests of dominant groups and reproducing uneven distribution of ‘cultural capital’ between those inhabiting the ‘social space’ suggests Jenkins:

“Pedagogic cause involves the exclusion of ideas as unthinkable, as well as their positive inculcation (depending, of course, upon the nature of the ideas). Exclusion or censorship may in fact be the most effective mode of pedagogic action” (Jenkins, 2002: 105).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) see the work of pedagogic action as being achieved through ‘pedagogic work’:

“A process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, e.g. a habitus, the product of internalisation of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after PA [pedagogic action] has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalised arbitrary” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 31).

Aspects of the conceptual framework of *symbolic violence* provide a sound theoretical perspective from which to evaluate the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a). For long term unemployed adults, identified recurrently through this thesis, ‘conditionality’ has

always been an associated requirement for the receipt of welfare benefits (DWP, 2005). This study considers how such 'conditionality' is now so 'culturally' embedded that such activity is *misrecognised* as a *legitimate* activity, and examines whether the conditionality of attending training was useful, as attendance Skinner (1989) points out does not necessarily equate to participation.

Adult learner motivation

The ability to choose a training course is not only closely associated with an individual's capacity for decision-making but also their motivation, or desire to undertake such a course. Motivation is a term often associated with desire – a desire to learn, to engage, to participate, to commit, and to develop and is defined by Curzon (1990: 195) as “a person's aroused desire for participation in a learning process”. A behaviourist psychologist links motivation with a stimulus-response mechanism inherent in humans, where behaviours are repeated if positively rewarded and not repeated if perceived to provoke a negative reward (Skinner, 1989). Alternatively, a humanist psychological approach to motivation and learning (Knowles, 1980) emphasises the likelihood that adults have an inherent 'natural desire' to learn (Freire, 1996: 98). Despite the numerous definitions of motivation, there is general consensus that motivation is an internal state or condition that serves to activate or energise behaviour and gives it direction (Huitt, 2001) and that it is a learned behaviour which will not happen unless energised.

Lepper *et al* (1973); suggest motivation can broadly be categorised as either extrinsic (outside the person) or intrinsic (internal to the person). They describe extrinsic motivation as relating to behaviours which arise as a reaction to some external stimulus which has associated with it some kind of indication of reward, threat of punishment, a need for competition or co-operation with others. Such motivation requires attached, attainable goals in order for it to be sustained. While suggesting intrinsic motivation alternatively is linked to an individual's inner drive, often being related to an individual's feelings of self-esteem and to a desire to satisfy personal curiosity (*ibid*). Such motivation provides self-reward for the individual. Gilbert (2002: 2) in his discussions on motivation asserts that:

... "motivation is a very misunderstood process ... carrot and stick may work if you want a classroom full of donkeys, but real motivation comes from within".

The implication here as Lepper *et al*: (1973) suggest is that unless an individual is intrinsically driven to undertake an activity or action then achievement of the goal is unrealistic. This position will be explored in this study, especially with regard to unemployed adult LLN learners who are not intrinsically motivated to develop their skills through attendance on an Employability Skills Programme; but who have been 'told' to attend by external forces or agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus (DWP, 2007).

For learning to be successful motivation is seen as a key factor (Reece and Walker, 2000). Maslow produced '*A Theory of Human Motivation*' in 1943 based on a hierarchy of needs, where he stated that basic needs must be satisfied in order to move on to further developments. Whilst Maslow's (1943) work on motivation is highly regarded it

is not without its critics. The most common criticism surrounding his work is methodological (McLeod, 2007). In undertaking his empirical work Maslow (ibid) hand-picked a small number of people whom he declared to have achieved self-actualisation. Self-actualisation suggests Skinner (1989) and Freire (1996) is conceptually difficult and confusing to interpret; this is largely due to frustrations and variations in and of human behaviour, which in itself is problematic.

This motivational theory is widely recognised and drawn upon in educational settings for LLN learners and significantly for this study this theory is used by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in their research activities that underpin the development of their intervention strategies (DWP, 2002). For example ECOTEC (2003) reporting to the DWP on their two-stage, predominantly face-to-face longitudinal study of approximately 200 basic skills clients' outcomes, state:

“Maslow’s theory has been used as a means through which Jobcentre Plus clients’ motivations to participate or not participate in the basic skills process can be explained”. (ECOTEC, 2003: 5)

Using this motivation theory, ECOTEC (2003) developed a four-component typology of DWP clients:

- *‘Clients who are highly motivated to enhance their current situation and participate in (or return to) the labour market’.*
- *‘Clients who are moderately motivated and willing to accept intervention, but who might not make the changes for themselves’.*
- *‘Moderately unmotivated clients who are quite accepting of their current situation, but could not be persuaded to change their views’.*

- *'Unmotivated clients who resist change and prefer their current state. These clients do not want to, or will not recognise that they have a problem(s) and that help is available to overcome it'. (ECOTEC, 2003: 6)*

A further conclusion from this research by ECOTEC (2003) was that a variety of factors affect the motivation of adults with low LLN skills who are in receipt of welfare benefits and these could be linked to both their past experiences and their considered views of the future. These were described as an important factor in influencing how individuals respond to offers of education and training or other assistance to improve their circumstances. They concluded that motivation alone was not sufficient to explain such behaviours.

Within an index of motivational indicators Pintrich and Schunk (2002: 41), provides four factors which can be related to motivation which are:

- *Choice of task*
- *Effort*
- *Persistence*
- *Achievement.*

Lepper *et al.*, (1973) also found that the ability of an individual to select a task under free-choice conditions indicated a motivation to accomplish that task. Learner research participants demonstrating effort, particularly strong effort with difficult material had a relationship to motivation. This is also the case when learner research participants demonstrated persistence over a longer time scale, especially if obstacles had been encountered and successfully negotiated. An additional consideration linked to

achievement was identified as the culmination of choice, effort and persistence to accomplish the task (ibid).

Persistence is a common measure of motivation and is of particular importance because of the time it normally takes to learn a new skill, especially when faced with obstacles (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002). Persistence is related directly to resolve with increased persistence being likely to lead to higher accomplishments (ibid). The work of Zimmerman and Ringle (1981) illustrates the interdependence of persistence with motivation. They asked children to observe someone unsuccessfully attempt to solve a problem for either a long or short time whilst receiving verbal statements of either confidence or pessimism. The children themselves were then asked to attempt to resolve the puzzle. Those who received the confident statements persisted longer in attempting to complete the model than those who had heard the pessimistic statements. Persistence through encouragement therefore, can be considered crucially important when considering motivation to engage and continuing to engage in learning, when obstacles are encountered (ibid).

Comings *et al.*, (1999) set out to explore persistence amongst adult LLN learners in America and develop their analysis by stating:

“A key difference between adult and child learners is that adults choose to participate in educational programmes, whilst children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper “work” of “childhood”. (Comings *et al.*, 1999: 1)

They interviewed 150 adult learners and identified four key areas that they concluded, acted to promote and form persistence in learning. These were:

- *'The management of the positive and negative forces that promote and hinder persistence'.*
- *'Self-efficacy – a focus on a specific task and the associated feelings of being able to accomplish the task'.*
- *'The establishment of a goal by the learner. The identified goal should then be the context on which learning is constructed'.*
- *'Reaching a goal. Progress towards achievement of the goal should be regularly reviewed, assessed and measured' (Comings et al., 1999: 43).*

The study concluded that strategy makers should expand their definition of persistence to include:

... "adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow" (Comings et al., 1999: 47).

The study also identified two further aspects of educational experience associated with persistence, firstly that adults who had been involved in previous training programmes were more likely to persist than those who had not. Secondly Adults who, when asked why they had entered a programme mentioned a specific goal were also more likely to persist than those who did not mention a goal (Comings et al., 1999). This view concurs with prominent writers in the field of adult learning, such as Knowles (1975) and Mezirow (1991) who popularised the hypothesis that adult education is usually a voluntary activity, undertaken for self-development and personal interest.

However, Illeris (2003a) presents a differing viewpoint to the key assumption underpinning the hypothesis that adult education is usually a voluntary activity. He suggests that adults do not choose to participate in training programmes, but that most adult learners move towards education in very indecisive ways. The majority of participants take part in education (as is the case with the ESP) because they are often forced to do so and not because of an internal motivation or interest. He goes on to suggest that “In practice adults typically develop a range of psychological defence strategies to avoid learning that challenges their identity and personal ways of thinking, reacting and behaving” (ibid: 13). One characteristic of adult learning is that:

...“adults have very little inclination to really learn something they do not perceive as meaningful for their own life goals; adults in their learning draw on the resources they have; and adults take as much responsibility for their learning as they want to take” (Illeris, 2003a 13).

During his work on the ‘Adult Education Research Project’, Illeris (ibid) investigated three well-liked adult education systems in Denmark. Using an extended qualitative research design involving both observations and interviews, he focused on learners’ accounts of their experiences and on evaluations of the educational environment and setting as well as the process that led to their participation. This approach to investigating experience aligns with Foskett and Hemsley-Brown’s (2001: 44) argument that:

...“the use of extended, in-depth, qualitative research methodologies are an essential requirement of researching a view of choice processes”.

What Illeris (2003a) reported as a result of his research was that some adults described attending educational programmes because they wanted to learn something; while

other adults reported attending because they had to; this resulted in them displaying evidence of passive resistance and confusion within the learning environment. Illeris (2003a: 22) found that for the unemployed with little realistic chance of obtaining employment doubt tended to develop into resignation and despair quite quickly at the outset of any new education venture. Whilst in 2004, Illeris when discussing the fundamental differences of learning in relation to age also affirmed that adults need to take personal responsibility to determine whether they do or do not want to learn (Illeris, 2004). Comings, *et al.* (1999) commented that, in fact most adults entering educational institutions have not freely chosen to do so and concluded that:

...“the main result of our investigating adult education from the perspective of ordinary learners who are alien to such concepts as lifelong learning and lifelong education is that if it is given to or forced upon participants who have not mentally accepted and internalised a wish or need to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes or qualities in question, it will tend to be a waste of human and financial resources”. (Comings *et al.*, 1999:76)

Motivations associated with attendance at education programmes therefore appear to be a combination of social, personal and technical elements, having a particular focus on the concrete skills that adults are expected to achieve (NIACE, 2008).

This study will examine how, for some adults attending Employability Skills Training Programmes, the option of choice and, importantly, owning that decision and taking responsibility for that decision have been removed (DWP, 2007). This is particularly the case for individuals undertaking training who are unemployed and for those dependent on the state for welfare assistance who have become passive participants within the welfare system. The welfare system uses ‘conditionality’ as part of receipt of benefits, routinely presented as ‘carrot and stick’ interventionist strategies (*ibid*).

In considering how the state came to be involved in the development of individuals' knowledge and skills in order to positively affect employment, the next section reviews the literature on the evolution of the welfare state in England and examines how interventionist strategies came to be such a distinctive component of the system. Additionally, I explore whether an essential underpinning intention of using such strategies is to bring about change in peoples' behaviour through the use of 'conditionality' (Jarvis, 2006: 107).

The development of the welfare state

The United Kingdom (UK) introduced the first National Insurance Act in 1911. This Act aimed to provide a comprehensive programme of financial assistance to those people who found themselves unemployed. Prior to this Act unemployed workers historically sought support through the Poor Law system, adopted in 1834 (Wu, 2000). In 1948 unemployment assistance was wrapped up into a new national public assistance programme by the National Assistance Act of 1948, followed by a supplementary benefit system in 1966 with subsequent further restructuring in 1975 through the Social Security Act. Common to the system throughout its growth is that it was designed to secure a basic living for people in financial need by providing income during periods of inability to earn (Wu, 2000).

Freire (1996) describes a major revision and overhaul of the system being undertaken in 1996 when the then Conservative Government introduced a revised type of

unemployment benefit called Jobseeker Allowance. The purpose of this benefit was to focus more closely on helping unemployed people into work and it required:

“All unemployed people to enter a Jobseeker Agreement, committing them to a plan of action to seek work” (Wu, 2000: 6).

The Jobseeker Agreement (2010) saw the introduction of a mandatory role and responsibility document, which replaced the Back to Work Plan of 1996. The 1996 plan consisted of an advisory document, which had previously been an optional one, completed by new claimants for welfare assistance. The replacement Jobseeker Agreement forms a personal contract between the individual claimant and Jobcentre plus (JCP) that details the steps the individual intends to take to find employment and claimants are required to sign it as a condition of benefit receipt. Job-seeking activity also became a condition of benefit receipt at this time and allows JCP staff to formally monitor job-seeking activities (DBIS, 2010).

Jobseeker Allowance, then, is a benefit for people needing financial support as a result of unemployment. However, individuals can be disqualified from the allowance and the major causes for disqualification from eligibility includes voluntarily leaving a job, dismissal for misconduct, refusal of an offer for suitable work, and taking part in labour disputes resulting in job loss (DWP 2005).

A report called ‘Sanctions and Sweeteners’ (Stanley *et al.*, 2004) considers the extended use of conditionality as a means of effecting change in people’s actions and identifies some limitations in its use as a strategy instrument to achieve positive outcomes. Sanctions form part of the framework of ‘conditionality’ imposed on

individuals in receipt of benefits from the governing authorities (DWP, 2007). Such sanctions form part of the 'normal' intervention strategies of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who take responsibility for the management and delivery of the welfare benefit system for the unemployed in the UK (ibid).

However, Mwenitete (2004: 8) argues that the rationale behind conditionality, including sanctions such as "the suspension or withdrawal of welfare support" to an adult who does not undertake an action upon instruction as a concept appears reasonable when using such measures to drive positive client behaviour to increase job entry rates.

Mwenitete (2004) further argues, sanctions exist to enforce compliance with the conditions associated with the receipt of benefit and more directly:

... "sanctions contribute towards the wider welfare to work agenda by influencing the behaviour of individuals who would otherwise dismiss opportunities to remain in, move into, or move closer to the labour market without good or just cause".
(Mwenitete, 2004: 9)

The aim of the application of a sanction is seen as an attempt to re-engage welfare recipients who do not comply with the system and acts as a tool to raise the issue of responsibility on the individual. Mwenitete (2004) however, goes on to suggest that the current sanctions regime might be considered contrary to the stated wider social goals of increased individual responsibility through employment. The removal of financial assistance, she argues, potentially has a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged, with the risk of hindering job-search activities or re-engagement with programmes. This argument is supported by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2004)

which asserts that the effects of compulsion and sanctions force those who are already marginalised further from the reach of employment.

The long-term unemployed and the welfare state

Adults are defined as being 'long term unemployed' if they have been unemployed for a period of 26 weeks or more (DWP, 2002). In aiming to alleviate the problem of long-term unemployment the New Labour Government's employment strategy encompassed three key elements:

- *Targeted welfare-to-work strategies,*
- *Measures to remove significant barriers to work for groups of people in deprived parts of the country*
- *Strategies to create and strengthen work incentives*
(Webb, 2007: 18)

When initially discussing the requirements of future economic success, the New Labour Government proposed:

...”investing heavily in education and training, aiming to increase productivity through tackling a range of skills shortages, along with introducing a crusade to improve adult basic skills in literacy and numeracy” (DWP, 2002: 25).

They went on to suggest that up to 40% of working age adults on benefits have LLN problems and stated that:

“It is essential both for them and for the economy that they are encouraged and enabled to improve their skills” (DWP, 2002: 27).

This reflects the seriousness with which the New Labour Government at the time received the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) and their subsequent responses, including the establishment of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a). The publication of the

Employment Green Paper “*Towards full employment in a modern society*” also occurred in March 2001 (DfEE, 2001). It outlined the steps the New Labour Government planned to use in responding to the identified challenges. Among these the Government planned to:

...“broaden the scope of its Welfare to Work programmes to include all people on benefits who are economically inactive as well as the long term unemployed” (Webb, 2007: 7).

The Green Paper set out how the New Labour Government aimed to provide more intensive support for the hardest to help welfare recipients. There was a specific focus on raising levels of basic skills for the unemployed in order to prevent any potential for adverse impact on economic growth (ibid). The first appearance of the terms “basic skills training” and “training in language, literacy and numeracy” within the framework of Government’s welfare support programme was in 1985 when a series of Wider Opportunities Training Programmes commenced (Feinstein *et al*, 2003). The Employability Skills Programme introduced in 2005 is a descendant of this type of training course and is of particular interest to this study as it was to this scheme that adults identified as holding LLN skills below Level 1 were referred (DBIS, 2007). Attendance was described as voluntary but in fact has become mandatory for those in receipt of Jobseeker Allowance or welfare subsistence found to have ‘poor’ social and LLN skills (DBIS, 2007).

There are two main areas highlighted by Freud (2007) that are particularly interesting about this training course of which:

- *One is the belief that adults who are eligible to attend this course have an element of choice over the decision to attend or not. (DBIS, 2007: 219)*
- *The other is that it was intended to serve as a strategy to increase the basic skills of this group when in fact; its primary focus is quite clearly a work-focussed one. (DBIS, 2007: 223)*

Although the ESP still exists, since 2011 it has become part of an overall package of support for the long-term unemployed and other welfare recipients that follow a black box approach (Keep, 2011). The Conservative led Coalition Government in order to maintain the economy as it moves out of recession and into recovery has introduced a Welfare-to-Work strategy based on the research undertaken by Freud (2007). Support has been put in place for those deemed to be the most vulnerable in order to help them overcome the cycle of benefit dependency (DBIS, 2010).

Responsibility for helping the long-term unemployed back to work has been given to specialist training providers, allowing them freedom to tailor support based on customer need. On reaching the eligibility criteria benefit claimants are now required to attend the Welfare-to-Work programme for an initial one year period, but they can attend for up to two years. During this attendance they are assessed and are expected to address any LLN needs via the ESP of study. One worrying aspect for those reaching the eligibility criteria for the work programme is its mandatory nature (NIACE, 2012). The justification for this mandatory participation is said by the present government to be “that work is not only the best way out of poverty but will have wider health and social benefits both for the individual and society” (DBIS, 2010: 15).

Summary

Through a review of Government strategies surrounding unemployed adults, it is clear that the receipt of financial assistance for this group has always been, and continues to be, associated with conditionality and is designed to discourage individuals from continuing to receive welfare subsistence for an indefinite period of time (DWP, 2005). Throughout the evolution of the strategies disqualification from receipt of benefit has been a fixed component of the system, with the aim of effecting change in an individual's behaviour (ibid).

There appears to be evidence of incongruity and tension between the expressed aims of the Government to achieve economic success and social cohesion through the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a). The Sfl strategy suggests clients will be offered an invitation to participate in training programmes to support the development of LLN skills for those who have been assessed as needing such assistance. However, the Government's 'Welfare to Work' aim, has a clear focus on ensuring the available adult workforce obtain the employability skills required of the developing knowledge economy of which LLN are only one aspect (DBIS, 2010).

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) is a two-pronged one, aimed at achieving economic success and social cohesion. However, all the original targets that have been put in place to assess the development and on-going success of the strategy seem to be based on economic indicators rather than social indicators. It is this literature concerning human capital and inescapably social capital that is now reviewed.

Approaches to social and cultural reproduction

In attempting to understand the structures and mechanisms that underpin societal constructs, in relation to those participating in this study, I will utilise aspects of work completed on the concept of different forms of capital by Bourdieu (1997) Coleman (1998) Putnam (2000) and Field (2008) among others. They all describe structure and distribution of different types and sub-types of capital, described below, at a given moment in time and use them to represent the expected structure of the social world. Lingard *et al.*, (2005) comment that both Bourdieu's and Coleman's work on social reproduction and education has had considerable influence within the sociology of education, similarly so has the work of Putnam. Aspects of Bourdieu's and Coleman's sociology are useful in educational research suggests Field (2008) as they help to provide explanations and ways of understanding how positions of people in a society are constructed and continuously maintained by the dominant few upon the dominated majority through influences of family, of community, of school and of wider culture and society.

Social capital

Field (2008: 1) suggests the central tenet of social capital theory can be summed up in two words 'relationships matter'. Field (2008) suggests that social capital, a social measure, should be considered alongside human capital, an economic measure, to determine how each can help the other to achieve their specific aims. The literature associated with these concepts and their importance to adult LLN learners will now be discussed.

Social capital, as a concept highlights Inglehart (1996), provides a way to explore the usefulness to learner research participants of attending language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) provision from a perspective other than economic. The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) employs a variety of measurements as markers of success and performance linked primarily to economic activity. However, in the developing the concept of social capital the work of Bynner (2006) and colleagues at the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning have identified a range of benefits which can be associated with attending training, including the development of friendship groups and increases in personal health and self-esteem which they describe as social capital indicators.

Particularly pertinent to this study was whether such outcomes were valued by the groups initiating the training programmes, or whether as Oxga (2000) suggests such outcomes act to perpetuate a social classification; thereby contributing as an instrument of and for social control. Bynner *et al.*, (2001) seem to agree that the concept of social capital broadly refers to the access people have to varying stocks of an asset not resting in their pockets. However, there are distinct differences between these authors mentioned above about whether the concept can be regarded as altruistic or as an alternative form of social control (*ibid*).

An individual, argues Bourdieu (1997), is shaped by the position they occupy within a social *field* and this is intricately linked to capital, described by Bourdieu (1997: 89) in three forms:

- *'Social capital, which is made up of social obligations or 'connections', which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital'.*

- *‘Cultural capital, which is convertible on certain conditions into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the use of educational qualifications (symbolic capital)’.*
- *‘Economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money’.*

It is aspects of these three forms of capital that allow the individual a framework within which their judgements can be formed and conclusions drawn (ibid). Bourdieu suggests that relationships between people are constructed by domination, subordination or equivalency and that these relationships are connected through goods or resources. All of these terms can have different impacts on members of society and Webb (2007) argues through domination and subordination they fall more unequally on the long-term unemployed the subject of this research.

Bourdieu (1997) uses the term ‘social capital’ to describe characteristics of valued relations with significant others. He asserts that ‘family’ is the main arena for the build-up and dissemination of this form of capital. Field (2008) criticises this as placing overemphasis on kinship because it assumes that families always share the same cultural world and attitudes. Whilst Bourdieu describes this as the main forum it is recognised that other areas exist in which this kind of capital can be accumulated, these are specifically social networks within the community. These different *fields* can be identified individually or act collectively, for example someone accessing an English boarding school is likely to experience these three distinct elements as a collective: the school acting as a community, as a family group and as the school for education.

Networks of relationships are described by Bourdieu (1997: 50) as products of “investment strategies aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable, either in the short or long term”. Because of its relation to specified networks, social capital can never be completely independent of either economic or cultural capital influences and is the “product of an endless attempt at institution” (ibid: 51). Jenkins (2002: 115-16) suggests Bourdieu uses social capital as one of four identified capitals (social capital, cultural capital, economic capital and symbolic capital) to consider how *fields*, a structured system of social positions, are inhabited. He discusses social capital in terms of different types of relations which are valued by others who are significant and important (ibid).

Bourdieu’s (1997: 173) interpretation of social capital as a type of social control argues that, the relationships between agents, groups of agents, and differing *fields* are the core identifiers for social capital, allowing for clear visibility of the development of social organisation, social interaction and, particularly, social advantage. Using Bourdieu’s perspective then, social capital can be employed as one method of constructing and maintaining social control, reproducing a society within a framework for domination by a dominant group (Bourdieu, 2003: 33).

Bourdieu (1993) wrote from within a largely Marxist context differentiating between the three forms of capital namely cultural, social and economic. In exploring the processes that lead to unequal access to resources and differentials in power and the way that

these feed into the class formation and establishment of elites he suggested social capital to be:

...*"the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition"* (Bourdieu, 1993: 249).

The possession of different capital was, in his view, "an attribute of elites, a means by which particular networks held onto power and advantage" (ibid: 251). Field (2008: 17) criticised Bourdieu suggesting he furnished only one indicator of social capital: namely membership of golf clubs, which he held to be helpful in oiling the wheels of business life. Adding there is no place in Bourdieu's theory for the possibility that other, less privileged individuals and groups might also benefit in their social ties. A further criticism by Field (2008: 19) of Bourdieu was that he "presumed social capital generally functions to obscure the visible profit-seeking of its holders, and is therefore contrary towards the open democratic society that he espoused in his writing and political activism. Field suggests Bourdieu fails to consider the simple fact that some people like (and dislike) each other more than others, even though they may move in the same cultural world and share the same attitudes.

Grenfield (2004: 56) comments that at the centre of the social world described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 93) is the belief that much of this social world occurs in a misrecognised form, while differential access to and expressions of what is 'thinkable' form the basis of *misrecognition*. For Bourdieu (1993: 76) the relationship between the individual *habitus*, (p: 97) and the context (*field*, p: 99) form the basis of his theory of knowledge and have application for this study.

Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman sees social capital much more as having a functional role and suggests:

“It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of actors” (Coleman, 1998: 98).

In his understanding of social capital Coleman outlines three aspects of social capital namely, obligations and expectations, information flow capability, and norms accompanied by sanctions. Coleman’s (1998) contribution to the exploration and understanding of social capital was an extension of Bourdieu’s work which led him to examine the processes and experiences that impacted on non-elite groups. Coleman (1998: 66) in developing Bourdieu’s ideas took a broader view of social capital and argued ‘that those living in marginalised communities or who were members of the working class could also benefit from its acquisition’. Coleman argued that an important factor in the acquisition of social capital for these groups was that unlike human capital, which is normally a private good whose returns reside with individuals, it is quintessentially a public good that is created by and may benefit not just those whose efforts are required to realise it, but all those who are part of a community. This way of defining social capital is particularly pertinent to the non-elite groups investigated within this study. He also linked social capital to economics, but in an altered way by seeking to unite the insights of sociology and economic theory, seeing social capital as a way of making sense of the overly analytical and distinctive models of traditional economics (ibid: 106). Coleman suggests social capital is:

“Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman 1998: 98).

Coleman (1998: 96) also argues that social capital has “two broad intellectual streams in the description and explanation of social action”. Firstly he outlines the sociological approach, putting the individual in a social and cultural context subject to norms, roles and obligations. However, he is critical of this where he sees the action as a product of environment, going on to suggest there will be an individual drive or purpose present. Secondly there is an economic approach, which he suggests is about self-interest and independent individuals seeking to achieve their goals he argues that:

...“the economic stream flies in the face of empirical reality: persons’ actions are shaped, redirected and constrained by the social context; norms interpersonal trust, social networks and social organisation are important in the functioning not only of the society but also of the economy” (Coleman, 1998: 96).

Coleman’s (1998: 101) model suggests social capital is one of the potential resources that an individual can use, alongside other resources such as their own skills (human capital) tools (physical capital), or money (economic capital). Within this model social capital is not necessarily owned by the individual, but rather arises as a resource which is available to them (ibid). Neither Coleman nor Bourdieu seem to pay much attention to the fact that people can be described as liking, loving or loathing each other and therefore collect together or ignore each other for other reasons that remain outside the realm of rational behaviour. For social capital to achieve a positive outcome under these circumstances both authors suggest the individual will normally be pursuing their own self-interest.

Putman *et al.*, (1993) also developed a concept of social capital, suggesting that social capital is available in:

...“features of social organisations such as networks, norms and trusts that enable co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit”. (Ibid: 17)

Putnam *et al.*, (1993) logic of social capital can be described as an extension of Coleman’s, although awarding more attention to the accrual of capital through loose ties, while unlike Coleman, taking a limited view on the role of religion and family.

Putnam *et al.*, (1993) describe associational activity as the process of bringing together relative strangers, on a regular and frequent basis, in order to establish and maintain a wider variety of networks and values that foster general reciprocity and trust. This in turn is seen to develop mutual collaboration. Putnam’s (2000: 208) message, often criticised as being over-simplified, was that “social capital is in a state of long-term decline, and the main culprit in its demise is the promotion of television”. For Putnam (2000):

...“social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”. (Ibid: 18)

Putnam (2000: 22-3) distinguishes two different kinds of social capital: ‘bridging’ (inclusive) and ‘bonding’ (exclusive). Bonding social capital is seen as reinforcing individual identities and maintains homogeneity. Bridging social capital he suggests brings together people from across diverse social backgrounds. While bonding is described as being good in maintaining strong group loyalty and reinforcing specific identities, bridging connections are seen as generating broader identities and reciprocity. He also argues that kinship is less important as a source of unity than acquaintanceship and shared membership of secondary associations, which could bring together individuals from quite distinctive and separate small groups. He goes on to suggest that ‘vertical’ bonds might be less sympathetic to the individual than ‘horizontal’

ties, in that they might undermine the capacity for collective action and tend to produce suspicion (ibid: 28).

This formulation of social capital is embraced by Schuller (2000) who argues that social capital requires notice to be paid to the relationships that affect the realisation of human capital's potential, including relationships between different groups as well as within groups. Whilst there is no substantive definition of the concept, all constructs and discussions of social capital consider the elements that comprise the establishment of relationships between and within groups.

Human capital

Exploring the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) using the lens of human capital theory provides a different interpretation of the strategy, and shows it aimed squarely at developing a human capital 'stock' of adults who can effectively participate in employment to fulfil the Government's desire to achieve high economic activity. The evolution of human capital according to Becker (1975) is the process by which such capital is deliberately developed in order to achieve economic gain. Becker was pivotal in bringing to the fore the prospect of human capital in relation to education, in providing a framework for human capital theory based on the hypothesis that greater economic return will result from educational investment and in describing anticipated outcomes of education in terms of knowledge and skills which enhance employability.

This argument was supported by the OECD when it stated that:

...“the development of contemporary economies depends crucially on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of their workers”. (OECD, 1987: 69)

The OECD (1998: 9) and again in (2012: 12) continue to define human capital as

...“the knowledge skills and competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity”.

Schuller (2000a: 154)) also frames human capital within a focus on the economic behaviour of individuals, and especially on the way their accumulation of knowledge and skills enables them to increase their productivity and their earnings and, in so doing, increase the productivity and wealth of the societies in which they live.

The relationship of human capital theory with education was further developed by Baptiste (2001) who determined that human capital theory could be associated with two primary outcome assumptions:

- *There is a causal impact of human capital on economic productivity, and,*
- *The differences in workers’ earnings are due solely to differences in their human capital investments.*

(Baptiste, 2001: 189-190)

Broadly it appears that human capital theory considers the knowledge, skills and qualifications that individuals acquire as a result of organised learning and their relationships with economic activity (ibid). The fundamental consequence of a human capital strategy implies that investing in education and skills results in financial returns, both individually and communally within an economic model.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) reflects this attitude and the New Labour Government invested heavily (1.6 billion pounds in the first three years of the life of the strategy; (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2006) to work towards developing the knowledge and skills of the adult population in order that they, as individuals, and the country as a whole are strongly positioned when competing in the global market economy. Measures of outcome and target setting are also closely aligned with human capital theory by associating success and achievement with outcomes, such as qualification achievements and employment (Wolf, 2002). Schuller (2000) presents an evaluation structure of social capital and human capital perspectives (see Table 1 below), which identifies the differing focus of each theory:

	Human Capital	Social Capital
Focus	Individual agent	Relationships
Measures	Duration of schooling Qualifications	Attitudes/values Membership/Participation Trust levels
Outcomes	Direct: income, productivity Indirect: health, civic authority	Social cohesion Economic achievement More social capital
Model	Linear	Interactive/circular

Table 1: Evaluation of Human Capital and Social Capital after Schuller, 2000: 5

Social capital and human capital theories, Schuller (2000) argues, constitute a group of complementary activities that can support the developments to which they aspire; implying it is unhelpful to discuss them as opposing or conflicting theories. However, this is a difficult position to accept when there is on-going debate regarding the essential components, ideas and values of each of the theories.

This is also the case for human capital with authors such as Becker (1975) arguing that developing economic activity for an increased return through growth should be underpinned by the expansion and acquisition of knowledge and skills. This view, however, is challenged by Baptiste (2001: 198) who *précises* the contemporary understanding of human capital theory as incorporating technology, which is a “factor that resolves the relationship between human capital and productivity”. Unlike Becker, he argues that human capital theory works towards an exacerbation of social unrest and complexities rather than their alleviation. He goes on to suggest that using such a belief in the development of educational strategy undermines more civically responsible practices.

Wolf (2002) also supports this view, suggesting that training should not be the only activity to be focussed on when considering the economic wellbeing and the development of a country and its population. Whilst she recognises that those without good levels of basic academic skills are more disadvantaged, she goes on to suggest that education is not the only answer to all social problems. Using special education programmes as a ‘cure-all’ method for individuals who are unemployed or considered

disadvantaged have historically proved both costly and inefficient, argued Wolf. She questioned the New Labour Government's enthusiasm and focus on education as 'the engine of economic growth' (ibid: 15).

In undertaking a review of the literature on social capital theory and its relationship to the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) I felt it was also necessary to review the literature associated with human capital theory. Both of these theories specify a different framework or lens through which the strategy can be interpreted and analysed. However, this study aims to examine the effect of the strategy on the learning experiences of specific adult LLN learner research participants and it is clear that the social network, or culture, which is inhabited by the learner, their *habitus*, (Bourdieu, 1993: 76) contributes significantly to their experiences of learning. It therefore became important to consider identity; a review of this area of literature is provided below.

Identity capital

An established view of the construction of an individual's identity suggests that one's identity is formulated during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). However, others argue "that 'identity' is more closely associated with social development, rather than a personal one and is crucially dependent on social relations and constructs" (Gergen, 1994: 204). Alternative observers such as Giddens (1991) and Edwards and Usher (2000) argue that a strong identity is undesirable and difficult in a world that is constantly moving, developing and changing. Illeris (2003b: 16) further develops such arguments, suggesting that identity:

...tends to be seen as something much more changeable and unstable: a person may take on different identities in different situations, or there is only a limited stable core identity and in extension of that, a zone of more fluid layers”.

Cote (1996: 425) explains identity capital as representing what individuals “invest” in “who they are” and provides the following description of the components he argues create the links between culture and identity:

- *Social structure, which can include political and economic systems*
- *Interaction, comprising patterns of behaviour that characterise frequent contacts among people in socialising institutions like the family and schools*
- *Personality, which encompasses terms like character, self and psyche, including subcomponents like ego identity (Cote, 1996: 426-427)*

Using these descriptors Cote (1996) suggests that, as a minimum, individuals require significant social and occupational networks, and need to be in possession of a portfolio of assets that should include two elements:

- *Firstly, tangible assets, such as educational credentials which act as a ‘passport’ allowing membership of groups or acting as a ‘gatekeeper’ ensuring non-entry into a group*
- *Secondly, intangible assets such as psychological factors and characteristics which allow one’s capacity to understand and negotiate opportunities and obstacles encountered through life.*

(Cote, 1996: 429)

Cote sees the creation of one’s identity to as encompassing these elements. Whilst some of these elements appear to be pre-determined, others, Cote argues, are controlled by the social structure of society or culture and one’s experiences within that society.

