



School of Education

**HOW CAN WE CHARACTERISE FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES
IN ENGLAND, IRELAND AND MALTA: A COMPARATIVE CASE
STUDY**

By

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Abstract

Family literacy programmes have become an increasingly popular pedagogical tool utilised by policy makers to help address the literacy needs of families with low skill competencies and who are viewed as economically and socially underachieving. Taking a comparative case study approach, in this research I consider what benefits family literacy programmes have for the literacy skills of families.

Drawing on Bourdieu's *habitus* (1993) and *field* (1977) and Bourdieu, Coleman (1988) and Putnam's (2000) notions of social capital, in this research I compare family literacy programmes in selected case study areas within England, Ireland and Malta. The objectives are to establish differences and similarities in policy rationale, the characteristics of delivery and learner engagement. Predominantly qualitative in nature, the research consisted of 94 semi-structured interviews with actors involved in family literacy programmes across the three areas including coordinators, practitioners, learners, ex-learners, non-participating fathers and children's teachers. Interviews were supplemented and triangulated by a range of other data sources including a number of classroom observations.

Family literacy programmes across the three areas exhibited many similarities: the content of sessions; the underlying policy rationale for offering and funding programmes; the motivation of learners for attending; benefits reported by learners; and difficulties faced by practitioners. In addition, parents attending were mainly mothers. Some differences were also found, mainly between Ireland and the other two participating areas. For example, in Ireland different types of locations were used and children were not usually present. However, the main difference was not cultural, but

political, between the desired policy outcomes, and the motivation of learners. The evidence suggests that, regardless of the cultural context, there is a mismatch or at least a lack of awareness between the two, with learners predominantly motivated to attend to help their children, whilst policy objectives primarily seek to address inadequate literacy levels, as part of wider social inclusion strategies.

List of Acronyms used in this thesis

ADM	Area Development Manager, Ireland
ALBSU	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
BERA	British Educational research Association
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CIA	US Central Intelligence Agency
COMET	City of Manukau Educational Trust
CSO	Centre Statistics Office, Ireland
DCSF	UK Department for Children and Families
DES	Irish Department of Education and Science
DfEE	UK Department for Education and Employment
DfES	UK Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DTI	UK Department of Trade and Industry
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EEA	European Economic Area
ESF	European Social Funding
ESOL	English Speakers of Other Languages
Estyn	Her Majesty's Chief Inspection of Education and Training in Wales
EU	European Union
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Programme
FE	Further Education
FES	Foundation for Education Services, Malta
FETAC	Further Education Training Awards Council
FLLN	Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HFLI	Hispanic Family Literacy Institute
HIPPY	Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement

Id f'Id	A Maltese family literacy programme which translates as 'hand in hand'
ITM	Irish Traveller Movement
KUWTC	Keeping up with the Children
LEA	Local Education Authority, England
LLN	Language, Literacy and Numeracy
LLU	Lifelong Learning Unit
LSC	Learning and Skills Council, England
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland
NCDS	National Child Development Study
NCFL	National Centre for Family Literacy
NCSALL	National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum, Malta
NPF	A non-participating father
NRDC	National Research Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy
NSO	National Statistics Online
NSOM	National Statistics Office, Malta
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, England
ONS	UK Office of National Statistics
PACE	Parent and Child Education
PAFT	Parents as First Teachers
Pefal	Parental Empowerment for Family Learning
RaPAL	Research and Practice in Adult Literacy
SfL	Skills for Life
UIE	UNESCO Institute of Education
UN	United Nations
UNCEDAW	UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USDOLETA	US Department of Labor: Empowerment and Training Administration
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
VEC	Vocational Education Committee, Ireland

Civil society has the right and duty of superintending and influencing education, inasmuch as education bears upon the child's capacity to become a member of society. Society's right here is paramount over the arbitrary and contingent preferences of parents.

(G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*
1821)

'Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin'

(Julia Lang, *Listen with Mother*, 1950-1982)

Chapter 1

Introducing the field of study

Learning within a family context has always existed. Indeed, until the introduction of mass schooling it was one of the principal formats for learning. It could be argued that this is the most fundamental form of learning. It is natural and unavoidable. Programmes that encourage or formalise such learning take many forms. Some are social; others are subject-related, for example providing children with the ability to integrate into wider society and the capacity to develop literacy and numeracy skills relevant to the needs of society at any given time, skills which will be invaluable throughout life. Learning which takes place in the family can be a positive experience that forms a firm foundation which is carried throughout life, or conversely, it can be a difficult, negative experience, which places some children at a permanent disadvantage (Haggart, 2000). During our formative years, most of what we learn and how we develop is dictated by the family environment. According to Alexander and Clyne (1995: 5) ‘...learning within the family is usually more lasting and influential than any other. Family life provides a foundation and context for all learning.’ In recent years government policy makers concerned with education and employment have become increasingly interested in the concept of ‘the family’ as a learning unit. They are particularly interested in terms of family literacy, how learning in the family takes place, when the family does not constitute an effective learning environment and the implication this has for a child’s educational attainment, the wider community, society in general and the overall economy (NIACE, 2003). Particular interest has been shown in relation to disadvantaged groups such as single mothers, ethnic minority groups and those from socially disadvantaged communities. Such families are often referred to by policy makers and practitioners as the ‘hard to

reach' (LSC, 2004). This introductory chapter sets out the overall field of study, examines key terms, considers the historic development of family programmes and outlines the research questions to be addressed.

This area of study was selected following my participation in previous research at the School of Education, University of Nottingham, between September 2003 and August 2004, into rural adult literacy provision in England. The comparative case study, conducted for the National Research Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), found family literacy programmes were one strategy amongst many being employed by Local Authorities to achieve Learning and Skills Councils' (LSC) literacy and numeracy targets. These targets were set by the government under the Skills for Life (SfL) strategy (DfEE, 2001). Research into this topic area is timely for several reasons. Since the implementation of SfL following the report of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser in 1999, family literacy programmes in England have become more widespread. Subsequently, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) report *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy: a guide for policy makers* in 2005, offered guidelines for policy makers delivering family literacy programmes. In 2005/06, the LSC, the body responsible for funding family literacy programmes in England, allocated nearly £37 million to fund provision (LSC, 2005). This doctoral study began in late 2004, near the beginning of the United Nations Literacy Decade, which runs from 2003-2012 (UN, 2005). Further, adult literacy is considered key to the achievement of the European Union's Lisbon Agenda '...to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council, 2000:2). This was demonstrated by the UNESCO Institute of

Education (UIE) Nexus newsletter - distributed by UNESCO, Hamburg June 2005 - which published an article reporting the proceedings from the European Regional Meeting on literacy held in Lyon in April of that year. The article stated that the meeting had agreed that ‘...there will be no achievement of the Lisbon Agenda without adult literacy’ (UNESCO, 2005a: 2). Therefore, the research, findings and implications of this study, which looks at family literacy programmes in the European context, are current and applicable, not just to England, but to the European and international context. Furthermore, making a comparative analysis in the field of family literacy is not only timely but also necessary if a sharing of good practice within Europe is to be achieved.

Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters. This introductory chapter considers the broad field of study. It explores the origin of family literacy programmes, states the research questions and provides a description of the three participating case study areas. Chapter 2 will review the relevant literature and map family literacy programmes in the national and international context. It will also provide the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 sets out the research methodology employed and the justification for its selection relative to the research question(s) outlined at the end of this chapter. Chapters 4 and 5 contain the research findings and discussion. These are presented under key themes linked to the research questions. Chapter 4 focuses on family literacy programmes from a policy and professional perspective, incorporating the rationale for funding programmes. It also explores the type of programmes offered and considers who attends them. Chapter 5 concentrates on the families involved in programmes. It looks at learner motivation, impact and benefits. Finally, in chapter 6 conclusions are drawn, and

justification for the studies' originality, its contribution to knowledge and suggestions for further research are made.

The origins of family literacy

According to Brooks, et al. (1996), Thomas (1998), Benseman (2002), the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Ireland (2004) and others, the term family literacy originated from the work of Denny Taylor in 1983. Family literacy emerged from her study in the USA of how young children learn to read and write, entitled *Family Literacy: young children learning to read*. Since then, many have offered their own ideas of what constitutes family literacy and, as Thomas points out, definitions are as diverse as the activities themselves. Gadsden (1999: 258) believes that 'family literacy has no singular meaning, and family literacy programs have no monolithic purpose.' According to Thomas (1998) who looks at family learning in Canada, the term has been used to:

Indicate interest in the way literacy is used with families, the study of relationships between literacy use in families and children's academic achievement, and the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes to facilitate the literacy development of families.

(Thomas, 1998: 6)

Thomas finds family literacy falling into two common types. The first, family literacy itself, denotes the use and development of literacy in the home. This is then transferable to the broader context. The second, family literacy intervention, refers to the many programmes or initiatives intended to, '...recognise the influence of the family on the

literacy development of family members and try to support families in literacy activities and in accessing literacy resources' (Thomas, 1998: 6).

Wolfendale agrees that defining family literacy is anything but simple, claiming '...it would be invidious to pigeon-hole the rich array of practice into one overarching defining statement' (Wolfendale, 1996: 168). For Wolfendale, family learning is concerned with the past, present and future of cultural heritage. For NALA (2004: 9) it is '...the uses of literacy within family networks, especially activities which involve two or more generations; education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context.' For Taylor (1997) family literacy can only be effective when set in the relevant context, or culture. Taylor stressed the importance of context in the home, at school and in the wider community, for the development of a child's literacy skills. Whilst the families involved in Taylor's study did not necessarily have low levels of literacy skills, Taylor went on to conduct further research with families in poverty and living in urban areas.

In England, family literacy programmes are frequently closely linked to the SfL strategy (DfEE, 2001) rather than the lifelong learning agenda. They are most commonly, but not always, delivered in deprived communities. In other countries the rationale may differ. Family literacy programmes may be targeted at ethnic minority groups, with the primary aim of helping families to integrate into a new culture, or in areas where it is difficult, even undesirable, for learners to attend school. This could be due to either the remoteness of the community, or as a result of the local industry on which communities rely. They may not view education as relevant to them or as a priority at certain times of

the year. This is particularly true for the families of migrant workers in rural areas involved in agriculture, forestry or fishing (Atkin, et al., 2005: 78).

According to Thomas (1998: 7), 'the first family literacy programs, aimed at supporting families in their literacy development, began in Israel, the USA and England in the 1970s and 1980s...' with Canada following in the early 1980s. Programmes varied in context, length, aims and places of delivery. However, according to Brooks, et al., (1996), the first family literacy programmes appeared in Britain in 1993. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) established the Family Literacy initiative in October 1993 with funding from the Department for Education (and the Welsh Office), now the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The initiative had two main aims, 'to raise standards of literacy among adults with difficulties and their children, and to extend awareness of the importance of literacy and the role of family literacy' (Brooks, et al., 1996: 3). Levels of parental literacy were low at the beginning of the course and their children were viewed as being at a disadvantage in their learning, exhibiting slow development of vocabulary, reading and writing.

Family literacy programmes did exist prior to 1993, both in Britain and in the USA. However, according to Brooks, et al., (1996), the Demonstration Programmes in England had four specific features previously unseen. Demonstration Programmes were the first to stipulate a course length rather than to use a model of drop-in sessions. All participants were voluntary (frequently in America, programmes tended to be linked to the entitlement of social benefits). The main aim was centred on educational outcomes, namely the improvement of language and literacy skills, rather than wider social benefits. Finally, the intergenerational nature of the programme was paramount to its

success. The Demonstration model, or the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) model as it is sometimes called, has subsequently shaped family literacy programmes in England, including those that this study aims to examine, as well as influencing programme formats in other countries, such as Malta (Pers Comm, 2005a).

This research is specifically interested in family literacy programmes that are being offered to families where one or both of the parents are assumed, often by a teacher at the school that the child attends, to have low levels of literacy and/or numeracy skills. In such instances, attending a family literacy programme is seen as beneficial to both the parent and the child. Whilst a full definition of the parameters of family literacy programmes, within the context of this study, is provided towards the end of this chapter, they are essentially formal programmes of delivery, occurring within a set time. Programmes are delivered at a designated geographical location by at least one experienced facilitator, usually the adult tutor. The parents attending generally have dependant children aged between three and 11 years old. Ultimately, the underlying aim of family literacy programmes is to teach literacy and numeracy skills. The main focus is families that appear to be locked into a continuing cycle where children have repeatedly been considered to fail to fully achieve academically. Generation after generation are known, usually by the schools, to have left compulsory education with few or no qualifications, entering low-paid, low-skilled employment, generally in the case of the fathers or, commonly in the case of the mothers, to start a family of their own. This generational cycle of underachievement is well documented and highlighted in the SfL report of 2001, *The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* which states, ‘parents with poor literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to have children with similar difficulties’ (DfEE, 2001: 29). Drawing on the work of ALBSU in

1993, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) estimated the impact could be as high as 60 per cent, resulting in a ‘...generational cycle of underachievement... (DfEE, 2001: 29). The latest report by the National Literacy Trust finds the situation has changed little (Bird and Akerman, 2005). The SfL report cites the educational level of parents as one of the key risk factors leading to adult social exclusion and to nearly four out of five 16 year old boys with low reading skills, wishing to leave school early; thus highlighting family background as an important influence on academic success or failure.

Mapping the field of study: Introducing the concept of family literacy programmes

As discussed previously, family literacy programmes cover a wide range of activities that differ from one context to another. They are elusive, wide-ranging and fluid in nature. In some countries they may not be recognised as family literacy or even family learning. Often, whilst the two terms are used interchangeably, they actually refer to similar types of delivery. Responsibility for family literacy, types of programmes, context and funding may be placed within a country’s Education Ministry or, in some cases, voluntary organisations may take the lead. For example, in Ireland family learning programmes are the responsibility of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), a membership organisation with voluntary status. In the United States of America (USA), the main provider is the National Centre for Family Literacy (NCFL). The NCFL is based in Kentucky and has charitable status (NALA, 2004). In England, family literacy is currently predominantly government-led and forms part of the SfL strategy (DfEE, 2001).

Family learning can be found under many different banners including lifelong or intergenerational learning, and adult or family education. According to Cairney (2002: 153) ‘family literacy as a descriptive label has emerged from a number of related, and at times overlapping, terms including parent literacy, parent involvement, intergenerational literacy, and community literacy.’ As such, it is often difficult to grasp exactly which type of family literacy or learning is being considered. Many European countries, for example Denmark, Norway, Germany and Britain have a strong tradition of adult education – often informal, over and above the compulsory school education system (Federighi, 1998), but few mention ‘family literacy’ or ‘family learning’ specifically. In such countries, learning through the family appears to be implicit within the wider social and educational ethos. It is often viewed as natural and positive, rather than a separate, potentially negative or problematic issue that needs to be addressed. Programmes vary in terms of who the learners are; expected number of participants; duration; content; frequency; venues of delivery and social context. Due to the complex nature of family learning programmes, it is difficult to ensure all types of programmes are fully mapped at any one time.

Even within one country, where coherent policy and funding exists, programmes still vary greatly from one region to another. For example, whilst England has an overarching policy under the SfL strategy that incorporates family literacy programmes; methods of delivery differ across the country (Atkin, et al., 2005). Although the LSC has overall responsibility in terms of funding family learning programmes, numerous models of delivery can be found. In Cornwall a variety of programmes are delivered by Links into Learning, part of the County Council Adult Education Service. Cornwall was one of the first areas in England to offer such programmes, with provision running since the late

1990s. Approximately thirty courses a year are offered to around 450 learners. In contrast, in Herefordshire, family programmes are delivered through a partnership between the Lifelong Learning Unit, which sits within the Local Education Authority (LEA), and the local college. The Unit acts as a broker, organising provision in primary schools whilst the college provides the tutors to enable delivery. This provision is more recent (approximately five years), smaller, and closely tied-in with the SfL strategy (Atkin, et al., 2005: 46).

The following pages provide an overview, rather than a comprehensive account, of family literacy programmes in the international context at the time of the study. Programmes are delivered predominantly in either English-speaking countries such as the USA, Canada and England or in Western European countries.

In England, family learning programmes are generally divided into two strands. The first, family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN), aims to address the deficit in literacy, language or numeracy of some parents in some areas, usually by linking adult learning to the National Curriculum (Atkin, et al., 2005). The bigger policy issue is 'inclusion', particularly breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Consequently, programmes are predominantly offered in inner city communities, in communities where there is a high number of ethnic minorities (Horne and Haggart, 2004) and where an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) need has been identified (Pefal, 2004a). The second strand is wider family learning which, according to the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), (2003), covers everything that FLLN does not, but may also include literacy, language and numeracy learning. Programmes range from making crafts to using computers, learning first aid, healthy eating and helping with

general parenting skills. Wider family learning comprises many aspects of how a family learns and grows together.

A variety of different types of family programmes are currently being delivered in Wales (Estyn, 2004). Provision is predominantly literacy and numeracy, based on the BSA model delivered in England. However, some programmes are aimed at parents with ESOL needs whilst others focus more on outdoor and non-school based or leisure activities, for example, 'supporting adults with English as an additional language' (EAL), and 'intergenerational programmes' such as motorbike maintenance and pottery. Delivery usually takes place during primary school age. It is unclear from Estyn's *Quality and Standards in Family Learning* report (2004), if delivery takes place in English, Welsh or both. Programmes are funded by several sources. Funding predominantly comes from the Welsh Assembly Government, but European funding and the schools' own funding may also be used. Programmes are often delivered in partnership with a Further Education (FE) provider which 'employs the adult tutors and manages the accreditation for the adult learning,' (Estyn, 2004: 7). This partnership was reported to be in the early stages of development.

As stated earlier (page 8), the NCFL is the main provider of family programmes in the USA. The NCFL is based in Kentucky, a State where multiple literacy difficulties, particularly amongst the rural poor, have been a concern since the 1960s (Berman, 1982). First established in 1989 with a grant from William R. Kenan Junior, hence the term the 'Kenan model' of family literacy, the NCFL caters for 'at risk' children and their parents. Recently it has incorporated the Hispanic Family Literacy Institute (HFLI) established in 2003 (NALA, 2004). The Kenan model of delivery emerged from the

Parent and Child Education (PACE) programmes piloted in 1986. This model recommends that all family literacy programmes should contain four core elements. First, there should be a basic education element intended for adult participants. Second, there should be a focus on children's education. Third, there should be time allowed for the child and the parent to work together. Finally, there should be parent-only time that allows space to explore parenting skills and issues. Many countries use this model as the basis for their family literacy programmes (NALA 2004: 31). For example, there are more than 300 programmes in Canada. In Soweto, Capetown, South Africa, provision is run through the Families Learning Together Project (2000). Manukau City, Auckland, New Zealand, has adapted the Kenan model to become the Manukau Family Literacy model. Australia has a 'Talk to the Literacy' programme which has been running since 1990 and in Europe family literacy programmes were found in several countries including Britain, Ireland and Malta.

According to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) website, Canada has well-organised family literacy programmes across the provinces and territories, actively promoting the ethos of family literacy through lifelong learning. The primary aim of the HRSDC is to focus on developing a love of reading across generations. Its secondary aims are to enhance quality of life, enrich communities and maximize human capital (HRSDC, 2005). An annual family literacy day, organised by the ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, is held in Canada each January. The event receives wide media coverage and support from many agencies.

According to NALA's Report, *Working together – Approaches to Family Literacy*, (2004) programmes in Ireland are delivered by more than 27 Vocational Education

Committees (VECs), Adult Literacy Schemes through partnerships with adult education, schools, libraries and community projects. Family learning programmes have been delivered in Ireland since the 1990s and are based on the Kenan model described above. Broadly speaking, there are three types of programmes; 'Short outreach courses for learners new to adult education; Programmes which focus on specific skills, such as language, reading or using a computer; and intensive family literacy and numeracy programmes involving parents, carers and children' (NALA, 2004: 11). According to NALA, programmes involve two or more generations and aim to improve and develop literacy and numeracy in the family context.

Cyprus has long established parental educational programmes, largely as a result of specific historical issues faced by the island (Phitiaka, 1999). During times of occupation, by both the Turkish and the British, Cypriots used education as a means of '...protecting their religious, national and cultural identity...later, it became a means of professional and social advancement' (Phitiaka, 1999: 98). Parental education took on a particular significance following the last Turkish invasion in 1974 which led to the division of the island and the destruction of many extended family networks. Schools were utilised as one way of filling the gap, offering social support and practical advice concerning parenting that had traditionally been provided by family members (Phitiaka, 1999). According to Phitiaka, school teachers in Cyprus have been viewed as holding all knowledge whilst parental experiences and skills have been regarded as having little or no value. Parental provision in Cyprus is largely seen as a one-way system in which the teacher disseminates knowledge to the parent. The parent takes on this learning in the same manner as the children. Currently there are three organisations offering learning to parents in Cyprus (Phitiaka, 1999). The oldest is the Pancyprian School for

Parents established in 1968. The School is reported to have a large number of attendees and centres. The Adult Education Centres of the Minister of Education were originally set up by the British in the early 1950s to tackle illiteracy. The centres have undergone various changes and now offer a wide variety of courses covering a diversity of topics including parental education. Finally, parental education falls within the broad remit of the University of Cyprus, a relatively new institution founded in 1996. Parental learning programmes in Cyprus have traditionally focused on parenting abilities, the encouragement of parental awareness and the development of parental skills (Phitiaka, 1999) rather than the academic or economic advancement of skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Another Mediterranean island, Malta, also has a strong tradition of family programmes. In Malta programmes are run by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) which was established in 2001 to work with the Ministry of Education. Malta has several initiatives, including Club Hilti, which means ‘my ability’ in Maltese (Camilleri, unpublished). Club Hilti is a family literacy programme offered to families with children in primary school. Malta has also been involved in European Union initiatives, notably the Parental Empowerment for Family Learning (Pefal) project. Funded through Grundtvig 1 the European Co-operation project Pefal ran for two years, ending in July 2004. The project was coordinated by Malta and assessed by Spain. Five other countries participated: Belgium, England, Italy, Lithuania and Romania. The project focused on issues of literacy, numeracy and social skills for parents and children of marginalised families (Camilleri, et al., 2005). In each country, the programme addressed specific needs. For example, in England it was concerned predominantly with the Pakistani and

Bangladeshi communities of Burnley, Lancashire (Pefal, 2004a). In Lithuania, it focused on the Polish and Russian communities (Pefal, 2004b).

Thomas (1998) and Bensenam (2002) cite Israel as establishing one of the earliest family literacy programmes together with the USA and England. The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, commonly known as HIPPY (or HAETGAR in Israel), is an on-going long-term government funded programme. According to the programme website (<http://www.hippy.org.il/>), it provides support for pre-school children in the home ensuring that they are ready to enter education. Parents are encouraged to spend fifteen minutes each day with their children on a storybook, a puzzle, or a learning game. HIPPY has established an International Network with programmes, or versions of the programme, currently operating in several other countries; Australia, Canada, France, El Salvador, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. Interest has also been shown by governments in China, Portugal, Singapore and Zimbabwe.

Throughout Europe numerous family projects can be found. However, many appear to be one-off, short-term funded initiatives rather than sustained, long-term family literacy programmes. Whilst many have been evaluated for their impact, few studies appear to identify exactly how this impact occurs (Bensenam, 2002). Examples of such projects include the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning's (formerly the Institute for Education) two-year pilot project in Hamburg. This family literacy project aimed to support the literacy skills of parents and children from migrant backgrounds. The European Socrates Grundtvig 2 programme funded the Teddy Bear project; a three year intergenerational project where Teddy Bear stands for Twinning the Elderly

Disadvantaged and Disabled with the Young By Enabling Active Reminiscence. The project aimed to promote a greater understanding between children aged 6-12 and the elderly, 50 plus, (The Herefordshire Learning Partnership, 2004) through life histories of the older generation and creative artwork and writing by the children. It was not necessary for the adults and the children to be related.

Outside of Europe and North America, the Manukau City family literacy project, run by the City of Manukau Educational Trust (COMET) in New Zealand, represents a relatively new development into the area of family literacy for the country (Benseman, 2002). Whilst New Zealand has established programmes, which include HIPPY and Parents as First Teachers (PAFT), such programmes generally assume the adult already has good literacy skills. Family literacy programmes aimed at increasing the skills of the adult as much as advancing a child's learning, is a relatively new concept (Benseman, 2002: 2).

In total over twenty countries were found to be delivering, or had recently participated in the delivery of, one type of family programme or another. In Europe, many programmes were found to be one-off, project-based, rather than established or on-going.

Research implications

The complexity of delivery and definition, as outlined above, posed particular difficulties for identifying three case studies suitable for the research. The diversity of programmes called for a narrowing of the field to make a viable focus for the research to be undertaken. Therefore, the research concentrates on specific areas within England, Ireland and Malta.

Contextualisation of the case study areas

The benchmark from which to gauge the suitability of countries selected to participate in the study, was the model of family literacy programmes delivered in England. The reason for this was two-fold. Firstly, I already had knowledge of family literacy programmes in England from my past research activities in the field of adult literacy and numeracy (Atkin, et al., 2005). Secondly, being British, I wished to begin comparisons of family literacy programmes from the perspective of a system that was familiar. At the time of the study, all three selected countries were running established family literacy programmes that were sufficiently similar to each other to be comparable, yet different enough to provide a contrastable component to the study. The following provides an overview of the three countries involved in the study, the rationale for their inclusion in the study, and their approach towards family literacy programmes, some of which have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Details for each of the specifically identified case study areas within the chosen countries, such as population statistics and social context are also provided.