An alternative view of identity interpretation is provided by Wenger (1998) in his work on learning through communities of practice where he advocates that one's identity involves five elements:

- *A negotiated understanding of self,*
- *Community membership,*
- *Learning trajectory,*
- *Connections of multi-memberships*
- *Relationships between local activities and global activities.*

(Wenger, 1998: 34)

The views of Cote (1996) and Wenger (1998) recognise the interconnectedness of an individual's identity structure between different elements. However, Blumer (1969: 74) argues that "identity" is based on "symbolic interactionism" where "individuals act according to the meanings that they attribute to their experiences". Such meanings, Blumer suggests, "are generated through processes of social interaction that are continually reinterpreted and altered through frequent social interactions" (ibid: 74). It is through such processes of social interactions that actions are constructed 'by actors out of what they take into account' and through which identity continually evolves (ibid: 75). Identity for Blumer is the result of interaction between identification and self-identification.

Given the determination of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a: 13) to target socially constructed groups such as 'long term unemployed adults' and 'illiterate adults', and to actively work to influence, manage, and in some instances coerce a change in an individual's behaviour, it is important to consider the relationships and the priority

between the targeting of 'groups' and the appointment of responsibility for personal successes and by default, failures, squarely with the individual. It appears that the strategy's reliance on social networks or groups to access individuals may contribute to undermine or diminish the role of social networks within the social justice aspect of the strategy, creating a kind of 'social fragility' (Field, 2008: 123).

The term 'social network' was introduced and used in 1954 by James Barnes, who identified it as:

... "a system of ties between pairs of persons who regard each other as approximate social equals" (Barnes, 1954: 44).

Barnes (1954: 64) social network theory views social relationships in terms of *nodes* and *ties*: 'nodes' referring to the individual actors within the networks, and 'ties' referring to the relationships between the actors. In its simplest form, Barnes suggests, a social network can be described as a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes being studied (ibid). Additionally he suggests a social network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors (Ibid: 66). As previously noted, social capital is a term used by a number of authors to describe types of valued relations with significant others; with family and school identified as the main arenas for the collection and dissemination of this form of capital.

The focus of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) on literacy and numeracy as skills precludes the opportunity to consider them as either social or cultural practices that present in different forms as part of our day to day lives (Papen 2005). Central to this viewpoint, as noted earlier, is that LLN practices are embedded within a social and

cultural context and undoubtedly always involve people in some way (Barton *et al.*, 2005; Papen, 2005): i.e. a social network. I now turn to an examination of the theoretical framework that informs the data collection and analysis in this thesis.

Theoretical framework

In this study I explored the learning experiences of socially constructed groups identified as 'long-term unemployed' and 'illiterate adults' who had low levels of LLN and who are referenced in the discourses of manipulative influence and evident in the growing literature and strategies since 1997 (DfEE, 1999; DfEE, 2001a; DWP, 2002; DfES, 2002b; Illeris, 2003b; DfES, 2003c; Atkin *et al.*, 2005; Barton *et al.*, 2005; Papen, 2005; Atkin *et al.*, 2006; Webb, 2007).

This section of the review of literature surveys aspects of the theories put forward by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Bourdieu (1993, 1997, 1998), particularly the concepts of *habitus* and *field*, and its use in (re)producing societies, constructions of cultural norms and especially the dominant positioning of positions, have been used in this study to help provide a lens through which the research data could be analysed. In undertaking this analysis I focussed specifically on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990: 87) theory of symbolic violence and its incorporation of misrecognition and legitimacy. However, it is unrealistic to consider Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) without considering Bourdieu's (1993) sociology of *habitus*, plus *field* and *doxa* and their links with capital and therefore these are also explored. The concepts are discussed using the three overarching themes of the thesis: adult LLN, choice and capital.

The association of *habitus field* and *doxa*

Adults undertaking training programmes, such as the ESP, are mainly doing so because either they have decided, or outside agencies have decided for them, that their current level of LLN skills is compromising their existence in some way either socially or economically. These outside agencies include global organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD, which link LLN skills with the abilities of both individuals and countries, particularly developing countries, to be able to function effectively in both local and global economies (OECD, 1997). An adult's ability to develop these skills it can be argued is informed and affected by their *habitus*, *field* and *doxa*, and through capital in its various forms (Bourdieu 1997). Concepts used by Bourdieu to try to comprehend, explore and explain the practices of society.

The first concept in Bourdieu's (1993) anthology is the concept of *habitus*, which provides a generative method of structured social practice. He describes *habitus*:

... "as a system of dispositions acquired by implicit or explicit learning which functions as a system of generative schemes, generates strategies which can be objectively consistent with the objective interests of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end" (Bourdieu, 1993: 76).

More clearly Bourdieu (ibid: 93) describes *habitus* as a 'system of dispositions', which are the result of:

- *An organising action*
- *A way of being and*
- *A pre-disposition, referring to a tendency, a propensity or disposition*

Bourdieu (ibid: 99) proposes that *habitus* is embodied in the individual in three significant ways:

- *Habitus only exists 'inside the heads' of actors*
- *Habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors, their interactions with each other and their environment*
- *Practical taxonomies are rooted in the body*

Habitus suggests Bourdieu (1993), is the process which socialises individuals, preparing them to handle different situations and creating consistency in behavioural response patterns and choices. The models of individual conduct or outlooks shaped by *habitus* are intergenerational and inculcated from an early age being socially reinforced through education and culture, rather than by explicit teaching (ibid). It can be argued from this that *habitus* is also creating those choices and acts to reinforce the primary drivers.

A product of history, *habitus* results in producing singular and collaborative practices and attitudes in accordance with the patterns generated by history; a 'taken for granted' of actions and activities within a social *field* (Jenkins, 2002: 71). Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to add a link to go beyond the 'opposition between subjectivism and objectivism' (Jenkins, 2002: 74). While Bourdieu (1977) argued that:

"One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a common-sense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (sense) of practices and the world". (Bourdieu, 1977: 80)

In this sense *habitus* can be considered a subjective rather than an individual system of internalised structures, perceptions, conceptions and actions common to all members of a group and thereby constituting the precondition for all objectification (Bourdieu, 1993: 97). This relational 'homology' allows room for an individual's *habitus* to become united as a group *habitus* with evidence of a 'structural variant' from other groups (ibid: 106).

Therefore, adults who have been identified as possessing poor LLN skills can be considered to be united as a group, in the same way as ethnic groups have come to be classified.

The concept of *habitus* as applied to adult learners of LLN focuses on whether this group's acquired *habitus* has influenced or influences their learning experiences in relation to the *field(s)*, described below, in which they are situated. For these adults it is most likely that their historical *habitus* is one in which LLN has featured only marginally, if at all. Before entering any systematic understanding of 'social reproduction', such as education or training individuals have already acquired a *habitus* through their experiences of *fields*; particularly their family and their community: their social network and have developed a predisposition to that experience (Bourdieu, 1993: 76).

In understanding the meaning of *habitus* for the individual, one must consider this in relation to *fields*; the second of Bourdieu's concepts to be examined. Bourdieu (1993) outlined:

... "social arrangements as consisting of various social fields. Social fields have their own logics of practice with varying degrees of freedom from other fields, sitting in a hierarchy within the overall arrangement and also with internal field relations of hierarchy between positions and agents (individuals) who inhabit them and who possess varying amounts of differing capitals". (Bourdieu, 1993: 68)

Within each *field*, argues Bourdieu, there is a competitive market place, in which positions are constantly being played out and reinforced by actions or encounters between actors within the *field* and between actors in different *fields* (Lingard et al., 2005).

Bourdieu (1998) observed a *field* as:

...”a social arena within which struggles take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them ‘Fields’ present themselves synchronically as structured spaces or positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of the occupants”. (Bourdieu, 1998: 72)

Bourdieu (1998: 42) presents three distinct operations of *field*: first, the *field* of power, identified as the most dominant *field* of a society and the one which overarches and structures all other *fields*. He describes this *field* “as the space of activity within which the holders of capital (of different types) struggle in particular for control over the state, that is, over the statist capital granting authority, over the different kind of capital and over their reproduction, particularly through the school system” (ibid: 43). Secondly, within a *field* a ‘social typology’ is constructed which maps relationships of individuals within that *field* in an effort to determine the *field*’s particular type of capital (ibid: 44). Thirdly, the *habitus* of the individuals within the *field* are analysed, considering especially the interaction between *habitus* and the constraints and opportunities determined by the structure of the *field* (ibid: 44).

If we accept that *fields* do not exist independently but are in fact structured systems of social positions; then to think in terms of *field* involves recognising the centrality of social relations to social analysis. Wacquant, (1989) defined a *field* as:

...”a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation ... in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions”. (Wacquant, 1989: 39)

Fields, then, are not only the shapers of *habitus* but also the products and producers of *habitus*. The structure of the *field* is a state of the power relations among the actors or institutions engaged in the struggle (Bourdieu, 1993). The struggle that takes place concerns the monopoly of the legitimate violence or specific authority, seen as characteristic of that particular *field* and this struggle is rarely linked to a majority but to the dominant cultural position (ibid: 47). Lingard *et al.*, (2005: 664) suggest *field* is a relational concept that presents a society consisting of quasi-autonomous *fields* with their own logics of practice and required *habitus*; this appears particularly relevant to considerations of the strategy cycles in education.

For this study the strategy focus on adult LLN skills and competencies is presented through the Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001a). This strategy advocates that the support and development of these skills in order to achieve both greater economic prosperity and also increased social justice through equality of opportunity, can arguably, only be achieved with a minimum level of LLN within a knowledge society (ibid). The *field* of adult education and training is discussed in this thesis but it is clear that associated with this *field* are other relational *fields* notably employment, employability and education. In these *fields* *habitus* is situated in relation to individuals' social constructs and their position within that *field*: the positioning of positions within a spectrum of *field* which is constructed through *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1997: 60), which is now discussed.

The third concept presented in this anthology is *doxa*, which is used by Bourdieu (1997: 60) to refer to the mutual agreement and unspoken understanding of appropriate behaviour. A large number of human activities are governed by such *doxa* where there is no need to make expectations explicit. However, difficulties arise with such governance when individuals become holders of positions that allow them to determine the 'norm', 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours or responses to activities (ibid).

Aspects of the concept of *doxa* put forward by Bourdieu (1997) provide a means of understanding spontaneous beliefs and opinions which affect the respondents' views of the world, founded on the relationships between the ideas and attitudes of individuals and the structures within which they operate such as:

“The coincidence of the objective structures and the internalised structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility” (Bourdieu, 1997: 60).

Applying the concept of *doxa* within this study an adult's experiences of learning can be linked to the way in which their *doxa* has been constructed. For some learners their ideas and attitudes towards learning are related to the framework in which that learning is delivered. For example, adult LLN learners will react differently to their training programme dependent on where and how that training course is provided whether at an FE college, or through a private training provider. Alternatively, it could be part of an individual's *doxa* to accept their position within the positions of power structures and

relationships of power in which their position exists; their *habitus*, created through their experiences of *fields* (ibid).

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) has arisen as a reaction strategy by the dominant culture of this society to a report (OECD, 1997) stating that global economic success could be compromised if all members of society cannot readily engage in productive employment within a knowledge economy. In order to do this, arguably all adults must possess a minimum level of LLN skills. Wolf (2002) suggests by constructing a strategy which gives individuals an obligation of expectation and responsibility for the acquisition of such skills, they have by implication positioned those who do not acquire these skills as failures.

Those who have been targeted by the strategy to receive training to develop these LLN skills have according to Ahrenkiel and Illeris (2002: 121) a *habitus* which has been shaped historically and socially reinforced; their interactions with *fields* controlled by the state create a *doxa* of suitable behaviours including an acceptance of the power controls working in the *field* which have shaped their views, based on the ideas and structures within which they exist and operate. Bourdieu (1998) provides the following explanation of how these relationships exist within a social structure:

“In a field, agents and institutions are engaged in struggle, with unequal strengths, and in accordance with the rules constituting that field of play, to appropriate the specific profits at stake in the game. Those who dominate the field have the means to make it function to their advantage; but they have to reckon with the resistance of the dominated agents”. (Bourdieu, 1998: 88)

The relationship between the *fields* of education policy in the form of the Skills for Life strategy; the *field* of adult education and training; the *field* of employment involved in this study and the *habitus* of the research participants (adult LLN learners and LLN teachers and coordinators) play vital and significant roles in understanding the learning experiences of adults attending LLN training programmes.

Summary

In summary, this literature review considers the development of adult LLN training programmes under the remit of the *Skills for Life* strategy, tracing their development from an activity which initially focussed on supporting the LLN skills of the developing world, to a more introspective examination of adult LLN skills in the Western world. Literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) training, according to the DfES (2002b), which was once supported by a largely volunteer workforce has moved to one which now sits at 'centre-stage' and is seen as a fundamental underpinning of an economic strategy initiative.

The literature review maps the movement of adult LLN training programmes from one which held a liberal approach to the subject, aimed at supporting adults to improve their literacy and numeracy capacity in line with their personal aspirations and goals, to one which suggests Barton (2007) is now firmly rooted in the development of LLN as knowledge and skills which can improve employability and in turn economic efficiency and functionality. The stigma which has historically been associated with holding minimal LLN skills has been considered, the move from a deficit model of failure,

inadequacy and incompetence has been shelved and replaced by one, which is seen as embracing and encouraging. However, the success of this transitional approach is questionable and the move to individual accountability continues to ensure that any failure to achieve identified skills levels is seen as undesirable and is the responsibility of the individual (ibid).

Following the consideration of adult LLN skills and similar ideologies and philosophies, the review considers how the perception of 'choice' could be instrumental in the experiences of adult LLN learners who had been identified as target groups by the strategy. In this section of the review choice was assessed in its relational affect to social and cultural factors. Using facets of Bourdieu's models of cultural structure and individual *habitus*, the literature associated with alternative practices was explored. Of particular importance in this section of the review was the relationship between the minority group of society which dominates the majority and how intermediaries often misunderstand and misrecognise the imposition of strategies as legitimate, such that activities become fully legitimised and accepted as legitimate by the whole dominated section of society, even those who are the receptors of the act.

The relationship between motivation and learning plays a significant part in the consideration of LLN skills development, as do measures of success in terms of increasing attendance rates or measures of success in terms of engagement and skills development. The misrepresentation of a neo-liberal strategy that has as its focus a

work-first directive is considered alongside the 'selling' of training programmes that seek to improve LLN skills.

In considering both the evolution of adult LLN as an area for research and the simultaneous development of strategy, the review has considered the two original goals of the strategy: economic enrichment and social cohesion. Illuminated through the review is the fact that whilst 'the individual', is the focus of the strategy and being thoroughly discussed throughout the strategy, in reality there is little evidence of the individual in the strategy. It is clear that the dominant group of society requires a more knowledgeable 'human capital' stock in order to continue to be economically successful and competitive and there is a feeling that increased LLN skills and increased employability will inevitably lead to more social cohesion. However, the strategy is not clear as to how this will be achieved.

Historically, unemployed adults, and to a lesser degree adults with LLN needs have, been portrayed by the dominant group as people who want to be 'managed' and 'controlled', rather than people who need help, support and encouragement. In the next chapter I will describe the research methodological approach, the methods used and theoretical interpretation of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the methodological process and the choices that were made by me during the research. I firstly identify the way that I understand notions or ideas about reality in this work through my ontological and epistemological stance (Crotty, 2009). This allowed me to confirm the methodological approach, followed by the methods to be used for data collection. The research design is presented and includes ethical concerns, issues of objectivity, validity, bias, trustworthiness and reliability. Finally, having identified the various research techniques used in the study the chapter concludes with a summary.

This study focuses on adults attending employability skills training (ESP) and requires an understanding of contextual conditions. Therefore I felt it appropriate to use this element of a case study approach, which as Yin (2009: 18) suggests is an exploration of “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, and is used where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. As Yin points out a case study:

“Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and which relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (ibid: 18).

The data used included the thematic use of interview discourses, combined with observation and quantitative data. In the course of using mixed methods I have attempted to uncover the impact attendance has had on an individual’s self and social identity.

As researcher I assumed the role of 'outsider' (Bridges, 2001; Breen, 2007) to the study sites and non-participant observer of teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. I have included some discussion from trainers/managers in order to provide an additional perspective on the way learner and teacher positions are constructed by these individual agents.

Using the structure suggested by Crotty (2009: 5) this chapter utilises the following broad headings to structure this work:

- *Ontology*, my philosophical stance or understanding of whether reality and truth are the result of individual perception or are a given.
- *Epistemology*, the theory of knowledge I have that is embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.
- *Methodology*, my strategy, plan of action, process and design that lay behind the selection and use of methods to achieve the desired outcomes.
- *Methods*, the techniques or procedures I used to collect and analyse data related to the research question and hypothesis.

Preliminary considerations and research philosophy

The research philosophy for this study encompasses a belief about the way in which information regarding a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used (Tashakorri and Creswell, 2007). Philosophical questioning was indirect and circular, being used to promote in-depth thinking and generating further questions in relation to

the topic under investigation (Crotty, 2009). Exploration of basic empirical beliefs was used to assist in understanding wider philosophical issues such as my ontological and epistemological stance.

The term ontology 'what exists in the world' linked to epistemology 'how we come to know what exists' encompasses the various philosophies of any research approach (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). These are linked primarily to methodological philosophy i.e. 'How can I, as researcher, discover what I believe can be known' (ibid). Two major research philosophies have been identified in the Western tradition of science, namely positivist, often referred to as scientific and anti-positivist, also referred to as interpretivism (ibid). The differences between positivists and anti-positivists can be described as being one of sociological positivism versus sociological naturalism, that is, seeing the world of nature as not the same as the world of society (ibid).

The nature of positivism

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) advocate the researcher who follows the objectivist ontology towards social science will adopt a scientific attitude to reality, and a realist's belief that society and objects within it have an independent existence that are not reliant on the knower for their existence. An objectivist interpretation of adult education suggests that "knowledge exists independent of the learners' interest in it, or awareness of it", and that the teacher is the expert holder of knowledge (ibid: 443). In subscribing to this viewpoint an objectivist will see the mind as an "empty bucket or blank page waiting to be filled with meaning, impressions or the results of reasoning" (Wolf, 2011: 33).

Therefore, the realist will often adopt a positivist approach aligning themselves with the methods of natural science through their view of knowledge of the world being relatively fixed, hard, and tangible and 'out there', while adopting an epistemological stance, which is most likely to result in them undertaking quantitative research (ibid).

Creswell (2009: 57) suggests positivists will have confidence in the fact that "reality is stable and can be observed and described from an objective viewpoint" requiring the researcher to stand outside society so as not to interfere with the phenomena being studied). While Crotty (2009: 215) contends that "phenomena should be isolated and that observations should be repeatable". He proposes that "predictions can be made on the basis of the previously observed and explained realities and their inter-relationships" (ibid 215) and that a more pluralistic attitude towards social science research methodologies should be adopted.

The nature of anti-positivism

Those who subscribe to the subjectivist ontology will according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) adhere to the nominalist belief that abstract concepts, general terms or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names and that reality comes from individual perception. The nominalist, in seeing knowledge as personal and therefore subjective and unique will subscribe to anti-positivist research principles and methodology. This requires interpretation, explanation and understanding of how the individual interprets the world in which they live (Cohen *et al.*, 2009).

Based on interpretation, subjectivists see knowledge as dependent upon what individuals realise through perception, which is seldom logical. Knowledge and truth is created not discovered; the world can only be known through people's interpretations of it (ibid). Unlike the objectivist the subjectivist sees learners as active makers of meaning and a person's history, prior experiences, and value system are the important aspects needed to establish and interpret knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The role of the teacher and learner in this paradigm is one where the teacher is concerned with the learner's construction of knowledge, conscious thinking and reflective practice (ibid). Researchers and teachers who position themselves towards this end of the epistemological spectrum are more likely to conduct qualitative research.

Cohen *et al.*, (2009) submit human nature is also split between the two extremes of a subjectivist or an objectivist approach with subjectivists subscribing to voluntarism, or the belief that humans are the initiators of their own actions through free will. The objectivist will develop a deterministic outlook, believing that humans respond mechanistically to their environment, are the products of this environment, and are controlled like puppets (ibid).

The above description indicates that these different ontological and epistemological approaches had an important influence on how I conducted my research. I followed a predominately subjectivist stance taking an interpretive approach to my research, but did include some quantitative data, believing in neither method being exclusive. The

following section discusses more fully how my ontological and epistemological approach to this research evolved.

Ontological perspective

Ontology is often described as a “brand of philosophy concerned with articulating the nature and structure of the world” (Wand and Weber 2002: 220). In entering this world I was required to use a set of terms and their corresponding definitions to allow its description (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). Having spent most of my adult life in a practical engineering role, I had considered my ontological approach to be realist and positivist in nature. Schwandt (1994) describes a positivist approach as being

...“located within historical and political settings; following the methods of the natural sciences and by means of supposedly value-free detached observation, seeking to understand common features that offer explanation and hence control and predictability”. (Schwandt, 1994: 125)

This view of knowledge according to Cohen *et al.*, (2009) requires the researcher to adopt a structured observer’s role and quantitative methods aligned to those of natural science. This approach I felt was inadequate within this research and I decided that a nominalist and anti-positivist approach, where I looked for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world. This step by me could be described as a paradigm shift from a generalising method linked to natural science to one of an individualising method more suitable to the social sciences. In this way I came to make a distinction between what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as the natural sciences seeking to establish universal laws, and the cultural sciences, where in order to detect any specific development I investigated individual phenomena.

The writings of Weber (1970) add substance to this position by concluding that human science is concerned with *verstehen* (understanding). He also contrasted *verstehen* with *erklaren* (explaining) and placed emphasis on these distinctions as leading to either quantitative or qualitative research methods. Like Weber (ibid), I see that both the natural sciences and human and social sciences may comprise at any one time both the nomothetic, i.e. treating the social world like the natural world, and idiographic where the individual is perceived to create, adapt and interpret the world in which they live.

Therefore, for this research I chose to use empirical quantitative methods to understand what is occurring regularly and qualitative methods to study particular phenomena.

Phenomena in this context as described by Crotty (2009: 197) “refer to what we directly experience” that is, “the objects of our experience before we start thinking about them, interpreting them or attributing any sense to them”. These are the things themselves seen in the study of people's subjective and everyday experiences.

Epistemological perspective

The nature of human understanding and knowledge that can possibly be acquired through different types of investigation and alternative methods of analysis is identified by Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 7) as epistemology. They further describe this as an analysis of how people, or groups of people, know what exists in the world, how they think they know what exists in the world, and is concerned with the nature and justification of human knowledge (ibid). Hirschheim *et al.*, (1996: 21) suggest that the “epistemological and the methodological questions are interdependent” and “ontological and

epistemological issues are also related in the sense that the latter concerns how human actors inquire about, and make sense of the former”. Their questions often involve what is generally referred to as a person's worldview or thinking from their viewpoint.

As identified previously, my aim for this research was to investigate how learners create and change character while attending a course of study. My epistemological approach followed that of an anti-positivist, through the belief that the social world differs from the natural world and that in order to unearth meaning I needed to use different methods to the quantitative ones usually adopted by positivists (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). In order to understand the research cohorts' individual meanings and constructions as understood through their voice (Ward and Edwards, 2002), whilst acknowledging it is my interpretation, I used the individual's personal accounts of their experience in order to ascertain their subjective reality (Denscombe, 2005). This subjectivist approach as previously described sees the individual as initiator of their actions through free will; described by Cohen *et al.*, (2009) as an idiographic methodology.

In following this approach as a subjectivist researcher I argue that knowledge cannot be value-free since all incoming information intrudes on the lens of our beliefs. Pratt (1998) points out:

“We cannot detach our experience from the purpose and values that lead us to that experience...The separation of mind and world, observer and observed, subject and object, or learner and content must be rejected”. (Pratt, 1998: 24)

Subjectivism according to Hamersley and Atkinson (2007) can be described as being based on interpretation which endorses the idea that reality is what each person

interprets it to be. The individual's feelings and emotions are an integral part of the subjectivist view. The ultimate aim for this method of research is to comprehend the way the group of people in a study 'view the world' (ibid: 157).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that although some researchers argue that quantitative and qualitative paradigms differ ontologically and epistemologically, there is a counter-argument that the two approaches are similar in their objective, scope and nature of inquiry across methods and paradigms. I felt that the blending of one with the other is possible where the approaches have a similar theory of values, which allow for the best representation of both worldviews.

Alternative world views

Cohen *et al.*, (2009) suggest two possible theoretical perspectives that can be used to describe world views which are objectivist and constructionist and it is argued below that these will have a profound influence on the perceived relative importance of an individual's view of their world. This increases the importance for me to be able to distinguish between a constructivist view, where the social dimension of meaning is local and individual, and reality is actively and socially constructed, to that of an objectivist approach where it is not (ibid).

The objectivist approach according to Crotty (2009) can be described as focusing on the distribution of information when the meaning is reasonably well known, coming from a community that has developed a strong and mature perspective. Schwandt (1994: 125)

suggests that the objectivist view recognises that “the facts of the world exist independently of us as observers” and “that constructivists are deeply committed to the contrary view, that what we consider to be objective knowledge and reality is the result of interpretation”. This constructivist/interpretive thinking I felt was more appropriate for this study which discusses relations between actors with differing backgrounds, with a position that is immature and evolving, and has different local realities.

Interpretivism

As a methodology, interpretive research in this study did not predefine dependant or independent variables, or test hypotheses. However, it was intended to be a way of understanding the social context of the phenomena under investigation and the process of how these phenomena influence and are influenced by the social context, through accessing the meanings research participants assign to them.

The construct of social reality was significant within this study – the research participants have individual, heterogeneous, social realities, based on their *fields* of experience that have formed and informed their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1998). Cohen et al., (2009: 19) submits that qualitative researchers agree “that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the on-going action being investigated”.

Beck (2000: 111) in reinforcing the principles of a qualitative approach to research states that “the role of social science is to understand social reality as different people

see it and to determine how their views influence the action which they take within that reality". Beck (2000: 55) points out that the social sciences "cannot discern what lies behind social reality, so they must work directly within social science definitions of reality and the rules devised for coping with it". While Crotty (2009: 134) states that the social sciences offer "explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around him".

One of the ways used to obtain information regarding the social world of the identified participants involved in this study was achieved as Silverman (2000: 91) suggests through the process of interviewing, allowing the generation of "data which gives an insight into people's experiences" and provides access to the meanings people attributed to their experiences and their social world. Interpretivism in utilising a qualitative research methodology, such as one-to-one interviews, therefore, offered the opportunity for such an investigation of the views of the research participants (Silverman, 1997).

Initially I thought a phenomenological approach to the study would be most appropriate as it is based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity. As such it can be described as being a powerful tool for understanding subjective experience, giving insight into people's motivations and actions (ibid). However, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out pure phenomenological research seeks to describe rather than explain and to start from a perspective free from hypothesis or perceptions. Therefore for this study I felt it more appropriate to follow an interpretive approach in the qualitative

tradition. The process of interpreting and defining the situation came about as the result of the context in which I, as the researcher, was placed. An important point I needed to consider in these circumstances was the power of others to establish their own definitions of situations upon the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2009: 151).

Understanding research issues

Bias

An important component of the research design is the recognition of the potential for bias by the researcher. Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that everyone sees the world through frames of reference that are developed as a result of their possessing individual attributes, or being situated in particular social, historical, geographical, political, and religious contexts, which inevitably lead to differing experiences; what Bourdieu (1997: 76) entitled their *habitus* which is constructed through associations with varying *fields* during their lifetime.

Bias is always a concern for those engaged in qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 872) suggest that one could, in fact, argue “that all human knowledge and experience, as expressed through verbal accounts is in essence, biased”. In acknowledging that such bias may exist, I sought throughout this research to recognise its existence wherever possible. There was a requirement on my part to acknowledge, and take into account my own biases, as a method of dealing with them (Gray, 2009). In attempting to seek out my own subjective states and effects on the data it became

essential to understand how subjectivity would occur in my mind before committing any information to paper (Creswell 2009).

Qualitative researchers, it is suggested by Cohen *et al.*, (2009), have wrestled for some time with charges that it is extremely easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data. Gray (2009) suggests qualitative research as being too subjective, in large part because the researcher is the agent of both data collection and data analysis. This sort of research will always be biased in the sense that it is partial and interpretivist, while it can be argued that scientific research is just differently biased when it takes for granted the conditions of its own possibility and inherent assumptions.

Whilst using face-to-face, one-to-one interviews demonstrates the importance this study places on the participation of the research participants and allows for in-depth analysis of responses, it is accepted that the personal nature of this approach may lead people to respond to questions in a way that they think is required or most pleasing at that moment based on how they want to interact with you.

Gray (2009: 495) suggests all research “whether quantitative or qualitative, experimental or naturalistic, is a human activity subject to the same kinds of failings as other human activities” and a number of possible sources of bias are present, these are identified as:

- *The reactivity of researchers with the providers and consumers of information*
- *Selection biases including people, time, place, questions*

- *The availability and reliability of various sources of information*
- *The affinity of researchers with certain kinds of people, designs, data, theories, concepts and explanations*
- *The value preferences and commitments of researchers and their knowledge or otherwise of these (Gray, 2009: 495-9)*

Cohen *et al.*, (2009) comment that, while it is possible to identify potential sources of bias, it is difficult to establish rules or specific procedures which, if followed, will systematically eliminate bias and error. In order to reduce the risk of bias happening within this research I recorded field notes, which included reflection of my own subjectivity. Also having looked at the advantages and disadvantages of both qualitative and quantitative method, I chose a design, which encompassed elements of each in order to pay attention to both the depth and breadth of the issues to consider.

I felt I needed to employ qualitative methods, which would allow me to get closer to practice, in order to witness what the teachers do and to learn how this affects the choices the learner research participants make, and the personal meanings they attach to what they do. I felt it legitimate to apply quantitative methods to describe the breadth of the issues in view of the potential for strategy implications the findings of this study could bring. For example elements of the quantitative data were used in tabular form in my findings to provide an overview of the study area.

Reliability and validity

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 869) define the term 'reliability' as a concept used for testing or evaluating quantitative analysis, however, testing in a qualitative paradigm is viewed

as a way of information elicitation, by way of causing something to be disclosed, especially by a process of questioning or analysis. Creswell (2009: 34) identifies a good reliable qualitative study as one which “can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or misleading”. While Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 76) see reliability as “the purpose of explaining” in a quantitative approach and “a means of generating understanding” in a qualitative approach to research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 52) used the term “dependability” when discussing qualitative research suggesting it corresponds closely to the belief of “reliability in quantitative research”. Gray (2009: 142) endorses the concept of “dependability” in qualitative research when discussing the concept of “consistency or reliability in quantitative research”. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 55) state that “since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the validity of research is sufficient to establish the reliability”. However, this ignores the fact that information which is valid can be collected, but which is not reliable from one day to the following in terms of results.

Reliability of the information gathered, as Cohen *et al.*, (2009) suggests, was built into this research design through the phasing of fieldwork activity, and multi method data collection, which in turn provided the opportunity to establish consistency and reliability over time and with similar groups of respondents. Data were supported through the use of alternative sources, including fieldwork notes, observation notes and artefacts of the institution (such as marketing literature, programme outlines, schemes of work and initial assessment results). A further important consideration during the development of

the research design for this study was the need to be able to offer the findings as a truthful picture of the learning experiences of the research participants. Of particular concern for this study is the ability to provide evidence of respondent validity. This is a concern for the researcher because of the very real possibility that the learner research participant will be unable to read a transcript of the interview interaction in order to verify that it was an accurate representation of the interview encounter. Also because of the fluid nature of both the training provision and the learners, it was thought unlikely within the time constraints of the project, that I would be able to return to the location at which the second interview was completed in order to read the transcript to the learner research participant or to discuss the transcript.

For this reason, a paraphrasing interview strategy was adopted, as Anderson *et al.*, (1998) point out:

...”paraphrasing takes what the interviewee has just said and repeats it back in different words. It acknowledges your attention and it increases validity by checking whether what you heard the interviewee say was the intended message. Paraphrasing crystallises comments by repeating them in a more concise manner”. (Anderson *et al.*, 1998: 197)

Three common approaches to validity used in qualitative research are validation as investigation, as communication, and as action (Kvale, 2007). Validity in qualitative research is linked to interpretation and description, and whether or not the given interpretation fits a given description. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the idea of validity as one of the quality concepts in qualitative research, which has to be achieved in order for the researcher to claim a study as part of quality research. Validity, in this study, was identified through the ability of the narrative being told to be representative of

the research participants' subjective reality, being interpreted to mean the development of a strong understanding of the accounts, or narratives being provided by research participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2009).

Triangulation

Triangulation according to Denscombe (2005: 346) refers to the use of “more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to increase confidence in the resultant findings”. In social science it has come to represent the mixing of methods or data so that diverse viewpoints can be used to cross check the information collected. For my research I felt it important when considering the research objective to determine how information could be or needed to be triangulated.

In this thesis triangulation was sought by the use of data source collection through time, space and person, which identified the time the information was collected, the place, or setting and from whom the data were collected i.e. participants such as learners, teachers and coordinators. See appendix 11: 299, for identification of place, interview and observation timings.

For this research I utilised methodological triangulation also known as multi-method or mixed-method, to gather data through the use of interviews, observations, questionnaires, documents and statistical data (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). By using different methods my goal, as highlighted by Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 276), was to minimise the “deficiencies and biases that stem from any one particular method” thus creating “the

potential for counterbalancing the flaws or the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another”.

Ethics

The theory that underpins ethical research is one where research is seen as, not just a matter of collecting information, but is concerned with the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of those taking part in the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). This required me as the researcher to act with responsibility regarding issues of privacy, acceptable data collection methods, storage of data and use strategies. I was required to ensure when planning and undertaking my research that the above as Silverman (2000) points out was central to the different elements of the process.

In constructing the framework for this study I gave considerable attention to the ethical component, acknowledging, as proposed by Kvale (2007), that ethical decisions are likely to occur throughout the entire research process. I acknowledge that research is far from being an objective process and this is especially true when evaluating its results. Questions were asked therefore, about why the specific topic was selected and how findings from the evaluations were to be used. A further concern was how far the analysis has the potential to improve practice and how this might accord with the principles set out above.

Once a complete rationale for the investigation had been identified, consideration of the resources and expertise available along with the risks and benefits to participants was

also recognised. The research cohort consisted of adult learners on a programme of study who were informed of the reason for the research and were able to give informed consent. However, it was felt that, due to the learners' low level of literacy and language skills, there was a possibility of them being identified as vulnerable adults. Therefore, it was important to use the research ethical framework of the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines to support the development of an ethical framework for the study.

Learners who agreed to participate in this study were invited to complete a consent form confirming their right to anonymity and confidentiality of information (appendix 3: 291). All research participants were informed that they could, elect to withdraw from the study at any time. Following this process, consent forms were signed and dated by both the research participant and me as researcher. BERA (2001) point out it is necessary to be conscious of the fact that consent, which is informed, is an ideal, but it is not necessarily a one off event to be taken at the start of a project, rather it is a process and needs to be negotiated throughout the course of the project.

It was important, for the study to be successful, that all research participants were regarded as equal in the research process. Reflecting on the 'potential human issues in qualitative research' (Anderson *et al.*, 1998: 127) draws attention to the necessity of ensuring that research participants feel at ease with the research process in order to participate fully. Whilst it is recognised that there is likely to be an imbalance in the power relationship in the interview process (Foucault, 1980), particularly with the learner

research participants, consideration was given to how to overcome potential barriers at interview prior to the event. Time was spent considering appropriate dress code when undertaking interviews, endeavouring to ensure a 'dress code match' where possible. Additionally, the environment in which the research interviews were conducted was given some consideration. Where possible barriers, such as tables, were removed from the environment or put to one side. As noted previously, all research participants were invited to sign a consent form that described the nature and purpose of the study. In addition, all research participants were advised that their identity would remain restricted to the study (appendix 3: 291)

Methodological approach and methods used.

The purpose of the research methodology and methods adopted for this study was to illuminate the relationship between Government strategy requiring unemployed adults with low LLN skills to attend targeted training programmes and the experiences of these adults as they encounter such strategies and practices.

Qualitative research

There are a number of points to consider when deciding to adopt a qualitative research approach and Creswell (2009: 148) writes that "qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known". They can also be used to discover new perspectives on things about which considerable detail is already known, or to gain more in-depth information which may be difficult to convey quantitatively (ibid). While Crotty (2009) suggests that, open-ended questions are used

to gain insights in qualitative research and support the discovery of new information. He also observes that in situations where one needs to examine the variables which might eventually be tested quantitatively, or where the researcher has determined that quantitative measures do not adequately describe or explain a situation, qualitative methods are more appropriate (Ibid).

Oxga (2000) describe qualitative research as representing different things at different times and in different contexts. However, for this research it is essentially a form of inquiry based on reasoning. For this study as Anderson and Arsenault (1998) advocate qualitative research is considered as being multi-method in its focus, taking an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its area of interest. Just as Denzin and Lincoln, (2005: 879) proposed I felt I needed to use a variety of empirical materials which included case study, personal experience, reflection, life story, interview and observations, while recognising these are personal and therefore biased accounts of difficult moments in the research participants' lives.

The potential of qualitative data to more fully describe a situation suggests Lincoln and Guba (1985) is an important factor not only from my research approach, but from that of the reader as well, and that:

“If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it”. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 120)

Gray (2009: 149) details how qualitative research, which is “typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus becomes more meaningful”.

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 83) also identify the characteristics required to make humans the “instrument of choice for naturalistic qualitative inquiry”. They suggest humans are responsive to environmental cues, and are able to interact with the situation through the ability to:

- *‘Collect data at various levels simultaneously’*
- *‘Perceive situations holistically’*
- *‘Process data as soon as they become available’*
- *‘Provide immediate feedback and request verification of data’*
- *‘Explore atypical or unexpected responses’* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 84)

Cohen *et al.*, (2009) identify that the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher comes from a number of sources, including professional literature, professional experiences, and personal experiences. I found as Anderson and Arsenault (1998) reported that the integrity of a qualitative research report, such as this one, is dependent on the confidence the reader has in my ability to be sympathetic to the data allowing me to make appropriate decisions in its collection. In qualitative research, “the researcher is the primary data collection instrument” (ibid 1998: 124) and, as such, I have attempted throughout to understand phenomena and interpret the social reality.

For this study I accomplished this through interpretive research, based on the assumption that knowledge of the subject was to be gained, or filtered through social

constructs, such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). There is an acknowledgement by me that the socially constructed nature of the learner's reality will, through interpretive research, examine the relationship between me the learner research participants, teachers and coordinators, along with the situational constraints which influence this process (ibid). I have also made an implicit assumption, as pointed out by Crotty (2009), that people will develop and relate their own subjective meanings to situations and information as they interact with the world around them.

A framework for qualitative analysis.

In constructing a research design, which is primarily aimed at understanding and interpreting the experiences of the actors involved with the ESP, both from their perspectives and their realities of the world a qualitative approach was constructed to enable this goal to be achieved. The purpose of conducting this research in this way was to investigate affective, social and educational factors that may have contributed to the lack of development of literacy and numeracy skills in long-term unemployed adults.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) has brought the issue of adult LLN skills to the political 'centre stage'. The phenomenon of adults possessing significantly low levels of LLN skills are remarkable in a Western developed country which has had compulsory education for children in existence for more than a century. The qualitative study approach in this situation is one where the researcher attempts to understand a real life phenomenon, and which will contain important contextual conditions. Indeed, one of its

strengths, identified by Cohen *et al.*, (2009), is its use in observing effects in a real context, by recognising that situation is a strong determinant of both cause and effect.

Yin (2009: 18) proposes that research covers the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis and is an enquiry that:

- *'Investigates a contemporary situation in depth and within its real-life context'*
- *'Identifies boundaries between phenomenon and circumstances that are not clearly evident'* (Yin, 2009: 18).

According to Yin (2009: 19) "phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations", data collection and analysis strategies appear to be an important part of the definition of a qualitative inquiry which allows it to cope with:

- *'The technically distinctive environment in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points'*
- *'Reliance on multiple sources of evidence, with the data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion'*
- *'Benefits accrued from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis'* (Yin, 2009: 19).

The focus of this study is to gather up to date information and involved the use of not only direct observation and structured interviewing, but also contemporary documentation (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998). This holistic research method, which uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate a phenomenon (ibid) I anticipated would allow for the learning experiences of adults with low LLN skills to be brought to life through the collection of a strong chain of evidence, with the purpose of enhancing and illuminating the field of study (ibid).

The purpose of analysis in this study is to make sense of the learning experiences of the research participants (Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007). A qualitative approach to analysis according to Seidel (1998: 24) involves a process of 'noticing, collecting and thinking'. Noticing includes observation, recording and coding which will facilitate and inform further investigation; collecting the coded data into groups and finally thinking and examining what had been collected (ibid).

This approach to data analysis, Seidel (Ibid) asserts, enables the researcher to make sense of each sub-group and of the whole data; to identify patterns and relationships both within a sub-group and across sub-groups in order to inform and make discoveries about the researched phenomena. Using this approach, he argues, enables a comparing and contrasting of data, identification of similarities and differences, and any sequences and patterns.

I decided for this research information was to be analysed following the model offered by Seidel (1998) by considering research participants' *habitus*, *fields* of experience (Bourdieu, 1997: 76) and how or whether misrecognition and legitimisation of actions (previously discussed in Chapter Two) played any role in the learning experiences of employability skills programme learners.

Data was generated and scrutinised to identify similarities and differences of experience, both between learners' undertaking training in the same institutional

environment as well as exploring experiences of learners in training across the providers of other institutional environments, and their *habitus* generally (ibid).

Qualitative and quantitative studies and generalizability

Qualitative research studies according to Mertens (2003) have a number of positive aspects to them, but are often criticized as lacking objectivity and not being generalizable. The word generalizable is defined by Cohen *et al.*, (2009) as the extent to which the findings can be extrapolated from the study sample to the total population. While qualitative studies are not seen as generalizable in the traditional understanding of scientific research, I believe they do have features that make them attractive for education research. To this end I see the key strength of a qualitative approach as being the degree to which investigations are managed and explanations are written.

In quantitative work Denzin and Lincoln (2005) label generalizability as statistical, pointing out the survey sample is matched to the population at large to ensure comparability of demographic features and, if this is done correctly, it is assumed the findings from the sample are generalizable. In qualitative research, however, contributors are not selected by random sampling as they are required to be able to provide information about the topic under investigation (ibid). To this end knowledge of the situation is what I sought from my research participants. Therefore, generalizability for this research examines the extent to which any theory developed within this study might be transferred in order to provide explanatory theory relevant to the experiences of others who are in similar circumstances.

Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 153) point out that for research results to be transferable all that is needed is to conclude with a high-level of validity something about a particular learning situation and to know that the make-up of this situation is representative of another to which the generalization is being applied. However, this conventional possibility of validity is quite naïve and if generalization's are to be made from research setting A to research setting B, then we must make sure that the circumstances are comparable.

For this research emphasis was placed on evaluation through survey, and sampling processes were used to confirm a broader applicability than the primary research study proposal. The main approach used during this research was case study, interview and observation.

Research access and participant selection

In order to complete this research I approached institutions offering employability skills training (ESP) for Jobcentre plus within the West Midlands Region of England that were reporting low attrition rates. One, which is part of a large international private training provider group, offered access to potential research participants (learners, teachers and coordinators) at three of their sites based within the Midlands area. Meetings were arranged with key personnel (gatekeepers) to discuss the study in more detail and the anticipated amount of time that might be required for completion. Achieving goodwill and co-operation was seen as important at this point because it was anticipated the research would encompass several months work.

Verbal approval from the relevant managers to proceed was obtained and access was granted without any hindrance to interview potential research participants, learners teachers and co-ordinators. It was planned for the majority of research participants to be ESP learners identified from a specific subgroup of adults who were long-term unemployed, had been found to have no qualifications and with literacy, numeracy or language (LLN) skills at Level 1 or below (appendix 1: 289). The research participants, having been subjected to the teaching and learning practice being investigated, also had to be willing to communicate their thoughts about these experiences. In completing the research I interviewed 43 research participants of whom 39 were learners and 4 were teacher/co-ordinators. In the later part of my research, I completed an additional 15 second interviews with available learners which resulted in an overall total of 58 interviews.

As explained previously in this thesis the learning programme followed a roll-on-roll-off format which required numerous attendances from me in order to engage with potential new and continuing research participants. The attendance dates and numbers involved in the interviews are shown in appendix 11: 299. For each of my attendances at the provider institute I had the opportunity to make an Initial introduction and have a brief one-to-one informal discussion with potential research participants. New learners that I spoke to and who met the sample criteria set out above, were approached and asked whether they wished to participate in the study. Learners expressing an interest in participating were invited to contribute further by undertaking a one-to-one interview that was to be digitally-recorded and later transcribed to form the basis of the study. A

similar exercise was undertaken with the teacher/coordinator participants, who agreed to be part of this study. They were, like the learner research participants, advised of the role their participation would play in its construction, were told of the required commitment to the study and what had been put in place to ensure that their confidentiality and anonymity was respected and informed they could withdraw from the research at any time.

Sampling was therefore opportunistic using learners available at the place and time I carried out the research and this form of non-probability sampling can be justified in qualitative, mixed method and case study research according to Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 113) 'because it focuses on a specific subgroup unique in nature'. It was anticipated that this sampling method would provide 'rich qualitative information through the use of illustrative quotes that were verbatim comments on the specific topics under investigation' that could be used in the findings (ibid: 114).

Qualitative research as I have identified on page 117 suffers from the suggestion that it is extremely easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data. There was therefore a need on my part to acknowledge qualitative research as being subjective, in large part because the researcher is the agent of both data collection and data analysis and, as Gray (2009) suggests, this sort of research will always be biased in the sense that it is partial and interpretivist.

Although it is not possible with opportunistic sampling to claim the findings as generalizable to the total population I believe that the findings are relatable to similar populations. Le Gallais (2006: 99) also found that 'a case study is often thought of as unique in nature and it may be difficult to generalise the results'. However, through a review of relevant literature she did find resonance between her work and the wider population allowing her to also claim relatability.

Some research participants were initially reluctant to take part because, as they explained, they were either suspicious of the research motives, lacked self-confidence or felt they had nothing to contribute. However as the research progressed and learners became more aware of what the research involved a number of those who were initially unwilling approached me and asked to be included.

It was planned for fieldwork to cease once the data collection period ended and it was felt a sufficient number of interviews had been completed. Morse (1994) suggests that a sample is adequate when:

"Sufficient data have been collected...saturation occurs and variation is both accounted for and understood In qualitative research, the investigator samples until repetition from multiple sources are obtained". (Morse, 1994: 230)

I intended to ensure that sufficient multiple 'stories' were collected as suggested by Bertauz (1981: 62), thereby developing a strong body of evidence through the accumulation of various experiences from research participants who are existing in similar sets of socially-structured relations.

Mixed method research

In considering the appropriate methodology for this study I was reminded of the following quote:

...many arrows, loosed several ways, come to one mark....

William Shakespeare, Henry V, act1, scene 2

Similarly with this analysis there were various methods available for use in achieving my goal which is referred to as mixed method research and is defined by Cresswell (2009) as:

...“the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of data at one or more stages in the process of research”. (Cresswell, 2009: 204)

I have also observed how mixed methods research has grown in both scope and popularity and, although it could be described as a still developing field, some proponents argue that it encompasses much more than just simply combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009). Tashakorri and Creswell (2007: 4) describe it as a “deliberately inclusive” methodological paradigm which sits between positivism and interpretivism and which can be described as:

...“research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws references using both quantitative and qualitative approaches or methods in a single study”. (Tashakorri and Creswell, 2007: 6)

I feel that in sitting between these two methodologies it was permissible to utilise elements of both in completing my studies. Creswell (2009) points out that researcher choice often employs a multi-method matrix approach to data collection, and integrates qualitative and quantitative data. However there are reported limitations in using mixed

methods and it is argued that bringing together data collected by two or more different methods carrying different ways of looking at the world can give rise to questions of research consistency or clarity (Feyerabend 1993). In following the reasoning of Creswell (2009) that the quantitative approach is linked to a positivist paradigm and the qualitative approach is linked to the interpretivism paradigm, I believe they can be brought together in one study in order to explore different characteristics of the research question.

Marshall and Rossman (2006: 40) suggest that “In the study of human experience, it is necessary to understand how people define their situations” and therefore methods that are sensitive to personal experiences are needed. In seeking insights and understanding of individuals’ perceptions of the world research tools, which recognise the original source of data collection and have a focus on words are required (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

However, as previously stated I found it not necessarily relevant to consider qualitative and quantitative methods in opposition to each other but, rather, that each can complement the other and have valuable contributions to make in the construction of a rich data-set from which my analysis could be undertaken. Several other studies seeking to understand personal experiences have similarly adopted such an approach, for example: Ahrenkiel and Illeris (2002); Ward and Edwards (2002); Atkin *et al.*, (2005); Porter *et al.*, (2005); Joyce *et al.*, (2006).

Mayor and Pugh (1987) discuss how Individuals make sense of the world and themselves through narrative and also use it to organise their experience and knowledge of interactions with the world. Through narrative individuals can both create and change perceptions of their world. Narrative can therefore be said to inform us of our identity, “since self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of their story or biography” (Giddens 1991: 53) and identity is seen as the ability to keep a particular narrative going.

Importantly, the interviews that make up this study demonstrate the structure, shape and style most comfortable to the person telling the narrative, bringing order and meaning to the experience for both the teller and the listener (Atkinson, 1998). The data collected in the study focused specifically on one theme: learning experiences through the life-time of the learner, with a particular emphasis on current learning experiences, whilst attending an employability skills programme. Through this approach I hoped to locate changes to self and social identity over time while accepting that this information may not always be complete. Outcomes will often be suggestive rather than definitive and may only be described as credible and convincing ways of seeing things.

Research instruments

The research instruments used in this study were, semi-structured interviews informed by the research question and the theoretical framework of the study, researcher observation and background and statistical data. Like Wengraf (2001) I believe that in using such instruments, the data collected from research participants involved in the

project only represents an interpretation of reality and truth for the participant during the conversation, observation or information that occurs at the time of the study.

Four research instruments, including two semi-structured learner interview schedules, a practitioner/coordinator interview schedule and a background data collection form were developed to complete the information collection process. Of the two semi-structured interview schedules, one was constructed for use with the learner research participants at the beginning of their course of study (appendix 6: 294), and the other was to be completed towards the end of their course of learning (appendix 7: 295) An interview schedule was also completed for the practitioner/coordinator research participants (appendix 8: 296). The instruments were designed to allow the research participants to develop the initially prepared questions in an unplanned way (Wengraf, 2001) and as Giddens (1991: 53) identify would enable their 'story' to be told about the pre-identified aspect of their life experience: namely the effect of having under-developed LLN skills.

Research interview

Interviews are culturally and historically a specific phenomenon (Wengraf, 2001). Kvale (2007) sees the research interview as one which is based on conversations of daily life, defining it as one:

... "whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena". (Ibid: 5)

The research interview is further defined by Cannell and Kahn (1968) as:

... "a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purposes of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him [sic] on

content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation". (Ibid: 527)

Kvale (2007) proposes that the use of interviews in research marks a step towards regarding knowledge as being generated between humans through conversations. An interview is a professional dialogue with structure and function; defined, guided and controlled by the researcher (ibid: 91). It is clear that a research interview specifically comprises the collection of information through direct vocal communication between individuals. It can be described as being an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two or more partners about a matter of common interest; a specific type of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue (ibid).

Interviews were therefore as Atkinson (1998) suggests seen as being ideal for studying the learner research participants' perceptions for consideration of the meanings of their world, allowing them the capacity to discuss their experiences by providing a description of self-understanding; illuminating and explaining their own perception of their lived world. Using such an approach in this study allowed for a window of opportunity to open up so that a fuller understanding of an individual's experience could be developed.

Research interviewing is described by Wengraf (2001: 34) as a 'type of conversation' which has been specifically designed and constructed to develop knowledge in order to develop an understanding of a reality for the research participants at that time. As such, the lengths of interviews undertaken in this study clearly varied between research participants. Some participants readily engaged in an elaborate account of their

experiences whereas others told their story within the limitations they had constructed for themselves.

The research participants are acknowledged as key informants in the collection of data to support this study, as they have particular experience and knowledge about the topic being discussed (Anderson *et al.*, 1998). Similarly to Porter *et al.*, (2005) and Ward and Edwards (2002), the interviews undertaken in this research project were carried out with the research participants on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis. Using such an interview approach suggests Alvarez and Urla (2002) enables research participants to discuss their understandings of the world in which they live, not only allowing for the collection of information about the research participants' lived experience, but giving them the opportunity to construct and articulate their experiences in ways they may not have undertaken previously.

Whilst it is clear that an interview incorporates an arrangement of information between the research participant and the researcher, a number of interview approaches can be employed. For the purpose of this study I used a non-directed and informal style, where I had a number of key issues to address which were to be raised in a conversational style. Therefore, in this study a semi-structured design was widely adopted. An interview schedule was prepared with key questions and broad themes to be covered (Denscombe, 2005) which allowed movement between less formal and completely informal forms of interviewing, as appropriate.

The majority of questions I used were open-ended; an approach strongly associated with subjectivity in analysing and interpreting responses, described by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) as following an interpretive paradigm and theoretical perspective for this element of the research as I interpreted the meanings people attributed to their actions by focusing on what they said about social facts. An interpretivist they suggest can be described as someone who is sympathetic to the people being researched and tends to use qualitative research methods as these allow the researcher to study selective issues in depth and detail (ibid, 2002).

The limitations of using interview as a research method.

In using interviews, it is necessary to recognise the limitations and difficulties associated with using this method as a mechanism for data collection. Some problems identified by Cicourel (1964) and also found while conducting this research are set out below:

- *There were a number of factors which naturally differ from one interview to another, such as mutual trust, social distance and the interviewer's control.*
- *The respondent if feeling uncomfortable will adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep.*
- *Both interviewer and respondent are bound to keep back part of what it is in their capacity to state.*
- *Sometimes the meanings which are transparent to one will be somewhat confusing to the other, even when the intention is open communication.*
- *It was impossible, just as in everyday life, to bring every aspect of the encounter within rational control.*

(Cicourel, 1964: 64-67)

In undertaking the interviews for this study, it is recognised that the experiences and understanding of reality that are the researcher's may vary significantly from those of the research participants and that these experiences are brought to the interview interaction. McGrath (2004: 91) points out the danger of ignoring the actor's in the study, individual perspective, actions and behaviours and explains how they are bounded by the context in which they operate. He also pointed out it had not been possible for him as a researcher to suspend or 'bracket off' his own beliefs and attitudes; going on to suggest that his own educational and professional biography would have had an impact on his interpretation of the data (ibid).

Observations

The distinctive feature of observation identified by Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 396) as a research process is that it "offers the researcher the opportunity to discover 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations". An additional benefit I found as researcher was it allowed me to look directly at what was taking place, reducing the risk for me of relying on indirect information. Being able to utilise precise understanding using this form of research I felt had the potential to reveal more viable and reliable information than would otherwise be possible. Also, as Creswell (2009) suggests, quite often what individuals say they do differs from what they actually do, and observation can be instrumental in exposing this. Importantly within educational research the observer is expected to be able to observe events as they happen, such as, learner teacher interaction, the level of distracting conversation which may occur and the amount of

group collaborative work taking place (Crotty, 2009). There is a further opportunity to observe learner behaviour, especially any aggressive or antisocial behaviour.

Observations according to Crotty (2009) allow the researcher to collect data on:

- *'The physical environment and its organisation'*
- *'The organisation of people, the characteristics and composition of the groups or individuals being observed'*
- *'The interactions that are taking place, whether formal, informal, planned, unplanned, verbal or non-verbal'*
- *'The programme setting, use of resources and their organisation, including pedagogic styles, curriculum and their organisation'*

(Crotty, 2009: 46-47)

A recognised strength of observation research suggests it can in effect add to other approaches and information gathering techniques and thus improve the quality of evidence available to the researcher (ibid).

Qualitative observation.

Observation suggests Geertz (1973: 168) can also be used to “provide rich qualitative data, sometimes referred to as thick description”, an example of which is where the material phenomena have been carefully observed and detailed field notes have been recorded. In this case I did not tackle the observation with pre-defined categories or questions in mind. In approaching the observation in this way with openness, observation in this qualitative research was unstructured and encompassed an interpretive or critical perspective where the planned focus was one of understanding the meanings participants, in the contexts observed, attributed to events and actions.

One type of unstructured observation is described by Cohen *et al.*, (2009: 404) as naturalistic, which in this research was carried out in real world setting, and had as its purpose, to observe things ‘as they are’, without any interference or manipulation of the situation itself by the observer.

Hamersley and Atkinson (2007) propose three features of observation in qualitative research which are considered as:

- *‘Participant versus non-participant observation’*
- *‘Overt versus covert observation’*
- *‘Open versus closed settings’*

(Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007: 47)

This suggests a distinction can be drawn between participant and non-participant observation based on the extent to which the observer’s role fits within the situation. At one extreme the observer is an active participant in the activities; and at the other extreme the observer seeks to be as unobtrusive as possible, so as not to influence the situation being observed in any way. Hamersley and Atkinson (2007: 16-17) suggest that “all social research takes the form of participant observation and conclude that it involves participating in the social world in whatever capacity and reflecting on the products of that participation”. However, as participants in the social world we are still able, at least “in anticipation or retrospect, to monitor our activities from outside as objects in the world” (Ibid: 19).

Limitations of using observation as a research method.

I soon found out that one of the main disadvantages to using observation as a research tool is that it can be very time consuming and requires considerable resources. This led me to conclude that although a desirable strategy my limited time and resource availability made it a selective option. A further weakness of all observation suggests Denzin and Lincoln (2009) is that it is susceptible to observer bias. They also qualify (ibid : 730) that “any subjective bias on the part of the observer will reduce the reliability and hence the validity of the data gathered” . This can occur because there is a possibility that as observer I may not have recorded exactly what happened, but what I wanted to see, or thought I saw.

I was also aware of another potential weakness described by Denzin and Lincoln (2009: 731) as the ‘observer effect’, which refers to the way in which the presence of an observer in some way influences the behaviour of those being observed. Whilst it was recognised from an interpretivist standpoint that the presence as observer-as-participant was susceptible to observer bias and may have altered the dynamic of the group, it was I believed necessary as such opportunities provide for a deeper contextual understanding of the nature of the experiences of learners. This form of observation is often combined with other forms of data collection that, together, allow for the participants’ descriptions of situations and their actions to be more fully reported (ibid).

Pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken at a single site following the establishment of the research design. Primarily, this was to safeguard that the design enabled the essential information to inform the research question to be collected; thereby enabling me to try the research instruments that had been developed. The pilot study allowed the research design to be refined in light of the findings resulting from the pilot study. Potential research participants were invited to engage in the project and were briefed using supporting documentation (Information for Research Participants in Research Project appendix 3: 291) and by conducting individual one-to-one briefings with each potential research participant so that any questions or concerns could be addressed. Of those who participated in these discussions, not all went on to participate in the pilot study.

Those who agreed to take part more fully in the study were then invited to complete a consent form to participate (appendix 4: 292). This allowed the research participants to be allocated a number by which I could reference them during the analysis and discussion of findings. This number was generated by the digital recording device used to complete interviews.

The pilot study involved an interview with learner research participants and observation of classroom interaction. Research participants were asked to provide a range of background information, which was gathered through question and answer activity, rather than giving the form to the learner to complete independently (appendix 5: 293).

In this way both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and a very positive start to the main qualitative interview was achieved, because it allowed both me, as researcher, and research participants to develop a rapport. A further benefit to this approach was to support learner research participant vulnerability, and alleviate any anxiety they may encounter from being expected to read and complete any form filling.

Additionally, this provided a further opportunity for research participants to clarify any remaining questions they might have had. Furthermore, research participants were able to discuss the reasons for the digital-recorder (used to record interviews for later transcription) and allowed an opportunity for them to overcome any initial discomfort about the presence of the digital recorder. Once the research participants realised they were not expected to read material, they were able to relax and discuss their experience of the training programme more comfortably and confidently. All interviews were digitally-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

I did, however, find through this pilot study that my initial research and interview routine although insightful was lacking in depth and did not fully answer my research questions. I needed to expand my research focus while still following my research timeline (appendix 11: 299). Following discussions with my supervisor's I changed my interview procedure to incorporate learner's opinion and feedback at both the beginning and end of their learning period. To add more impact to my work, I felt it necessary to establish a perspective from a small number of teachers. This extension to my original study brief

still addressed the original issues I wished to explore but provided greater insight into the Employability Skills Programme of study and its impact on learners.

Research study refinement

The research study, as noted previously was conducted using a pilot phase and a further two phases. This was a purposeful decision, based on several factors.

Pragmatically, it allowed time for me as the researcher to undertake some fieldwork, collect data and analyse it in line with the Seidel (1998: 24) model of 'noticing, coding and thinking', while giving time to transcribe and evaluate the information in line with the research focus and research question.

The pilot study also allowed me as the researcher to develop appropriate research questions for stage one, learners at the beginning of their study, and stage two which was to be completed towards the end of their study. By using research participants accessing training programmes over a period of time I was able to understand how the learning experiences of people remained similar or changed over time. Through building on the reflections of the interviews already undertaken, the research can be identified as evolving and refining in line with a qualitative paradigm (Cohen *et al*, 2009).

Data collection.

Three key issues underpinned the quality of data generated by using reflection and interviews as the primary source of data collection: representativeness, reliability and

validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). These provided an on-going topic for consideration throughout both the collection and analysis of the data.

At the start of the interview process, a discussion took place with each research participant, which touched upon their concerns regarding confidentiality and anonymity, information on how data would be collected (use of digital-recorder), the ownership of transcript material, dissemination of information, contact details, freedom to withdraw from the research process at any time and the interview process, which includes types of questions, length of interview, etc. (appendix 4:292).

Following this discussion, background data were collected from each participant. This was undertaken for two reasons. Firstly it enabled the interviewee and interviewer to begin to establish a rapport prior to the introduction of the questions regarding their experiences. Secondly it allowed for a rich picture of research participants to be achieved.

In deciding the best method to evaluate the collected data in this study, I used the example given by Jorgensen (1989) and considered the following questions:

- *'What needs to be done with the data when it has been collected – how will it be processed and analysed'?*
- *'How will the outcome of the investigation be verified, cross-checked and validated'?*

(Jorgensen, 1989: 107)

The constructed background data collection form (appendix 5: 293) was used at the start of the research interview for two reasons, (a) because it allowed data to be

captured about the research participant, such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment history, relationship status and language spoken at home (appendix 12: 300) and (b) It allowed an effortless way into the research interview. This information also underpinned the development of a richer picture of the research participants. The questionnaire was completed with the research participant prior to the commencement of the interview. The digital-recorder, used to capture the interview conversation, was not activated and I could begin to develop an understanding with the research participant. Such a rapport was I considered necessary when conducting dialogue with the research participants about potentially sensitive areas of their life experiences.

The interviews conducted with research participants once recorded, were subsequently transcribed. I consider the transcriptions only as processed data which has been used to facilitate the analysis process, rather than the raw data of the interview which allows a multi-dimensional view of the interview interaction, including body language and tonality of voice which cannot be captured satisfactorily using a digital-recorder. Equally, I felt it inappropriate to bring into the interview interaction any extra technological aids, such as video recorders as this may have acted to further compromise the exchange interaction.

Summary.

The research instruments were built to reflect a timeline, starting with the identification of key events connected with the study. In this case, the emphasis was placed on all of the research participants learning experiences. The research instruments used during phase one of the studies, utilised a time-line within the interview setting, starting from

school experiences, going on to present experiences and finally looking at future aspirations. Following phase one, the instruments were further developed for phase two and a time-line starting from current experiences up to present day expectations and future aspirations was adopted. This came about as a result of data gathered during the pilot phase where it soon became clear that research participants gravitated towards telling their story starting from their earliest experiences that affected and impacted on the subsequent experiences.

Using this type of instrument allowed me as the researcher to obtain a thorough knowledge of research participants' experiences relating to and associated with learning, including the associated complexities which surround the focus of the research questions (see p: 14). The interview schedules provided a tool used to motivate and conduct the research interview (appendix 6-7: 294-295).

I have presented a summary of the research design for this study, drawing on studies from the field to support the selected methodology. Additionally the creation of the proposed research tools has been presented. The pilot study, undertaken to assess the research design and supporting research tools; findings from the pilot study and implications for the refinement of the research design have been presented. Methods of data collection and data analysis have been described. I now present the findings from my research.

Chapter Four: Research findings

“Ideas are like rabbits, you get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen”.

John Steinbeck, East of Eden, 1952.

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have discussed the theoretical framework, methodology and research design that have shaped this study. Through the use of a number of data gathering methods the research produced a rich data-set of information, detailing the learning experiences of adults attending an Employability Skills Programme (ESP) (DBIS, 2007) of training.

In this chapter I describe the emergent themes from the data using the responses of the research participants. The interview discourses were used to examine the learning experiences of adults attending the LLN training course from different perspectives and will be explored through selected quotes and by analysis of issues reported by the learner research participants. They will also provide a framework to inform the research aims that this study addresses, namely:

- *To what extent the learner research participants’ forced participation on the course impacted upon their engagement with the programme of study?*
- *Whether this participation created any change in expectancies, capital or self-identity by the research participants over the duration of the programme of study?*
- *How did the research participants’ understand their existing language, literacy or numeracy skills and was this perception altered during the programme of study?*
- *If their perception altered did it lead them to seek more interesting and personally fulfilling work?*

I will show where possible research participants' responses to questions as a percentage of total responses to support my findings, but may occasionally use the term 'some' when referring to less than 25% of the research participants, use the term 'most' to refer to a number above 75% and between these two figures I will refer to them as 'many'. In this way I hope the reader will get a feel for the significance of the selected quotes and how they support the emerging themes.

The key themes from the data have been identified and are presented through a detailed discussion and analysis, using extracts from the data where possible to provide real life examples of how learners experienced their Employability Skills Programme of learning. Some 84% of learner research participants reported an initial reluctance to join the course of study. However, they quickly became assimilated into a learning climate that presented few blocks or barriers, giving them the freedom to learn at their own pace and which allowed them some risk taking on their road to independence and empowerment. They were able to test their knowledge through contextualised learning before committing to a summative assessment, thereby increasing confidence in their ability to be successful in this new learning experience.

As identified in Chapter Three, semi-structured interviews were employed as the main research instrument for the collection of information, with classroom observations and informal discussions supporting this data collection process. Additionally, quantitative information on individual research participants collected prior to interview (appendix 12: 300), information from the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2009: 2010) and general

artifacts from training providers acted to support information and increase robustness to the study. I have also created pen portraits from a sample of research participants' selected for their richness of data and these are included within the findings.

When analysing the interviews I was able to relate what I had written in my reflective journal to material gathered from the learners. I have identified interviewees in the text by using a first name together with an alpha/numeric code that describes where the training took place (appendix 11: 299), followed by the interview number and finally the transcript page number used e.g. (TP1; A16, 5) where:

- TP1 = Motor Town
- TP2 = Chocolate Town
- TP3 = Iron Town
- A16 = Interview number
- 5 = Transcript page number

This chapter has been divided into sections, each of which is used to explore and reflect upon the issues that emerged from the research data. Each part may contain more than one theme because some themes are linked and will re-occur as the story unfolds. This background information has then been transcribed and analysed and is now presented and discussed.

Overview of the study area

This study was conducted in the West Midlands Region of England; specifically with a private learning provider delivering employability training with embedded literacy, language and numeracy skills at premises within three districts in this region.

During 2006 the West Midlands was one of the English areas selected to participate in a series of pilot studies being conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions through its executive branch Jobcentre Plus (Joyce *et al.*, 2006), in which adults identified as being long term unemployed and having LLN skills below Level 1 (appendix 13: 301) were expected to attend training programmes through a range of different measures. In one area of the West Midlands, adults were offered additional financial incentives to attend training programmes while in another area they were advised that they would face financial penalties and sanctions if they refused to attend training programmes (Brooks *et al.*, 2006).

The introduction of the Employability Skills Programme (ESP) in 2007 came about partly as a result of examination of the these pilot studies (Joyce *et al.*, 2006) and consisted almost entirely of mandated learners (DBIS, 2007). The study investigates the concept of choice and the potential impact of decisions and choices, made by others on behalf of learners, which compels their attendance on the ESP.