Comparability of the sample sites

All three case study countries in the sample satisfy the definition of family literacy programmes outlined earlier and stated in full at the end of this chapter. Namely, that they are formal programmes of delivery, occurring within a set time frame, with a beginning and end date. They are delivered at a designated geographical location and have an underlying ethos to teach literacy and numeracy skills. The parent learners generally have dependant children aged three to 11 years old. Each country also runs formal, centrally funded family literacy programmes of one type or another that are broadly similar in terms of mode of delivery and overall aims and objectives. This was

one of the key factors considered when deciding which countries should be included in the study. The three countries have many demographic and cultural factors in common, as well as many differences, some of which are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Key facts of the participating countries

Facts	England	Ireland	Malta
Official language	English	English, Gaelic	Maltese, English
Population	50.4 million	4,234,925	404,039
Mean age	39.6 years	34 years	39 years
Birth rate/1,000 pop	10.67	14.4	10.28
Death rate/1,000 pop	10.09	7.8 deaths	8.19
Life expectancy at birth	78.7 years	77.9 years	79.15 years
	76.23 (Males)	75.27 (Males)	76 (Males)
	81.3 (Females)	80.7 (Females)	81 (Females)
Religion	78% (Christian)	89% (RC)*	98% (RC)
Ethnicity	87% (British White)	94.2% (Irish)	98% (Maltese)
Marriage	6.6%	7.8%	9.7%
Divorce rate (%)	13% (of married couples - 2005)	0.8%	Nil - illegal
Employment	80.4% Services 18.2% Industries 1.4 Agriculture	64% Service 29% Industry 8% Agriculture	75% Service 22% Industry 3% Agriculture
Unemployment rate**	5.4 % (May, 2007)	4.3%	6.8% (2005)
Jobless households	10.7%	7.9%	6.7%
Population below poverty line	17% (2002)	10% (est. 1997)	N/A
Inflation rate	2.4% (June, 2007)	1.9% (April, 2007)	1.1% (April, 2007)
Area of country	130,395 square km	70,280 square km	316 square km
Population density	383 square km	1271 square km	1282 square km
Asylum applications	27,850 (2006)	1270 (2006)	4240 (2006)
Net migration /1,000pop	2.17	4.82	2.04
Natural resources	Varied including: coal, gas, iron ore, lead, zinc, tin, gold, limestone, salt	Gas, peat, copper, lead, zinc, barite, gypsum, limestone	Limestone, salt, arable land
Internet access per household	63%	50%	N/A
Currency	Pound, Sterling	Euro	Maltese Lira (or pounds)

Key: The information in Table 1 is drawn from a variety of sources including: Eurostat,(2007); The Centre Statistics Office, (CSO),(2005) Ireland from the 2005 year book; National Statistics Online (UK), 2001 Census; The National Statistics Office Malta (NSOM), 2005 Census; The CIA, (2007) The World Factbook; Finfacts Ireland (2007); and Wikipedia, (2007).

The majority of statistics for England relate to the whole of the UK / * RC = Roman Catholic / **Labour Force Survey measurement (ONS) / pop=population

Whilst all three countries belong to the European Union (EU), they are not part of mainland Continental Europe. To provide geographical context, Map 1 shows the location of each country within the EU and their geographical position in relation to each other.

Map 1 – The case study sites in the European context



(Source: The University of Texas, At Austin, 2007)

All three countries have urban areas of high population density. In fact, Malta is the most densely populated country in the EU (NSOM, 2006). In addition, each has rural areas that are sparsely populated within their own context.

As Table 1 shows, each country has English as its first or second language. In the case of Malta, where English is taught from primary school onwards (Ministry of Education, 1999), many citizens are bilingual from an early age. In Ireland, since the Irish Language Act of 2003 (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007) there has been a growing commitment to increasing levels of written and spoken Gaelic. This is embodied in the form of the new Irish Language Forum, or the Fóram Ghaeilge (Clare County Council, 2007). The Forum promotes the use of Gaelic in schools and communities although for the vast majority English remains the language of common use (Eurostat, 2007). The bilingualism of Malta and the potential for the strengthening of Gaelic in Ireland provides the study with an interesting perspective on the term 'literacy', especially when considered in relation to England. In England, English is not only dominant but also viewed as the default language. In every circumstance, in every sector of life, literacy is automatically assumed to equate to English. According to the CIA World Factbook (2007), the literacy rate in the UK and Ireland is 99%, whilst in Malta it stands at 92.8%, (see Table 1). The CIA defines literacy in the UK as those who are 15 years old and over that completed five years or more of schooling. For Ireland, it is defined as those aged 15 and over that can read and write; In Malta, it is aged 10 and over.

As Table 1 shows, two of the three countries, Malta and Ireland, are strongly Roman Catholic. In Malta, 98% of the population is Roman Catholic (CIA, 2007) whilst in Ireland the figure is 89% (CSO, 2005). In both cases, the Catholic Church still exerts much power and control over family behaviour and moral codes. For example, in Malta the Church opposes divorce, ensuring it remains illegal and in Ireland, the Church continues to oppose abortion. In this way, the Church not only plays a large part in the

role of the family but is also actively influential in the State. In both countries, the place of women has traditionally been viewed as predominantly at home with the family (Gilligan, 1989; UNCEDAW, 2004). In comparison, in England the Church is predominantly a separate entity from both the family and the state. England is no longer viewed as a religious but rather as a secular society. However, according to the 2001 census data for England and Wales, 78% of people who responded to the census described themselves as Christian (this includes Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Baptist) and only 16% as having no religion (NSO, 2004). The second most popular faith was cited as Muslim (3%) with Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh also mentioned. In essence, England is a multicultural, multi-faith, secular society.

However, whilst there are broad areas of similarity between the three participating countries, it should be noted that they are very different in size, socio-economic framework and culture. These differences raise important issues for the comparative nature of the study. For example, when considering the difference in the size between the three countries, Malta is a microstate and England, as part of the UK, forms one of the strongest powers and economies of the world. The UK is one of the G8 countries and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This diversity has implications in relation to the ability of each country to fund programmes and to be flexible in their delivery. Such issues are considered during the presentation and discussion of findings in chapter 4. Table 1 highlights some of the key facts, differences and similarities for the three participating countries.

During the search for suitably comparable case study areas, many European countries were found not to have family literacy programmes in the way that they are understood

in England, Ireland and Malta. In the study areas, family literacy programmes have emerged from a recognised need by policy makers in Government to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills within the general population. Through extensive research, including attending an international conference in Norway specifically concerned with family literacy and learning, it became apparent that many European countries did not perceive such challenges existed within their native population. Many countries claimed all citizens to be competent in literacy and numeracy skills and that no one leaves school illiterate. This was particularly so in Scandinavian countries, France and Germany. Family literacy and learning programmes that did exist were usually one-off, specific projects rather than continuous, planned programmes. Further, since countries did not perceive their indigenous citizens to have literacy and numeracy needs, the majority of programmes were aimed at helping the integration, often through compulsory citizenship classes, of immigrants, asylum seekers and their families. Predominantly, family literacy programmes were used as a starting point either for such groups to begin engaging with the local culture, or to encourage them to start facing some of the atrocities they had witnessed and fled from. The improvement in literacy skills, (numeracy was rarely included) was incidental and always in the language of the host nation. This is contradictory to family literacy programmes in Malta and Ireland, despite their bilingual nature. In the Irish case study area, the research found delivery was solely in English. In Malta, it was in either English or Maltese, depending upon the needs of the learners.

As documented earlier, numerous countries outside Europe offered family literacy programmes that were delivered along similar models to those in England; namely the English-speaking countries of North America and Australasia. However, these were disregarded as viable case study comparisons mainly due to the practical reasons of

distance and cost. Further, as we have seen, a large amount of research has already been undertaken in North America. Whilst family literacy programmes exist in many African, Indian and South American countries, these countries were rejected as suitable comparable study sites as neither their general educational development nor their systems of delivering family literacy were comparable to England.

Each specific case study within the chosen country was carefully selected to ensure sufficient similarities in terms of the characteristics of the geographical space, both physically and demographically; and the family literacy programmes being delivered at the time of the study. All three local case study areas can be described as semi-rural within the context of their country and were frequently referred to as rural by interviewees. Each area exhibited many differences as specified above, particularly in Table 1.

England and Herefordshire

England forms the largest of the study sites with a population of 50.4 million, with 87% of the population describing itself as British White (ONS, 2007), as shown in Table 1. England, rather than the UK or Great Britain, was chosen because education, both compulsory and adult, is not centrally funded from Whitehall throughout the UK. Since devolution in 1999, Wales and Northern Ireland, through their respective National Assemblies, have had autonomy over their education budgets. In the case of Scotland, education systems and funding have always been different. Whilst the Scottish Executive was not established until July 1999, Scotland has enjoyed a level of independence from Whitehall since the Scottish Office was established in 1885. This gave them power over such matters as health, justice, agriculture and education,

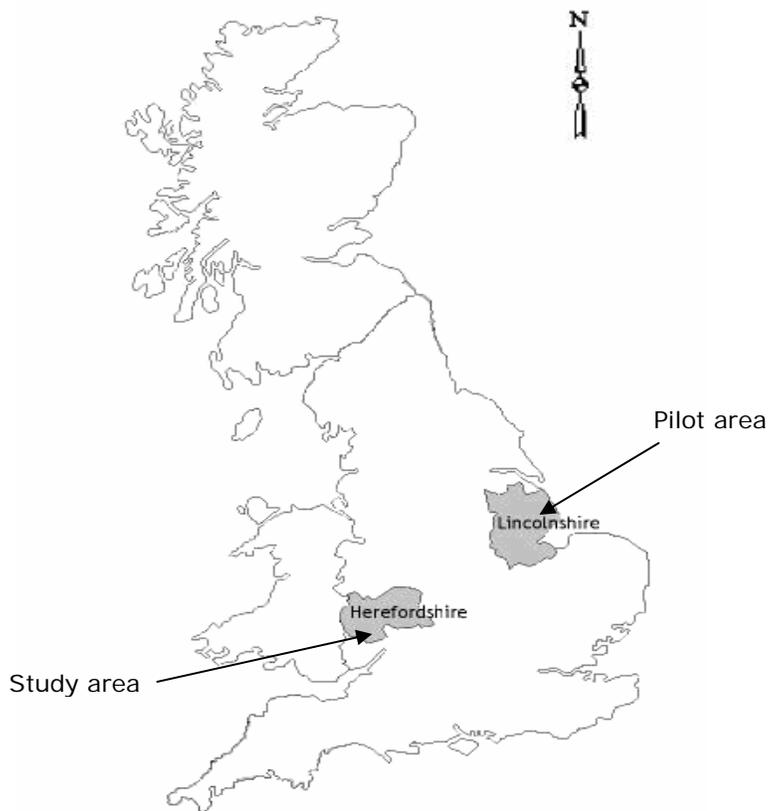
(Scottish Executive, 2007). The delivery of family literacy programmes in England is, and historically has been, sporadic (Ofsted, 2000). In some areas, such as Cornwall, programmes have been established for many years (Atkin, et al., 2005), but in other areas, such as Lincolnshire, delivery is still in the early stages of development (Interviews with county coordinators in 2004) or even, in some parts of the county, non-existent. The study by Atkin, et al., in 2005 found that family literacy and wider family learning programmes are delivered by various agencies within the Local Education Authority (LEA), including Adult Education Services, colleges, basic skills coordinators and Lifelong Learning Units. They also found that Government spending on family learning has substantially increased over the last few years as a direct result of the SfL agenda and the pressure placed on providers from the LSC to meet their SfL targets. Programmes are primarily intended for areas of deprivation, where low adult literacy and numeracy skills can often be found, and where children have been identified as in danger of repeating generational cycles of low academic achievement in these core skills (NIACE, 2003; Hannon and Bird, 2004; Reynolds, 2006). Whilst not explicitly stated, the literature indicates that the majority of family literacy programmes in England are delivered in primary schools during the school day (Ofsted, 2000; NIACE, 2003). Finally, the majority of parents involved in family literacy programmes in England are mothers (Ofsted, 2000; Brookes, et al., 1996; Goldman, 2005).

Herefordshire was chosen as the English case study for several reasons. First, whilst Herefordshire does not have the longest running family literacy programmes in the England, neither does it have the most recent; it is typical of many counties (Atkin, et al., 2005). At the time of the study, programmes in Herefordshire had been running for five years. Secondly, Herefordshire is a county that is committed to the principle of

family literacy. Thirdly, strong contacts had already been established with those responsible for delivering family literacy programmes in the county following my work on the rural adult learners' project (Atkin, et al., 2005) where Herefordshire formed one of the six case study areas for the evaluation. Frequently the most difficult part of research is finding a 'way in', gaining access through an existing contact who is willing to participate in the research. A personal contact in the proposed area of study eased issues of access. Finally, those involved in family literacy programmes in the county were willing to participate, viewing the study as an opportunity to obtain an independent perspective on their provision which could be utilised to enhance and develop future delivery. Participation also offered the opportunity to learn from other programme models.

Herefordshire is one of the smallest and most rural counties in England with an area of 2180 square kilometers (Atkin, et al., 2005) and a population of 178,000 (Herefordshire Council Research Team, 2003). It represents the only case study area which is landlocked. The location of Herefordshire within the British context can be found on Map 2. Herefordshire contains no large urban centres, compared with other counties in England. The population is concentrated around the City of Hereford (60,000) and the five surrounding market towns of Bromyard (4,248), Leominster (11,220), Kington (2,660), Ledbury (9,240) and Ross-on-Wye (10,180). According to figures drawn from the 2001 national census (Herefordshire Council, 2007) the population of Herefordshire is predominantly Christian (79%) and British White (97.5%). At the time of the census, unemployment in the County was lower (2.7%) than the national average (3.3%).

Map 2 – Location of the English case study and pilot area



Herefordshire has a strong tradition of cider-making, a high proportion of small firms with less than ten employees and very few large companies (Atkin, et al., 2005). According to the Herefordshire Council Research Team (2003), nearly 49,000 people are engaged in Service Industries and fewer than 10,000 are employed in Agriculture.

Ireland and County Clare

Ireland was recruited to the study following preliminary investigations, which suggested that it had similar, but different, family literacy programmes to those being delivered in England. Ireland is the second largest of the case study areas with a population of 4,234,925 (CSO, 2006). Its main language is English, (see Table 1) making it unproblematic for interviewing. Ireland comprises four provinces, Connaught, Leinster,

for less than six per cent of the population (CSO, 2005). In addition, there is a significant Traveller community. The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) estimates that there are 25,000 Travellers in Ireland, constituting around 0.5% of the population (ITM, 2007).

As noted earlier in this chapter (page 12), family literacy programmes in Ireland are organised and delivered by the 27 Vocational Education Committee (VECs) Adult Literacy Schemes through partnerships with adult education, schools, libraries and community projects. Family literacy programmes in Ireland have been developed since the 1990s and loosely follow the Kenan model of delivery, similar to that used in England. Broadly speaking there are three types of programmes as described in the Working Together: Approaches to Family Literacy report by NALA (2004):

Short outreach courses for learners new to adult education; Programmes which focus on specific skills, such as language, reading or using a computer; Intensive family literacy and numeracy programmes involving parents, carers and children...

(NALA, 2004: 11)

Programmes endeavour to involve two or more generations, with the primary aim of improving and developing literacy and numeracy in the family context. According to NALA this is achieved by supporting parents with limited education, breaking down barriers and supporting learning in the home and the community. The report recommends that the Department of Education and Science (DES) 'should take a lead role in promoting an integrated National Strategy for the development of family literacy' in Ireland (NALA, 2004: 12). Family literacy programmes form part of the social inclusion agenda and are at different levels in different counties depending upon local priorities. Some areas have no family literacy programmes whilst others have

established programmes of delivery, such as Dublin and County Clare (Per Comms, 2005b).

County Clare lies on the west coast of Ireland, in the province of Munster, between Limerick and Galway, as indicated on Map 3. It was selected as the second study area following preliminary telephone discussions and a meeting with the local coordinator at the Falcon Family Learning Conference in Norway (2005) where it was agreed that County Clare would be a suitable site for the study. As well as delivering established family literacy programmes, known locally as family learning, for several years, County Clare was felt to be comparable with Herefordshire due to its rural nature and small size. The total population of County Clare is 110,800 (CSO, 2006: 21). The majority of the population is centred on the town of Ennis, which has 20,234 residents (CSO, 2006: 47). The remainder of the country consists of five towns, Kilrush, Killaloe, Ennistymon, Scarriff and Shannon. In line with the rest of Ireland, the population of County Clare is predominantly indigenous Irish (94%) and Roman Catholic. County Clare also has a substantial Travelling community of almost two percent, mainly based around Ennis (Clare County VEC, 2005). The area is viewed locally as having the ‘...potential to become a development location of national importance... [and an] ...engine for growth of employment opportunities throughout the county’, (Clare County VEC, 2005: 9). Farming, forestry and manufacturing comprise the traditional employment sectors of the county. These are now being replaced, particularly by tourism and professional services that, according to the VEC in County Clare, require a shift in economic skills from manual labour to a knowledge economy. Therefore, the role of continuing education has become central to future policy development in the County. Clare County Council is committed to the promotion of the Irish language, Gaelic, through the new Irish

language forum or Fóram Ghaeilge an Chláir, as noted in Table 1 above. The Council believes that, ‘the Irish language is relevant to all of Irish society...[and that]...groups and individuals who are in the public eye need to take on a proactive position towards the native language’ (Clare County Council, 2007). Promotion is proposed through the collaboration of a range of sectors including the VEC, the Health Services and Tourism. However, at the time of the study, none of the family literacy programmes were being delivered in Gaelic, only English was used; therefore, bilingualism did not present any issues for conducting the research.

Malta and Gozo

Malta lies in the middle of the Mediterranean some 57 miles south of Sicily. Its climate is dry and warm with an annual rainfall for 1999-2000 of 821.2mm (NSOM, 2003). As Table 1 illustrates, Malta is much smaller than the other two participating countries covering only 312 square kilometres, with a total population of 404,039 (NSOM, 2006). Whilst the Republic of Malta is the most densely populated country in Europe at 1,282 residents per square kilometres – the island of Malta having a density of 1,513 - Gozo and Comino are comparatively rural with only 425 people per square kilometres (NSOM, 2006:xxiii & xxvii). According to the Maltese Census conducted in 2005 the UK is the fourth most densely populated European country with Ireland rated as number 20 out of 25. Permanent foreign residents represented only 2.3% of the total Maltese population, making the islands 97.7% indigenous (NSOM, 2000). According to the NSOM, the Republic of Malta, like many other European countries, has an ageing population. The official languages of the islands are Maltese and English, as stated in Table 1, with all pupils expected to leave school bilingual (Ministry of Education, 1999). Under principle 10 of the Maltese National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) document

bilingualism is considered to be ‘...the basis of the educational system...[and]...This goal must be reached by the students by the end of their entire schooling experience’ (Ministry of Education, 1999: 30). Like Ireland, the main religion of the Maltese is Roman Catholic (98%), (CIA, 2007). However, the country is so steeped in Catholicism that this question appears not to have been included in the 2005 census; it is implicit that the overriding majority of the population is Catholic. Overall, the number of people marrying has declined since the late 1990s for both Malta and Gozo. Unlike the other two participating countries, divorce in Malta is illegal. Therefore, families in Malta are largely traditional nuclear units, consisting of mother, father and children, with few alternative family structures found compared to England and Ireland.

As discussed earlier (page 14), family literacy programmes in Malta are organised and delivered by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES). The FES works closely with both the Ministry of Education and schools to provide family literacy programmes in areas of need. Funding comes directly from the Ministry of Education. According to their mission statement on the internet (<http://www.fes.org.mt/aboutus.html>) the FES was formed to:

1 - Develop and manage...innovative services and programmes...that ensure the provision of quality education for all students at risk of school failure and social exclusion.

2 - Develop and manage educational programmes for parents that enable them to support their children’s development and learning at every key developmental stage. (FES, 2006)

Family literacy programmes have emerged to help address the second aim of the FES, which is therefore the objective most pertinent to this study. In Malta, there were several

models of delivery. The main family literacy programme was Club Hilti which had been running for approximately five years at the time of the fieldwork. Club Hilti was an adaptation of the BSA model used in England. Programmes were targeted at families with children in primary school and closely linked to the children's NMC. Unlike the other two participating countries in the study, the delivery and spread of programmes in Malta was highly consistent and controlled. Malta's micro size made organisation and standardisation of provision relatively unproblematic. Programmes were offered where and when they were needed, in accordance with the FES remit and were extended to the island of Gozo.

Lying just eight kilometres from Malta, Gozo is one of three islands under the Maltese administration (the third being Comino). Gozo measures approximately 14.5km long and 7 km at its widest point giving a total land area of 67 square km (NSOM, 2003). Gozo can be located on Map 4. It takes less than half an hour to drive from one end of the island to the other. It is hillier and greener than Malta. Traditionally, like Ireland, its main industry has been agriculture and fishing. However, tourism is now the island's main source of income. Gozo and Comino have a combined population of just 31,053 (NSOM, 2006). Gozo's main town is Rabat (Victoria in English) with a population of 6,414 (NSOM, 2006). The villages visited during the fieldwork consisted of small populations that varied from 2,000 to 4,000 people. Gozo has 11 primary schools and two secondary schools. At the time of the fieldwork, Club Hilti, the main family literacy programme, had been running in Gozo for four years. According to a senior government official, the FES identified a particular need for programmes to be delivered in Gozo following a survey by the department, which showed that by the age of nine, many of the children from rural Gozo were falling behind their peers in urban Malta.

Map 4 - Malta



(Source: The Lonely Planet, 2007)

There were numerous reasons why Gozo was selected for inclusion in the study. Following initial enquiries regarding their family literacy programmes from information obtained on the internet and the *Pefal* project, Malta appeared to be a suitable study site. On closer investigation, the rurality of Gozo emerged as a factor that would provide consistency of comparison with the other two case study areas. There was also knowledge of those involved in education in Malta through academics at the University of Nottingham. This provided access to key personnel involved in family literacy programmes within the Maltese administration. Family literacy programmes in Malta are comparable to those delivered in England and Ireland since they were derived from the same basic model. Further, programmes were ongoing rather than one-off European Union funded initiatives. As discussed earlier, the majority of the Maltese population is bilingual, making the possibility of interviewing in English viable. Finally, the FES

viewed participation in a cross-European study on family literacy programmes as an opportunity to share good practice.

Thesis objectives and research questions

Defining the study

In this thesis, I do not aim to look at the whole of family learning but rather to concentrate on family literacy programmes that may also include elements of language and numeracy, often termed in England as Family Literacy Language and Numeracy (FLLN) programmes (DfES, 2005). I will not focus on family learning programmes that aim to teach parents about the general development of children, such as the parental education programmes which can be found in Cyprus (Phitiaka, 1999). Nor will I focus on initiatives that look at educating families in healthy eating, exercising or playing, or even programmes that simply encourage a greater level of parental involvement in school activities; for example, out-of-school trips, seasonal performances such as nativities or concerts, or simply listening to the children read. Rather, this thesis will focus on programmes that address parental skill gaps that, potentially, could hinder a child's progress and life chances, namely literacy or numeracy. Therefore, family literacy programmes are defined for the purpose of this study as:

...a formal programme of delivery, which occurs within a set time frame with a beginning and end date - although these may vary between different types of programmes - delivered at a designated geographical location. Programmes are delivered by at least one experienced facilitator, usually the adult tutor. The learners attending generally have dependant children at pre-school or primary school, (aged three to 11 years old). The underlying ethos of programmes is to teach literacy and numeracy skills.

(Rose and Atkin, 2006: 131)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is a great deal of evidence to show that children who come from disadvantaged, low-paid, low skilled homes have a tendency to repeat this cycle. Gaining competence in literacy skills is a major factor in breaking the cycle (Alexander and Clyne, 1995; Bird and Akerman, 2005; Cox, 2000; DfEE, 2001; Hannon and Bird, 2004; NIACE 2003 and OECD 1997). This research is interested in initiatives which aim to break that pattern, not only to enhance the child's development and future prospects, but which have the potential to improve the skills and prospects of parents. Such initiatives may even have an impact on the wider community.

Therefore, the overarching question for this research is:

What are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the three case study areas?

A set of sub-questions were designed to answer this principal question. They are:

1. What are the main aims of family literacy programmes?
2. Why do learners attend family literacy programmes?
3. What benefits, in terms of literacy skills, do family literacy programmes bring to the learners?
4. What are the key similarities and differences?
5. What are the future plans for family literacy programmes?

Chapter 2

Review of literature

The overarching question of this comparative study, “what are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the case study areas?” requires an examination of a range of literature from several educational areas. Principally this chapter will consider key texts of literacy, literacies as a political construct and literacies as a social practice, comparative education research, notions of ‘the family’, learning, and previous research on family literacy programmes. This will provide an understanding of the field and form a knowledge base from which the research questions can be addressed; namely the differences and similarities in programmes, why they are funded, what motivates learners to attend, their impact on the literacy skills of the learner, both adult and child, and future plans for programmes in the study areas. Understanding the political construct of literacy will be valuable in terms of researching the characteristics, future and current potential of family literacy programmes to address skill levels. The social practice literature and previous research on family literacy programmes will assist with the indicators required in establishing what works, how it works and the progression routes of learners. The literature and debates concerning ‘the family’ and ‘learning’ are key in underpinning knowledge and understanding of the overall field of study and are important concepts to note when addressing both the research questions and the theoretical framework. Within each subject area, questions of power and knowledge will be implicit. The theoretical framework for the study will be presented at the end of this chapter.