The areas identified above are included in those parts of the country which have been most affected by changing labour markets. Historically, their economy has largely been based on the secondary sector (manufacturing and engineering), but, over time, it has moved to an economy based on the tertiary sector (service-based employment), such as finance, customer services, and hotel and leisure services. It was, therefore, considered appropriate that these areas were used as a case study for this research.

Employment in the West Midlands' secondary sector identified by Medland (2011) was traditionally based on engineering, including tool making, machine tool and automotive manufacturing, and industrialised occupations demanding high levels of physical strength, but for a large number little in the nature of academic skills. Leitch (2006) also identified changes to the employment market in this area from the secondary to the tertiary sector which has led to a need for more knowledge-based skills and has left those without these skills struggling to secure new employment opportunities.

The study area districts

The central area designated as the West Midlands region of England was divided into 7 metropolitan districts by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2010) at the time of this study. The private training provider used as a resource for this study delivers the Employability Skills Programme (ESP) in three of these districts and to protect anonymity in this study I have changed the names of the these and used the definitions; Chocolate Town, Iron Town and Car Town. The defined region has a total population of 2,619,500, of which 1,607,500 are, of working age and, of these, 837,200 are males and 770,200 are females (ONS, 2010). The Government definition of working age includes all adults who are aged 16+ and Table 2 below compares age distribution within the West Midlands to that of Great Britain as a whole.

Age in years	West Midlands %	Great Britain %
0 - 17	20.1	22.7
18 - 64	56.8	61.4
65 +	23.1	16

Table 2: Age Distribution of the Population of the West Midlands. “Source: Office of National Statistics, local area labour force survey, 2010”.

Table 2 above also lends some support to the findings that the West Midlands has an ageing population, which is above the national average and that a decreasing number of the working age population are supporting this ageing population. Table 3 below shows economic activity for this region.

West Midlands Region	Total Population	Working Age Population	Economically Active Working Age population	Economically Active Males	Economically Active Females
Number	2,619,500	1,607,500	1,204,500	674,500	531,400
% of Working Age Population economically active			74.9%	42.0%	33.0%
% of Total Population		61.4%	46.0%	25.7%	20.3%

Table 3: Economic activity “Source: Office of National Statistics, Mid-Year Estimates, 2010 (Numbers are rounded)”.

Not all of the working age population are economically active (ONS, 2010) and Table 3 above indicates the number and percentage of the West Midlands active working age population in employment and includes for comparison these numbers as a percentage of the West Midlands total population. Although almost 75% of the economically active working age population are employed this represents only 46% of the total population.

It can also be seen from the data in Table 3 around 20% of the total population that are economically active are female and around 25% are male.

Skills levels

The West Midlands as a region performs poorly against the population of Great Britain as a whole for qualification outcomes. This is despite hosting several Universities and Colleges of Further Education. For example, Chocolate Town has a significantly higher percentage of its population having no qualifications at 20.7%, compared to 16.0% for the West Midlands as a whole and 12.4% for Great Britain as a whole (ONS annual population survey, 2010). It is evident from Table 4 below that each area of the West Midlands, included in the investigation (ONS, 2010) has a higher incidence of low LLN skills than the national average of Great Britain.

District of the West Midlands	% of adults with no qualifications	% of those in Great Britain without qualifications
Iron Town	28.2%	12.4%
Chocolate Town	20.7%	
Car Town	13.6%	

Table 4: Proportion of working age population with limited LLN skills by area of the West Midlands. "Source: ONS annual population survey (2010), percentage is for those of working age".

The figures for Car Town at all levels are also below the average for Great Britain - but to a lesser extent than Chocolate Town - with the percentage having no qualifications closest to the national average. Of the three JCP districts Iron Town has the lowest percentages across all levels for qualification outcomes, reporting almost 29% of its

working age population as having no qualifications. These figures suggest that a significantly higher percentage than the national average of this region's population have qualifications below Level 1; the level used by government as one of the benchmark indicators of an individual's ability to gain and retain employment.

There is a strong positive correlation between qualifications, wages and employment. The ONS (2010) survey indicates that wages in this region are lower than national average wages by 12 % with the exception of one of the ONS districts which is 14% above the national average. This reflects the greater numbers of residents in that district with higher level qualifications. For those who did less well at school, vocational qualifications give people another opportunity to improve their labour market value (Tusting and Barton, 2005). School underachievers who go on to achieve level 2 vocational qualifications points out Dearden *et al.*, (2005) will see their earning capacity increase considerably more than for those who do not undertake further education.

	All full time workers average weekly income £'s	West Midlands average	Great Britain average
Car Town	437.20	450.00	479.30
Chocolate Town	434.20		
Iron Town	425.20		

Table 5: Average weekly earnings by residence; £'s. Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings – resident analysis (2010) Note: Median in pounds for employees living in the area

Table 5 above illustrates how areas where the population has lower qualification levels will see an impact on levels of income and this lends support to the finding of a negative impact on employability (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). However, McIntosh (2004) identified people leaving school with limited GCSEs who later go on to achieve level 2 vocational qualifications in their twenties will see their employment chances increase between 11-17 %.

Table 6 below demonstrates that individuals without formal qualifications are more likely to be out of work than those with a level 2 qualification (NVQ 2). Further to this evidence indicates that 75 % of people with a level 2 qualification are in employment while less than 50 % of those with no qualifications are. This suggests that the unemployment rate for people with no qualifications is twice as high as for those with level 2 qualifications. An analysis by Leitch (2006) and DIUS (2007) of the qualification levels of long-term unemployed confirms that those who have no qualifications are more likely to be in this group.

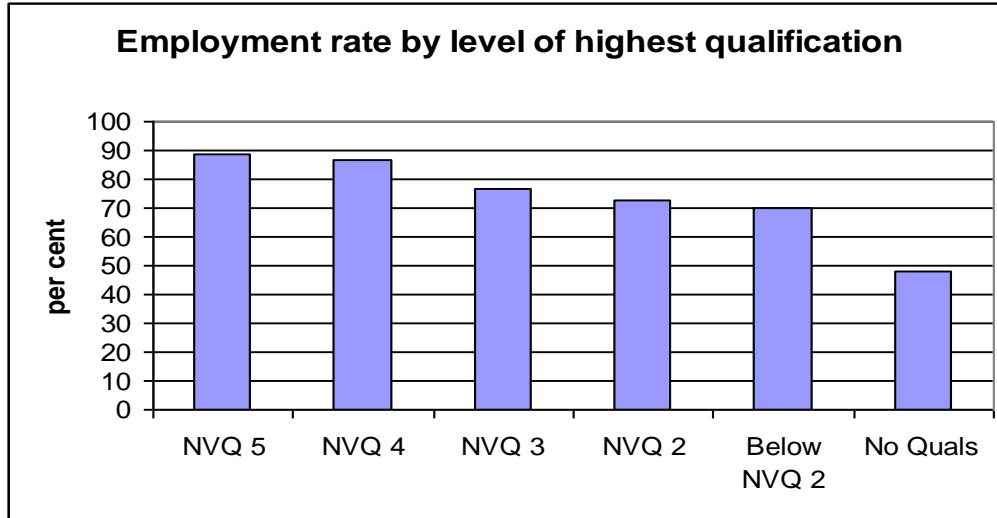


Table 6: Employment rate by level of highest qualification held by people of working age (2009). “Source: Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4; 2009, UK, working age (16-59/64)”.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are described in the QCF as work related, competence-based qualifications. The NVQ levels are used in table 6 as they allow for comparison of both academic and vocational qualifications. For example, a full NVQ Level 2 qualification equals an academic Level 2 qualification. A-levels equal NVQ Level 3; while a first degree is equal to NVQ Level 4 and post graduate studies are at NVQ Level 5 (QCA, 2000).

Wolf (2011: 41) when reviewing pre-19 vocational education reported to government that “far too many 14-19 year olds are doing NVQ courses with little or no value, because performance tables incentivise schools to provide these inadequate qualifications”. She suggests the current system actively discourages 16-19 year olds from addressing their English and maths needs, confirming that a large proportion are still leaving education without these skills that will allow them to develop in further

education and employment (ibid). Michael Gove the Secretary of State for Education, in 2012, when commenting on the Wolf report (Department for Education, 2012) expressed concern that equivalences between qualifications was leading to some confusion on the part of employers, and more importantly with learners undertaking these qualifications. Because of this doubt over their value he has recommended a comprehensive review of NVQ subjects being offered within schools (ibid).

Employment

The West Midlands manufacturing sector still employs 15% of the economically active adult population, which is greater than the 10.6% overall for Great Britain (ONS 2010). However, since December 2008 there has been a significant decrease in overall employment of around 61,000 jobs, a decline of 2.6%. The greatest percentage drop was in agriculture and fishing, with a reduction of 19.5% (although these jobs comprise only a small proportion of the total). Manufacturing showed a further reduction of 5%. There were also significant losses in transport and communications, distribution, hotels and restaurants, and construction (ibid). The public administration, education and health sectors showed a modest increase in overall employment creating 3,773 jobs. Employment in energy and water increased slightly, by an extra 215 jobs. Movement in the employment market has led to the distribution of labour being concentrated in the service sector, which has approximate employment levels of 80%, while 15% are employed in manufacturing and 5% in construction (ibid). The following Table (7) compares employment levels in September 2003 with those at September 2009 by broad industrial groups and includes any percentage change.

Industry	Numbers September 2003	Numbers September 2009	% Change
Agriculture & fishing	22,722	18,296	-19.5%
Energy & water	12,666	12,881	1.7%
Manufacturing	306,812	206,605	-32.0%
Construction	126,966	156,337	23.0%
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	545,254	523,717	-3.9%
Transport & communications	133,286	121,684	-8.9%
Banking, finance & insurance	387,634	443,634	14.9%
Public administration, education & health	619,926	623,699	0.6%
Other	112,626	110,802	-1.6%

Table 7: Comparison of change in employment levels by Industry in the West Midlands “Source: Internal documents Department for Work and Pensions 2009”.

The employment rate in the West Midlands stood at 68.9% for the period April 2010, which is slightly lower than the national average of 73.3%. Employment rates have continued to decline from their peak in 2005 (ONS: 2010) of 72.8% to 66.9% by the end of 2011, making the West Midlands the second highest region in the UK for unemployment. The district breakdown of employment rates are set out in Table 8 below.

District	Employment rate
Car Town	74.30%
Iron Town	68.20%
Chocolate Town	64.20%
West Midlands	68.90%

Table 8: Employment rate in West Midlands (April 2010). Source: Office of National Statistics Claimant Counts, April 2010. The employment rate refers to the number of claimants as a percentage of working age residents. Figures are rounded.

Unemployment

From Table 9 below it is evident that 61.0% of the population in the West Midlands are of working age and that 75.0% of this population are economically active, indicating that 25.0% of those who are of working age are not economically active. This compares favourably to the National Average

Population of the West Midlands	Population number	Population %
Working age population	1,607,500	61%
Male	837,200	52%
Female	770,200	48%
Economically Active	1,204,500	75%
Male	674,500	56%
Female	531,400	44%

Table 9: Summary of the Working Age Population and Economically Active Population in the West Midlands, by percentage. “Source: Office of National Statistics, local area labour force survey, mid-year population estimates 2010”.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that male economic inactivity increased by 3% in the region between 1999 and 2005 (ONS 2010). This figure is of particular interest to the study. The changing nature of employment in this region, as seen in Chocolate Town, has for some time suggests Bynner (2006) resulted in an increase in male unemployment, especially males who have historically undertaken manual occupations and where evidence of ‘poor’ LLN skills has been identified. It is members of this group of adults who are now attending the employability skills training programme, largely provided by private training providers contracted to Jobcentre Plus.

The West Midlands does however still continue to have a strong dependence on manufacturing industries for employment in some districts. Iron Town, for example, (ONS: 2010) continues to have over 20% of those employed within the manufacturing industry, compared to a national average of 10.6%.

Research participants breakdown by gender, age and status

This study examined the experiences of long-term unemployed adults, through their voice, that were out of work and receiving benefits, who were identified as having no qualifications and 'poor' LLN skills and were attending an Employability Skills Programme of study. In 2007 the New Labour Government changed their strategy towards this group and introduced compulsory attendance for the Employability Skills Programme of LLN training (DBIS, 2007). In Table 10 below I offer a gender breakdown of all research participants who were interviewed for the study. However, these figures do not include learners and teachers who might have been involved in the study on an informal basis through classroom observations and informal discussions.

Sample by Gender	Motor Town (TP 1)	Chocolate Town (TP 2)	Iron Town (TP 3)	Totals ()
Learner Gender				
Male	13	9	5	(27)
Female	3	3	3	(9)
Practitioner Gender				
Male	2	1	0	(3)
Female	0	0	1	(1)
Totals	(19)	(12)	(9)	(40)

Table 10: Numbers and Gender of learners and teachers interviewed.

Looking at the learner research participant sample, Table 10 above, in a little more detail it can be noted that there was a significantly higher proportion of males involved in the training programmes than females. An ONS (2010) survey within this region indicates that of the total population 56% of males and 44% of females are economically active. The number of unemployed people in the West Midlands at the time this research was undertaken was 261,000 of which 55% were male and 45% female (ONS 2011). The number claiming jobseekers allowance (JSA) however was 157,200 of which 68% were male and only 32% female (ibid). Research by Hasluck and Green (2007) indicates that this can be accounted for in a number of ways, namely that:

- *Females are less likely to be claiming welfare benefits if they are in a relationship where the male is employed or is claiming benefits on behalf of both partners in the relationship; therefore they are less likely to be available in education programmes contracted by Jobcentre Plus.*
- *Males are more likely to be claiming welfare benefits and therefore more likely to be referred to attend targeted training programmes as a necessary part of a conditionality of receipt of their welfare benefits.*
- *Females often choose to access training programmes through a more traditional further education institution.*

(Hasluck and Green, 2007: 57)

Females in this study, when asked, expressed a preference for being taught separately from male benefit claimants and they wanted teaching and learning support developed for them. Heterogeneity suggests Hasluck and Green (2007), within the unemployed group of learners makes it unlikely that any programme of learning will be attractive to, or provide a completely consistent service to all learners. However, research shows that females attending a mixed gender employability skills programme (ESP) of study

through Jobcentre plus (JCP) find that their chances of entering employment are doubled; when compared to those on other programmes of study (ibid: 86).

Research participants' age distribution

A review of the range of learner research participants involved in the study revealed that 50% of learners were between the ages of 20-39 and 50% were between the ages of 40-59; whilst the majority, namely 67%, were between the ages of 30-49 as demonstrated in Table 11 below.

Learner sample by gender	Learner sample by Age	Motor Town (TP1)	Chocolate Town (TP2)	Iron Town (TP3)	Totals ()
Male	20-29	1	1	3	(5)
Female		0	0	2	(2)
Male	30-39	5	1	1	(7)
Female		3	1	0	(4)
Male	40-49	4	6	1	(11)
Female		0	1	1	(2)
Male	50-59	3	1	0	(4)
Female		0	1	0	(1)
Totals		(16)	(12)	(8)	(36)

Table 11: Learner research participants by age.

This is particularly noteworthy as most of the younger group of learners had undertaken the majority of their compulsory schooling during the period when the then government had made significant changes to the education system, especially the introduction of a mandatory national literacy hour in primary education in 1998 following the pilot study started in 1996 (DfEE, 1999) However, these learners as adults on assessment of their

literacy and numeracy skills had only achieved between Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 3; where Entry Level 3 is recognised to be the level that a competent 7 year old should realise (appendix 13: 301).

Research participants status

A significant number of learner research participants in the study, namely 64% described themselves as single or divorced/separated, which is shown in Table 12 below:

Learner sample by relationship	Motor Town (TP1)	Chocolate Town (TP2)	Iron Town (TP3)	Totals ()
Single:				
Male	5	6	4	(15)
Female	0	0	1	(1)
Married/Partner:				
Male	7	1	1	(9)
Female	2	1	1	(4)
Divorced/Separated:				
Male	1	2	0	(3)
Female	1	2	1	(4)
Totals	(16)	(12)	(8)	(36)

Table 12: Learner research participants by marital status.

Within this group of learners 45% described attending training programmes as a result of a 'life transition' (Banks *et al.*, 1992: 41) or change in social network, a 'turning point' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 97) or a 'critical incident' (Atkin *et al.*, 2005: 52) that now left their poor literacy and numeracy skills exposed. Of the 36% who described themselves as married and undertaking training through the private training provider route, they

were predominantly male and responsible for the financial income of the household through the welfare benefit system.

Observation of Employability Skills Programme sessions.

Using observation as a research process for this study I expected to be able to observe events as they happened. Importantly for this research was the need to observe learner teacher interaction, the amount of group collaborative work taking place and the level of distracting conversation which may occur. I also expected the opportunity to observe learner behaviour, especially any aggressive or anti-social behaviour that may occur. In approaching the observation in this way with openness, the research was unstructured and encompassed an interpretive or critical perspective where the planned focus was one of understanding the meanings participants, in the contexts observed, attributed to events and actions.

The Employability Skills Programme (ESP) has been claimed by DWP (2007) to be successful in reducing attrition rates and engaging learners (see p, 15). It places emphasis on socialization for these non-traditional learners which routinely included addressing problems such as personal hygiene, time-keeping, aggressive behaviour and alcohol or drug use for some learners (see p180, 185). The roll-on-roll-off nature of the programme has new starters on each Monday and course completers leaving on a Friday.

An initial induction for new learners is completed on Monday mornings by a teacher and then where appropriate continuing learners are employed to introduce and mentor these new starters. This approach was being used to reduce new learner anxiety through its combined use of teacher and continuing successful learners. Reinforcing what Bynner (2006) acknowledged as a range of benefits associated with attending training, such as the development of friendship groups, an increase in self-esteem and for some an increase in personal hygiene and subsequently health. Intriguingly this approach places greater emphasis on the socialization of the individual rather than attributing focus to the deficiencies that exist in their LLN skills. While acknowledging these deficiencies exist, the Teachers are required to work with the individual building on and enhancing existing skills that are contextually relevant and meaningful to their life. These skills are often undervalued suggests Coleman (1998), both by the individual holder of the skills and by those acting to develop strategies and assessment practices.

In seeking to be as unobtrusive as possible I observed research participants over a number of visits being introduced to an understanding of area and volume as part of their numeracy curriculum. This was linked to a real situation requiring them to provide a worked solution and deliver the outcome. After an extended introduction by the Teacher to the concept of area and volume the class of around 12 was split into 3 groups who all had to perform the same task, albeit in their own way, which was to produce a written proposal and quotation for decorating their training room and then present it to other learners. Coleman (1998) and Rogers (2002) suggest bringing groups together in this way can engender a more positive experience and outcome. They justify this thinking by

proposing that adults are regularly involved in a host of literacy and numeracy practices and events, and have a significant amount of skills, that go unrecognised through assessment and testing which they can bring to bear on a problem.

Research participants are required to work together in small groups in order to reinforce outcomes expected of them and which they may encounter when entering a work environment. These were namely socialization of the individual through association and teamwork (Putnam, 2000) combined with the need to communicate with others in order to solve a problem. In creating the opportunity for this network of relations the Teacher was promoting what Bourdieu (1997: 50) described as 'products of investment strategies aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable in the short or longer term'. While Pintrich and Schunk, (2002) propose learners benefit from working in this way, through their own discovery, as this creates an increase in motivation to persist in learning a new skill, especially when faced with obstacles and leads to an expected better understanding and retention of knowledge. They were supported, when necessary, by their teacher who gave additional information and knowledge in order to help achieve their learning outcome. Persistence through encouragement therefore, can be considered crucially important when considering motivation to engage and continuing to engage in learning, when obstacles are encountered (ibid).

I attempted to evidence how research participants interacted and co-operated, their 'associational activity' (Putnam, 2000: 415), by observing the way differing teams

worked to solve the problem. One team completed their research into costs on-line while the others visited DIY establishments to gain current prices etc. The groups who visited the DIY establishments explained they felt more comfortable doing things this way as they could ask questions of the DIY staff and possibly look for bargains or gain a more favourable price on any consumables. The teacher in conversation with me described this as a form of contextualised learning using discovery on the part of the research participants with an expected outcome of a transferable skill that could be used by them in the future.

Each team was required to produce a quotation based on a full bill of goods that included labour costs and then present this to all the other research participants at a group session. This was a task that appeared to me to be unfamiliar to most of the learners who viewed it with some trepidation and how it was to be accomplished became the topic of numerous conversations. I was observing here how research participants placed obligations and expectations upon each other linked to an information flow capability, what Coleman (1998: 99) describes as the creation of 'social capital' and what Field (2008: 1) termed 'relationships matter' when attempting to describe social capital in two words.

This task was undertaken at a similar time at all 3 learning establishments that were part of this research and was set to run concurrently with other work research participants were completing. I noted in getting learners to work in this way an element of social control but in a form interpreted by Bourdieu's (1997: 173) as social capital. He

argued as a type of social control, social capital, allows for clear visibility of the development of social organisation, social interaction and, potentially social advantage (ibid). Schuller (2000) however, interprets this as developing social capital through relationships between different groups as well as within groups allowing individuals to develop broader identities. The ultimate aim of this exercise was to carry it through to completion and decorate the training room, thus it included an element of work experience for the research participants and an anticipated increase in their knowledge and skills which are expected to enhance employment opportunities.

I therefore continued with my observations of research participants throughout the exercise and was able to attend their final presentations. It was a stipulation of the exercise that in each group all research participants contributed to the delivery of their solution to the problem, in part in the form of a written proposal and quotation which was combined with a verbal or power point presentation for its justification. I was able to observe how research participants, who were part of the interview process, had changed from being cautious when interacting with others to become confident in their ability to present their findings, what Coleman (1998: 98) suggests was accomplished through an exercise in social capital which he describes as: 'like other forms of capital social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible'.

In discussions with Teacher's after the presentations they described this exercise as having accomplished a number of curriculum objectives, namely an understanding of

area and volume used in a real situation, but just as importantly teamwork that increased socialization for the individual through making new friends, the introduction or building upon presentation skills, an increase in confidence and arguable self-esteem for the individual plus a link to work experience.

Research Participants literacy, language and numeracy functionality

Approximately 80% of learner research participants involved in this study struggled to identify their level of LLN skills, feeling on the one hand that their skills were adequate for their everyday activities, whilst at the same time recognising their limitations, and acknowledging their need to rely on other members of their social network to help them especially with some literacy tasks. However, Papen (2005), when describing the JCP expectation of teaching and learning in line with the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a) for adults, sees it as imposing literacy upon individuals rather than allowing them to start from their own perception of need. Also Mayor and Pugh (1987:21) characterise this functional literacy approach as typically being associated with an imposed 'skill set' that does not associate literacy as just a 'social practice' but has universal applicability and gives the individual the opportunity to engage with society through employment.

Barton (2007) described individuals as maintaining a constructivist approach to literacy, intimating literacy practices will derive from the context in which lives are constructed and lived. There was some evidence for this thinking that came out of a discussion I had with a teacher who commented:

"Learners coming here often have a significant number of skills that go unrecognised through the formal route of assessment and testing... Often

these skills are undervalued by them and by others. We tend to build and develop existing skills making them contextually relevant to the individual” (TP1)

These activities are influenced by the ways, in which individuals organise their social network; this approach originally suggested by Coleman (1998) requires individuals to be able to incorporate a much wider agenda linked to active citizenship, political participation and individual development in turn leading to empowerment.

A further aim of any skills assessment, in line with the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a), previously identified by Gray (1956) is to determine the ‘functionality’ of an individual’s LLN skills. Functionality, as discussed in the literature review, is identified in two forms and relates to the most common definition of LLN; that is the ability to be able to function independently in society (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994) with all the demands that a literate society requires (Papen, 2005) and to maintain the LLN skills necessary to participate in the country’s economy through employment (Leitch, 2006; Freud 2007).

One important factor to emerge was that, even though the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a) links LLN functionality to employability, for some learner’s employment had not been a feature of their lived experience. For these learners it is likely that their historical habitus (Bourdieu, 1993) is one in which LLN has also featured only marginally if at all. Before entering any education or training they will already have acquired a habitus through their social network that predispositions them to that experience, suggesting that individuals are an integral part of the circumstances in which they exist and which contribute to their social identity their doxa (ibid). Importantly if individuals do not

attribute any value to education, either in terms of its ability to enhance their LLN skills or to support their employability development there is no incentive to attend training. The strategy perspective of functionality (Bynner *et al.*, 2001) has a very different meaning to that held by individuals, which was evidenced through research participants failing to relate LLN ability to employment. Learners engaged in this study did not connect their literacy and numeracy skills with their ability to function effectively. The functionalist model according to Papen (2005) is seen as a set of discrete technical skills that exist independently of the culture and society in which they are constructed. This also supports to the discussion of literacy and numeracy use linked to environment by Baynham (1995: 263) who defined it as “the web of relations with other people through which meanings are negotiated and changed in spoken and written language”.

Unless prompted specifically with contextualised examples from everyday life Learners had much less to say about how they felt about their numeracy skills or how they used these skills, either in their everyday activities or as part of their employability skills-set. An example of this occurred during my interview with Derek, a single male aged 43 who had progressed to entry level 2 in maths and entry level 3 in literacy (appendix 13: 301). Derek was looking for work within the retail sector and he went on to discuss his maths capabilities in the following way:

“Maths I can’t do that...that’s one thing I’m not good at. I can add up and multiply and stuff, but it’s after where you have to divide stuff, I’m not very good at that... I’m alright at times and addition, but multiplication I’m not very good at that...If I had a job where I needed to use numbers I would struggle a bit, but I’m OK with money” (TP3; C58, 3).

Derek's account of his maths capabilities was confused and he failed to identify its importance to the possibility of obtaining the type of employment he was looking for. His portrayal of self and decision making appeared to originate more from his experiences, or network of relationships (Bourdieu; 1997), on the Employability Skills Programme (ESP) and interaction with other learners, rather than from any judgement on his part of his ability to function within a specific environment. I felt this was an unconscious undertaking of what Bourdieu (ibid) suggests is a strategy that reproduces or establishes social relationships that are directly usable. The work of Giddens (1991) supports this thinking through his description of how the self develops at least partly through an individual's current situation and discursive consciousness, or their ability to communicate reason and discuss with others. He explains this by saying:

... 'self-identity becomes a reflexively organised behaviour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, taking place....the possibility of lifestyle takes on a particular significance' (Giddens, 1991: 5).

During the course of further interviews with other learners it emerged that they mostly felt that whilst their literacy skills were either satisfactory or developing, they had limited or inadequate competence regarding their numeracy skills and just as Parsons (2002) and Parsons and Bynner (2006) found in their research they failed to identify proficiency in one with proficiency in the other. The following excerpt is a reflective comment made by Robert, a single 32 year old male whose literacy and numeracy skills are both at entry level 2 (appendix 13: 301), and demonstrates how he fails to associate both:

"I know my reading and writing aren't good so I find it hard to understand the questions...but that's not why I'm bad at maths. I just can't do maths...Well I can add up and take away but like...percentages and stuff like that I'm rubbish at. I don't know really. It's just all these big numbers

and what do you call it, you know like these divisions. I don't know how to do them" (TP2; D50, 5).

As learners discussed their LLN skills it became clear there were contradictions in how learners conceptualised these skills. Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994: 23) suggest the way individuals perceive these skills identifies more with their "centrality to the individuals in their daily lives, than to the objective measure of performance reached". This also reflects the reporting by Willis (1998: 32) when saying "to be numerate is to function effectively mathematically in one's daily life, at home and at work". This could be described as a form of norm-referencing on the part of some learners; those without qualifications, described holding LLN skills which were 'above average' whilst others, as in Robert's example above, described their skills as 'rubbish', although they often had achieved the same level during formal assessment (ibid).

Some learners were found to apply these descriptions interchangeably to describe their skills. An example of this inaccurate assessment of skills occurred during my interview with Kevin, a 46 year old male, married with two children. Originally from Northern Ireland Kevin came to the Midlands with his family at the age of fifteen due to the increasingly violent sectarian troubles there. Leaving school a year early meant he did not achieve any qualifications but, he is confident in his numeracy ability.

As soon as he was able to he obtained work in the building industry and became a specialist in laying marble floors in commercial premises, a role that he suggests requires a good level of numeracy. He worked on several large projects around the Midlands, the latest of which was the new Bullring Shopping Centre in Birmingham.

Kevin described suffering from a worsening alcohol addiction for a number of years which resulted in him becoming unreliable in a work capacity and prone to making mistakes. This has meant he has not been able to find work for more than three years. He was assessed at Level 1 in numeracy when starting on the Employability Skills Program, and had gone on to achieve a Level 2 qualification outcome in both literacy and numeracy. When responding to a question about future training from me he commented:

“Yes I’m going to do a degree in maths...I’ll probably start by seeing what’s on offer with the Open University...I know it would be a walk in the park for me...I can still do all sorts...It’s something I have a knack for (maths) and I will do it” (TP1; A21, 8).

Having completed the ESP, gained a National Test certificate in literacy and numeracy Kevin still attends in a mentoring role because the learning establishment have sponsored him on a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) course and are offering him the opportunity to train as a numeracy specialist. This is subject to the condition that he continues to not drink alcohol during the working day, which he is confident, will be sustainable. What can be seen above is aptly labelled by Coleman (1998: 98) as increasing ‘social capital’, when describing it as not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of actors.

The ability of learners like Robert and Kevin to position their skills appears to relate to this possibility of ‘being average’ and was clearly measured in relation to their *habitus* (see p: 101) and within the *field* (see p: 103) in which they exist as highlighted by

Bourdieu and Passeron, (1990). The term 'average' is a culturally and socially constructed term, having different associated meanings linked to one's *habitus*. It is what Bourdieu (1997) sees as the process of structured social practice, which mingles individuals creating within them, a uniform response in behaviour patterns. For many learners being able to read, write or undertake even some simple mathematical tasks was above average, or more than could be undertaken by a majority of other members of their social *field* or network. Leading to them as Bourdieu (1977) suggests conjuring up a false impression of their ability.

The discussion around 'being average' is a recurring theme amongst research participants, both learners and teachers. Learners 'positioned' their literacy skills within their social network (Parsons and Bynner, 1998), teachers 'positioned' the learners skills within the framework of national standards, put in place by the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a), whereas strategy makers 'positioned' skills within the framework of national standards and associated labour market demands (OECD, 1997; DfEE, 1999, 2001b), nationally and internationally.

Being 'average' for learner research participants appeared closely associated with what they needed to do to exist within their social position – their *field* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Within these *fields* of influence the process described as socialising individuals occurs, creating consistent behaviour patterns and choices. Bourdieu (1977) describes these responses as being intergenerational and inculcated from an early age which are reinforced through education and culture. For learners in this research it

could be said that their *field* was not only shaping their individual *habitus* but was also as Wacquant (1989) suggests the producer and product of it.

The work of Bourdieu (1977) and Wacquant (1989) suggests the individual's *habitus* will be drawn from their experiences of *fields* – of home, education and employment or through experiences within other state institutions, such as the welfare system, the child care system or the prison system. Fairclough (1992) links language in these areas to a system of unequal relations of power that form a hierarchical relationship of domination and subordination. For Fairclough (*ibid*) these conventions are dependent on political power to underpin them, taking for granted and legitimising the existence of power through common and familiar ways of behaving.

Learner choice or obligation

According to Doyle (2003) the role of the state represented by DWP/JCP is pivotal in manipulating the unemployed population to address their own inadequate and deficit skills which have created their situation. Responsibility is placed on the unemployed to recognise the problems they have which are stopping them from obtaining work. They are being compelled to tackle them by DWP/JCP in order to make themselves independent of state benefits and to obtain paid employment. Doyle describes this as constructing subject identities that play to a political and moral agenda rather than just an economic one which seeks to remake and regulate society.

In this respect the welfare system is being used as a response to particular economic and social problems and is constructing identities for the unemployed that places emphasis on individual responsibility and failure. The use of coercive tactics, such as the threat to withhold benefits, to get those without qualifications who are also unemployed to take responsibility for and to address these 'failings' is a misrepresentative action by DWP/JCP. This action is described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1998, 98) as symbolic violence, seen as a legitimate action put in place by a system of power relations between the groups or classes that are most influential. In this study by DWP/JCP advisers acting to identify and position the unemployed in ways that are politically productive. JCP defend their actions by suggesting any criticism of a transformation of welfare or social movement as being seemingly misplaced while claiming to be the only legitimate agent of policy making practices. JCP in using this defence demonstrate how the identities and relationships of institutions and citizens are being restructured in an attempt to justify changes to social movement.

However, in using coercion in the form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1998) against vulnerable groups in society, such as the unemployed, there appears to be a contradiction to its initial negativity that can lead to a positive outcome for the individual in many cases. Leper *et al*: (1973) suggest that learners who are forced to attend training programmes exhibit little evidence of any intrinsic motivation to engage with teaching and learning. Freud (2007: 64) contends that learner's represent a group of people who are literally 'doing as they are told' being directed and managed with no apparent interest on their part in attending the programme. The following extract from

my interview with Danielle, a 21 year old female who has a partner and three children and has not been in employment since she left school early after becoming pregnant is an example of this resigned attendance:

“The Jobcentre made me come here, they send you. I didn’t want to be here. You sign off and you come here and like have to stick it out and get what you can at the end of it. I mean a qualification if you can. I don’t think some of them here will ever get a qualification...but like it doesn’t stop them trying. It’s good like that here everyone is in it together” (TP3; C55, 14)

A further example came from an interview with Craig a 24 year old single male out of work for 2 years since being dismissed from his last job as a cleaner because of his threatening and aggressive behaviour who said:

“When I was in the Jobcentre one day the adviser told me...She told me to come on this course. She said we’re sending you to a learning provider. That’s what she said; we are sending you on a course. I never thought of doing anything before, I wouldn’t have done this only I was sent here” (TP2; D38, 6)

Mohamed, 34 and married with five children, unemployed for 18 months also said:

“I didn’t choose to come here. I had a restart interview at the Jobcentre and because there are no jobs at the minute they sent me here. To begin with I was a bit anti, but here you’re not forced so If you want to do it (course work), do it and like me if you don’t, then don’t. Everyone knows you’ve got the option, everybody knows that but they still do as their told and come” (TP1; B32, 5).