As the review of literature will clearly show, the rationale for family literacy programmes, in the context of this study, is closely linked to government policy and rhetoric concerning social inclusion. It is also linked to adult literacy skill levels and the drive for national, as well as global, economic success (DfEE, 1999 and 2001; OECD, 1997; UNESCO, 2005b and c; Leitch, 2005 and 2006). In this light, the changing levels of literacies and the kind of literacies required for full participation in the workplace will also need to be examined. It is a common political rhetoric of governments, particularly in western developed societies, that increased employment opportunities aid social inclusion, thus reducing levels of poverty (Rose and Atkin, 2006; DfES, 2003a; USDOLETA, 2000). Ultimately, the rhetoric is that those who are labelled as excluded from society will be integrated, their standard of living will improve and generational cycles of deprivation will be broken (Cox, 2000). Family literacy programmes are generally viewed as one tool available to governments that have the potential to help them achieve this aim (DfEE, 2001; UNESCO, 2005b). However, before such political and social ideas can be explored fully the chapter will first examine, in brief, the notion of comparative education, since it forms an overarching component of this study.

The concept of comparative education research

This study is a comparison of family literacy programmes in three different countries, England, Ireland and Malta. Although the field of comparative education is well established, it is often difficult to define a coherent field of study (Bray, 2003). Comparative research in education crosses many disciplines, for example, history, politics, geography, philosophy and sociology (Bereday, 1964). It can be qualitative or quantitative in nature (Watson, 2001) and is frequently connected to educational systems. However, according to Bray (2003), whilst the field of comparative education

study has undergone many changes over recent years, it has established itself as an identifiable field of enquiry. For Gail, et al. (1982), who reviews the key writers of comparative education including Bereday, Noah, Eckstein and Holmes, the intellectual roots of comparative education research are firmly planted in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, according to Gail, it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that it finds itself emerging as a new academic discipline in its own right. Whilst the discipline was still very much in its infancy when Bereday wrote in the 1960s, he is widely acknowledged as one of the first academics to try and define the field of study (Gail, et al., 1982). For Bereday, comparative education study is similar to political geography and political science in that they aim to, ‘...study the structure and functioning of ideologies and institutions across national frontiers’ (Bereday, 1964: 5).

According to Bereday (1964: 5), the original rationale for comparative education was purely intellectual, ‘men study foreign educational systems simply because they want to know...’ According to Wilson (2003:18), comparative education is ‘...the application of descriptions, analyses and insights learned in one or more nations to the problems of developing educational systems and institutions in other countries’. This definition fits well with this research project, since it covers three nations. The cross-disciplinary nature of the field is, if anything, even more evident today in the light of globalisation and the rise of Information and Communication Technology, (ICT) (Wilson, 2003).

The history of comparative education is comprehensively tracked by Wilson (2003). According to Wilson, there are three stages of comparative education, the periods of “borrowing”, “prediction”, and “analysis”. Borrowing involves the systematic cataloguing of information of educational systems and practices, ‘...in order to make

available the best practices of one country for transplantation to others' (Bereday, 1964: 7). Prediction involves predicting the probable success of a given educational system in one country, founded on observations of how it had performed in other countries. Analysis involves systematic examination of the educational practices of one culture before predicting its outcome in another. A full discussion concerning the changing discourse of comparative education research over recent years can be found in Welch and Masemann's (1997) editorial introduction to the *International Review of Education Journal 'Tradition, Modernity and Post-modernity in Comparative Education'*. In their introduction, they argue that, whether a post modernity, positivist or functionalist approach is taken to comparative education research, many gaps remain. They particularly feel that there has been a '...successive failure to challenge the bias towards élite culture...' (Welch and Masemann, 1997: 398). This is an important point to consider in this study since it involves two countries, namely Ireland and Malta that are not considered part of the 'élite'. In this context élite countries are those which are considered to have larger economies. In the European Union, these include the UK, Germany, France and Italy.

For Wilson, comparative research in education inevitably has implications for policy makers developing education policy. For Watson (2001) and Gail, et al., (1982) there are a range of potential customers interested in comparative education, beyond nation state policy makers including, '...administrators of international and domestic programs, officials of international agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank' (Gail, et al., 1982: 506). Wilson also considers issues of globalisation and the growth of ICT in assisting the study and dissemination of comparative education. ICT presents new ways of communicating, beyond word of mouth or traditional academic textbooks. Therefore,

'...the increasingly global presence of the field and its practitioners is important for the future because ICTs are making comparative and international educators known to a much wider audience, including academic colleagues, other educators, and policy-makers throughout the world' (Wilson, 2003: 28). The comparative nature of this study is therefore significant and timely in light of the cross-international, particularly European Union, projects that are being delivered under the banner of family literacy. It is also in line with UNESCO's desire to achieve *Education For All: Literacy for Life* (UNESCO, 2005c), the Lisbon Agenda (European Council, 2000) and the aims of European cross-funding streams such as Grundtvig, under the Socrates programme. The role of the family and family literacy programmes in ensuring that basic skill competencies are attained by all, in a rapidly changing environment, to help address issues of social exclusion, is key. It is crucial that, in an increasingly globalised society, and with the opportunities new communication systems such as the internet provide, strategies employed by one country, which are perceived as successful in improving literacy skills, can be shared by others. This is particularly true for adult literacy (UNESCO, 2005c) and for those who are described as hard to reach, poor or deprived. There needs to be an understanding of how and when successful strategies can be adapted for use in the local context, rather than each country having to develop a workable, successful strategy of its own. Therefore, it is appropriate in investigating similar educational interventions, namely family literacy programmes, that a comparative methodological approach is employed. However, it is important not just to share what works, but also what does not work. It is hoped that this study will form a small part of this process allowing lessons of what works and what does not to be shared amongst all three case study areas and beyond.

At the beginning of this study, several countries were considered for comparison. However, England, Ireland and Malta were selected as suitable for a comparable research study for the following reasons: they all belong to the EU; all speak English as their first or second language, an important consideration for any comparative study (Bereday, 1964); all three areas run formal, funded family literacy programmes of one type or another that have, from a policy perspective, a broadly similar rationale; all programmes are accessible but are not necessarily exclusive to the indigenous population. Finally, they all have urban dwellings of high population density as well as rural areas that are sparsely populated within their own context.

The ‘family’

This research concentrates on family literacy programmes and it is therefore important to explore themes connected to family literacy to ensure a holistic understanding of the field. These include family learning, literacy, learning and the concept of ‘the family’ itself. The available literature concerning the family is vast and readily available (see for example Murdock, 1949; Moroney, 1976; Haralambos, 1981; Berger and Berger, 1984; Held, 1987; David, 1993; Barfield, 1997 and Barrett, 2004), also the works of Marx and Engels. Hence, deep philosophical debates concerning the family, gender implications and its role in civil or political society will not be entered into here. However, this section will provide a short general overview of the family, mainly within the context of learning.

According to the Oxford Compact English Dictionary (Thompson, 1996), the ‘family’ can be defined as 'a set of relations living together or not.' Whilst dictionary definitions act as a good starting point, further exploration is needed if fuller understandings of the

complex concepts of the field are to be achieved. Anthropologically, Murdock (1949:1) defined families as ‘...a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes...and one or more children...’ However, although Murdock based his definition on a survey of 250 representative human societies, he noted that, ‘...the term on its own was ambiguous’ (Barfield, 1997: 179). It is commonly agreed that the term ‘family’ is complex; there are multiple meanings and numerous types (Thomas 1998; Haralambos, 1981; Haggart, 2000). Families vary greatly from one cultural setting to another and can differ even within the same culture but, whatever form the family takes, it is, according to Haralambos, (1981: 325), ‘universal’. However, ‘family’ is generally taken to refer to the stable environment in which a child grows. NALA describes family as ‘a relationship of care and support among different generations, usually over a long period’ (NALA, 2004: 9). Haggart (2000) urges caution when defining ‘family’, pointing out that whilst families undoubtedly have a long-term influence during formative years, it is not always a positive experience. Further, whilst there is no one stereotypical family, the term is commonly used ‘...as an all-embracing term for inter-generational relationships in which people care for each other’ (Haggart, 2000: 5). NIACE, in its report *Evaluating LSC (Learning and Skills Council) Funded Family Programmes* (2003), actively declines to define the term family to ‘...enable parents and children with a wide range of relationships to participate together’ (NIACE, 2003: 3). Levi-Strauss defined the family as ‘...a building block of social life’ (Barfield, 1997: 179).

A comprehensive definition of the term ‘family’ is provided by Williams (1983). According to Williams, the term ‘family’ originally derived from the Latin word ‘familia’ meaning household. It referred to groups of individuals living in one location

who could be servants or blood relations. The term first appeared in English in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By the fifteenth century, the term family was refined to pertain specifically to a house, ‘...in the sense of a particular lineage or kin-group, ordinarily by descent from a common ancestor’ (Williams, 1983: 131). Family was further extended in the religious sense. Much of the Bible talks of ‘the family of God’ but usually in a broader context, not necessarily individuals who are related by birth, rather related through God as the omnipotent father. Williams found that it is somewhere between the seventeenth and nineteenth century that the concept of the family defined as a small group of related individuals living in one household becomes dominant. By the twentieth century, it became common to differentiate between family as a close unit and family in the broader sense. Eventually this gave rise to the terms ‘nuclear family’ (Murdock, 1949) and ‘extended family’ (Barfield, 1997).

According to Williams, the development of the term ‘family’ is complex and difficult to trace. The original sense of family, to include all those living in the household, survived longest in rural areas, ‘...with living-in farm servants who are at the same table’ (Williams, 1983: 132). Family also became elitist, tied to aristocracy and issues of inheritance. The family was further used to describe, in a derogatory way, those who did not come from a prestigious background with phrases such as ‘a person of no family’ being commonplace until the late nineteenth century.

For Thomas, the reference to ‘family’, particularly in relation to family literacy, usually assumes ‘...some essential aspects which relate to the structure, function, and development of the family unit’ (Thomas, 1998: 6). Thomas believes that our views of what the family should look like have been radically altered over recent years.

According to Thomas, the Canadian Council on Social Development's idea of the family is no longer as a stand-alone, insular, nuclear unit. Rather it is one in which, '...there are many combinations of caregivers and children and it is likely that many children will live in more than one type of family before reaching adulthood' (Thomas, 1998: 6). Whilst this may be true in many of today's societies, in some countries this multi-faceted model of the family may be contested. For example in Ireland, one of the study sites and a strong Roman Catholic country, family structures may be extended but still remain close-knit. We have already seen that many types of families have always existed; it is not exclusively a post-modern phenomenon. It has been common practice at certain times in history in certain cultures, even in England, that children frequently lived in more than one type of family. We only need look at the evacuation policy implemented during the Second World War that dispersed children who resided in high-risk urban areas to the countryside to live with complete strangers (Titmus, 1950; Welsham, 1998) to see just one example of an alternative family model. Also, it was common practice in the early 1900s that poor families with numerous children would send the eldest to children's homes to be looked after. Sometimes children were raised by other family members, often a sister, unable to have children of their own (Pers Comm, 1996 & 2007). More affluent families employed nannies and the children were sent away to boarding school at an early age.

The nuclear family, as we understand it today consisting of mother, father and children - preferably one boy and one girl - is an ideological myth perpetuated first by the bourgeois, then the Victorian élite, followed by the policy makers (Williams, 1983). Religions have played their part by promoting family values and monogamy as the dominant acceptable form of behaviour, especially in Roman Catholic teaching. In more

recent times, the concept of the nuclear, or ideal, family has been frequently reinforced by the media (Tuchman, 1995; Van Zoonen, 1995) thus ensuring its reproduction and survival. According to Williams, during the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, the concept of the family became increasingly important. The family unit ensured the workforce was fit to serve in the public sphere of the economy (Mattelart, 1995). The family also served to distinguish between the work of a man in the public sphere and the place of a woman, which was seen largely as belonging to the private sphere. Women were confined to caring for the family, excluded from actively participating citizenship, government or politics, (Held, 1987). As Williams states, '...the nineteenth century development represents, in one sense, a distinction between a man's work and his family: he works to support a family; the family is supported by his work' (Williams, 1983:133). After the Second World War particularly, the notion of the family was challenged by women. Many of whom had taken on the role of father and provider by working in the factories and in the fields, as well as mother, carer and housekeeper during the war. Women retained many of these duties post-war, when manpower was significantly reduced, at a time when production needed to be increased so that the country could be rebuilt. The family underwent further changes in the 1950s, 60s and 70s as a result of shifting social attitudes which saw first the baby boom, then an increase in the number of women entering the labour market, and finally rising divorce rates (Cherlin, 1983: 51). The introduction of the birth control pill also had an impact on family structures encouraging the birth of fewer children and allowing women greater control over when their children were born (Barrett, 2004). The changes in family structures, along with post-war social attitudes, were significant contributory factors in the rise of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995) ultimately resulting in the variety of family structures we have today.

In modern Western society, the notion of the family continues to change, often leading to a blurring or shifting of domestic roles (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995). Recent trends, particularly over the past two decades, have seen a shift away from the 'traditional' nuclear family, to more varied family forms. This has largely been due to increasing divorce rates and the growing trend of cohabiting (Barrett, 2004; Lewis, 2001). This has led to a greater number of children being brought up in step-or lone-parent families, sometimes known as 'reconstituted families' (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995: 347). However, it should be noted that overall, coupled households, be they married or cohabiting, are still the predominant model in which children are brought up - accounting for 73 percent of households in 2003 (Barrett, 2004: 35). In the latter case particularly, the mother usually has custody, awarded in nine out of ten cases (Hoffman and Moon, 2000). The mother is no longer the primary carer but often the only carer. At the same time, the expected rise of the 'new man', particularly by the media in the 1990s (Bilton, et al., 1996), has seen the role of fathers change to the extent that, in some families, the father may now choose to be the primary carer. However, in reality the ideal of the nuclear family, consisting of mum, dad and two children persists in Western societies as the dominant family model (Bilton, et al., 1996).

The family has frequently been seen as a separate institution from that of the State (McIntosh, 1984), being both civil and private. However, according to McIntosh (1984: 2005), during the nineteenth century, '...the gradual emergence of a more collectivist and interventionist state...was accompanied by the increasing regulation by the state of the family sphere'. This can clearly be seen in the implementation of public and social policies in Britain in the 1940s and 50s, following the birth of the Welfare State, to promote the nuclear family (David, 1993). According to David, whilst the inception of

the Welfare State after the Second World War aimed to respect the privacy of families, it also intended to provide social support and services to families in need. This ‘propping up of the nuclear family by state sponsored regulation,’ has been commonly termed the ‘nanny state’, (Bilton, et al., 1996: 496 & 498). This was intended to secure the family in its traditional nuclear form, that of two biological parents with dependent children, and to secure economic stability. Rapid changes in the number of family forms, particularly since the 1980s, saw the family becoming more problematic and costly. New Right Conservative policies developed during Thatcherism desperately tried to cling to the notion of the nuclear family, by demonising families who deviated from this moral ideal (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995). Particular targets were lone-parent families headed by mothers. At the same time the policies of the New Right rolled back the nanny state’s support for families, (Bilton, et al., 1996) replacing it with policies that encouraged the family to take care of itself. For example, the rationale behind withdrawing benefits in 1988 for 16-18 year olds who were not on training schemes was to ‘try to force families to take responsibility for maintaining unemployed teenagers’ (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995: 380), instead of the State. The New Right believed that by reducing state intervention, through deregulation, the family would be free to choose how it lived whilst remaining economically significant. According to Bilton, et al., (1996: 501), post-Thatcherism has led to two schools of thought, which problematise the notion of the nuclear family. First, Social Conservatism views the nuclear family as ‘...an inherently weak unit,’ which cannot survive without welfare support. The rise in divorce rates since the reduction of the nanny state is provided as one piece of evidence to support this view. Second, is Individual Liberationism which rejects Welfarism and the nuclear family seeing ‘...as the source of social justice and social cohesion [which] fails to recognise the truth that this kind of family is in fact a site of disadvantage, subordination

and oppression for its members, particularly women' (Bilton, et al., 1996: 502). Not surprisingly, much of this thinking comes from the feminist, as well as Marxist, perspectives.

Whatever form 'the family' takes many agree the family plays a key role in a child's development and learning, especially in the field of literacy (Haggart, 2000; Alexander and Clyne, 1995). This is one reason why learning which has the potential to incorporate the whole family, including initiatives such as family literacy programmes, have become popular.

Learning – formal and informal

Learning is another complex, frequently misused, term. It is defined in the Oxford Compact English Dictionary (Thompson, 1996) as 'Knowledge acquired by study'. The word 'study' in this definition implies that learning takes place primarily in formal educational institutions or settings at specific times. This puts learning in the family context at odds with formal learning. The majority of formative learning is acquired outside the educational system through the family, both immediate and extended, and as a result of interaction with the community.

Rogers is one of the key writers in this area. In his book *What is the difference?* (2004), Rogers considers how we define learning, drawing a distinction between what is learning and what is education. Rogers claims, that whilst they are often used interchangeably and are 'inextricably connected'; they are in fact two separate entities. For Rogers, education always includes learning but not all learning has to be education. Rogers finds it easy to define education, claiming it to be the process of '...someone

helping someone else to learn' (Rogers, 2004: 4). Education is viewed as something which takes place, predominantly, in educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities. Defining learning is more complex. Rogers uses many labels to describe different types of learning including; naturalised, formalised, tacit, acquisition, mechanical, task conscious, learning conscious and continuous. For Rogers, learning can be placed into two broad categories. Learning which takes place formally, usually in one of the aforementioned educational institutions and learning which takes place elsewhere, including in families. Commonly, in educational terms the first type is termed 'formal learning' and the latter 'informal learning'. Formal adult learning requires a time and place to be set aside from everyday life. It incurs a cost and is often associated with lifelong learning programmes. Rogers (2004: 10) suggests that we '...learn as our life changes', identifying three ways in which informal learning can occur. Firstly, we learn according to our social contexts as we take on different roles in life that ultimately form our identity. Secondly, we learn in relation to our occupation. Thirdly, we learn as '...we ourselves change' (Rogers, 2004: 10). This goes beyond the process of ageing, extending into how the experiences we have as we progress through life '...mould us so that we develop new perceptions and new interests' (Rogers, 2004: 11). Learning is seen by Rogers as a natural on-going process akin to breathing, occurring continuously and daily. Many of us learn without even realising it. For example, we learn by watching, reading or listening to the media. Some informal learning is immediately beneficial or functional to the recipient whilst other, informal learning, may be stored away until such a time as it is required. For Rogers there is no such thing as a non-learner, only learners who are enrolled on formal, usually accredited courses, and those who are not. Therefore, it is important for this research to consider who attends family literacy

programmes; why they elect to do so; and to establish if family members who did not attend still experience learning.

Illeris (2003) also investigates the concept of learning, by asking; what is learning? How can it be promoted? And why does teaching not always result in learning? For Illeris learning is the ‘...integration of two very different processes, namely an external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural or material environment, and an internal psychological process of acquisition and elaboration’ (Illeris, 2003: 398). Within each of the two processes learning takes place through what Illeris (2004) terms the three dimensions of learning; cognition or knowledge and skills; emotion; and environment; all within a specific social context. Learning for Illeris then is a holistic experience. Most importantly, Illeris points out that learning, especially for adults, can only really take place if the learner is self-motivated. Adults will only return to education and effective learning will only occur if they have chosen to do so, rather than been forced to learn by well-intentioned policy makers. The issue of relevance and personal motivation in adult learning is a notion supported by the findings of other researchers and philosophers (Atkin, et al., 2005; Dewey, 1897).

Rogers compares the value of formal and informal learning in society, claiming that traditionally formal learning or education has been ‘glorified’ as having a greater value in society than informal learning, which has been demeaned. Rogers believes that each has advantages and disadvantages. For example, formal learning can be restricted to the place of delivery and it is not necessarily transferable to outside situations. Informal learning, on the other hand, has a greater potential for transferability. Formal learning is often regarded as superior. However, according to Rogers, in certain sectors this has not

always been the case. In the past, formal learning has ‘...come under attack from non-formal educators and deschoolers such as Illich and radicals like Freire’ (Rogers, 2004: 33). This has resulted in some critics in the 1970s claiming the academic model of learning to be out dated and obsolete. Some sectors of society may be in agreement with the radicals, for example those who live in rural areas or come from working-class industrial communities. In such communities, where agriculture, fishing or coal mining have been the main employers, or where there is high level of unemployment, the benefits of formal education have, in the past, been viewed as either limited or as a ticket out to a better life (Atkin, et al., 2005).

Rogers believes that many teachers do not value informal learning. He cites examples of learners who are capable of reading the Bible or a hymn sheet, but claims that these skills are not used by teachers as the building blocks to further learning. Learning is often assumed to be an active, positive experience, an activity in which we first engage and then gain benefits. Rogers points out, that this is not always the case. Some learning, usually that of a negative nature, occurs whether we desire the learning experience or not. Rogers recommends combining the two types of learning for effective adult literacy learning. However, establishing effective family learning is not as straightforward. Having probed the complexities and diversities of the terms ‘family’ and ‘learning’ we now consider the notion of ‘family learning’.

Family learning

Family learning is commonly used as an umbrella, all-embracing, catch-all term like lifelong learning or lifelong education. It is overused, whilst rarely being fully understood or defined. Frequently it is used interchangeably with several other concepts,

including Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN), parental education, family education and intergenerational learning or programmes. In NIACE's evaluation of family programmes (2003) and Horne's and Haggart's report (2004), which looked at the impact of adults who had participated in family learning, the LSC's definition of family programmes was employed. The LSC defined family programmes as:

...learning as or with a 'family'...[which]...should include opportunities for intergenerational learning and, wherever possible, lead both adults and children to pursue further learning. 'Family' is purposely not defined to enable parents and children with a wide range of relationships to participate together.

(NIACE, 2003: 3)

For NIACE, FLLN and wider family learning are both included in this definition. According to the Campaign for Learning website (2005), family learning incorporates 'all forms of informal and formal learning that involve more than one generation.' Family members are not restricted to relations or carers but include friends, thus reflecting the multiple forms of the modern family. For Haggart family learning is simply that which takes place among family members. Often it is used '...as a short hand for what people outside the family do to enable and facilitate the learning that goes on in families' (Haggart, 2000: 3).

Historically, the family, the community and religion, have been the main sites of learning (Alexander and Clyne, 1995). Learning which took place in the home prepared children for the world of work. However, as learning became more formalised during industrialization, the importance of the family in the learning process become increasingly overlooked. Instead '...family learning became the preserve of faith communities, voluntary organisations, the media and agencies set up to deal with difficulties associated with family life' (Alexander and Clyne, 1995: 9). According to

Alexander and Clyne, family learning has no formal educational definition. Programmes are as diverse as there are types of families. Alexander and Clyne identify five distinct aspects of family learning all of which, ‘...contain intergenerational learning, based on kinship however that may be defined’ (1995: 6). They are:

- Informal learning within the family
- Family members learning together
- Learning about roles, relationships and responsibilities in relation to stages of family life, including parenting education
- Learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to wider society, in which the family is a foundation for citizenship
- Learning how to deal with agencies that serve families

The first two are concerned with the family as the ‘context’, place or domain (Barton, 1994) in which learning takes place, and the remaining three focus on the actual content of learning. Alexander and Clyne believe that, in reality, all five are interlinked and overlapping.

According to Estyn, (2004), family learning incorporates four different features. First, there are voluntary learning programmes led by tutors. Secondly, learners involved can be any or all of the following; children, adults, grandparents, carers, interested young people and adults from the community. Thirdly, participants usually work together on a common theme for some or all of a planned programme. Finally, a third party is involved in provision, for example the LEA or schools.

Having explored the terms ‘family’, ‘learning’ and ‘family learning’, I now turn my attention to the remaining two key aspects of this thesis, namely ‘literacy’ and ‘family literacy.’

Literacies: metaphors, definitions and theories of literacies

To establish the characteristics and benefits of family literacy programmes, as proposed by the research questions in chapter 1, there needs to be an exploration of the term literacy. Literacy is a complex, contested concept that many have tried to define in universal terms but no one has succeeded in accomplishing (Walter, 1999; Frater, 1995). For example, Goody (1999) defines literacy simply as the ability to read and write. However, most believe the term is far too complex to be classified so simplistically. Rather than literacy being a simple matter of learning a mechanical skill, literacy carries with it a host of cultural, social, economic and political nuances that are constantly shifting. As Frater (1995: 8) points out ‘literacy has a wide range of connotations, lacks a fixed definition and has no cut-off point.’ For Hannon (1995) ‘literacy is the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning.’ In so doing, each generation prepares the next ‘with a powerful cultural tool’ (Hannon, 1995: 2). Barton (1994) explores the definition of literacy and its components, illiterate, literate, literacy and illiteracy concluding that it is almost impossible to define literacy due to its complexities, fluidity and adaptability.

The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agrees that literacy, particularly the literacy required in modern industrialised societies and post-industrialised societies, incorporates a multiplicity of skills, which cannot be easily defined. The OECD’s working definition of literacy is:

...a particular skill, namely the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.

(OECD, 1997: 14)

Similarly, for the UN and the World Bank, literacy is about more than simply being able to read and write, ‘...it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture’ (UN, 2005). The World Bank defines it likewise as ‘...a set of fundamental communication skills that allow one to use written information to function in society, to achieve ones goals, and to develop ones knowledge and potential,’ (World Bank, 2005). The common consensus seems to be that the level of an individual’s literacy skills needs to enable each individual to function fully within their particular context and have the potential to be transferable to other, possibly international, settings. Communication is also an important aspect of literacy, particularly with the rise of new technologies such as computers (Barton 1994). As a result ICT is increasingly included when issues of literacy skills are discussed (Mellar, et al., 2004; Leitch, 2006).