These extracts demonstrate quite clearly how initially the learners situate themselves outside the activities being undertaken and do not acknowledge any responsibility or accountability for their actions or activities. However all three commented that they accepted the value of what they had had to do and were expecting to achieve a qualification outcome as a result of attendance. This is a further example of what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) describe as ‘symbolic violence’ which allows for the

interests of the dominant groups or classes in society to exist and be reproduced within society by the continuation of social control, but in this instance is realised in a positive way by the learners. The requirements, to either undertake assessments or training programmes, are clearly activities, whether legitimate or not, which are being forced upon learners by other more powerful actors.

The majority of the learner research participants in this study attending on behalf of Jobcentre Plus were on occasion ambivalent towards the programme. The following research participant's interviews also describe being forced to join the ESP but, as the interviews continued they started to confirm its success in increasing their independence and empowerment. There was an interesting response from one learner Penny, who had grown up and gone to school in a rural part of South West England. She explained that she lived close to an American air force base and the girls within her school put little value to education but dreamt of marrying an American airman and going to live in America. She left school with no qualifications and admitted having a lack of ambition which led her to work in a Cornish pasty factory, a fish and chip shop and then in a Butcher's shop. She described these as dead end jobs. Much of the work was seasonal with jobs disappearing in the winter months. She married and had her first child by the age of twenty and moved to the Midlands with her husband to find work. Again she only found what she described as dead end jobs eventually becoming a cleaner in a care home.

During her time working at the care home she became interested in becoming a nurse but did not know how to progress this ambition. For the last two years she has been unemployed and living on income support. Due to a change in government strategy towards people receiving income support she was required to attend the local Jobcentre and register as unemployed in order to continue to receive benefits in the form of jobseekers allowance. This led to an opportunity for JCP to exert pressure by threatening to withdraw benefits if she failed to address her lack of success in finding work. During the interview process described above she was offered a place on the ESP, which although at first she rejected eventually had to accept under the threat of losing benefits. Her interview responses are notable for summing up the initial negative use of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 87) by DWP/JCP to coerce learners onto the ESP but that can eventually lead to a positive outcome:

"I didn't want to do any courses, I liked going to school but I hated doing the work... My adviser tried to send me but I wouldn't come at first. I didn't like her she was a bit snooty and she wasn't going to tell me what to do. (TP1; B25, 8).

As the interview continued Penny reinforced her initial negativity when firstly attending the ESP but eventually admitted she had achieved a positive outcome associated with attendance when commenting:

I actually hated it when I first walked into this building, but now I just love it here...I do really like being here. No; and I get on well with my teacher. He said I would love it by the time I leave and he's been proved right, but don't tell him. I've now been offered a place on an access course at University for nursing. I'll be sad to leave here though" (TP1: B25, 8)

These last comments are noteworthy for summing up the repeatedly positive response this research encountered from these learners to the opportunity and support

component of their training programme. Although at first Penny felt the training would not help her, she has completed a level two qualification in both literacy and numeracy. Schuller (2000a: 154) sees the accumulation of knowledge and skills human capital as necessary to facilitate an increase in social capital suggesting, contemporary societies depend crucially on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of its workers to increase economic activity. Field (2005) in considering social capital, a social measure, also suggested it could not stand outside human capital, an economic measure, and both were required in order to achieve a specific aim. Penny, encouraged by her teachers, was starting an access course at a local university in order to begin professional training to become a nurse. In doing so she was utilising an increase in human capital, in the form of qualifications, to increase social capital which Coleman (1998, 98) sees as having a functional role and being something which is productive in making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible Therefore, lending support to the idea that utilisation of both forms of capital was a requirement in order to achieve her specific aim of professional training.

Penny told me she has enjoyed the learning and support received while on the ESP and is looking forward to starting her training at university. This new found optimism was in stark contrast to her previous experiences of education and work described above.

During my interview with Anthony, a 37 year old male there was also evidence of how the initial coercion to attend the ESP turned into a positive outcome, Divorced with two children he discussed the continuing and various training programmes he had completed and, although he failed to see the connection, there had been an element of

progression taking place, because of their consecutive nature, to a point where he was now confident that he would gain a qualification.

When Anthony was only five his mother died and his father felt unable to cope with him and his brother. Consequently they were placed into a children's home, which Anthony explained 'was a place of strict discipline'. He described himself as the class clown while at school from which he was excluded at the age of fourteen. His time in compulsory education was completed at a children's home education unit. He left compulsory schooling with no qualifications but eventually became an apprentice jockey. Anthony saw this period in his life as magical, being taken to racecourses by helicopter and also working with the disabled and elderly at special riding schools. However, he got in with what he labelled as 'the wrong crowd' and became addicted to drugs, eventually losing his job and apprenticeship

Reflecting on his life from that point Anthony described a downward spiral of drug addiction and crime, which culminated in prison sentences spanning more than a decade. He did marry during this time and has two children and while in prison gained some craft qualifications. However, his wife eventually divorced him and he now has little contact with his children.

When interviewed he gave a mixed response to why he was attending eventually admitting to being coerced under the threat of benefit withdrawal into attendance by his JCP adviser when commenting:

“They stop your money so this time I volunteered when they suggested it, but the first time I was here by no choice of mine. I’ve been in and out of prison but I’ve tried to better myself. I took an art and design course while in prison...I took a maths course then a motorbike course. But I have come here to improve myself, because there are things I don’t know that I’m learning and I know I can get a qualification now that will help me get a job” (TP1; A33, 3).

Cowley (2002) purports that learners in suggesting it is guidance being given to them are unconsciously hiding the real agenda of forced attendance as a punishment for being unemployed. Learner research participants like Penny and Anthony largely portrayed attending training on the insistence of Jobcentre Plus advisers. Research participants can be described as taking on the role and identity of passive participants in this process, when describing how they are persuaded in the decision making process by their JCP advisers. They are reinforcing power relations which Bourdieu (1993: 150) suggests “take on their full force only in so far as they disguise the fact it is a power relationship”.

In reinforcing the positive aspect of the ESP Anthony explained that since attending training he has kept away from drugs and is expected to achieve a National Test qualification in both literacy and numeracy, once more emphasising how the initial negative reason for attendance has led to a positive outcome in the form of human capital enhancement. Anthony does realise that with his background finding work is likely to be difficult, but he expresses a determination not to give up trying.

The following learner research participants did during their first interview comment that given the choice, they also were more inclined to choose not to attend training provision

at all. However, during subsequent interviews they all put forward how they had achieved a positive outcome linked to attendance. Again their initial responses confirmed coercion as the reason for attendance. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), advocate if among the underlying values, ideology, assumptions and aspirations of the individual's *habitus* they do not self-identify the existence of a problem, then they do not recognise there is a decision to be made. When I asked Janson, a single male who suffers from epilepsy, why he had started attending the ESP he replied:

"I didn't volunteer, however after signing on for about six months now...what happens is they give you a sheet of maths to see if you know the answers and see how quick you are. If you're not quick enough they send you here. Same as reading and writing, that's the same way and that's how you get sent to these places. If you don't try to do something about your maths and writing then they could stop your benefits" (TP3; C54, 4).

Philip, a single 20 year old male who lives at the family home with his mother, told a similar story about the reason for his attendance:

"The Jobcentre send you here. They ask you about your maths and English and like you keep putting it off. I had an exam and they said my English was alright but my maths was a bit below average...not enough to pass. So you keep putting it off but in the end you've got to go somewhere, haven't you. So they told me I'd got to come here or my money would be stopped" (TP3; C61, 5).

Micky the 42 year old male, who has been out of work for 2 years, also recounted a similar story as to why he was attending:

"I was told I needed to improve my maths and English...she said (his JCP adviser) this is your start date, you've got to go there on such and such a date or your benefit will stop... So here I am" (TP2; D41, 4).

The lack of educational achievement in the form of qualifications is not directly linked to the receipt of benefits, making the withdrawal of benefits for adults without qualifications

an illegitimate action taken on the part of Jobcentre Plus personnel. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) suggest this process of '*symbolic violence*', is enacted through the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups and suggest the actions can be seen as legitimate by both initiators and recipients of them when in reality they are not. However, an unemployed benefit claimant does sign a jobseeker's agreement document, requiring them to address any barriers to employment (JSA, 2010) and consequently the lack of qualifications are labelled a barrier making enforcement of ESP attendance a reality. This reflects what Bourdieu (1993: 150) describes as "an exercise of power accompanied by a discourse aimed at legitimising the power of the group exercising it".

What has arisen is a clear association between compliance and choice limitations that are so socially ingrained within the learners' *habitus*, that it gives them limited or no choice without very often a negative consequence, through what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) imply as having become something that is seen as culturally legitimate. Pragmatically, for many unemployed learners, as Tuijnman *et al.*, (1997: 98) indicate their *fields* of experience have also created this cultural legitimacy and 'choice' has become a redundant concept, replaced by passive acceptance of choices 'being done to them'.

Learning for the research participants was in some part associated with punishment that is, because they were unable to obtain employment they had to undertake activities such as training programmes. The ability to choose not to undertake an activity or to

opt out was often associated with the risk of a financial punishment (DWP (2005) through the loss of welfare benefits. Living with the threat or risk of removal of benefit was, in fact, more of a coercive activity than the actual reality – which was far less often carried out.

Punishment is closely associated with discipline and Peters (1966: 166) defines 'discipline' as submission to rules, with 'punishment' being explained as the consequence of breaking the rules. There is a clear representation here between Peters' interpretation and the format used by DWP through their executive JCP for long term unemployed adults to achieve compliance with requests. Again, the threat of sanctions against unemployed individuals can be seen as the potential to deliberately inflict punishment through the removal of financial assistance by a more powerful authority i.e. Government strategy.

Alternatively, it could be seen to reflect 'school detention', as Cowley (2002) state a commonly used system of punishment in the compulsory school system. The aim of associating punishment of some form with discipline is demonstrated by Gilbert (2002: 221) when explaining, if society understands the 'rules of the game' and the penalties attached to 'breaking the rules', compliance becomes the best, and arguably, the only option in order to avoid punishment. It is clear to see a further link here to what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) described as 'symbolic violence', found in the misrecognition of activities as legitimate linked to individuals' *habitus*, creating a mechanism for social control by the dominant group over the dominated. This is

demonstrated in this study by JCP advisors, who as the agents of JCP, are participating in the processes as instruments of control over the unemployed.

Learner research participants frequently described attending programmes only when it was associated with a particular identity, such as being an ex-prisoner or being unemployed and linked training programmes only with these identities and never considered undertaking them outside that framework. The following extract is from an interview with Ronald, a 52 year old single male made redundant after 28 years with the same company, and is characteristic of the explanations given by some long-term unemployed learners as their reason for attending training programmes:

“I started off when I left school...I got an apprenticeship and passed my City & Guilds...I’ve worked for over 30 years and never needed anything else (a qualification). I was 28 years in aerospace then got made redundant and have been out of work for over 3 years...I was offered this course not necessarily to improve my literacy and numeracy but to get a qualification. I left school without qualifications and only have the City & Guilds, so when people say literacy and numeracy that doesn’t really count for much...so I came on the course” (TP1: A20, 5).

For adults with ‘poor’ LLN skills the reluctance to choose a training programme, according to Kambouri and Francis (1994), can be connected to a number of causes, such as the need to complete course work or undertake written assignments as part of a course or the possibility of having to undertake summative assessments as part of the programme. Often these are reminders of their time in compulsory education. In some cases the learner was unable to see any value in attending any form of training to improve their LLN skills or gain a qualification. This theme of not wanting to attend

training and seeing no value in it was voiced by Maxell, who is a 35 year old, originally from Jamaica, and married with three children:

“I didn’t want to be here. I wanted to stop at home...It was the Jobcentre that sent me up here. I was happy sitting around the house doing nothing, watching telly, going in the garden, looking after the garden and other stuff. Cleaning the windows, doing some shopping and things like that...I don’t know why they sent me up here. I tried to tell the dole I couldn’t read and write...They said ‘oh give it a try,’ I give it a try and after 15 weeks I still can’t pick anything up” (TP3; C62, 8).

There is a problem for learners such as Maxell suggests Huitt (2001) because information regarding programmes is largely provided, in either a written format, which is generally inaccessible for low-level learners, or through other communication pathways, such as the internet. For adults with low-level LLN skills, this is a technology that they may feel is beyond them (ibid). Learner research participants once again, reported relying on either friends or those in privileged positions to advise and direct them to appropriate training programmes, while some like Maxell just wished to be left alone. Putnam (2000: 17) describes using social networks in this way, ‘as enabling co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit’ and uses the term ‘bridging social capital’ which he suggests generates broader identities and reciprocity.

When learners explored the possibility of choice in relation to attendance at training programmes, it became noticeable that having options or choices as a course of action within their lives was unfamiliar in relation to their *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993: 76). These learners often commented ‘you simply do as you’re told’ and appeared to passively undertake activities asked of them by actors or agencies who were regarded as holding power over them. All these actors, both learners and ‘agents of the state’ (Yeo, 2002)

work to maintain the social order or control of these adults. As previously argued; through Bourdieu (1998) they misrecognise these actions as legitimate. Such activities are now so ingrained in our nation's psyche that it is seen as legitimate, both by the learner recipients and the 'agents of the state' Yeo (2002), that unemployed adults be directed to undertake activities deemed by the state as reasonable, without question, negotiation or discussion, on the basis of 'conditionality' of receipt of welfare benefits.

Research participants assessment and the exercise of power

All learner research participants involved in the study had undertaken the Basic Skills Agency (2002) Initial Assessment of their LLN skills and each learner had been assigned a literacy and numeracy skill level following completion of the assessment (appendix 13: 301). It is unclear whether learners initially understood the value of the assessment and for some learners it appears to be something they undertook passively; the assessment appeared to be, as Tuijnman *et al.*, (1997: 168) identify, 'done to them' and had held little value for them. More significantly, I found there was no connection made by learner research participants between the assessment outcome and personal LLN skills or how the outcome of the assessment could be used by them to inform further decision-making regarding future training.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES 2001a) requires analysis of skills, assignment of levels and activities targeted at improving skills to a level, measured through concrete, quantifiable qualification outcomes. Such activities appeared to initially hold little value to those actually undertaking training and to be of considerably more importance to

those responsible for the creation and delivery of the strategy. This point is exemplified by Foucault (1995: 162), when discussing how power is exercised through an organization by suggesting that rather than the image of equality and agency often portrayed, the more common practice is one of domination of the many by the few.

During one of my observations I noted as Willis (1981) wrote, when describing power relations in education, a teacher yielding some ground to a learner and their definitions and interests. I felt this occurred in the interest of ensuring basic control. The teacher in doing this as Willis suggests creates a pragmatic not over-hopeful and fatalistic teaching relationship. He goes on to describe this interaction as:

“careful containment, we give them little bits...let them think their own way...but in all important things they're doing what you want...don't confront them let them think it's going their way” (Willis, 1981: 70).

Ranciere (2006: 213), when discussing playing politics, defines the individuals' struggle as that of an unrecognised individual striving for equal recognition in the established order. This, it could be argued, reflects how competition takes place over the learner's image in society, or in this instance within the group, in turn leading some to determine what is acceptable to say or to show in response to a teacher's questioning.

While talking with one of the senior teachers in Motor Town, he gave an example of how the exercise of power and these different values, or ways of thinking, can manifest themselves:

“Well I had a protest this morning from a student.....he said he was going to go back to the jobcentre and complain because the teachers make him do work. I thought, great that's how it should be. He thought he would just come here to hang around and have a bit of fun, just do nothing...actually trying to get people to engage after they've gone through a long process

of non-engagement is like pushing a piece of string up a hill...because they're pretty comfortable like that, they're not going to be comfortable in actually evidencing any progress" (TP1; B30, 4).

Foucault's (1980) re-conceptualisation of power as a positive as well as a negative force can also be seen at work here. The above statement reinforces Foucault's suggestion "that power is a positive force and that all power relations are potentially reversible and unpredictable" and "wherever authority is imposed resistances will inevitably arise" (ibid: 71). A learner's approach has a greater impact on the development of a working relationship than the assessed level and opportunities offered to the learner (ibid).

Just as Willis (1981: 59) argues I found that learners were struggling to 'overcome their opposition to conformism', recognising this insulated them from their class culture and gave them a sense of freedom. However, in some instances there was rebellion against any forced change by the learner, and just as Hodkinson *et al.*, (1996), observed, occasionally appeared to lead to the possibility of the teacher becoming alienated from the learner. Through observation I felt that teachers appeared to respond to this by spending less time in trying to engage with someone who was not really interested in taking part.

The importance of qualifications to the research participants

The conceptual understanding of language, literacy and numeracy skills (LLN), their contribution and influence on everyday activities as well as their relationship with employment opportunities were raised with all learner research participants. Learners were asked to describe their LLN skills and to consider how they made use of these and

whether they identified a connection between their LLN skills level and their employability.

This is a particularly important aspect of the former New Labour and current Conservative and Liberal Democratic Coalition Governments' focus on raising adult LLN skills to ensure continued economic prosperity. Evidence for this is contained in the Leitch (2006) Review of Skills and in discourse by Ian Duncan Smith (2010) as Minister for Work and Pensions for the coalition, which taken from research commissioned by the Treasury (DBIS, 2010) highlights the relationship between LLN skills and employment. A specific LLN learning opportunity has been created for the unemployed supported by a strategy of interventions (DIUS, 2007) in order to force those who lack qualifications to take part. Freud (2007) suggests this reinforces the persistent effort by Government to ensure all unemployed adults are in a position where they can usefully participate in, and contribute to, the prosperity of the country economically through endogenous growth, thereby creating increased life chances.

It is an employer using qualification outcomes as a screening tool during recruitment that people have become aware of, as Wolf (2002) points out, and it is the industrialised economies that are creating the demand for a more educated workforce. However, there appeared to be reluctance on the part of teachers to point out where the qualifications on offer sit within the national framework. As one teacher commented:

"We have to engender hope in them. We are in the business of search and rescue, throwing lifelines to drowning people. If we show them where they are in the social order then it is unlikely any of them will be motivated to do anything. Better to give them false hope than no hope at all" (TP2)

This teacher's comment is significant in the context of this teaching and learning provision as it shows how learners are potentially being set up for another disappointment or possible failure, rather than being told the truth about their situation. Confirmation of this potential for disappointment came from Michael a 54 year old divorced male who responded to a question regarding job interviews by saying:

"I have applied for a couple of jobs over the last two months and all they're interested in is a CV that shows your qualifications" (TP2; D52; 7).

However, this was not the view of all learners and it led to questioning of the ideology that sees increased spending on education as a necessity to guarantee economic growth as suggested by Freud (2007). Wolf (2002) uses the 1991 national census to support her argument that social skills are just as important in creating life chances. She puts forward evidence that confirms the proportion of people in professional, managerial and technical posts along with owners of small businesses who have higher level qualifications is still under half, while a large proportion in these positions hold no qualifications (ibid: 68).

During my interview with Janson, introduced on page 190, he confirmed that a lack of qualifications was not necessarily a barrier to gaining employment and went on to say:

"I've got no qualifications and I've had plenty of jobs since I left school... You don't need qualifications...well maybe health and safety and first aid, but none of them others; it's just common sense you need" (TP3; C54, 2).

Contrastingly, Leitch (2006: 6) states that "skill levels have an important impact on employment and social welfare" (Table 6, p 162) and his report concluded that "tackling low LLN skills, through upgrading the LLN skills of an additional 3.5 million adults from

the lower end of the skills spectrum, could yield an average annual net benefit; on top of current ambitions of 0.3% of GDP" (ibid: 11). In his 2006 report to government

"Prosperity for all in the global economy" Leitch points out that:

"In the 19th Century, the UK had the natural resources, the labour force and the inspiration to lead the world into the Industrial Revolution. In the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people and their potential is both untapped and vast....improving their skills will unlock that potential" (Leitch, 2006: 1).

Micky, a 41 year old male who has been out of work for 2 years, when describing the problem he was now finding when applying for jobs related it to his past experiences and, as Leitch (2006: 1) points out above, suggested:

"It was different years ago all you needed was experience and there were loads of jobs. People like me have been left out, know what I mean? ...because I could always get work there was no need to learn...but now things are different, everything is computers or writing and I need to be able to do that to get a job" (TP2; D52; 9).

Highlighted by Goodman (1987) and discussed in the Literature Review the issue of who needs to be literate, for what purposes and in what functions is now a concern of social and political strategy, rather than a curricular decision. Bynner (2006: 14-15) when analysing basic skills data drawn from two longitudinal studies, the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 British cohort study also asserted that:

"Literacy and numeracy are not only the key building blocks of educational progress and qualifications, but of entry into and progression in the labour market as well ... consequently, the upgrading of skills in all areas of the labour market is essential to keep a foothold in it". (Bynner, 2006: 14)

While interviewing other learners Bynner (ibid) also reflected that it was not their social skills that needed addressing, as suggested by Wolf (2002), but their poor LLN skills and lack of qualifications which were the major reason for their unemployment. Indeed

Grinyer (2005), when analysing literacy and numeracy and its relationship to the labour market, while drawing on the 2003 *Skills for Life* survey, found a clear connection between literacy and numeracy levels and labour market outcome. He found that women with Level 1 literacy skills were 7% more likely to be employed than women with Entry Level 3 skills, while men holding Entry Level 1 and 2 literacy skills were found to be 12% more likely to be outside the labour market. This identified concern is framed by a much larger global focus on LLN skills with UNESCO (2006: 36) describing literacy as:

...“An indispensable means for effective social and economic participation, contributing to human development and poverty reduction”
(UNESCO, Education Literacy Portal; accessed 17.02.11).

Analysis of the research participants' responses to the question of increasing skills, found 61% describing their abilities as being in line with and in some instances exceeding, the requirements of their everyday lives. They have constructed their lives in such a way that their LLN competence was seen as perfectly acceptable and adequate for them; only a few of the learners made a connection between their LLN skills and their employability. Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) found learners often referred to their skills in relation to the demands of their everyday activities and described this as a socially constructed view of LLN skills, linking this to what Bourdieu (1998) describes as their *field* (see p: 103) or social arena of life experience and their position within that *field*.

The research identified that 47% of learners did not believe they could improve their LLN skills to a level required to achieve sustainable employment. For example when

Robert, a 42 year old single male who had been unemployed for more than 3 years, was interviewed when starting the ESP he said:

"I'm not sure what this will help me with, but there is a possibility it will help. There is more possibility it will help than if I do nothing...I'm not sure what employers will ask for like. If they ask for a qualification in English or maths, I'll struggle to get that. I will yeah...I can talk alright but I'll struggle to get maths and English. I'm sound with talking it's when you put it in front of me, I just don't know" (TP2; D38, 2).

It was not uncommon for learners like Robert to report having negative feelings about their progress. Having achieved an improvement in their LLN skills and perhaps a qualification they had not considered that the level of qualification available, although potentially increasing the opportunity of work, is unlikely in the longer term to increase job security.

Whilst some of the learners in this study were able to demonstrate a qualification outcome, the use of these qualifications to instigate further education or improve appropriate employment pathways did not reflect the initial potential identified through qualification success. Indeed individual understanding of LLN skill requirements associated with acceptable behaviour is mainly affected by movement within an individual's *field* of experience; or social arena (Bourdieu, 1998) and the *doxa* (p 105) of informed experience (ibid).

For learner research participants like Robert above, being passive participants in learning activities reflects their position within their cultural existence argues Barton (2007). Barton (ibid) also suggests that literacy has a social meaning, and is one that is

constructed out of personal or social networks. He also suggested that literacy is rooted in the context of culture and ethnicity linked to people's socio-economic status, and is policed within the social networks of these realities seen in Robert's description above. Other learners, as Wolf (2002) suggests, recounted how they did not believe their LLN skills had been a contributing factor to their current inability to secure sustainable employment. When asked whether having LLN qualifications would help to gain employment or improve their everyday life Mohamed, 34, and married with five children who described himself as a warehouse operative and part time DJ responded by saying:

"No I've been used to not having qualifications that long it's never really occurred to me to be honest. I've not really got a problem with me maths and English as such. So I've never needed a qualification to tell me what I can do...I'm happy with using them [English & maths] in everyday life"
(TP1; B32, 7)

Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) also put forward a theory that, whilst many adults described as long-term unemployed can, but by no means always, accept that they have limited LLN skills, they may not necessarily consider such limitations as problematic where the cultural and social context in which they exist, their *field* (Bourdieu, 1998), enables them to function satisfactorily on a daily basis.

There was a similar response to Mohamed's from learners who did not connect their difficulty in gaining employment to a lack of qualifications or 'poor' LLN skills. This is a significant finding for both teachers and strategy makers; if learners believe that their current low LLN skills enable them to participate in society effectively, it is difficult to see why they would want to start a training programme to develop these skills. Despite the

efforts of Government, through the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a) to provide a national standardised understanding of LLN skills (DIUS, 2007), these are seen primarily by learner research participants to be associated with the requirements of their daily lives, rather than linked to an employability agenda.

A recorded 70% of the research participants in this study indicated a qualification was unnecessary in order for them to gain employment. Their skills level was seen by them as acceptable and they linked this mainly to speaking and listening skills with participants discussing other components, such as reading and writing, less often and putting much less emphasis as Parsons (2002) also found on numeracy. The evidence of them being long-term unemployed was not linked by them to their lack of qualifications, but to other factors such as economic recession or, lack of openings to suit their skill-set. Learners did participate in comprehensive interviews as part of this study and evidenced a range of spoken vocabulary that exceeded their written literacy competency.

Writing skills are however an important part of the ESP and although learners referred to writing less often, when they did it was usually task-related, for example writing letters to family members (separated/divorced), or completing forms, or sometimes writing shopping lists. Very rarely was writing considered an elective activity; only learners who were separated or divorced discussed writing as an activity to be voluntarily undertaken when talking about writing home to family and friends. Learners undertaking training as part of the Jobcentre Plus employability skills programme often referred to their writing

in terms of completing worksheets (DWP, 2002). All learners are encouraged to research a topic of interest and write an essay relating to it as part of a learning portfolio and these too were referred to as worksheets.

Atkin *et al.*, (2007) also observed that learners often referred to writing activities undertaken in the formal learning environment as predominantly worksheet oriented even when referring to essays. However, for these learners writing was scarcely an activity undertaken anywhere other than during training programmes. If forms needed to be completed, they often deferred this activity to their wider social network for assistance. What appears to not be communicated well to learners is that in order to achieve a level where they could obtain sustainable employment the expectation from employers (DfES, 2004) is a minimum of five GCSE's at A* to C grade, which should include English and maths. For the majority this would be an unobtainable goal, and could possibly be de-motivating if pointed out to them, while for others it would require potentially a minimum of three years education to obtain.

The learner research participants are still on the margins in trying to get work (Webb, 2007), and in most instances are looking for short-term unskilled roles, while still needing to learn to trust others in order to complete their ultimate goal of being employed. I found that only learners who had achieved a qualification at Level 1 or 2 and who planned to continue their education in order to obtain a more professional level of employment were positive about their future. The effort spent in obtaining this basic qualification by these learners, however, not only impacted on their human capital stock

(Bourdieu, 1997) but, had also introduced them to a wider understanding of the support available to them and changed the way they interacted with others. Putnam (2000) suggests that bringing together relative strangers on a regular and frequent basis, through loose ties and associational activity, in order to establish and maintain a wider variety of networks and values will lead to the accrual of social capital for these individuals whilst also fostering general reciprocity and trust. Research participants described seeing a value in this change to their social networks and development of a link that would support this change. Inglehart (1997) also suggests this increase in social networks can increase social capital and comes about through:

...“a culture of trust and tolerance, in which extensive networks of voluntary association emerge”. (Inglehart, 1997: 188)

Identifying research participants language, literacy & numeracy issues

Hodgson and Spours (1999) as noted previously in the Literature Review identify a skill level of Level 1 as the minimum that individuals are required to hold in order, according to Government, to achieve functionality. Learners engaged in this study had largely been ascribed a skills level of Entry Level 3 or below, with less than 20% being capable of achieving Level 1 or more, although some had the potential of reaching beyond a Level 2 outcome. (Appendix 13: 301). Given this detailed level of diagnostic assessment, it is perhaps surprising then, that only a few of the learners in this study associated their LLN competence with employability or used this resulting level as a measure of their LLN competence (Table 13, p 178).

Whilst learners were encouraged to talk about their LLN skills, it is noteworthy that when discussing their literacy competence they generally referred to a lack of reading skills.

John, a 45 year old single male who was described by his teacher as having learning difficulties, when asked how he would explain his literacy skills he responded:

“My reading...some words I can read and some words I get mixed...confused with, like long words...I don't think I could read a book, or something like a road map. No, I don't think I could read a road map. Newspapers are a problem...I could probably read the main headlines and pictures and things like that, but...not the actual story...no not the story. I might get tongue-tied, twisted and things like that” (TP1; B24, 4).

Although acknowledging his difficulty with reading John did not see the connection between his lack of reading skills and his ability to obtain employment. Bynner (2006: 5) provides further suggestive evidence that members of the population who have LLN skills at Entry level 2 (appendix 13: 301) or below are significantly disadvantaged and further marginalised when attempting to access the employment market and that a “lack of basic skills; especially reading; is the key ingredient of a poor academic career culminating in a lack of qualifications”.

As the interviews progressed it was becoming apparent that learners were aware that to move into employment, a number of hurdles needed to be overcome and that verbal communication alone is not enough to secure employment. Barton's (2007) research lends support to this rationale when describing literacy as including aspects of reading, writing, and language, further arguing it has social meanings consisting of the individual's attitudes, actions and learning. Language then for Barton is a dynamic social activity serving the purpose of the people using it. There was some evidence from

research participants to support this thinking as demonstrated by Micky, the 41 year old male who had been out of work for 2 years, in the following quotes.

...”me speaking is okay, but I need to improve me skills...I need to be better at reading and writing so I can do a CV and get a job”(TP 2: D52; 5).

I continued questioning Micky about how he coped with being unable to read or write when leaving school he responded with the following comment;

“I couldn’t read or write when I left school...no not at all. I had to look for work that didn’t need reading or writing...I worked stacking shelves then got a job on a milk round” (TP 2; D52, 6).

Elida, a 36 year old female, married with three children also identified poor reading skills as a problem to be overcome in order for her to progress and find work:

...”my problem is reading, writing and spelling the written words because speaking is easy...but reading and writing...that’s hard. I need writing to be able to do a CV and get a job” (TP 1: B29; 10).

Elida, who is Albanian but had been living in Serbia, arrived in England with her two children in 2000 as a result of a war in her country. Her husband followed a year later and not long after they had a third child. She had been working for a number of years as a cleaner and attending community learning in order to learn to speak English. In her home country there was limited compulsory education. Girls who did attend school were not expected to continue in education after puberty so she left school early and expressed disappointment at having to do so. Her parents had chosen her husband and she had seen her role in life as a housewife and mother and had never considered employment before coming to England.

In the UK she found life to be different and because her husband is unable to speak English or find employment she took on the responsibility of working to support her family. Her reason for joining the ESP was to improve her situation by gaining qualifications that would improve her work opportunities, what Schuller (2000a: 154) describes as increasing 'human capital'. She wanted to qualify and become a shop assistant or care worker; but through attendance on the ESP and the support she received there now had the opportunity to start studying nursing and midwifery at a Midlands University. The characteristics of these valued relationships are described by Bourdieu (1993) as increasing social capital who suggest this kind of capital is accumulated specifically in supportive social networks within a community. While her we can see what Coleman (1998) talks of as social capital arising from productive relationships that make possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. For Elida she recognises this is an opportunity that has come about only through attendance on the ESP.

During my interviews comments were often made by research participants about being unable to read and write. Cook-Gumperz (1986) when commenting on individuals who were unable to exercise these practices found they often felt there was a stigma attached to them because of this. Adult literacy programmes constructed on formal models of teaching and learning built for children and not contextualised from learners' life experience were found (DfES, 2003a) to be compounding this issue.

Numeracy was a subject that learners discussed less often and appeared, from their point of view, to be a subsidiary subject to literacy although they often reported that they found working with numbers easier than reading and writing. Micky, the learner quoted above, who had admitted being unable to read or write, responded positively when asked about numeracy and went on to explain:

“On the milk round you were shown what to do with the figures. You had training in how to run your own book. Putting figures in and taking figures away...I found that quite easy. I’m alright with numbers...but like what he’s doing today fractions and that it’s completely different. I’ve never done fractions ever before” (TP 2; D52, 7).

Although numeracy was a subject discussed only broadly, learners were able to highlight particular numerical activity that they found more difficult to understand. In research by Hasluck and Green (2007) they found some teachers also tried to place less emphasis on teaching numeracy because they thought it was more difficult to maintain engagement with learners through numeracy teaching.

However, given the limited amount of time learners were able to spend on training programmes, teachers were encouraged by their managers to focus on one subject, usually numeracy, to try and facilitate an increase in both literacy and numeracy skills which could lead towards a target outcome for them, the providers (DfES, 2002a), in the form of a qualification for the learner. Promoting the views of Peters and Rousseau (2008) some teaching and learning provision managers took the stance that engaging learners with numeracy as the primary objective would in fact support both their numeracy and literacy requirement at the same time and therefore learners, on joining

provision, were generally expected to begin their learning journey with numeracy training.

This provided on-going motivation for learners to engage in learning where they felt they were working towards a qualification they may be able to succeed in, plus it also helped teaching and learning providers to complete their contractual targets and the achievement of national targets set by Government. These targets were a result of the Moser report (DfEE, 1999), which Government expected to accomplish through its Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) executive arm, Jobcentre plus (JCP). Learners who did manage to achieve a National Test Certificate reported their joy in finally being successful within a learning environment. This was for most the first time they had achieved any kind of formal qualification. However, they still remain on the margins of society as the qualifications offered through the ESP course as already discussed are really only an indication of learner potential, which are not necessarily fully recognised by employers (DfES, 2002a). For learners to obtain a full GCSE level qualification, which is widely recognised, would normally require them to complete 2-3 years of further study. Almost 56% of learners felt going beyond this first achievement was not a reality, but saw it as proof that during previous learning episodes with the right support they should have achieved an outcome. Others as described in this chapter saw it as an opportunity to start off on a way to further study and possibly higher levels of employment.

However, 20% of participants indicated that the development of their skills was apparently causing them some concern. An example of learner concerns was voiced by Janson, the 27 year old single male introduced above, who said:

“I guess I am happy with that (progress report) It’s getting there slowly; Err, my English is improving a hell of a lot. My maths has even; it’s improved too much for my liking. My mates are taking the mickey because of it; I’m not feeling comfortable about that” (TP3; C72, 3).