This difficulty with the complexity of defining literacy could be explained by the many different epistemological perspectives of those who have tried to define it (Levine, 1986; Rassool, 1999). These include political, economic, sociological, social justice, cultural and philosophical perspectives (DfEE, 1999 and 2001; Leitch, 2005; Barton, 1994; Gee, 1989; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; World Bank, 2005; UNESCO, 2005b and c; Freire, 1985 and 1993) as well as linguistic. Each has its own agenda for advocating, or in some cases opposing, literacy competencies for global citizens. Literacies have numerous applications. They can be used for societal and individual empowerment, enlightenment, identity, development, citizenship and conscious-raising, to name but a few (Rassool,

1999; Freire 1987; Stubbs, 1980). However, it is one of the key areas requiring exploration to facilitate the understanding of family literacy programmes in the context of this study. It will be invaluable to the discussion at the end of the thesis in considering if, how, and why family literacy programmes work and their future direction.

The discussion falls into two broad categories; literacies as social practice, referred to by some as the ideological model of literacies (Street, 1993) and literacies as a political construct (Gee, 1989 and 1990) favoured by government and policy makers (DfEE, 2001). Embedded within each category, ideological positions of power and knowledge can be identified. Yet it is frequently difficult to separate the two strands into discreet categories. In many instances, the relationship between them is complex, interrelated and interdependent. There are many who write on literacy, including those in the New Literacy Studies field, for example Street (1984 and 2003), Gee, et al., (1996), Gee (2000) and Barton and Hamilton (1998). Those from the New Literacy Studies consider literacies in ordinary peoples' daily living. An overview of the main literacy issues and perspectives will be provided in this chapter, concentrating on those pertaining to this study and focusing particularly, but not solely, on literacies in the British context.

Traditionally, at the simplest level, to be literate has meant that an individual has the ability to read and write (Stubbs, 1980:14). However, in recent years, this succinct definition has been significantly expanded in policy documents and research projects to include numeracy skills and ICT or computer literacy, often referred to as the third basic skill (DfES, 2003a; Mellor, et al., 2004). For the purpose of this study, literacies refer to numeracy as well as literacy competencies but do not include ICT. This section begins by exploring the theories and origins of literacy as a concept, and, by implication, the

demonising of those termed illiterate, before going on to look at political and social literacies.

One of Britain's contemporary writers on literacy, David Barton, suggests two theories of literacy, that of everyday literacy, and that of professional literacy. The former relates specifically to how ordinary individuals view the use and theories of literacy. The latter is concerned with how teachers, policy makers, and academics view literacy. The main difference, according to Barton, is that professional theories:

...are often more articulated and explicit, often they aim to be more general; they can be checked in more systematic ways; they are formalised...and they are often passed on in an explicit way by teaching.

(Barton 1994: 15)

It will be useful to return to this perspective of literacy later in the thesis to consider how the policy makers and tutors view literacy compared with the view of the learner. For Rassool, literacies are specific to institutions such as educational and governmental. They enable the legitimisation of literacies through embedded discourses that in turn ensure the reproduction of power hierarchies within society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). 'Literacy then is always embedded in a discourse about, for example, knowledge and learning, about working and living in society, about culture, about social development', (Rassool, 1999: 6). For Hannon (1995: 2) it is the '...the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning,' a form of cultural communication. Pahl and Roswell, 2005: 3) believe 'literacy is not a neutral set of skills that we have in our heads and develop through language teaching and learning. Rather literacy is always and everywhere...inseparable from practices'.

Taking a social linguistic epistemological stand-point Gee (1992), in his book *The Social Mind*, connects the mechanics of literacy learning to languages, ideology and most importantly social practice by examining concepts of meaning, the mind, memory, soul and society. Gee refutes the arguments of cognitive scientists that language can only be studied in terms of the mechanical processes undertaken by the brain, or that studies by social scientists into the sociological impact of language acquisition is not rigorous or scientific. Gee (1992: xvii) believes that ‘...”psychological entities” are actually *out in the social world* of action and interaction’. Gee (1990), firmly links literacy to social, cultural and institutional relationships, placing an emphasis on the importance of an ideological position, by both individuals and organisations, in the reading, interpretation or encoding and decoding of literacy text. In his article *What is Literacy?* Gee (1989), is probably one of the first to frame literacy in terms of discourse, which he views ‘...as an “identity kit” coming complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on particular roles that others will recognise’ (Gee, 1989: 18). Discourses provide the social and cultural conventions that allow us to make sense of texts in any given context. For Rockhill (1987), literacy is power that is used by men to dominate women and render them powerless.

Within each definition above, which represents only a sample of the many available, specific ideologies, hierarchies and power discourses exist and are, indeed, relied upon. From the outset, literacy has been viewed as belonging to the privileged and the educated. Whilst its opposite, illiteracy carries negative connotations relating to the poor and the uneducated (Barton, 1994; Freire, 1985). This is why eradicating illiteracy is a high priority for both UNESCO, under *Education for All* (2005c) and the UN, following the millennium summit in Dakar in September 2000. Literacy forms part of the UN

Development Programme (UNDP) of the subsequent Dakar framework, which set eight goals to be achieved by 2015. Commonly referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2006), literacy is particularly pertinent to goal two, which aims to achieve universal primary education. Literacy also impacts on many of the other eight goals, such as goal three, promoting gender equality and empowering women (UN, 2006). These goals are particularly significant because they are interconnected. According to information on the UN website, 70 per cent of those living in poverty throughout the world are women. Two-thirds of the children denied access to primary school are girls. Further, of the 876 million adults who are illiterate world-wide, 75 per cent of these are also women. According to the UNDP report *Gender Equality* (2002), goal three is a core goal in its own right that ‘...lies at the heart of human development and human rights. And...gender inequality is an obstacle to progress, a roadblock on the path of human development’ (UNDP, 2002: v). Therefore, equality, prosperity and well-being for all global citizens cannot be achieved without first eradicating gender inequality and, secondly, by encouraging the empowerment of women. The UNDP is involved in supporting numerous initiatives, which ultimately aim to provide women with the tools they require to lift themselves out of poverty; to allow them to engage in domestic governance; and to ensure that they are kept healthy, especially in terms of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Education is a key factor in achieving all of these goals.

In his book looking at the ecology of the written language, Barton (1994) finds dictionary definitions a useful starting point from which to explore the theory of literacy. According to Barton (1994), the first dictionary reference to literacy does not appear until 1913. Prior to this most of the references are to the illiterate dating from 1556 onwards. Barton looks at literacy in terms of unmarked and marked linguistics. This is

where pairs of words or dichotomies exist, with one, the unmarked word, seen as natural, normal or common and the other, the marked word, viewed as derived. For example, 'honest' is seen as unmarked whilst 'dishonest' is marked. Barton points out that due to the historical use of the term literacy it is in fact 'literacy' which is seen as marked whilst 'illiteracy' is natural, unmarked, viewed as the norm; the one that came first. The OECD in its report (1997) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* agrees that in the past illiteracy has been seen as the standard from which to draw policy, thus making literacy invisible. The report argues that this approach is unhelpful as, in reality, 'all people are literate to a degree' (OECD, 1997: 11). Individuals can only be labelled illiterate in a society that values, uses and relies upon literacies to function, as the work of Paulo Freire (1985) demonstrates. Freire recounts a conversation he had with a Brazilian who presented the scenario of two Indians hunting, one with a bow and arrow, the other with a rifle. Freire was informed that the second Indian could be illiterate, but that the first Indian could not be since, the man explained, the first Indian did not live in a lettered society. The point was 'to be illiterate you need to live where there are letters and you don't know them' (Freire, 1985: 14). According to Freire (1985: 13) whilst the culture in which an individual lives forms the barriers to literacy, '...illiteracy is not in itself the original obstacle'. Therefore, the question to be explored should be: how well can individuals read, write and interpret the text in a society that requires these skills, *not* who is illiterate?

Considering commonly used metaphors of literacy within society, Barton (1994) believes literacy is often viewed by governments, academics and individuals who possess such skills, as a disease from which individuals who lack literacies are to be cured. Nearly a decade earlier Freire (1985) in his book, *The Politics of Education*,

described the understanding of illiteracy as ‘...naïve at best...’ (Freire, 1985:7). Emotive language to illustrate how society saw it as a condition in need of curing included, ‘...a depressing ulcer...[and]...a poison herb...’ (Freire, 1985:7). According to Street (1993), illiteracy became problematic in Britain and the USA as early as the 1970s. In April 1977, the *New York Times* ran the headline, ‘Illiteracy of Adults Called U.S. Disease’ (Street, 1993: 214), implying that illiteracy was infectious and spreading. Those who were illiterate were demonised as unintelligent, incapable and lazy. This negative image of illiteracy has led policy makers to encourage the delivery of a range of literacy programmes to be based on deficit models, including family literacy programmes, as discussed in chapter 1. In these terms, literacy is seen as something lacking in an individual that must be corrected for the good of the individual and society alike. According to Barton (1994: 11) ‘the disease metaphor particularly is pervasive. It can be used to damn the illiterate...or it can be used to praise the literate,’ as we have seen. It can also be used to justify the implementation of programmes such as family literacy under a social inclusion or justice agenda, a concept that will be investigated further during this study. Another metaphor, which is particularly common in education, is that of literacy as a skill.

According to Barton, viewing literacy as a skill, a mechanical, teachable, technical concept, has been influential over the years in forming the basis for many reading programmes in the educational sector. Education aims to build on this skill as literacy is progressed. In the context of this metaphor, ‘...literacy is seen as a psychological variable which can be measured and assessed’ (Barton, 1994: 12). This is often taught by what Freire describes as the ‘deposit’ model of education in which illiterate learners are “filled” with literacies in a systematic, predefined way. Literacies are given, repeated

and therefore learnt. For Freire, 'the illiterate is a "lost man". Therefore, one must "save" him, and his "salvation" consists of "being filled" ' (Freire, 1985: 8). It is constantly a middle-class aspiration to 'save' the poor from themselves. According to Gee (1989), literacy is divided into two distinct categories, dominant and powerful. The first consists of primary and secondary discourses, the majority of which are learnt through acquisition rather than formal learning. Examples of primary discourses would be oral communication predominantly acquired through our families, it is '...our socio-culturally determined way of using our native language in face-to-face communication...This is sometimes referred to as "the moral mode" ' (Gee, 1989: 22). It is an important point for the study to consider the informal transference of literacy through primary and secondary discourses within the families of those who attend formal programmes. Secondary discourses, according to Gee, go beyond the family to include schools, workplaces and churches. However, powerful literacies, which equip those who are in possession of them with the tools to critique literacy discourses, '...almost always involves learning, and not just acquisition' (Gee, 1989: 23). The shift to formal settings, particularly to schools, is pertinent to this research since interest lies in formal programmes of family literacy, which occur outside the family home. Here, as we have seen in the chapter 1, schools, particularly in England, are closely, but not exclusively, linked to this form of provision.

Barton considers literacy in terms of knowledge and information, claiming that 'to be literate is to have access to the world of books and other written material' (Barton, 1994: 12). Ultimately, this results in the ability to gain access to power. This metaphor can be easily extended to include different types of literacy such as computer literacy, political literacy and cultural literacy. Without literacy, many aspects of today's society are

inaccessible. This is why literacy is seen as important in the primary schools curriculum in Britain, particularly since the introduction of the Primary National Strategy, following the publication of the *Excellence and enjoyment, a primary strategy for schools* (DfES, 2003) report. Competency in literacy and numeracy enables children to access all areas of the curriculum and attain their full social potential (Ofsted, 2005).

The use of traditional metaphors to study literacy has been rejected by Barton (1994) who instead suggests a new metaphor, that of the ecology of literacy. The word 'ecology' was originally used in biology to investigate the relationship between plants, animals and their habitat (Williams, 1983). Barton gives ecology a sociological meaning which, when applied to humans examines 'the interrelationship of an area of human activity and its environment' (Barton, 1994: 29). In this case, the activity being considered is literacy. Barton believes that using the metaphor of ecology provides a broader framework from which to discuss literacy. This new discourse, according to Barton, allows the exploration of ecological niches, ecosystems, ecological balance, diversity and sustainability; bringing together different strands of literacy. The ecology of literacy allows social scientists to examine how literacy is constantly changing and evolving to meet new social conditions. Barton believes that the ecology metaphor can be used to study the alarming rate at which languages are vanishing, how dominant languages such as English can maintain their diversity, and the role that ICT plays in changes to literacy. Hannon (1995: 3) also views literacy as continually evolving, '...redefined as the result of technological changes...', within a constantly shifting cultural setting. According to Barton (1994: 32) 'rather than isolating literacy activities from everything else in order to understand them, an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity....' The ecology of literacy

provides a useful contextual framework from which to discuss literacy issues, not just of today, but of the past, and the future, particularly in view of the rapid changes in this area both socially and economically that have been discussed above. Literacy can be used either to ‘...break down the barriers between work, community and private life...’ (Gee, et al., 1996:7), or to exacerbate the inequalities between those who have literacy skills and those who do not. The concept of literacy domains or ‘ecological niches’ can be applied to the positioning of family literacy programmes as a means of bridging the divide between the public and the private; the home and the community; particularly schools, in an attempt to address issues of inequality of literacy skills.