Attending training has enabled Janson like some others did to develop their LLN skills to a point where change has occurred to such an extent that it is making learners feel uncomfortable within their present social networks. Personal dispositions or ‘*habitus*’ (Bourdieu, 1997: 76) and the identity that they brought with them was deliberately being challenged through education in order to modify their identity from that of being unemployed to being employable. Blumer (1969) describes how the individual’s identity is generated and modified through frequent social interactions and how change can in some circumstances make existing social networks become unstable and unsustainable. Daly (2003) describes how societal policy is now put forward as a function of particular levels of skill, enterprise and flexibility as a goal attainable by all. These have become a phenomenon to be governed in order to create idealised consumer citizens who act responsibly and are independent of state support. Daly sees this being accomplished by using a combination of legislative and institutional mechanisms to move those dependants on welfare out of their existing social networks thus creating change for its target audience. The sub text to this form of agency assumes that individuals, as self-regulating subjects, are expected to provide for themselves and take responsibility for their own future welfare.

A critique of this thinking is it can result in an inability on the part of some learners to move on from their socially constructed community, such as family and friendship groups, because of this fear of becoming isolated (ibid) therefore defeating the a key objective of challenging and changing learner identities in order to help them take responsibility for their own future welfare and to create a positive outcome. This led me to conclude as Field (2005) found, that education, whilst being seen as the key to economic prosperity and personal success, can act as an isolating apparatus which can potentially bring about social fragility amongst the social network of a community and for individuals within that community.

Developing coping strategies.

It was found that 67% of the research participants were over the age of 30 and had developed a considerable amount of strategies that they drew upon in order to overcome LLN obstacles. Atkin *et al.*, (2005: 96) similarly found that:

...“Learners develop coping strategies and are unlikely to seek help until such time as they see a need. This often occurs after a change in their circumstances, personal or professional”.

Learner research participants spoke of needing support from family and friends; i.e. their social network, defined by Barnes (1954: 44) as “a network of ties between pairs of persons who regard each other as approximate social equals”, as being important in the operation of their everyday lives. This is noteworthy as some participants felt they had more LLN skills than their social network (Ward and Edwards, 2002) and yet relied on it heavily to cope with various administrative tasks, such as understanding their postal correspondence. An example of this occurred when discussing with Steven, a 44 year

old male who described himself as having a partner with two children, how poor literacy skills affected his dealings with organisations such as his bank when recounting:

...“well I have a bank account. If I get letters from the bank...if I can understand them then okay, if not I go to the bank and explain my situation...like you know ...I can’t understand the letter. and get some advice off them...and if I get a letter from the jobcentre or benefit...If I’m not really sure I’ll go to them and ask for some advice...My brother helps me a lot with application forms...and my sister and her husband does. But I mean my ex-wife knows and my daughter and son. My son is only young so he couldn’t help...but my daughter helped me a few times”(TP2; D57, 6).

Other learners also gave examples of how they managed their lives in line with their levels of LLN, their dependence on their wider social network, described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) in terms of valued relationships with others, and some of the strategies they had developed to manage their limited LLN skills. Derek, a single male aged 45, described how he now relies on his sister since his father died saying:

“I have a post office account my sister helps me with that. She tells people he’s trying his hardest but you’ve got to give him time like...she’s good my sister is. Families should stick together and help each other out. I do feel independent if she helps me...yeah because like my sister’s wrote like £10 to £100 so I can copy all my letters yeah...sometimes , when I’ve got patience...I haven’t really got patience to do it” (TP3; C58, 8).

It is clear that these adults relied heavily on their families for LLN support and as Parsons and Bynner, (2002) found would find their daily activities severely compromised if they were required to manage independently of it. The learners appeared to have two main ways of dealing with literacy and numeracy issues: one was to avoid any activities that may cause them any difficulty or discomfort, such as not reading newspapers, not having a bank account. The other key strategy that learners developed was to seek support from the people that were related or close to them; as

suggested by Bourdieu and Passeron(1990) family is the main arena for the build-up and dissemination of social capital. It is also clear from the above responses that, as identified by Bourdieu (1997), networks of relationships are an individual's investment strategy aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships.

I found these strategies were being used simultaneously and interchangeably, with learners drawing on those they felt most appropriately positioned to undertake the necessary tasks. Drawing on a social network of support was not only necessary for their existence but, as suggested by Atkin and O'Grady, (2006) preferable to undertaking training programmes to acquire these skills independently. In reality as Bourdieu (1977) suggests individuals do not necessarily have a social life that is based on rules but that their *doxa*, or social identity, relies on improvisation. A process "which is neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious, but is rooted as suggested by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 62-63) in an on-going process of learning which begins in childhood".

Research participants had an assortment of support, usually family, but had begun to use what Putnam (2000: 22) suggests is "bridging social capital", which brings together people from across diverse backgrounds. They were positioning themselves within the environment of the training programmes using it as a mechanism through which they could draw on the necessary people to help tackle literacy and numeracy tasks for and with them.

In the same way as Bourdieu (1993) argues I found individuals operated within the constraints and opportunities of their *habitus* while mapping out relationships with individuals within their particular *field* (see p 103) who could support them. An example of this occurred during an interview with Ricky, a 42 year old male separated with four children, who has a history of violent behaviour. Ricky's violent lifestyle had brought him to the attention of the family court that was going to make a decision about whether he should still have access to his children and he recounted how he had been supported with a letter to the court by a teacher:

... "I first came here when I was in trouble with the police. But this time...but this time it was only innocently, because my wife and I split up. I was fighting for the kids and it was letters from the teachers that helped me. Because...because I had to tell them the reason I was in court, what for and the reason why. The teacher says I can write a letter for you. So he wrote a letter for me and it was read out in court, that I'm here helping out learners and things like that. So when the court case was dropped...they took me into a model learner...I'm starting to behave myself...because if I fight I'm going to lose the kids" (TP2; D40, 16).

This 'critical incident' (Atkin *et al.*, 2005: 52) had brought about a 'turning point' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 97) that had taken him away from continued violence and brought him to an acceptance of others who previously had been seen as the 'enemy'. Ricky's history of violent behaviour surfaced at the age of fourteen when he was excluded from school, his time in compulsory education was completed at a church school where he described the teaching nuns as being just as violent as him and he left without gaining any qualifications. Ricky explains his own school experience as:

"I went to a normal ordinary comprehensive, yeah. And...I felt a teacher used to single me out, particularly in English, like; used to make me stand up and read my work out and...read out of books and that and I'm not very good at reading or spelling. It made me feel... I think the right word is rebellious. Yeah, I rebelled against the system and only went to lessons I fancied...I was extremely disruptive there. So I got kicked out of

there...Then my father put me into...I was taught by Nun's then...the hard way" (TP2; D40, 1).

On leaving school he worked with his father in the building trade, they eventually fell out and had no contact for a number of years because of his lifestyle, which led to the breakdown of his two marriages and alienation from his four children. He went on to start his own painting and decorating business but that too eventually failed and he has been out of work for five years. When asked to comment further on why he had been suspended from school he replied:

Through violence...basically since the age of around 13 to 14 I've been like into football violence...things like that (TP2; D40, 2).

Ricky, by engaging in football violence, had finally found a 'counter culture outside his school and family' (Willis 1981: 33) that he immediately felt part of and which he believed introduced excitement, purpose and structure to his life. At this point in the interview he was alluding to what Putnam (2000: 22) put forward as 'bridging' (see p: 91), that is the creation of social networks through bringing together people from across diverse backgrounds, these connections are described as generating broader identities and reciprocity. While Blumer (1969: 74) suggests this form of identity capital is also "being generated through processes of social interaction that are continually reinterpreted and altered".

Taking part in these extreme activities mirrors Willis's 'lads' (1981: 34) behaviour of deriving a positive delight in fighting, in causing fights through intimidation, in talking about fighting and the tactics applied in the fighting situation. He had for most of his adult life had an 'identity' that was more closely associated with this social development,

rather than a personal one and, as Gergen (1994: 204) identifies, was crucially dependant on these social relations and constructs to such an extent he had been unable to socialise with anyone who did not support his team.

Football played such a role in his life that when first attending the Employability Skills Programme he had been unable to mix with other learners and linked them to football teams when commenting:

*“You have to start mixing with other football teams here...because half of the people what are here I wouldn’t give them the time of day. But now because you’re made to like work...you just forget about those barriers”
(TP2; D40, 5)*

He no longer reacts violently to others and in fact works as a mentor to learners on the ESP. During our interview Ricky reflected on his belief that attending the ESP has changed his ability to socialise, his outlook on life and his relationship with his parents. He does recognise that his eventual aim of gaining a qualification may prove difficult and, because of his criminal convictions for violence he will struggle to gain employment, but he still wishes to change from his present lifestyle.

The realisation that he was failing his children awoke in him his own feelings of early childhood and he determined to change the course of his life with help from his family and ESP teachers. He was starting to become closer to his parents and confirmed this by saying:

“Me and dad have spoken more in the last year than we’ve ever done before...normally I would phone and say ” where is mum”, he goes “in town” and just puts the phone down...But now he says right “how’s your day been son”?...”how’s this been”?...”got any problems”?...it’s so different now I behave myself...I know it’s going slowly...I know it’s not going to

happen just like that, it's going to take time...but it's an improvement"
(TP2; D40, 8).

Putnam (2000: 23) describes this process as 'bonding' (see p: 91) and is evidenced by the creation of loyalty in the form of a strong family group and strengthening of this through family identity (Durkheim, 1972). Ricky appeared to believe there was some way to go to repair the broken relationship with his parents that had lasted most of his adult life, but with the support he was being given through the ESP and his own inclination he described his life as changing.

Ricky was developing what Putnam (2000: 22) describes as bridging social capital, the bringing together of people from different social backgrounds. This in turn was leading to what Putnam (2000: 23) described as bonding, seen as a way of maintaining strong group loyalty and reinforcing specific identities. In the development of these approaches learners are able to assess their skills as satisfactory and as previously discussed in this chapter 'average or above', even though the diagnostic assessment which they had undertaken identified them as having significantly limited skills if framed within the expectations of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a).

The focus of the *Skills for Life* strategy (ibid) on literacy and numeracy as skills associated with personal responsibility and related employability precludes the opportunity to consider them as social and cultural practices presenting in various forms as part of day to day lives (Papen, 2005). Central to the reframing of literacy and numeracy as social practices according to Barton (2007) is the belief that these come in

a number of forms and become obvious in their differing uses for differing purposes and in differing contexts. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) point out they are always embedded in social and cultural contexts and always involve people in some way. Such reframing argues Papen (2005) brings into question whether it is appropriate to require all to achieve the literacy and numeracy expectations set out in the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Research participants recognised that their limited LLN skills had played a role in their inability to gain sustainable employment (DfES, 2003b), primarily because of the need to undertake a significant amount of paperwork during the recruitment process. For 18% employment had not been a part of their lives whereas others had experienced some fairly significant periods of employment often with one employer. However, because of either redundancy or time out of the employment market, or because of child-care responsibilities, they found that re-entry to the labour market required a different set of skills from those required during their first point of entry into employment (ibid).

An example of this necessity for a different set of skills arose during my interview with Michael, the 54 year old male introduced on p199, who discussed the difficulties he was having when applying for jobs due to his 'poor' LLN skills. He commented that:

...”companies are asking for a CV. That’s something I’ve never had in my life. You just used to go and talk to the foreman and if he liked you the job was yours. I have had a word with my teacher ...and he turned round and said we will get you a CV sorted out...It’s just as bad if they want you to fill in an application form. You sit there and all you can do is fill in your name,

address and national insurance number...if you've got to go through the questions then that's difficult" (TP2; D52; 7).

Although at first Michael appeared to resent having to write a CV to help in getting employment, he did go on to say that it was preferable to having to fill in an application form when on a prospective employer's premises. He could have a CV prepared which took away the embarrassment of him not being capable of understanding or completing paperwork during the recruitment process. What Michael appeared to fail to realise, along with other learners, was that the content of the CV and details of past success is one of the most important factors to potential employers. This misconception was common among the learners interviewed and teachers did not appear to emphasise the importance of CV content such as employment history, education and qualifications plus skills and strengths; elements which may be difficult for ESP learners to identify because often they had little or no employment history to highlight in any positive way.

Summary

To summarise this section, all learners in this study participated in an in-depth one-to-one interview. Most of the learners discussed their speaking and listening skills in relation to their overall literacy skills, although it was clearly visible from their interviews that participants held a wide and varied vocabulary. It appeared that learners did not appreciate their ability to be able to undertake detailed conversations and analysis. Contrastingly they often stated that they preferred face-to-face encounters and reported feeling anxious and worried about using technology, including the telephone. Again, this

provides an interesting insight into the conceptualisation and contextualisation of LLN, associated to one's habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

Also all learners had mobile telephones and used them routinely as a communication tool between their social network, mainly by texting and making voice calls. The fear they associated with using the telephone was generally about having to make telephone calls beyond their social network and interacting with people who they positioned in a hierarchy of power.

What did start to emerge was the fact that learners either failed to establish any connection between qualifications, work history and their inability to find employment, or did see a link and were actively seeking out further training that would lead them to long term sustainable employment. This later group of learners were capable of achieving a higher level qualification that could be linked to a specific occupation and were actively pursuing this path with the support and encouragement of their teachers.

Previous learning episodes

Research Participants experiences during compulsory education

Here I explore the theme of non-engagement and rejection of learning by the research participants during their period of compulsory education. When discussing literacy and numeracy skills, learners linked the development of their LLN skills with their experiences of education during their formative years (ages 5-17 in England). Learner research participants described a variety of experiences that for the majority were

regarded as inadequate and not linked to their ultimate desire and competence to enter the world of work.

Research participants who were attending the Employability Skills Programme (ESP) through JCP often described a negative image of compulsory education. They related how they had been unable to cope in the comprehensive education system; they spoke about the large class sizes, the lack of attention from the teacher, their feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment at not being able to undertake tasks requested of them. Their reactions to the system were generally negative as Willis (1981: 10) found and research participants detailed actions that they termed 'rebellion' through demonstrations of anger and aggression, including behaving disruptively, attacking teachers and pupils and throwing classroom furniture. This unruly behaviour goes beyond that of 'the lads' described by Willis (1981: 12) as exhibiting a 'caged resentment' which always stopped short of outright confrontation.

Several of the learner research participants detailed recurring expulsions from school. Also, these learners described a breakdown of relationships between themselves and an individual teacher or other school staff, leading to what Bourdieu (1998) described as a social arena within which struggles occur, a *field* of structured social positions. These had shaped and produced the individual's *habitus*; a process which Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 221) suggest creates a consistent behavioural response of rejection, which evolves into a continual struggle against the specific authority, or dominant cultural perspective.

There were also more fundamental barriers to engaging in any formal learning identified in the research of Cebulla *et al.*, (2004) and Wincup (2009) described by learners, such as drug taking and drinking alcohol to excess. Willis (1981: 19) suggests that ‘smoking and drinking’ by children are associated with ‘adult values and practices’ and are undertaken openly in school because they show the individual as a more mature social being. In reality I found through this research that these practises often reinforced the marginalisation of the learners in this study and led to their early exit from compulsory education.

Some research participants described feeling so unable to cope with literacy or numeracy expectations placed on them during school lessons that they often elected to stay away from school, using expressions such as ‘wagging it’ or ‘skiving’. While others suggested their non-attendance came about because they felt there was no point to school and that time was better spent with their friends doing other activities. They were exhibiting what Curzon (1990: 195) described as ‘a lack of aroused desire to partake in a learning process’. This is aptly demonstrated by the following comments made by Andrew a 31 year old single male:

“I had a load of friends we were always wagging it. We always had somewhere to go, so I didn’t see the point in going to school...I didn’t feel it had anything to do with work and jobs” (TP1; B31, 1).

Andrew continued by discussing having some remorse for his school non-attendance but recounted his success in post-compulsory education; suggesting it was proof that he was capable of achieving a successful learning outcome.

“I wish I had gone because I know the brains are there to do things, but I just haven’t done it basically...I ended up going to college and got an NVQ in catering, and then went on to be a chef for 4 or 5 years, something like that” (TP1; B31, 2).

Here was the beginning of a tacit acknowledgement by Andrew, who recognised he was capable of doing better things, and now felt he had missed his opportunity earlier in his life, but was now being given a second chance. Huitt (2001) describes this as internal motivation that has been activated or energised via an external stimulus gained from learned behaviour and experience. Indeed, Andrew had started to recognise that his initial lack of engagement with learning was now the major barrier to obtaining more fulfilling work and it had in fact led him into a downward spiral of repetitive tedious jobs. He went on to articulate this by commenting on why he was no longer a chef saying:

“I got fed up with that...I have been going from one job to the next doing really boring stuff...and that’s basically my life in a nutshell. But coming here now I think I can change things” (TP1; B31, 2).

A further example of how a learner frames their experiences of compulsory education and now regrets their lack of participation came from Danielle, who left school in her last year due to pregnancy, is 21 and has three children, who said:

“Well looking back really I suppose I liked school, but at the time I felt I hated it. I hated it and wanted to get out, but I now wish I had done more...I was really angry with myself...I wasn’t paying attention, now I know I should have...I would be different now, I know what’s important now” (TP3; C55, 2).

Lack of motivation to learn while at school is linked to extrinsic factors by Gilbert (2002), which he suggests requires an obtainable goal or indication of reward, a need for competition or co-operation with others and the threat of punishment for non-co-operation. The threat of punishment however, suggests Banks *et al.*, (1992: 181) is

related to a feeling of rejection by learners from 'the system' or individuals such as teachers, support workers; leading them to believe that education is a subordinate function to their future economic activity.

Research participants reported they were in a system that did not reflect a capacity to provide additional support in order to enhance their LLN skills whilst still in compulsory education. The inability of the compulsory education system suggests Tomlinson (2004) to provide some people with levels of literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to meet the criteria identified through the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a); its primary purpose, is significant. Providing literacy and numeracy training programmes for adults is, at best, a second chance for adults to acquire such skills and is hindered and compromised because of the largely negative experiences of learning participants may have been exposed to during their period of compulsory schooling suggests Ananiadou *et al.*, (2004).

Several other learners attending LLN training provision recounted significant periods of time out of mainstream school. Anecdotally, some learners described irregular attendance at school from the age of 10 dwindling to very little attendance by the age of 14 and complete non-attendance by the age of 15. During my interview with Samantha, a 31 year old female who is separated with one child, she described going to boarding school at the age of 10. When questioned further it became apparent that she had had a quite disturbed childhood and admitted to being 'out of control' suggesting both her

parents and school had found her difficult to deal with. She was separated from her parents at this early age and went on to describe this stage in her life

“My school was a boarding school ...well it was a residential school...and when I did go I was more dossing than going to the class...I was sent there because I get into trouble with the police too much. Everything has changed now though. I used to get into trouble with the police and my dad couldn't handle me because I had such a bad temper...I was about 10...it was a special school...It was for kids with behaviour problems...I don't know how to put it. With kids...well their parents couldn't handle their kids easy...I didn't get any qualifications there” (TP2; D46, 2).

Due to Samantha's chaotic childhood she lacks many of the acceptable social skills that children begin learning during this stage in their lives. Bourdieu (1993) suggests school provides the setting, at a given moment in time, where social and cultural reproduction takes place. He implies membership of society is based on these principles and individuals must learn to co-operate with those who are neither relatives nor their friends in order to successfully engage in society by its rules. Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) also describe structure and distribution of social and human capital within the school system as an important factor in encouraging social skills. Durkheim (1972) however, places greater importance on family membership, which Samantha appears to have rejected from an early period in her life, as the important driver in developing the various types and sub-types of capital while identifying peer group membership as a personal choice.

In exploring the relationship between education and social reproduction Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 87) put forward a theory which they suggested continually (re)produced indirect cultural mechanisms. In Samantha's case she was placed in an

environment where children are expected to observe strict routines linked too little or no social interaction with family reducing as suggested by Grenfield (2004) their ability to develop and establish normal relationships either at this time or even later in life. The institutionalisation of an individual as a child can, according to Cote (1996), also cause developmental delays and lead to behaviour disorders such as aggression withdrawal or self-harm. For Samantha becoming institutionalised at an early stage in her life appears to have increased her aggressiveness and contributed to her lack of social skills.

Since leaving school she had only had one job which lasted 13 weeks as a security guard and admitted she had not been able to sustain any long term relationship. Now aged 31 and with a young son, she was trying to be what she described as a 'good mother' and one way of doing this she thought, was to improve her chances within the job market by getting sustainable employment. It became clear during this part of the interview that on reflection, her historically and socially reinforced *habitus*, its interaction with *fields* of influence from family and state, had produced a *doxa* of behaviour she was trying not to inculcate upon her own child (Bourdieu; 1993).

Learner research participants generally described being schooled through the mainstream system and attending until the compulsory leaving age. However, they regularly reported missing lessons when they felt unable to contribute to the session or to meet the expectations of the teachers.

Research Participants experiences in non-mainstream schooling

For a number of the learners, their experience of school had often taken place outside mainstream schooling, in what they termed 'special schools' or 'backward schools'; which are old and negative terms. This type of school traditionally worked with learners considered to have learning difficulties or disabilities. For some learners they seem to believe they were cheated by this school environment, suggesting that the development of their LLN skills was not targeted and the attitude towards learning by the school was less than satisfactory, as described below by Brian, a single 42 year old male who still finds reading and writing difficult:

"I went to a special school and left there when I was 16...I went because my learning was low...First I went to a normal school but I couldn't keep up. So they sent me to a special school for slow kids. I've never been able to read or write properly, I just can't pick it up...I have never been good at learning. Even the special school it was just like the other one. The teachers didn't do much to help, you asked but mostly you just sat there like a dummy. Because at that time they thought you were lazy. Now they know you're not lazy you need special needs" (TP2; D48, 2).

This environment could be described as solving, confusing or postponing the learner's problems in the short term and even the long term suggest (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994). Field (2005) submits there is often a commitment within the school to professional goals that are independent of the functional needs of their learners. Brian was not alone in his description of a feeling that these schools were being run in an intentional way that precluded any progress for them as learners. Steven, also described his attendance at a special school as one where progress was not encouraged by his teachers:

"Well I went to a special school in Chocolate Town. So...you know...I had learning difficulties...yeah for my reading and that...They weren't really

bothered about us there...so we didn't really learn much there. We sat down all day or played games" (TP2; D47, 1).

Micky, introduced on p: 194 also agreed with these learners in their opinion that progress was not expected or required by saying:

"Like at school, because I had learning difficulties...Obviously, initially I was put into special classes and obviously that meant that my English in particular, wasn't very good. Eventually they sent me to a different school a special one but really my English wasn't very good there either" (TP2; D41, 1).

This feeling of being isolated and left to 'get on with it' was spoken of by those interviewed who had admitted not being able to survive in main stream schooling. What did appear significant from learner responses was that there is a systematic misrecognition and an unintended consequence of an expected lack of progress for them when attending these special schools. It appears from the learner responses that as identified by Cote (1996) the teachers were reinforcing the conceptualised role of these institutions and perpetuating a system of cultural and social reproduction that labelled them as failures. However, one learner Paul, a 43 year old male with one child and separated from his partner, was able to describe a more positive result from his attendance at a special school and did relate making some progress:

"I didn't really get on at school I had issues with reading and writing. They weren't bothered about us then (comparing to ESP here), yeah they didn't care about it back then like...and nor did I really. They just didn't do anything...At the other school you had a good teacher...had one teacher that put me in a special class to help me learn a little bit because they thought I was dyslexic. I was like I do things back to front sometimes. This one teacher did pick up on it and it did help me a bit, but I didn't have enough time to catch up" (TP2; D45, 1).

For some learners this possibility of inadequacy in their LLN capabilities had contributed to their present interest in addressing their low LLN skill levels and how they are finding

more help is now available. In the above example Paul alludes to the difference he finds in teaching and learning on the ESP, which as Parsons (2002) suggests offers a more humanistic approach to people's desire for success and sees people as having unlimited potential to improve themselves and seek fulfilment .

Summary

It was not uncommon for learner research participants to admit they had not engaged with a school culture during their period of compulsory education and indeed recalled periods when they failed to attend school completely. Just as Morgan (2002) determined, I recorded learners' negative feelings towards compulsory education and their inability to see the relevance it had to the eventual goal of work. Cultural reproduction for learners seemed to be taken from the standpoint of personal determination and not from any external influence (Bourdieu, 1997), leading to what Jenkins (2002) identified as a rejection of the institutional depiction of what was required of the learners while in the compulsory education system. This in turn had led to rebellion and what Willis (1981: 33) described as, a counter culture which appears to have had more value to them than that offered by school. Their structure of their social network as suggested by Putnam *et al*: (1993), was developed in such a way that the learners could not find an acceptable identity that existed within the school system and so they attempted to create an identity outside the norms of the society they were expected to inhabit.

During interviews it became evident as Coleman (1998) suggests, that rejection of the norms of society involves a social network, which also requires shared norms, but these do not necessarily constitute a societal good. Parsons and Bynner (2002) also point to the downside of this social network as creating the exclusion of outsiders, restrictions on individual freedom and a downward levelling of norms. Here I could see a link, which was described by learners such as Ricky (see p: 208), to settings in which group cohesion is reinforced by a common belief of adversity leading to resistance to mainstream society (ibid).

Some learners were unable to cope with their position within compulsory education because they described themselves as having special needs. They regularly attended what are termed special schools but recalled feelings of disappointment from attendance at these schools. They recalled having the same problems with learning and of concern with teachers in this environment who reinforced their feelings of failure. Learners who had attended special schools however, did seem more motivated to try and improve their skills once introduced to the Employability Skills Programme (ESP). For all learners perceptions of improving their skills may be essential to the decisions these adult learners made about commencing learning programmes such as ESP's. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) argue that these perceptions contribute significantly to their persistence on these programmes after they begin and embark upon new educational and employment ventures more generally. Overall, learners reported more positive feelings about being able to obtain a learning outcome now than at any time in their past.

Choosing new opportunities

As a result of the pilot studies carried out by JCP, which took place in 2006 and the introduction of the Employability Skills Programme (ESP) the then New Labour Government in 2007 (DIUS, 2007) introduced a number of measures to force the long-term unemployed to address any LLN deficiencies. These included the threat of financial sanctions for anyone refusing to attend LLN learning provision (ibid). Evidence obtained from the Employment Zones in the UK and presented by Freud (2007) suggests that not all benefit claimants are aware that they have a choice regarding any learning provision that is offered to them. They tend not to exercise that option and are therefore allocated to learning providers or courses randomly (ibid).

Choice was also closely associated with other activities and consequences; if unemployed adults choose not to attend training programmes, the consequences were likely to be removal of welfare benefits (ibid).

Limitations of training programmes from which to choose was a recurring discussion with learners attending the ESP through the Jobcentre Plus system. The possibility of a choice of training provision from an identified group of programmes seemed to be a concept which few of the learner research participants could associate with. They also described being assigned to the ESP and having minimal, if any, involvement in the decision-making process. There appears to be a culturally constructed legitimacy around who has 'choice'; this is depicted by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001: 45) as a 'social and political battlefield' with tensions existing in and between different *fields* of society. They further argue that it is:

...”not about whether choice does or should exist, but about how far this choice should be constrained or unconstrained by external intervention”. (ibid: 45)

Ananiadou *et al.*, (2004) highlight how the perceived value and usefulness of the employability skills being undertaken was mainly associated with the learners’ personal assessment of their LLN skills and their involvement in the decision to attend the specific training programme. Just as Ananiadou, (ibid) reported I noted evidence of a strong relationship with need and value; those who had self-assessed their LLN needs had a greater tendency to assign value and meaning to the training programme than those who did not believe their LLN skills were negatively influencing their life and had not freely elected to attend a training programme to develop these skills.

Yeo (2002) put forward the theory that through the introduction of LLN core curricula, national test qualifications and revised teacher training programmes, the New Labour Government presented a prescribed training package that worked to ensure that learners can be labelled and compartmentalised, both socially and economically focused on the development of their LLN skills. However, it is important to recognise as Feinstein *et al.*, (2003) point out that some learners undertake training programmes, because they deliver tangible evidence of outcomes and progress through qualification achievements, have a significant aspirational goal and one which they wish to achieve in their desire to obtain employment and successful economic activity.

The training merry-go-round

The repetition of training programmes became a significant feature of the discussion around the range and choice of these training programmes. Once again, those learners

who were prescribed training programmes, recounted stories of attending the same programme repeatedly; this is particularly the case within the Jobcentre Plus system. Several learners also told of undertaking LLN skills assessments several times – as an unemployed benefit claimant, or on entry to prison, on exit and into probation and yet again as an unemployed claimant. For some suggest Hasluck and Green (2007), attending training along the same or similar theme had been a pattern of their existence since leaving the mandatory system of education.

When speaking to teachers about the progression of learners in their LLN skills, they stated that often learners were able to increase either their literacy or numeracy skills by one level. The DfES (2002a) reported learners who entered the training course at Entry Level 1 in their literacy skills were often able to obtain an Entry Level 1 result, consolidating this level and sometimes learners obtained an Entry Level 2 result. An example of the importance teachers placed on qualification outcomes was expressed by Zoe, a teacher working in Motor Town, who said:

“Being able to gain a qualification by an individual is often good for the learners who haven’t done very well in past exam situations. If they are coming from a bad previous learning experience then we can support them through the adult learning curriculum by showing them their new qualification is equal to a GCSE. That’s still how people recognise these qualifications, so that has real value to them to know they have passed that today” (TP1; A22, 6).

During observations I noted that teachers were much more likely to describe and discuss their learners’ skills in relation to national pre-set levels and measurable outcomes linked to future employability, rather than as described by Bynner (2006) a social practice approach. This was found to be linked to the implementation of the *Skills*

for Life strategy (DfES, 2003a) and the management of pedagogic action in the form of national frameworks for the teaching, learning and appraisal of adult LLN skills, highlighting the relationship of LLN skills with employability (ibid). This is in direct contrast to the historical LLN curriculum identified by Jude (2010) as being based on constructing adult LLN teaching and learning relating to an individual's identified requirement, such as letter writing or report writing.

Teachers were asked to consider the sustainability of learners' LLN developments following the end of the training programme; particularly focusing on learners who had experienced repeat attendance on training programmes. When interviewing Peter, a senior teacher, he described how this repeated attendance affected the learners and what could happen when they finished ESP's:

"Well you have a mixed group, some of them do some learning and some may not actively engage as you would like... When they come here you have to try and move them off that cycle... Most realise they have reached a certain point and have realised that they have to make a change in their lives. I would say about 90% wake up to the opportunity but of course some have come round and round again. Some do need several bites at the cherry, especially the pre-entry. You just don't know how long an individual's journey is going to take... You can herd these people around, but when they finish here some are just going to slink back to where they were" (TP1; B30, 12).

The last sentence in the discussion above is quite serious and indicates how some teachers take a resigned view of their learners. Progression in this context from the point of view of the teachers can be described more as maintenance of the present circumstances, rather than any capacity on their part to arouse enthusiasm within learners, or desire for learning advancement.

The need for groups of learners to leave a formal learning environment for significant periods of time presents a difficulty. Drawing on the work of Comings *et al.*, (1999), there is good evidence to suggest that flexible training programmes that enable learners to persist in these training programmes over long periods of time provide a framework in which participants can evidence measurable progression in their literacy and numeracy skills. However, teachers did state that if they had a repeat learner who had, for example, achieved an Entry Level 2 qualification in literacy during their previous attendance, they would only offer them activities which would develop their skills to that required of an Entry Level 3 qualification. Alternatively, should a learner have needs in numeracy as well, they could choose to focus on that skill instead.

The DWP focus (DfEE, 1999) is on progression through qualification outcomes enabling learners to achieve at Entry Level 3 and therefore return to paid work. For the participants on the ESP this is often an unachievable target and once again they perceive themselves to have failed in an educational environment. Hodkinson *et al.*, (1996) identified a clear association, which linked current learning experiences with previous experiences of compulsory education. While Parsons and Bynner (2002) propose that this works to reinforce an individual's place within the socially constructed positioning between the dominating and the dominated. Even if a learner does achieve a qualification at any of the levels as identified by Bynner and Parsons (1998) it clear that such skills need to be used on a regular basis in order for them to be sustained.

For learners attending training programmes, whilst there was some repetitiveness, the learners' discussions often described progression over time. However, learners did undertake assessments to move 'up through the levels' and this could be, as Coleman (1998) found the reason they felt they had progressed. They described undertaking a number of programmes with different learning providers, but linked progressively, rather than repetitively, supporting what Comings *et al.*, (1999) refer to as providing consolidation.

This feeling of progression by learners according to Bynner and Parsons (1998) in their work 'Use it or Lose It,' may not be a reality. In their research they found that learners who completed a programme of learning, but failed to find work, would when re-tested six months later, have returned to the level they achieved before attending any learning programmes (*ibid*). This has serious implications for both learners and teachers, because under DWP (2005) rules, on completion of a programme of study learners are barred by JCP from attending another one for a period of six months. If they have not consolidated their learning in the interim they are likely to return to learning provision to start all over again, extending the time required for any progression.

The teachers expressed awareness that the ability of learners to maintain their LLN development independently of the Jobcentre Plus training programme was unlikely unless they obtained employment or continued their education at other teaching and learning establishments. They confirmed Bynner and Parsons (1998) findings that their repeat learners who had remained unemployed and did not regularly draw on literacy

and numeracy skills within their daily activities were more likely to lose these skills and return at their previous start level. This was especially true for those learners at the lower entry levels.

Life changes linked to choices for research participants

One significant outcome from the research identifies those who were most readily able to describe a choice of provision, generally described attendance associated with a change in their life; a 'life transition' (Banks *et al.*, 1992: 41) or 'turning point' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 97) and a 'critical incident', as previously noted by (Atkin *et al.*, 2005: 52).

Bynner and Parsons (2005) see life changes as supporting the hypothesis that participation in education projects is frequently linked to these changes in life circumstances. However, they also reported a contradiction in how this response can occur, because a change in life circumstances can create a window of opportunity and growth for some but can be debilitating for others (*ibid*). I also found that some people may decide to participate in educational activities following life altering events such as changes in job, the breakup of a relationship, having children, bereavement and retirement as this is often seen by the individual as an opportunity for effecting change.

It was not unusual for a learner to describe suffering a 'critical incident' (Atkin *et al.*, 2005: 52) in their youth that hindered their educational progress and now in adulthood they wished to address their LLN needs. A number of the learner research participants reported recurrent experiences of training programmes through the welfare system that

had not led to either the development of their LLN skills or to employment. In these cases the learner research participants' reasons for attending appear intrinsically motivated (Lepper *et al.*, 1973) however, the majority had been mandated to attend provision so had in reality been extrinsically motivated (*ibid*). Les, a 45 year old married man with one child who comes from Northern Ireland and had spent a number of years serving in the army there before leaving to live in England, recounted an incident which occurred when he was aged 11 which led to him being away from school at a crucial time during his formative education saying that:

“As a kid I spent 3 months in a hospital bed. My kid brother stabbed me in the eye when we were playing sword fighting. I was actually away from school all year. I think that’s why I ended up at the back of the class. It never bothered me, I did learn how to count and spell my name”
(TP1; B26, 8).

In reality by the age of 11 his reading and writing skills should have been advanced beyond those he described above and his present LLN ability of entry level 3 in literacy (appendix 13: 301). Other learners I found like Alvarez and Urla (2002) often appeared to feel the need during their interview to justify their 'poor' LLN skills with stories regarding absence from school. This can be described as reflecting a functionalist model of LLN as described by Barton (2007: 189) which “holds the individual accountable, not only for their successes, but equally for their failures”. A further example of this occurred with Mohamed, introduced on p184, who discussed how his formative schooling was compromised due to a change in life circumstances and how he gave up at this time and has subsequently struggled to develop his LLN skills:

“Well me old man died in my last year at school. I didn’t really have any interest after that. My mum died when I was four and my father brought me up and helped me with my school work. He really encouraged me to

do well at school. But I just, well, lost interest and a lot of work and like, whatever, I just couldn't get back into it so I've come to improve my English and my maths and like" (TP1; B32, 2)).

What Mohamed suggests is that not engaging with teaching and learning during his last year at school has resulted in him having low levels of LLN. However, when looking at appendix 13: 301, it can be seen that by this time in his life he should have already achieved at least level 1 or 2 in literacy and numeracy and have built upon this in adulthood.

In the next extract, Michael, a 38 year old male married with two children who finds reading difficult, describes how he had come to depend on his son to support him with his literacy needs. When his son left school it created a problem for Michael as his son became less available to help and Michael found himself struggling when his daughter asked him for help. This was the 'turning point' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) that led him to seek support outside of the family network (Durkheim, 1973):

"I'm here to improve my skills. I need to be better at reading and writing so I can do a CV and get a job. Things really came to a head for me...when my daughter...she asked me to spell something and I just couldn't. If my wife was in then she would do it. And like if she's in, she used to help her and I said, to myself this is silly and, you know, so I just went to the jobcentre and asked them to send me here" (TP2; D39, 4).

Correspondingly, these learners have recognised as put forward by the Social Exclusion Unit (2004) that their poor LLN skills are becoming challenging for them in managing both their daily life and in obtaining employment. These factors together have led the learners to seek support to develop their skills.

For all learners, choice meant different things. The choice to attend or not attend training or the choice implied by Bourdieu (1997) that is associated with identity. It appeared that learners relied heavily on others to advise them about which course to undertake, or whether there was a choice to be made between a course and where to attend. When asked why he started this course Steven the 44year old single male with a partner and two children discussed previously, told how he had gone to the Jobcentre to ask his adviser whether there was a course he could attend in order to improve his English and Maths and she had referred him to the ESP:

“This one was recommended (the ESP) from the jobcentre to be honest with you...It was two things – one I need to get a job, because it’s a lot of agro being out of work. The second one, I decided that it’s about time I learnt...do it without missing out on my children’s growth...growing up as I’m missing out on that...helping them. I might as well do my education, even if it’s only for a few weeks, it’s something to do” (TP2; D47, 8).

Steven was describing a ‘turning point’ (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 97); having previously had no inclination to address his low levels of LLN he now felt it was appropriate in order to gain employment and to bond with his children. Ben, a single male aged 22, who admitted to being unable to read properly also described wanting to improve his literacy but had not known where to go for this. He also approached his JCP adviser and from their conversation about the ESP decided he would like to ‘give it a go’. If, as Bourdieu (1977) suggests, individuals are an integral part of the circumstances in which they exist and which contribute to their social identity, then the above learners are demonstrating that social life is not accomplished on the basis of rules but that improvisation is the exploitation or manipulation of time.

Ben told me during our interview that his Father had died recently and it had left him feeling isolated and vulnerable and that was why he now needed to do something about his low level of LLN. This had been the catalyst leading to a 'tipping point' (Gladwell, 2010) that had resulted in him joining the ESP:

"I can't read that good my reading isn't excellent, or my writing. I can write, but it's just like...I'm just saying it's like spelling I'll struggle with the spelling....When I'm writing I can't spell none of this stuff like, because, I have problems with my English. I've had spelling problems, I'm having problems reading and I'm having problems with my maths. That's why I spoke with the adviser and asked if I could come here" (TP3; C53, 7).

It is evident from the previous extracts that, although the learners seek out advice on an appropriate programme of study, they do not always have a real role in the process of choosing the training programme they attend and that the course as indicated by Ahrenkiel and Illeris (2002) is often being given to them. The extracts also highlight the balance of control, with the state, through Jobcentre Plus, controlling the actions and activities of its actors (Yeo, 2002), deciding what those in receipt of welfare benefits should be doing, even where the learner wishes voluntarily to address their low LLN needs as found by Johnstone and Rivera (1965). This issue is further illustrated by Bourdieu (1990: 63) when implying "practice is the product of processes which are neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious-which actors know-without knowing-the right thing to do".

During their interviews I encouraged learner research participants to describe their feelings about their current training programme: how useful or valuable had they found the programme. They described a range of experiences, both positive and negative and identified the value of the training programme as being closely aligned with their

initial motivations for attendance. A further component associated with the choice of training programme, which I discussed with learner research participants, was their motivation and reasons for attending the employability skills programme. This produced interesting discussions, bringing about a range of responses from participants, both learners and teachers, regarding what Lepper *et al.*, (1973) advocates are both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations.

Learners' motivation to attend training programmes appeared to fall into two broad categories: voluntary attendance: those who had taken the decision to commence a training programme and non-voluntary attendance; those who had no ownership or, at best, as described by Joyce *et al.*, (2006) a diminished ownership over their decision to attend training.

Learners, who had volunteered to attend training, often as a result of a change in their lives which was beyond their control, mainly recounted very positive and constructive learning experiences, as demonstrated in the following extract from Derek's second interview:

"They teach you more, not like school, here they explain to you on a board like and they help you out if you need any help. If you say you're stuck they'll help you. They have more time for you; at school they never did...They just said do this and we'll give you a certain amount of time to do it and if you made a mistake they wouldn't help you like. But here if you make a mistake they'll help you. There's more support and you're not forced to gallop through things, you take your time. If you see something you can't do you just ask...it does encourage you like" (TP3; C67, 5).

For some learner research participants there was often a natural time for a 'life transition' (Banks *et al.*, 1992: 41) to occur and this was often age related, with results

from this study suggesting it to be between the ages of 27 - 33. It became apparent during interviews that most of the learners held their teacher in high regard and were found to be reluctant to describe having a difficult relationship between them as a learner and their teacher(s). Bourdieu (1990) describes characteristics of valued relationships with significant others like those of teacher/learner as generating social capital. While Coleman (1998: 101) sees this relationship as one which generates social capital that is not necessarily owned by the individual but rather arises as a resource which is available to them.

Brooks *et al*, (2006) reported that learners who had been told to attend JCP programmes of study were likely to be doing so unwillingly, but through attendance had found their lives going in a different direction, often in a way that they may not have previously thought of. The following extract taken from my second interview with Janson, introduced on p190, lends some substance to this thinking and confirms a change in his goal for attending the ESP:

“I hadn’t thought of doing any training in order to get back into work. No not really, but now my goals have changed and coming here has helped me achieve what I needed. It has helped me get a qualification so I’ll be able to take my forklift truck licence again. I’m working towards that now when I’ve finished this course. Yes being here has helped me regain my confidence. I’m sure I will be able to complete the full course now” (forklift) (TP3; C72, 2).

What did appear significant was the way reluctant learners were quickly assimilated into the positive ethos of the Employability Skills Programme and became engaged learners. Learner research participants who had often relied on welfare benefits from a few months to more than 20 years have evolved into what Ball (2008: 75) described as

'compliant passive actors' through the process of attending prescribed training programmes in order to continue to receive benefits. I believe this to be a significant finding and one where learners appeared to have taken on an identity that they associate with being long-term unemployed. These elements, taken collectively, could be associated with what Coffield (1999) describes as being institutionalised. Even though there are no tangible structures, such as walls, there are some similarities between learners attending the employability skills programme that could be seen as representative of groups living within an institution, in that they take on similar behaviour patterns and habits, such as self-limiting beliefs, compliance and a passive quality (ibid). Learners appeared as Coben (2002) found to enjoy the routine of 'having somewhere to go', enjoying the company of their 'colleagues' and the development of their confidence to interact with other people. This is described by Coffield (1999: 81) as 'institutionalisation of behaviours to align with an identity of unemployment and their unemployability'. Institutionalisation is a term widely used to refer to the way a concept, social role or a particular value or mode of behaviour becomes a process that is embedded within an organisation, social system, group or society as a whole (ibid). Often it carries a negative connotation and is applied to vulnerable or damaged human beings through the application of flexible systems of social medical or legal controls. You become institutionalised when you have lived for a long time performing a set routine and find you cannot easily live outside that routine. People can feel lost without familiar structure in their life and adopt a defined role in all aspects of life and fear that structure being removed (ibid).

Summary

This section has investigated the reasons why learners are attending employability skills training programmes. Learners who are motivated to attend as a result of a 'critical incident' (Atkin *et al.*, 2005: 52) show a very positive experience, embracing the learning opportunities made available to them and working constructively towards achieving their goals. However, those who are attending programmes because of extrinsic factors (Lepper *et al.*: 1973), for example under the direction of Jobcentre Plus portray a different picture; initially attending reluctantly and without any demonstration of desire to develop their LLN skills. However, this attitude changed very quickly after starting learning provision in all but a small number of instances, where these learners left the training provider within the first days or weeks of starting. The significant difference between the learners on the ESP and other programmes of study appears to be actual engagement in the training programme regardless of the learners' original motivation for joining the programme.

In addition, for all learners, the idea of choice (DWP, 2005) in selecting and deciding which, if any training programmes to attend is limited and, at best, is linked to a network of individuals who can provide appropriate information, advice and guidance about various training programmes. At worst, learners are directed without consideration of individual needs and with little or no idea about the programme's content and their reasons for being there (*ibid.*).

During the study, learner research participants provided a diverse picture of their LLN skills, ranging from extremely poor to above average; concepts which are according to Putnam (2000) socially and culturally constructed. Additionally, learners discussed the choices of training programmes for them and how the possibility of choice is one that is not largely considered by many. The next section of this chapter considers how learners attending training programmes conceptualised and measured progression and success and how this aligned with the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2003a) indicators.

What next

During the interviews learners were asked about their aspirations and plans for the future. Learners reported a wide range of benefits associated with attending training programmes. These included the traditional economically-focussed goals of gaining appropriate knowledge and skills to achieve measurable goals and outcomes (such as qualifications Grinyer, 2005) which could lead to employment opportunities. There were also less tangible outcomes, described by Coleman (1998) as those associated with social and personal development; linked to the importance of camaraderie and friendship groups, the development of self-efficacy and confidence, as well as a feeling of belonging. Interviewees were able to recount these less tangible outcomes during their second interview which took place after they had spent a number of weeks with the learning provider. For some learners like Paul, the 43 year old male who has one child and is separated from his partner, this was the first time they had entered a learning environment since leaving school and therefore they often made a comparison between the two environments when discussing their progress:

“I have progressed here. I like it, everyone helps each other. It’s nice to work in a group, you make friends and it’s like you can help each other as well. Sometimes you can help each other and sometimes you have to do it for yourself...It’s nice to go and talk to someone if you’re struggling. It wasn’t like that at school. At school you’re different, you’re told you’re stupid, go and sit at the back...which is wrong, I realise that now” (TP2; D48, 4).

This is particularly interesting as it links closely to the previous discussion in this chapter and in the Literature Review on social networks and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993: 76). All learner research participants reported that they valued the shared experience of ‘belonging’ (Coleman, 1998: 36). The research identified as Webb *et al.*, (2002) found that individuals occupy a position in a multi-faceted space, where they are not defined by social class membership, but by the amounts of each kind of capital they possess. This capital included their value of social networks, which Field (2008) hypothesised could be used to produce or reproduce inequality. This is seen as both a positive or negative process, but often means individuals do not look beyond their own experience to see alternatives to their present situation (*ibid*). Social class is seen by society to preserve social privileges across generations (Coben, 2002) however, equality of opportunity and higher social mobility over generations it is thought can be achieved through education (*ibid*).

Learners described the importance of sharing the training experience with people who had similar learning needs and similar social backgrounds; again, this is linked with earlier discussions both in this chapter and the Literature Review around ‘institutionalisation’ and ‘homogeneity’ of ‘unemployed learners’ (Atkin and O’Grady, 2006: 32) and their focus which becomes much more individual, heterogeneous and

linked to qualification outcomes with employment aspirations. During my second interview with Theresa, a 40 year old single parent with two children, she also talked of her success and how she linked this personal development with development of her self-efficiency and confidence saying:

“I’ve got on alright here, I passed the first part of my maths exam last week...I’m dead chuffed, John (Teacher) said it’s one of the best he’s seen so far (referring to Theresa’s previous attempts), that’s made me feel quite good ...Like I said I was quite nervous when I first started, but as I’ve got to know everybody in the class you can have a good laugh as well as do your work. I’m a bit more confident all round now, especially as far as maths is concerned...It’s restored my confidence because I’m coming out and mixing with people who are in the same boat as me. It’s worth coming here just for that, but also hopefully the qualification will help me get a better more interesting job” (TP2; D56, 2).

The discussion with Theresa led into what Illeris (2004) describes as learners measuring progression in relation to either their LLN skills or in relation to the previously identified wider apparent benefits to attending the training programme. Interestingly, even though the majority of learners attending training provision were not always positive about the classroom experience in relation to the development of their LLN skills or their employability skills (DfES, 2002b), two positive experiences were recounted: one was related to the attendance on learning provision, which they associated with or saw as work- experience (Kerka, 2000) and the other was the connection with the development of social capital through meeting and engaging with different people in different classes of society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Bourdieu, 1997).

The idea of belonging to a group or 'tribe' was considered a valued aspect of the training programme; although the training programme itself was held in little regard in relation to the construction of a 'place' for people of what Bourdieu (1997) describes as similar *doxa* to congregate. Learners *habitus* it can be argued, through the findings, has been historically and socially reinforced, while their interactions with *fields* controlled by the state has created their *doxa* of suitable behaviours (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), including the acceptance of the power relations (Field, 2005) that have shaped their views and acceptance of the structures in which they now find themselves.

For learners it was easy for them to fall into the trap of doing something that is comfortable for them, but often still did not allow them growth away from this safe zone. There is a danger that if they continue within this environment for any length of time the thought of experiencing any new venture becomes more remote as they resist leaving an environment described by Kambouri and Francis (1994) as safe and not prone to any unexpected surprises. The evidence for this can be seen in the reluctance of some learners to leave a programme at its end and as intimated by Wedege and Evans (2006) their continued attempts to relive the camaraderie they had found.

Learner research participants were asked whether they felt they had made any progress with their LLN skills during their attendance at the training provision and the majority of learners self-reported small improvements in their LLN skills. They also commented on the development of their self-efficacy (Field, 2005) through, for example, feeling confident enough to try new skills. In addition, however, learners also described the

equal importance of gaining a tangible outcome to their training, such as qualifications. Feinstein *et al.*, (2003) suggest it is not unreasonable to expect learners to have this set of aspirations, that is the traditional economically-focussed goals of gaining appropriate knowledge and skills to achieve a qualification outcome and ultimately employment. However, the other more abstract outcomes of the training programme mentioned above appear to be valued more and hold more significance to the learner research participants in this study.

During my second interview with Ben, who is in his early twenties and has never worked, he was describing a growth in his confidence and an increase in the development of friendship groups, what Bourdieu (1997: 50) described as ‘investment strategies aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships’. However, Putnam (2000: 415) provides a clearer explanation for this growth in confidence, when describing it as ‘an expansion in associational activity the process of bringing together relative strangers on a regular basis’. Ben had started to establish what Putnam (*ibid*) suggests was, a wider variety of networks and values which were fostering within him a general increase in reciprocity and trust, which he linked to having somewhere to go.

“Well it gets you out of the house doesn’t it? When I didn’t use to do anything...when I was just stuck in the house it was hard to meet people. Now it’s getting me out, I’m meeting new people and just having a good laugh with everybody...It’s good to come here because you’re meeting new people every time. I’ve said this to my mum I’ve met loads of new people...I don’t come here just to get out of the house though, I come because I want to learn “ (TP3; C53, 10).

Whether this last comment by Ben is genuine or not it can be interpreted as the act of attendance being the first step in learning and as found by Ward and Edwards (2002)

there is an opportunity here for teachers to promote the social benefits of learning. The following quote from Paul, introduced on p: 230, also provides an example of how learners felt the training programme had added to what is often termed social capital (Bourdieu, 1997), but in reality is more akin to the development of self-confidence and construction of 'social networks', which Putnam (2000: 415) suggests is an increase in associational activity. I had found it difficult during my first interview with Paul to get him discuss in any depth his history prior to his attendance on the ESP. However, there was a noticeable difference in his more positive responses during our second interview where he told me:

"I have made a lot of friends here; I have got on alright with people in there, we all work together...I help them out and sometimes they help me. It has made me a lot more confident in myself. Like I say I was shy, I've always been a shy person and things like that, but it's been worth coming here...I mean meeting different people; meeting different friends. I do read a bit now and I've bought some books...well I never used to go to libraries, but I do now" (TP2; D64, 11).

My second interview with Maxell, the 35 year old Jamaican who is married with five children, also confirmed this feeling within the learner of having increased their confidence and in doing so their ability to progress.

"I have got on well here...yes I feel more comfortable now, like I say I wasn't when I first came here because there was the pressure on me to be working. I'm getting things to challenge me and that kind of motivates you a bit more. Now if I think something isn't right I ask the teacher, when I first came here I wouldn't do that. To get self-confidence is a big move, I didn't really have it when I started the programme, I was a bit nervous and it made me not well. Here it's good they listen and they encourage you"

The previous quotes confirm that learners did not necessarily associate progress with any formal measures, such as qualifications, but as Field (2005) found with increased confidence in their ability to deal with day-to-day activities and tasks. The most

significant benefit which individuals valued and associated with the training programme, regardless of the institution in which they were studying or the reasons why they were attending, appears to be this development of self-confidence and for some, the continuation of a 'social network' (Putnam, 2000: 296), rather than the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

The obligations and expectations placed on learner research participants in relation to the development of LLN skills appear to be a socially constructed and imposed requirement. Explained by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 93) as a constructed and legitimate activity carried out by the dominant few and misrecognised by those dominated, as an individual social responsibility contributing to the social and economic wellbeing of the cultural arbitrary. Jarvis (2006: 107) describes how the Government, is using training programmes, in order to control the actions of society by using the construction of 'social capital' to act as a mechanism for 'social control', ensuring that all members of society are located within a hierarchical structure of positions from which there is little movement. Jarvis (*ibid*) suggests the ultimate aim for learners in this hierarchy is to encourage them to leave their comfort zone, tackle the unexpected and explore job and career opportunities.

Making progress

Research participants in the study who had attended previous training programmes with private training providers repeatedly recounted their dislike of these training programmes, of the classroom environment and the learning tasks they were asked to

undertake. It was somewhat surprising, then, towards the end of my interviews to hear learners describing the mostly positive progressions they felt they had made in their LLN skills during their time on the employability skills programme (ESP). This could be for reasons suggest Bynner and Parsons (1998) such as:

- They were being required to use their LLN skills on a more regular basis and there is likely to be an improvement in skills associated with increased usage over time.
- They did actually enjoy the training programme but were reluctant to voice this view to others in their social network.
- They had actually made no progress and did not want to share this information with the researcher.

(Bynner and Parsons, 1998: 83-84)

These skills developments reported by learners have not been measured in a formal manner by the researcher, but are personal reflections of developments by the learners. For example, when Michael the 54 year old divorced male was asked during his second interview whether attending the ESP had helped him he responded:

“Since I’ve been here in the maths I’ve learnt more in there in the last 15 weeks than what I have done in all my time at school “ (TP2; D52, 9).

This response is, of course, subjective and could just reflect reinforcement of learning from previous teaching and learning episodes. When discussing progress with Jamie-Leigh, a 22 year old single female who had been out of work for 6 months, she also believed she had improved her maths and English abilities, but also recognised that this may just be reinforcement of previous learning:

“I’ve got on good here, very good, I have improved a lot...You do actually learn here, the work you’re doing does really improve you...I think I had forgotten just about everything since leaving school, it just refreshes you coming here. I’m fully confident I will get my qualification here” (TP3; C69, 13).

Whilst undertaking the fieldwork phase of this study I found a number of learners involved in the ESP training pathway wanting to obtain qualifications. They had become sufficiently motivated, as Zimmerman and Ringle (1981) point out, to persist until this goal was achieved. Although previously they had thought qualifications were only for 'clever' people (McGivney, 1990), they were now finding their resolve was linked to persistence as described by Pintrich and Schunk (2002) and they had become determined to succeed through higher accomplishments. However, Wolf (2002) in recognising that those without good levels of basic academic skills are disadvantaged argues that targeted education programmes for disadvantaged individuals are both costly and inefficient and questioned the New Labour Government's enthusiasm and focus on education as "the engine of economic growth" (ibid: 15).

The association reported by learners between 'qualification' and 'cleverness' was an interesting finding and was also the reason given for lack of previous progress in work by McGivney (1990). Some learners were able to describe the hierarchical acquisition of academic qualifications (Gergen, 1968), which lead to professional career pathways that were initially beyond their reach. However, most of the learners associated qualifications with school-based qualifications that had been unattainable for them in the past. For these learners, the construction of their *habitus*, formed through the experiences of the social networks and *fields* (Bourdieu, 1998:72), which they were exposed to did not include a familiarity or association with people obtaining qualifications; more often learners described associations with people who had similar backgrounds in terms of skills level and employment histories.

Progression for these learners was not associated with qualification outcomes, but as suggested by Field (2005) with the development of skills which allowed them to develop more confidence in managing their day-to-day activities. What is important for a learner in terms of progression is to achieve independence suggests Jarvis (2007); independence from the institutional structures of society which have played significant roles in defining and determining their lived experiences to date.

Typically, these may have included care homes, social workers, probation services, judicial systems, the police service and penal establishments. Education, for these learners, is seen by Bynner and Parsons, (2005) as a significant factor in achieving this independence. In the following extract from my interview with Paul, introduced on p224, he describes how important it is that he is able to write by himself. Progression for Paul is associated as Jarvis (2007) exemplifies with the construction of skills that enable independence.

“Now I’ve got my certificate I feel a bit proud, a bit proud. I think it’ll make my life, not a hell of a lot easier because I’m going to have a hard struggle when I finish but like, filling out forms, I’m going to feel confident in like filling out job applications. I’m going to feel confident about writing my own CV and I’m going to feel confident about writing letters and things like that” (TP2; D45; 8).

Research Participants future aspirations

All learner research participants were asked to think about their future aspirations. The purpose of this question was to ascertain to what extent learners linked future aspirations, future employability and employment with their current training programme and the development of their LLN skills.

Generally learners expressed a desire to be part of the labour market; to gain and sustain employment. For some, this was a well thought through plan with an ultimate goal, starting with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, particularly LLN skills, and the acquisition of qualifications that could lead to further training opportunities and ultimately employment. For a number of others, as Casey and Mellows (2005) observed in their research, they had been unable to recognise what they had gained from the embedded literacy and numeracy within the ESP. However, they also had a desire to get employment in order to avoid the need to re-enter what they felt had been, a recurring and valueless training experience from which they believed they gained little, either in relation to employability skills or the development of their LLN skills in any significant or sustainable measure (ibid).

For some learners attending training programmes, there is a resigned feeling about their conversations; a sense of apathy and defeat – they accept their situation as the ‘natural order’. Such responses echo the work of Bourdieu (1993; 1997; 1998) who argues that the individual’s *habitus* is shaped historically and their interactions with *fields* controlled by the state create a *doxa* of suitable behaviours, including an acceptance of the power controls placed upon them. This was validated by learner reflections and comments that suggest the most likely outcome for them following this training programme is yet a further period of unemployment that may be followed, once again, by re-entry to an identical training programme.

The *Skills for Life* strategy in response to the OECD (1997) report supports the argument that for adults to readily engage in productive employment within a knowledge economy they must possess a minimum level of LLN skills (DfES, 2003a). This strategy places on the individual the obligation, expectation and responsibility for the acquisition of these skills (ibid), which suggests those who are unable to acquire them are once again regarded as failures. The following example given by Robert, the 32 year old single male introduced on p178, typifies these resigned feelings of what ESP had or had not done for learners when saying:

“I haven’t set myself a goal to achieve yet....They try to help you with things you struggle with here. I’ve been thinking about the qualification I might get and whether it will help me get a job and.....no not really, no definitely not. I don’t feel very positive about that. Because I want, I want to do like something like positive with my life instead of just being negative all the time, you know what I mean. I don’t know it’s just the way I feel. There are no jobs around at the moment.” (TP2; D50, 3).

Whilst there is a resigned feeling to some of the conversations at this point, it is clear that for others, there is a need to ‘tell the expected story’ (Ward and Edwards, 2002:43), that is they accept that they need to, as Bourdieu (1993: 94) describe ‘play the game’. Having been part of the game of unemployment, in some cases, for considerable periods of time players of the game as identified by Edwards and Usher (2000) need to ensure that they recount the expected responses to certain questions, for example, demonstrating an eagerness to obtain employment. However, from the perspective of the researcher, it became important to accept the account of the learner research participant as being the true account for them at the time of the interaction. The narrative changed from participant to participant, with some being resigned to a future involving long periods of unemployment and prescribed training programmes, while for

others they had an aspiration to find employment and to provide an end to 'the game of unemployment' (ibid: 103). For example, Penny, whose pen portrait is on p244, rationalised this by saying:

"I was working at Chasewood care home but I had to leave when I became pregnant. So now I come here to get my maths and English qualifications then I'm going to go to City College, I have been accepted to do an access course to go to university. Higher Education in nursing....I'm going to go and do nursing because I found when I was working in the care homes I wanted more out of it than I could get. So for me nursing is the best way to go" (TP1; B25, 2).

Penny was beginning to use the network of relationships (Putnam, 2000) or social capital (Bourdieu, 1997: 49) she had built up as products of what Bourdieu exemplified as "investment strategies aimed at establishing social relationships that are directly usable, either in the short or long term" (ibid: 50) to change the direction of her life. While Anthony, whose pen portrait is on p232, also had a definite goal, but he was unsure about whether it was achievable:

"I have thought about jobs I would like to do, yes I have. I've thought long and hard about what I would like to do when I finish, but it's if I'll be able to achieve them really. If I...if I've got the qualifications to do it when I leave I'd like myself to be either a drug counsellor or somebody that goes round and talks to kids in schools and share my experience with them" (TP 1; A33, 6)

For some learners engaged in training programmes there is a greater sense of hope and determination to achieve the goals they have laid down for themselves, having played a crucial role in constructing these, which includes both the acquisition of qualifications and the aim to achieve secure employment. Cote (1996: 225) describes this as the creation of "identity capital" represented by what individuals "invest" in "who they are" while still being controlled by the social structure of a society or culture and the experience within that society. They were developing an 'identity' linked to the learning

situation which Gergen (1994:204) identified as being “closely associated with social development and crucially dependant on immediate social relations and constructs”.

A further example of this was put forward by Elida (whose pen portrait is on p203) who had arrived in England as a refugee in 2000 from Serbia. During our initial interview when I asked if she had a goal she had expressed an interest in becoming a care assistant.

“I would like to work with older ones...I want to get a qualification and find a better job than the cleaning I do now...it’s a boring and hard job” (TP 1; B29, 9)

At our second interview she explained that she had achieved a level 2 qualification in both literacy and numeracy and had successfully applied to a University where she would study nursing-midwifery.

“I am getting on very well...I have passed my level 2 tests and will start college to study in September...my husband and my family are very pleased...it’s something I can only do since coming here “ (TP 1; B34, 23)

Like Penny, Elida was also creating a ‘social network’ (Putnam, 2000: 296) which Barnes (1954: 44) describes as a “system of ties between pairs of persons who regard each other as approximate social equals” and using it to increase her ‘social capital’ with the ultimate aim of converting it into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997). The answers to the question of where next appeared to fall into three camps, firstly those like Penny and Elida who had already obtained further training opportunities that would lead to more secure employment and an expected increase in economic capital (ibid). Secondly those who wanted to continue in education but did not really know what route to take, and therefore did not have an ultimate goal. Thirdly those who had no intention

of continuing in any form of education, and who believed any outcome from the ESP was enough to increase their employability and opportunity for sustainable work.

The previous and following quotes all detail how the research participants have hopes for the future, based on their most recent experiences of the employability skills programme. In the following extract Ravinder, who is 47 and separated from her husband has two adult children and a daughter aged 14 presently in foster care, outlined how she planned to re-enter employment following a long period out of work due to depression. She explained how the labour market she knew has undergone major changes and how this is impacting on her re-entry into it:

“Well I’m looking for something very different.....because I did machining for 10 years in a factory and that’s a long time to be in one jobI know how to do baby clothes, ladies underwear but all that industry is going out the window now because it’s all cheap imported. With qualifications it’s more like secretary work and I think at the moment I don’t know what I want to go into, but at least I’m doing something; you understand what I mean? I’m not just wandering around the house and watching television”. (TP3; C59; 9).

A few of the learner research participants discussed in some detail, how they wanted to use the education system to ensure they had the skills they thought would be needed in order to regain employment and so avoid further periods of unemployment. While others considered a minimum qualification would be adequate. The following extract taken from my interview with Jamie-Leigh, the 22 year old single female previously discussed, is an example of this way of thinking:

“I was a bit naughty at school.....I got kicked out before I took my exams. I had a chance to go back and take them but I didn’t so.....I just didn’t care at that time. I didn’t think it would be important to do the exams.....I got kicked out for mouthing off..... I was always arguing with the teachers. I

didn't really see the point of what we were doing. I didn't think it would be important to do the exams".

"Now I regret it I should have stayed at school and taken them.....If I had taken the exams I would have qualifications now and not be here....I lost my last job and haven't been able to find another one....So I thought I may as well get some qualifications while I'm not working. It all goes back to leaving school early; this is what happens to you. I don't want to be stuck behind a till or working in a bar for the rest of my life" (TP3; C60, 2).

For the majority on the ESP like Jamie-Leigh they had no ambition to take education any further and saw it as something they should have achieved at an earlier stage in their life.

Summary.

In conclusion, it is apparent that learner research participants involved in employability skills programme training place considerable value on the wider benefits of attending a this programme, describing the development of confidence and courage to carry out daily tasks; the development of identity capital (Bourdieu, 1997). However, some learners attending training programmes did demonstrate a very depressed view of the future, apparently resigned to repeated periods of unemployment and training programme attendance, in compliance with the 'perceived' conditionality component (DWP, 2005) of their welfare benefits.

This could be seen as part of their *habitus*, drawn from their fields of experiences (Bourdieu, 1993) based on what Putnam (2000: 296) describes as 'social networks'. Arguably, this is what Coleman (1998: 17) suggests is a 'comfort zone' of existence that is familiar and uncomplicated. Whilst some learner research participants give

disgruntled accounts of their experiences on employability training programmes through the Jobcentre Plus pathway, along with the sense of apathy and helplessness, there is also a state of contentment with the situation. This is in stark contrast to the learner research participants undertaking training programme who demonstrate an enthusiasm for a future which involves the development of their LLN skills and the potential to gain qualifications and engagement in the employment market.

For learner research participants in this study, progression was measured by them mostly in relation to the skills that enable them to manage their day-to-day activities with more confidence. However, the recognition by some learners that 'qualifications are for clever people' (McGivney, 1990) and their concern that they may develop their skills so much so that they will feel uncomfortable in their present social groups indicates that the ESP is challenging and changing the identity of learners involved with it. In work by Jenkins (2002) the overwhelming feeling is that teaching and learning programmes are being used as a new form of social control by bureaucratic authorities, constructing localised legitimacy and expectations on its participants.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) describes how a set of cultural positions are established, managed and controlled by those in a position of power through the use of pedagogic action and legitimised through misrecognition, a concept they describe as symbolic violence. This can be evidenced in the way that Jobcentre Plus advisors threaten the unemployed with the withdrawal of their benefits if they fail to address their LLN needs

to a prescribed level (DWP, 2002), regardless of whether this is achievable by the individual, or not.

Our society is changing and evolving; the demands and needs of our society also need to adapt to meet these demands. What I feel this chapter has shown is that adults need to be supported and motivated to develop their LLN skills to a level that will enable them live their lives more confidently and with more independence. This can be achieved by providing a choice of meaningful, useful, contextualised and flexible training programmes that are not prefaced from a functional model of coercion.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

In this final chapter I return to the questions introduced in Chapter One and examine them in relation to the work undertaken in this research. In summarising my conclusions I have used my research questions to organise them into sections. I then go on to make recommendations outlining areas within this study to consider for further research. I plan to place emphasis and make comments on what I believe are the most significant findings

My research questions sought to explore:

- *To what extent the learner research participants' forced participation on the course impacted upon their engagement with the programme of study?*
- *Whether this participation created any change in expectancies, capital or self-identity by the research participants over the duration of the programme of study?*
- *How did the research participants' understand their existing language, literacy or numeracy skills and was this perception altered during the programme of study?*
- *If research participants' perception altered did it lead them to seek more interesting and personally fulfilling work?*

An important element within my research was to understand how a change in Government strategy (DBIS, 2007) leading to the possibility of compulsory attendance on the Employability Skills Programme of training impacted upon unemployed adults with low levels of Language Literacy and Numeracy. I have, in listening to the voice of the learner research participants (Ward and Edwards, 2002), put forward their stories in my findings in an endeavour to bring new evidence to bear on how government

strategy, based on projected need and economic factors, is viewed from the learner perspective. I feel this offers a contribution to the body of knowledge already existing within the lifelong learning sector through insight into how vulnerable and disadvantaged adult learners interrelate with these training programmes.

The concept of choice

In completing this work I have highlighted how the ability to choose a training programme is not only closely associated with an individual's capacity for decision-making, but their motivation or desire to undertake such a programme and its perceived legitimacy on their part. The training programme, submits Leitch (2006), needs to demonstrate value to the potential participant by being able to satisfy their needs and demands and this often lies outside the framework identified by strategy makers organising LLN provision. It is clear from this research that possibilities of choice and decision-making are shrouded in the assumption that the individual has all the necessary knowledge and skills to make an independent and free choice, or the capability of collecting such knowledge externally through a framework of information, advice and guidance (IAG).

As I discussed in the Literature Review the ideological view of adult learning within a philosophical framework of free choice has been challenged by the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a). While often learners are coerced into joining the ESP, within the ESP the LSC (2010) have introduced a substantial amount of freedom for teachers to incorporate contextualised learning). However, choice for teachers still

requires them to develop learners skills directly linked to employability (DBIS, 2007), although a limited flexible social practice approach to content has been included.

Reviewing the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) in the light of both social and human capital theory, I have argued that, given the bureaucratic nature of the strategy, it is heavily weighted in favour of economic outcome and the development of human capital (Bourdieu, 1997). This is justified, by those developing the strategy, in a desire for tangible qualification outcomes and a need to improve adults' LLN skills (DBIS, 2007) which will, within the rational of the strategy, give them greater potentiality to become employed and contribute to society economically. Whilst it may be argued that this is a legitimate course of action, it does not take account of the importance of social networks in the construction of a society that demonstrates cohesion. Instead, I have argued that the focus of responsibility towards the individual for both successes and failures can lead to a situation of social fragility where there is little evidence of communities working together.

Social control

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a), I have argued in Chapter Two provides an excellent example of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 87), operating through a process of misrecognition and legitimisation, both by the implementers of the strategy and the recipient actors of the strategy. A network of social controls has been placed on members of a section of society who may be, on the one hand seen as the most vulnerable and needy and, on the other, as unwilling to participate in employment

and are therefore seen as a drain on the resources of the state (DBIS, 2010). Targeted categories of adults (see p: 2) often attend training programmes as part of a requirement to obtain welfare support. It is not possible for me to claim that the training programme adds significantly to the development of either learners' employment prospects, or their LLN skills beyond the lifetime of the training programme as I was not able to research learners beyond this point.

However, during the research it was found that teachers contracted by Jobcentre Plus saw their role, in delivering the employability skills programme as one of reinforcing the message that employment and engagement in the employment market are the priority and all activities should be seen to be working towards that goal. Teachers then in the context of this research, can as advocated by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) be described as the vessel through which they are legitimately reproducing the existing model of culture, either positively or negatively. As one teacher in Motor Town suggested:

... "maintaining culture in a learning environment. You come into a culture you fit in with that culture, or you leave. If that can be maintained as a very positive force where people are taking ownership over their own learning and making their own decisions to progress and perform, then I don't think there will be any problems" (TP1-teacher).

One aim within the context of LLN (DfEE, 2001b) intends that people of working age should be able to live independently, both socially and economically. To that end, it is seen as legitimate by those administering social benefits (DfEE, 2001) that all adults should be able to find sustainable, long-term employment. However, what I found to be less well recognised during this research is that the changing nature of employment

globally has led to a change in requirements from employers upon employees. In this global knowledge society adults do require to be skilled in different domains of practice in order to participate, both economically and socially. However, this may be an unreasonable and unattainable goal for the whole of the adult population.

Successive UK Governments, defining the size of its adult skills deficit, and the importance it places on addressing the issue has resulted in the commitment of substantial and continuing government funding (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2006). The effort in addressing the perceived need and required cultural change has been sustained for more than a decade. Brooks *et al.*, (2006) advocate what has occurred during this period is co-operation between strategy organisations in order to support shared good practice and collaborative working with the ultimate aim of ensuring learners continued attendance leading to harmonised qualifications

Evidence has been presented in Chapter two of this thesis, that strategy-makers in England and Wales have adopted a functionalist definition of LLN (Barton, 2007) in their approach to resolving the 'financial burden' (DfES, 2002b) on the state of adults with 'poor' LLN skills. The adoption of this approach, following the seminal publications by the OECD (1987; 1997; 1998), Moser (DfEE, 1999), Leitch (2006) Freud (2007) Clegg (2009) and Wolf (2011) has significantly affected the development of adult LLN training provision. As a consequence it has restricted those responsible for the development of such programmes to an economic application of training provision. This has had the

effect of making the associated benefits of LLN skills development in relation to social cohesion as suggested by Payne and Keep (2011) take on a subsidiary role.

Coffield (1999) indicates that a functionalist approach to LLN which is being used as a form of social control continues to dominate adult LLN training provision. I have argued that whilst the *Skills for Life* strategy has adopted and persisted in driving forward a functionalist approach to teaching and learning the incorporation in the ESP of elements of a more liberal approach that requires input from the learners on curriculum have proven more successful in engaging and retaining learners.

The changing expectations of research participants

A further surprising outcome to this research was that, although learners were often able to describe some benefits as a result of attending the ESP, these were not always primarily linked to significant developments in LLN skills. They largely related to wider benefits attributable to attending a programme of study, such as the development of self-worth which is seen by Bourdieu (1993) as more a social capital development, rather than a human capital development. The more important outcome for learners appeared to be making new friends and developing social skills, giving rise to a potential increase in social capital, and is as argued by Merriam and Caffarella (1999) of equal importance to human capital in the form of qualifications when wishing to obtain and maintain employment

What this study did identify is that people, who have low LLN skills, acknowledge that they struggle to exist in a society which has grown and changed rapidly over recent decades. There is now a greater dependency by them on LLN skills for both every day and employment needs. This has resulted in some finding independent living as unrealistic and subsequently they have developed strategies which enable them to get by. These I found were usually based on the development of what Putnam (2000: 296) described as a 'social network' of support from family or friends. I also found that some of the learners see education as a way out of their present situation, a means of change in their social lives, enabling them to solve personal problems and, in their eyes, become more successful in life. Examples of this were found in my interviews with Penny, Anthony and Elida, which are recorded in the findings (see p: 264-5).

I found thought provoking the importance of social networks and human capital outcomes (Bourdieu, 1997) that learners applied to their training programme which was often linked to their initial motivation for attendance. Learners attending training programmes voluntarily had a focus that was both social and economic in its outcome and they appeared to recognise value and development of self-worth during their time on the ESP. While a further benefit resulted from them recognising a value in terms of its ability to enable them to become more employable and for some to seek more interesting employment than they had previously sought. I also identified that some wished to achieve qualifications because; they saw a value in qualifications when applying for future employment.

However, for the learners who had been forced to attend the ESP, they evidenced a self-limiting approach to learning, which they based on their past learning experience, and their focus appeared to be only related to what Putnam (2000) suggests are social network gains. This was interesting because it is this group of learners who had been mandated to attend programmes (DBIS,2007) specifically to develop their human capital capacity as discussed in the literature review.

The data from this research challenge the argument that compelling an adult, who is receiving welfare benefits, to take part in the ESP will mean they do not actively participate in, or with, the programme of study. Active participation, in this study, means the willingness of an adult to embrace and engage in learning opportunities in order to develop their LLN skills. The findings confirm that although the learner research participants in this study had almost all been compelled to attend training the low attrition rates recorded for the ESP and the wish to continue training on the part of these learners provide evidence to support active participation on their part. What adults in this study did resent were the actions enforced upon them to attend the ESP, believing they were passive participants in the processes being utilised. This was seen by them as something they must do because they are dependent on the welfare state for financial support while unemployed.

A further finding of this research was that adults accessing training programmes, who are receiving welfare benefits, are often required to attend a repeat Jobcentre plus training programme. This is because of continuing periods of unemployment, rather

than them feeling that they have developed their LLN skills markedly. Interview results confirm that learners valued the camaraderie they associated with attending the training programmes not the opportunity to gain a qualification outcome, which suggests the course experience becomes more important to them than a qualification or finding employment.

Within the ESP there is an acknowledgement of less tangible 'success' indicators, such as increased confidence or engagement in the community by teachers and learning providers. These are activities suggest Casey and Mellows (2005) which were seen to encourage learners to want to continue with the programme but, are not valued or recognised as success indicators for Government statistical purpose.

The impact of the ESP on research participants identity

The learners in this study reflected on life experiences which had significantly affected who and what they had become; including family experiences, experiences of schooling, peer-group relations and interactions with their community. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that an individual's ability to become involved in decision-making and choice processes is also influenced by these past experiences. This study attempts to show the extent to which such experiences can impact upon the individual.

Research participants in this study associated their LLN skills development predominantly with their experience of 'compulsory' education, which became the basis on which the current experience was considered. Some learners demonstrated they

had been able to develop their educational experiences positively through a process described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as growth of their *habitus* (subjectivity) and their current reality (objectivity). However, for most learners, they described this process as being limited and strained. It became apparent that their present and past cultural influences and experiences were restricting their ability to move on (ibid). These self-limiting beliefs were described by learners as a fear of change, of the unknown, in turn leading them to a passive acceptance of their current and familiar routines.

In developing this point it became very evident during this research that adults are only likely to seek help with their LLN skills when they have identified a need for themselves. Significantly learners in this study had not started to identify a need and they were aligning their self-identity with that of being non-learners, non-skilled and unemployed while linking this to a role of continually performing a set routine, put in place by Jobcentre plus advisors, and finding it difficult to break free from this routine. What did begin to emerge during interviews was that as Coffield (1999) also found over time this process could lead to those, who are its recipients, to become institutionalised by their routines.

The research further identified that LLN learners often developed a social identity that is associated with the acquisition of a cultural possibility or 'rule' which determines what they can or cannot do or what they can or cannot achieve (Cote, 1996), reinforcing the elements of institutionalisation. This also supports the conclusion that the ambitions

and routines of individuals and groups are predisposed to the formative circumstances of their respective *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1993) and appear to reproduce those behaviours, experiences and stances consistent with the situations under which they were formed.

I became aware through this research that social identity can act to provide the individual with the freedom to live outside their socially constructed reality or *habitus* (ibid), or can equally act to provide constraints and limitations on what is considered reasonable for them to achieve or to aspire to achieve. This idea implies Tressell (2004), sees the truly oppressed as those who have lived in poverty and degradation and consider what has been good enough for them, will be good enough for their children. Further to this I have argued during this thesis that this process of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1993) is not one that is conscious or unconscious for the individual, but is on-going through a process of learning in time and space through significant others.

A further related point that I found as did Webb *et al.*, (2002) was that for most learners, the belief in choice of training programmes was limited, with participants relying on other 'significant' figures with different *fields* of experience for advice and direction towards an appropriate training programme. Learners' motivations for attending training were complex and for those who had chosen to develop their LLN skills, this was often as a result of a significant life-changing event.

There are examples of this occurring in the section on 'Life changes linked to choices' (see p: 242). One example was given by Michael a learner whose father had recently died leaving him feeling isolated and vulnerable and this had resulted in a 'turning point' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 97) for him to attend the ESP. Also my discussion with Penny (see p: 264) reaffirms more than a century of learning philosophy that demonstrates learning is more effective and successful when the individual has a vested interest in the subject being taught along with any expected outcome. Penny had no intention of returning to education until she had a child; from this event she recognised that education would help her support her child and was the route out of unemployment.

Effecting change through education

Within the literature review and findings of this thesis I have put forward evidence to confirm that participation in adult learning is an important driver in effecting change and educational participation has a range of benefits that are non-economic (Feinstein *et al.*, 2003) which include health and social outcomes. One example of this could be evidenced by its effect on Kevin who before joining the ESP had an alcohol dependency. During his period on the ESP he had not been allowed to drink or attend if intoxicated and had gone on to achieve a level 2 qualification in numeracy. This initial success was encouraging Kevin to continue learning and at the same time was reducing his dependency on alcohol in turn contributing positively to both a health and social outcome. Ricky's story also evidenced how attending the ESP could engender a positive social outcome. During our initial interview he had discussed his violent feelings towards other learners who did not support his football team. But later

remarked how he had learned to accept others on the course and no longer felt violent towards them but in fact often helped others to understand things they were struggling with.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a), at its inception, was seen as a strategy which could provide a win-win outcome for both individuals with low level LLN skills, for employers and for Government. By supporting adults to increase their LLN skills, it was envisaged adults would be able to participate more substantially within the economy and in society more generally (DfEE, 2001). However, the qualifications on offer through the National Test framework are not widely recognised by employers and as discussed in the findings may add little value to an individual's CV, an important factor in helping them to gain employment. Although the direct relationship between LLN and the economy is clearly described in strategy documents (OECD, 1987, 1997, 1998) what is not clear is specifically what jobs requiring Level 1 LLN skills will open up as the UK workforce skills are improved.

The strategy had similar potential for success suggests Schuller *et al.*, (2002) from a social perspective, in terms of the development of social cohesion factors of improved confidence, self-esteem, social networks and relationships as it did for economic factors. However, I have argued that the focus on qualification targets has eclipsed the social component of the strategy almost entirely; it is not recognised within the framework of the strategy (DBIS, 2010) as it currently stands. In fact, the rigidity of the strategy framework could work to disrupt elements of social cohesion through in some

cases the devaluing of established social ties. The social capital benefit potential within the *Skills for Life* strategy is being overshadowed by the need to construct a human capital stock of qualified workers and, in fact, social capital, as discussed in the literature review, has been used as one more form of social control (ibid).

This research concludes that the race to compete in the global economy has overshadowed the potential benefits of social networks in realising the goals of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a); particularly the development of LLN competence amongst adults of working age in England. A re-focus of the strategy which highlights a social practice approach to the development of LLN skills and which values the existence of social networks in its drive to work towards the successful improvement of these skills has the potential to result in more sustainable outcomes as evidenced from the ESP findings. In turn, giving more choice for both teachers and learners in terms of the types and range of training opportunities available, enabling training programmes to be built based on the needs and interests of the learners, rather than the demands of those overseeing the strategy.

Research participants perception of skill levels and strategy implications

A set of assessment activities (Basic Skills Agency, 2002) have been developed to enable adults' LLN levels to be measured and an LLN level to be achieved through an individual learning plan. The outcomes of these assessments can, and are, then used to ensure adults are accessing the correct level of training programme. In addition,

formative assessment through standard national tests has been created so that learners can evidence achievement and competence at a recognised level.

The data in table 13 (p: 172) demonstrate that the initial assessment activity undertaken by learners is not fully understood by them and therefore, arguably holds little meaning for them. Most learners were unable to report the level that they achieved on its completion. I found that voluntary learners, saw the experience as part of the process of information gathering, but, were still unable to describe their LLN skills in terms of levels (appendix 13; 301). While the majority of non-voluntary learners simply stated that they must have failed the assessment for them to be on this course. I came to the conclusion that for assessment to add value to a learner it is important for it to be made meaningful.

I also concluded from this research that it can only be beneficial if it is used to inform joint learning plans and joint personal development plans, constructed through a process of negotiated interpretation between the learner and the provider of the programme of supported development. Levels of LLN skills only had meaning for learners who understood that on achievement of a level 1 qualifications, the target threshold for the employability skills programme, they would no longer be expected to attend the programme. Unfortunately, for learners attending this programme, who generally presented with LLN skills assessed at Entry level 2 or 3, this was all too often felt to be an unachievable goal within the timescale of up to 26 weeks allocated to the programme.

Identifying skills

Learners did not link their LLN skills to economic or social factors and what constituted LLN skills generated interesting discussion between learners. As previously described in the findings and by Willis (1981), learners often applied a wide-ranging approach to defining their skills as being either 'rubbish', 'average' or 'above average' and usually related their LLN skills to other people in their immediate social network. For learners in this study, as discussed in the findings, average was linked to and assessed in the context of the LLN skills of the learner cohort, the group they were now a participant of, and not necessarily others in what Putnam (2000: 296) describes as their social network. This created concern for some that their skills were developing to such an extent they would go past the range of the social network in which they regularly engaged, believing this could have a serious negative impact for them. What these learners had not understood was the ESP required some disruption of present social networks in order to move them from their comfort zone and into either further education and/or employment.

Whilst some learners accepted that their LLN skills were prohibiting them from becoming employed, others recounted problems with their daily activities, such as reading a newspaper; dealing with household bills and budgeting, and writing and reading letters. This brings into question the relevance of LLN training that is so far de-contextualised and removed from the participants' daily existence that they struggle to make meaning from the programme of study they are undertaking. This is an

interesting finding for strategy-makers, learning providers and teachers, which would be beneficial for them to reflect upon as they consider creating future study programmes.

Creating flexible programmes to aid perseverance

The findings from this thesis indicate that in the development of employability skills training provision, flexible training programmes that are linked to personal interests, whether social or vocational will provide an improved framework for achievement, allowing for a greater possibility that the goals set out in the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) can be met. Success, through the *Skills for Life* strategy (ibid), is linked solely with achievement of tangible outcome measures. Again, this work provides further evidence to strategy makers, learning providers and teachers, that LLN skill cannot be seen as a set of skills that sit outside the framework of learners' lived experience. It is necessary to expand the focus of LLN from a functionalist approach to a wider social practice approach in considering how to support unemployed adults in the development of both their LLN and social skills.

The adoption by learning providers of flexible training programmes for the unemployed, based on the social realities of the participants, which work to disrupt and then re-establish social networks linked to the construction of support communities that are not built on a deficit model, are essential. Jobcentre Plus training programmes followed a rigid guide to delivery (DBIS, 2007), which allowed little or no opportunity for teachers to ensure that training meets the individual needs of the learner. However, within the ESP,

although still having to follow the adult core curriculum, teachers have been allowed an adaptable approach to delivery and content.

The Employability Skills Programme of study is still available within the new welfare to work programme, but has placed limitations on those able to access it through a change in eligibility criteria. This change is set to continue as a result of publications, such as *Realising Potential* (DfES, 2003c), *World Class Skills* (DIUS, 2007), *Reducing Dependency* (Freud, 2007), *Skills for Sustainable Growth* (DBIS, 2010) and the *Budget Speech* (Osborne, 2011) which have continually called for more employer demand-led training that focuses on improving adults LLN skills for employability.

I have argued that for delivery to be effective strategy makers, learning providers and teachers need to understand unemployed adult LLN learner's motivations and account for them in the development of training programmes. The OECD (2012) report that devising flexible training programmes that enable learners to persist with their training until they achieve a successful outcome has been found to be a more effective route to encouraging learners to become engaged, lifelong learners. The ESP, suggest Peters and Rousseau (2008), has gone some considerable way towards following this prescribed format proving successful in reducing attrition rates while increasing learner persistence and as such became the provision of choice for Jobcentre Plus advisors.

A range of options, for curriculum managers, are highlighted throughout this study. Historically, submits Ewens (2012), within previous JCP learning programmes for

unemployed adults there has been more control of teaching by curriculum managers through the use of teaching guides, suggested questions to be answered and comments to be made during teaching sessions, in turn leading to high learner attrition rates through the delivery of dull and monotonous teaching. For curriculum managers I have identified that the focus should be on a wider range of contextualised learning provision (appendix, 11), which has a flexible component introduced by teachers to allow long-term engagement and retention of learners.

For teachers, I have identified a need to ensure learners are able to develop their learning opportunities through the use of contextualised resources linked to their day-to-day lives which they have some involvement in selecting (appendix,11). This research has established that a number of elements have contributed to the success by teachers in the ESP environment. Teachers have been given considerable freedom to determine curricular content based on both the compulsory and optional components of the core curriculum. This was linked by them to the contextualisation of learning for non-traditional learners, designed by people who know them, through the adoption of teachers own delivery methods. What this research reinforces, as recommended by Barton (2007) is that strategy makers, curriculum managers and teachers should now work together to identify mechanisms of support for learners based on a meaningful and useful assessment of their LLN capability, premised on a social practice model rather than the present deficit model of skills gaps.

Extending the research

This thesis does not extend to all strands of adult learning provision for very pragmatic reasons. The study was undertaken in order to answer the questions set out in the introduction to this chapter. The data collected offers a detailed picture of the learning experiences of unemployed adults identified with low LLN skills who are attending the Employability Skills Programme of study to address this issue. Further research that explores the learning experience of unemployed adults attending adult and community learning services and voluntary organisations provision would afford the opportunity to enhance the findings. An extension of the study to determine the effect of the course on learner success within subsequent employment opportunities was considered but was not felt to be feasible due to data protection issues.

I have highlighted in the findings Table's 9-10 (p: 165-6) that there is a gender difference in the take up of provision through the provider pathways. However, this was not a focus for this study and further work to explore reasons of attendance at learning provision from a gender perspective would enable strategy-makers and training providers to develop strategies to support wider engagement in LLN programmes.

Details are provided in Table 10 (p: 166) which demonstrates age variation in attendance at training programmes. Again, age was not a primary focus of this study, but exploration of age at the time of attendance could provide compelling insights for programme providers in planning training programmes.

The link between LLN skills and economic development has been explored. I have argued that such a narrow focus contributes to the breakdown of social networks on which this society has historically been constructed, leading to a new level of social fragility. Further research could explore the role of LLN in the development of sustainable communities, based on community cohesion and 'social networks' (Putnam, 2000: 296). Successive Government Minister's Ewens (2012) identifies have a continued focus on qualification targets which has overshadowed the social component of the *Skills for Life* strategy almost entirely; they are not recognised within the framework of the *Skills for Life* strategy as it currently stands. In fact, the rigidity of the strategy framework could work to disrupt pockets of social cohesion and there is little in the way of supported progression through institutions (ibid). Further research could be used to determine how supported progression could influence learner's ultimate outcomes either positively or negatively. This may also help in tackling the concern that for some education is an identity associated only with certain social conditions such as unemployment and it is not something undertaken voluntarily or electively.

Concluding thoughts

I have, within this thesis made recommendations for further research in this field which would assist programme providers in the development of LLN training programmes that could be appropriately contextualised to provide greater relevance to adults' day-to-day lives. The findings of this study lend support to these arguments and I conclude that for the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) to achieve its full potential then it must seek to value social capital in similar terms to human capital development.

What did become apparent during this research was that strategy-makers, training providers, and learners, would benefit from the promotion of an adaptable and contextualised approach when delivering programmes under the *Skills for Life* strategy. This idea embraces the concept of learner persistence presented in the work by Porter *et al.*, (2005) who, drawing on findings from Young *et al.*, (1994) found that learners often did not participate in programmes long enough to make substantial learning gains. This can be accomplished through, for example, the equal weighting of accreditation in recognition of “positive transformations in health and well-being” (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006: vi) and other associated “wider benefits of education”, as is sometimes seen in more traditional accreditation of progression in areas such as literacy and numeracy (*ibid.*).

Just as Porter *et al.*, (2005) recognised, I found that learners faced a number of barriers which hindered their ability to participate in LLN learning and in turn restricted the amount of progress they could make. Further to this it was recognised that programmes, which provided alternative routes for learners while at the same time placing less emphasis on group learning and more on individual teaching permitted learners to take part in learning provision as their ability improved (*ibid.*).

Such an approach to training provision, it could be argued, permits adults to become independent lifelong learners who willingly take up learning. This does give rise to problems associated with measuring consistently and effectively elements of social capital and their development, but this is an essential facet of any education strategy

that sets out to strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly economically and educationally stratified population.

Drawing on the conceptual discussions of Pierre Bourdieu regarding *habitus*, *field*, *doxa*, and particularly, symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 87) and associated discussions of social and human capital theory, I have argued that the *Skills for Life* strategy is being 'misrecognised' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 93) as justifiable by those responsible with realizing the targets connected with this strategy. I suggest that the *Skills for Life* strategy has been marketed as a tool to develop both the social cohesion and economic competence of adults, but, in fact, the desire to raise human capital has meant social capital development has been squeezed out of accepted practice almost entirely.

In completing this research I feel that I have learned much but, have also come to realise that in exploring the learner's lived experience it is only my own interpretation that I am reporting. As my level of knowledge and understanding of research has evolved I have come to realise there are areas I chose to explore and others that warranted deeper exploration that I perhaps overlooked. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify, the open-ended nature of qualitative research leads to multiple interpretive projects which resist attempts to impose a single paradigm over a subject.

Appendix 1

The Gremlins campaign



In this picture the Gremlin is describing the confusion that may occur in people who do not have the necessary numeracy skills to deal with their domestic finances.

Appendix 2

Beryl



Beryl, a talking face made of hands used to promote *Skills for Life* and *Functional skills* to the adult population of England

Appendix 3

Information for Participants in this Research Project

Reasons why I am undertaking the project

I am undertaking research that aims to collect information about the experiences of learners who are currently participating in an Employability Skills course on a voluntary or non-voluntary basis.

I would like to find out about the reasons why learners participate in this course and also how useful that training has been for them.

Why you have been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part in an interview for one of the following reasons.

- (a) Because you are currently undertaking Employability Skills training.
- (b) Because you are currently teaching/managing Employability Skills training.

What will happen to the information you share?

If you decide to participate in the research, you will be asked to arrange an interview (one-to-one) which will be recorded. The recorded interview will then be transcribed (typed-up). I will then use that information in writing my research report. It may be necessary for me (Ivan Wincup) to contact you again following the interview to clarify or confirm information discussed. The report, when completed, will be available to read and will form a doctoral thesis at Birmingham City University.

You will be asked to complete an "Agreement to Participate" form, which will ensure that your identity will remain confidential. You will be anonymous in the report.

You are free to leave at any time if you decide you no longer wish to participate in the research.

Appendix 4

Agreement to Participate in Research Project

I confirm that I have read, or have had read to me, and understand the information outlining the details of the research being carried out by Ivan Wincup as part of a doctoral course of study at Birmingham City University.

I confirm that I agree to participate in the research through an interview to be conducted by Ivan Wincup and understand that my comments will be recorded, transcribed and interpreted to form the basis of his research. I also understand that I can withdraw from this research at any time should I choose to.

I understand that my identity will remain confidential to Ivan Wincup and I will not be identified by my own name in his report; instead I will be referred to by a code number that does not identify me in any way.

PARTICIPANT

1st Interview

NAME (Print)
SIGNATURE
DATE
CODE NUMBER.....

2nd Interview

SIGNATURE.....
DATE.....
CODE NUMBER.....

READER/WITNESS

NAME (Print)
SIGNATURE
DATE (1st interview).....

NAME (Print).....
SIGNATURE.....
DATE (2nd interview).....

Appendix 5

Background Data Collection Form

Age 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+

Gender Male Female

Ethnicity White Mixed Indian Pakistani/Bangladeshi
 Black Caribbean Black African Chinese

Institution

Training Programme

Length of Training Programme

Length of time On Programme

Last training Course attended

Study Aim (reason for attending)

Last Occupation

Employment Status Employed Unemployed Self Employed
 Unwaged Retired

Relationship Status Single Separated/Divorce Married/Partner

Number of Children 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Language Spoken at Home
 Work

Basic Skills Assessment Instrument Used
 Date Undertaken
 Results

Appendix 6

Learner Interview Schedule 1

I would like to talk with you about your education and work history. To do this is it alright if I ask a few questions that will allow you to briefly outline your education and work history?

Can you tell me what life was like for you at school?

What was school life like?

What was life like outside school?

What qualifications did you achieve?

What were things like when you were close to leaving school?

What do you think about your maths and English?

What happened when you left school?

How did that come about?

How do you feel about that?

What did you like/dislike about that?

Did/Do you think qualifications were/are important?

What did your mates do when they left school?

At the time you chose your first job what alternatives were there for you?

What was the job market like?

How do you think the job market has changed since you left school?

What did you do next?

How did that come about?

How did you get on/ how long did it last?

What did you like/dislike?

Can you tell me why you decided to come here? ESP Provider

Why did you start this training?

What other courses did you consider before choosing this one?

What sorts of activities do you undertake here?

What's it like to be here?

How often do you attend?

Do you do work experience here?

What do you hope to do in the future?

Do you need qualifications to be able to do that

Financial implications.

Motivations.

Future learning opportunities.

Appendix 7

Learner Interview Schedule 2

I would like to ask some general questions about training and work.
Or I am particularly interested in your views about training and work.

Has doing this course made a difference to your life?

How? Why? What ?

What does work mean to you?

Why do you work?

What do qualifications /training mean to you?

What is the importance of a qualification to you?

What would you like to achieve now you're at the end of the training?

Have your priorities changed since beginning here?

How have your views to both work and qualifications changed over the years or since being here?

If you put aspects of your life in importance to you where would you put work/quals?

How have these views changed over the years or since being here?

Has doing this course made a difference to your life?

How?

Is there anything else you would like to say about work, past present and future, or anything you feel would be helpful or haven't been able to say?

What sorts of training/work would you like to do in the future?

Prompts: *highlighted in blue*

Importance of qualifications
Employability
Range of learning opportunities
Measures of progression
Financial implications
Wider benefits/experiences
Work experiences
Motivations

Appendix 8

Practitioner/Coordinator Interview Schedule

How do you define 'basic skills'?

How did you get involved in adult basic skills teaching?

What training have you had to undertake to be a basic skills teacher?

Who decides who attends your training programmes?

Are learners attending your courses voluntarily or none voluntarily? How do you feel about this?

What, specifically, do you teach?

How do you assess learners' levels of basic skills?

What do you consider to be the key factors for success?

What do you think are the main barriers, faced by learners, to achieving success? How might these be overcome?

What would you like to see learners achieve by the end of the training?

Where do learners go from here?

What effect have Government strategies/strategies since 1997 had on your current role?

Prompts: *highlighted in blue*

Importance of qualifications
Employability
Range of learning opportunities
Measures of progression
Financial/funding implications
Wider benefits/experiences
Work experiences
Motivations
Continuous Professional Development

Appendix 9

The 8 Millennium Development Goals

- 1 ['Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger'](#)
- 2 ['Achieve universal primary education'](#)
- 3 ['Promote gender equality and empower women'](#)
- 4 ['Reduce child mortality'](#)
- 5 ['Improve maternal health'](#)
- 6 ['Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases'](#)
- 7 ['Ensure environmental sustainability'](#)
- 8 ['Develop a global partnership for development'](#)

In 2000, 189 nations made a promise to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge became the eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. In September 2010, the world recommitted itself to accelerate progress towards these goals.

(<http://slechurch.org/?id=349>)

Appendix 10

Education for All Goals

Six internationally agreed education goals aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

Goal 1

'Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children'.

Goal 2

'Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality'.

Goal 3

'Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes'.

Goal 4

'Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults'.

Goal 5

'Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality'.

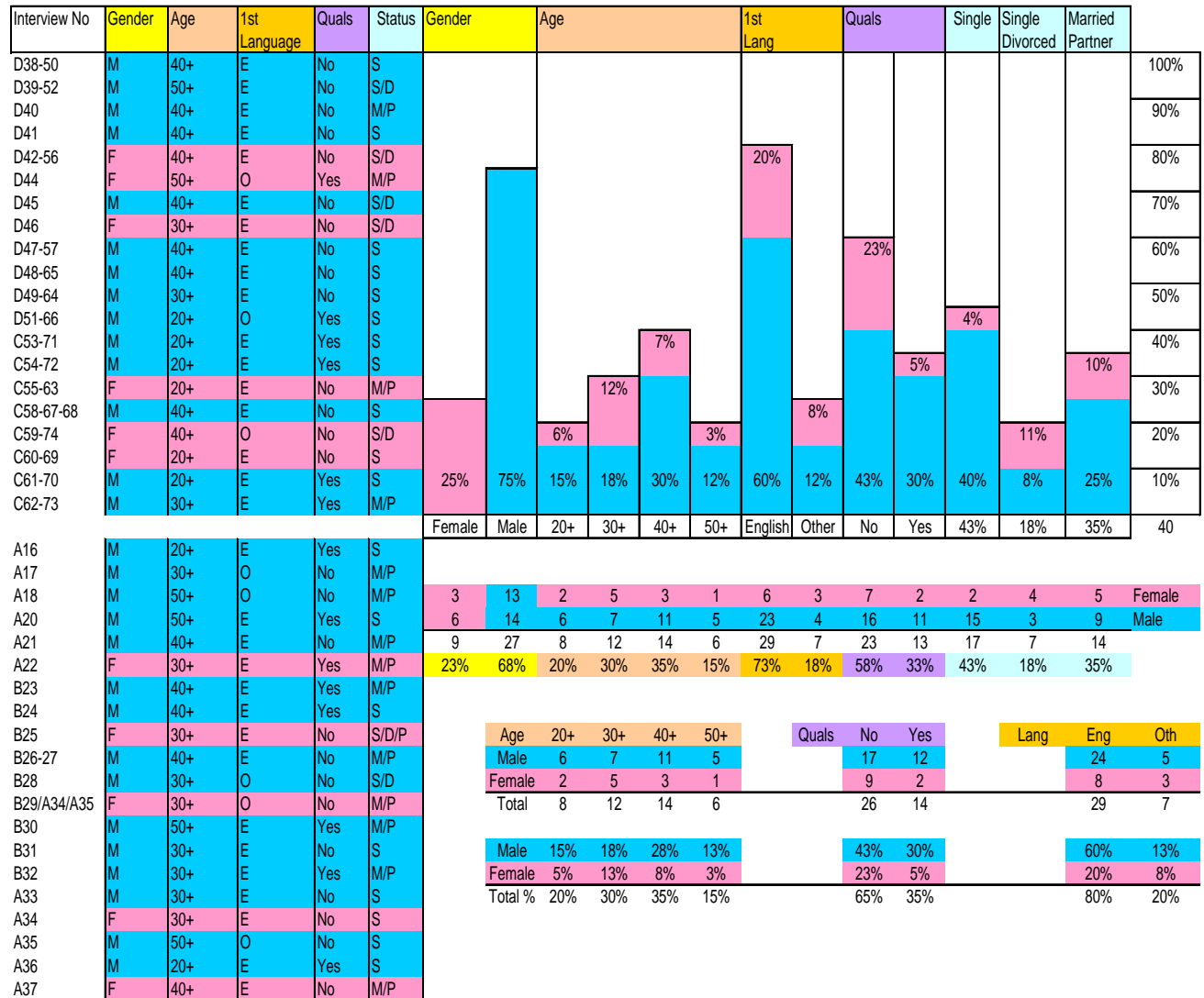
Goal 6

'Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills'.

(<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/lead-the-international-agenda/e...>)

Appendix 12

Data from interviews 2009/10



Appendix 13

Comparison of Qualifications and Levels in England (Ofqual 2011)

	Pre-entry	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Adult LLN assessment levels qualifying for fully funded learning												
Approximate age range of expected achievement		5-6	7	9	11-14	16	18+		21+			
GCSE (D-G)												
GCSE (C-A)												
A Level												
Undergraduate												
Masters												
PhD												

(Adapted from the NQF framework)

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