Political literacies

The effect of literacy levels on poverty cycles

Whilst it could be argued that literacy practices are themselves evolutionary, literacy *per se* consistently relates to matters of knowledge and power. Literacies equate to knowledge. Knowledge is power. Power leads to control, or what the Italian social political theorist and activist Gramsci (Jones, 2006) terms hegemony, a dominant set of social norms, specific to a time and place. For Gee, et al., (1996) literacy, learning and knowledge are intrinsically linked, located in families, communities and cultures. Gee, et al., (1996: 6) believe that, ‘...in the end we need to see learning and knowledge as distributed across lifetimes, social practices, social groupings and institutions’, as potential energy waiting to be released. The implication of literacies as knowledge and power is that those who are illiterate are powerless and ignorant whilst those who are literate are powerful. This notion concerns many academics and policy makers alike but particularly Freire (1993) who wrote regarding the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

For Street (1993: 7) ‘...literacy practices are not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures,’ denoting ideological positions from which there can be no escape. Street does not view ideology in Marxist terminology relating to ‘false consciousness’, but rather within a contemporary framework as interpreted by the works of recent scholars such as Mace (1979) and Bourdieu (1977), as ‘...the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other’ (Street, 1993: 7-8). Street calls for researchers ‘...to admit to and expose the particular ‘ideological’ framework being employed from the beginning: it can then be opened to scrutiny, challenged and refined in ways which are more difficult when the ideology remains hidden’ (Street, 1993: 7-8). There is an increasing body of evidence which further verifies that those who are illiterate or have low levels of literacy skills are more likely to be poor and in low-skilled employment than those who are literate (see UNESCO, 1972; Frater, 1995; Bynner and Parsons, 1997; OECD, 1997; DfEE, 2001 and UNESCO, 2005b and c). This does not only apply to individuals but to whole communities and to countries, particularly those termed ‘third world’ or developing. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2003: 4), in the 1960’s ‘illiteracy was seen as a major impediment to economic development...’ resulting in poor countries remaining poor and powerless, a problem that still exists today (UNESCO, 2005c). Referring to the work of Paulo Freire, Barton (1994: 27), comments ‘adults in the world today who cannot read and write tend to be the poorest; the least powerful; the oppressed’. Further, the OECD report concludes that literacy dictates social status, commenting ‘literacy is a powerful determinant of an individual’s life chances and quality of life’ (OECD, 1997:11). Literacy affects the health, well-being and success not simply of individuals but also of societies and economies. It also leads, in many instances, to a generational cycle of poverty from which it can be virtually impossible to break (Cox, 2000).

Obtaining competence in literacy skills has been shown to be a major factor in breaking this cycle of deprivation (Alexander and Clyne, 1995; OECD 1997; Cox, 2000). Whilst more analysis needs to be carried out, work recently published by Bynner and Parsons (2006) looking at literacy levels of the children of parents participating in the British birth cohort studies for birth years 1958 and 1970, strongly supports this view. The research findings, ‘...point to parents’ literacy and numeracy as key components of influence on children’s educational achievements, particularly at the lowest parental literacy and numeracy levels’ (Bynner and Parsons, 2006: 28). A four-year case study by Pickerden (2002) carried out for the University of Birmingham, England, assessing the participation levels of Muslim women in higher education, concurs. Pickerden found the women ‘...were role models for their children to aspire to higher education, thus breaking the downward spiral of social and economic disadvantage, as well as providing another generation of potential students to the institution’ (Pickerden, 2002: 43).

Connections have long since been made between the ability to function at a basic literacy level and social disadvantage. At the inception of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) in England in 1980, Boyson made clear links between illiteracy and permanent ill-health and between literacy and social exclusion commenting, ‘men and women who cannot read and write suffer continual isolation in our society’ (ALBSU 1982: 53). Yet Freire notes of the illiterates, whom he terms the oppressed due to their lack of power and critical awareness, ‘...are not “marginals”, are not people living “outside society”. They have always been “inside” – inside the structure which made them’ (Freire, 1993: 55). However, those with low or no literacy skills are seen as marginalised, incapable and a potentially untapped economic resource.

Literacies for the economy

One of the main reasons for the alleged negative impact of illiteracies on an individual's life chances is their perceived inability - by policy makers and those who are literate - not to be able to fully participate in the workplace, therefore constraining economic growth (World Bank, 2005). The role of family literacy programmes in up-skilling adult learners, to provide them with an opportunity for greater engagement in the local economy, is one of the key research questions. Over the past decade, Western developed governments, particularly the UK, the USA and the European Union as a whole, have become increasingly preoccupied with the mismatch of individuals' literacy and numeracy skills with those required by the economy to ensure nation states can compete in an ever competitive, global market place (Leitch, 2005; DfEE, 1999; USDOLETA, 2000; European Council, 2000). Businesses constantly demand new types and higher levels of literacies to enable them to compete successfully in the global arena, (Gee, et al., 1996; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). In the European Union, this is driven by the Lisbon Agenda, (for full details see Appendix A). This is a political objective agreed by European Union heads of state at the 2000 Lisbon European Council meeting with the aim of ensuring that the European Union becomes, '...the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council, 2000: 2). The Lisbon Agenda calls for the offer of '...learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives' (European Council, 2000: 8).

The European Commission has introduced programmes to deliver various aspects of the Lisbon Agenda for example, the Grundtvig programme for adult and continuing

education pathways (European Commission, 2007). The Grundtvig programme funds provision which will:

...assist people from vulnerable social groups and in marginal social contexts, in particular older people and those who have left education without basic qualifications, in order to give them alternative opportunities to access adult education.

(OJEU, 2006: 59)

Family literacy programmes are one strategy to meet this Grundtvig objective, working towards the Lisbon Agenda's call for economic development, job creation and social cohesion.

By 1997, literacies for the changing workplace in Britain, which increasingly included computer skills as well as literacy and numeracy, had entered the political domain, appearing in both the Labour and the Conservatives parties' election manifestos (Pitt, 2000: 115). This has led to literacy initiatives such as SfL in Britain (DfEE, 2001), included within the Lisbon Agenda in Europe (European Council, 2000) and the implementation of the UN Literacy Decade, which runs from 2003-2012. However, the linking of literacies to the workplace, resulting in mass literacy campaigns, is nothing new. It is the very reason why most developed, western, countries put in place compulsory primary education for children by the end of the nineteenth century, (Bantock, 1970). Prior to this only the élite and privileged had access to formal learning. According to Bantock, education became increasingly political, being ultimately viewed as '...an instrument of the state...' (Bantock, 1970: 21). Further, Bantock points out that the requirements of the state dictated to a large degree the subjects taught in school. Education needed to be systematic to ensure those emerging from compulsory schooling possessed the skills to function in a changing economic climate. Education needed to be fit for purpose, which was a means of meeting economic growth. 'Education had

become an investment, and the state looked forward to collecting the dividends' (Bantock, 1970: 21). Many of the more recent literacy initiatives, that are specifically relevant to the background and context of this study, particularly in England and Ireland, materialised as a direct result of reports into adult literacy levels in the late 1990s. The reports highlighted that a large percentage of adults had low levels of literacy skills that needed to be addressed if full economic participation was to be achieved (Rose and Atkin, 2006).

In Britain, the findings of the committee chaired by Claus Moser, which produced the report *A Fresh Start* (DfEE, 1999), proved to be seminal. The report resulted in large sums of government funding and mass public awareness campaigns, particularly the "Gremlins campaign", to encourage those who fell below the desired standard of literacy levels; a standard set by the élite, ideally to be validated by examination in schools - to seek help in addressing their deficiencies. Low levels of literacy in Britain or illiteracy worldwide are no longer viewed as socially, politically or economically acceptable (DfEE, 1999; UNESCO, 2005c). The premise was that if an individual improved their literacy, they would be able to access better life and work opportunities. The Moser report estimated almost seven million adults (around 20 per cent) to have literacy levels below those expected of an 11 year old with the figure for numeracy thought to be even greater at around 40 per cent. Prior to Moser, policy makers could only guess the number of adults with low levels of literacy skills, with the number of individuals struggling in Britain with literacy estimated to be between two and five million, (Kedney, 1978; Levine, 1986). The realisation of the scale of the problem led directly to the implementation of the SfL strategy (DfEE, 2001), which aimed to address the literary and numeracy needs of 1.5 million adults by 2007; a target which has been met

(DCSF, 2007). Family literacy programmes, which were already in existence in some parts of the country, became one strategy amongst many, (See Atkin, et al., 2005), through which the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the funding body in England, could meet these national targets. Following on from SfL and Moser, the next big challenge for Britain will be a direct result of the outcome of the Leitch report published at the end of 2006. Commissioned in 2005, by Gordon Brown at the Treasury, and not by the DfES, Leitch was asked by the British government:

...to consider what the UK's long-term ambition should be for developing skills in order to maximize economic prosperity and productivity and to improve social justice.

(Leitch, 2005:1)

In the final report, Leitch advocates that the UK becomes a world leader in skills by 2020 using the OECD targets. This will require the achievement at all skill levels to be doubled. Specifically, Leitch recommends that 95 per cent of adults should achieve basic skills in functional literacy and numeracy and over 90 per cent of adults should be qualified to at least Level 2. Further, for Leitch it is imperative that '...skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers, vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned' (Leitch, 2006:3). If the recommendations are followed, Leitch believes that the economic and social benefits for the UK could be enormous. Economic benefits could be as much as £80 billion over a 30 year period due to increased productivity and this, in turn, could significantly reduce social deprivation, social inequalities and poverty. The new Brown Government has set out exactly how they plan to implement the recommendations of the Leitch report in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) publication, *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (2007a). Section 2 outlines how

they will support individuals to improve their skills and help them make progress at work. They reiterate the link between low skills and poor employment commenting that many are still ‘...trapped in a cycle of low skilled, poorly-paid, often short-term employment with few training opportunities and dependence on public support’ (DIUS, 2007a: 22). Proposals include the introduction of Skills Accounts, a new Adult Careers Service and, most pertinent to this discussion, ‘a new communications campaign to get across the value of skills and foster a new culture of learning’ (DIUS, 2007a: 21).

In Ireland, the results of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1997, which identified one in four adults as having low levels of literacy skills, and the Department of Education and Science (DES) subsequent production of the White Paper on adult education, entitled *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000), led to an Irish Adult Literacy Strategy. The strategy aimed to target 110,000 adults with a £73.6m budget between 2002 and 2006. The White Paper is concerned with the ability of the Irish workforce to adapt to the needs of the global economy, with ‘competitiveness’ forming one of its six priorities. Family literacy programmes are one strategy employed by local deliverers to help Ireland achieve this largely economic goal, thus ensuring Ireland has a suitably qualified workforce that will continue to build on the recent economic success, which has seen a rise in income levels across much of Ireland.

However, there are two important points to consider. The first is to ask what and where are these new employment opportunities for individuals who have participated in literacy programmes and who are the individuals who have up-skilled themselves? This is a particularly pertinent point to consider if this study is to address the question of progression routes and further opportunities for those who participate in family literacy

programmes. Assuming that the majority of those who have attended literacy programmes of any kind are living in poor areas where employment is often hard to find, there is a danger that those with new skills will not be able to find employment at the appropriate level, if at all. Rather, the result could be highly literate individuals in low paid employment. The second point to consider is what happens to the menial, low-skilled, low paid jobs that need to be undertaken in society, for example cleaning, collecting refuse, stacking supermarket shelves or certain jobs in the service and agricultural sectors, for example the manual harvesting of crops or the factory packing of food, if those who are up-skilled find alternative employment at higher levels? On the one hand, if individuals do not or cannot achieve reasonable predetermined good quality skill levels they run the risk of becoming economically unviable, and, despite what Freire believes, excluded from mainstream society. On the other hand, if such levels are achieved there is still no guarantee of employment which will be waged at a level that extracts those individuals and families from poverty.

Nevertheless, a lack of literacy skills does not always lead to social disadvantage. Taylor (1997) claims that rather it is a reason to 'shift the blame for poverty and unemployment onto the people least responsible for and least able to struggle against the systematic inequalities of modern societies' (Taylor, 1997: 2). Taylor cites programmes in Australia, Canada and Britain as aiming to break the cycle of deprivation by promising that improved skills will result in a greater level of economic success and social well-being. Taylor points out that there are many other obstacles besides a lack of literacy that act as barriers to breaking the poverty cycle including race, gender and socioeconomic status. However, literacy is more than just a tool to be employed for economic gain, be it at the micro level of the family unit or the macro level of the nation

state. Literacies have a wider span relating across geographical, cultural and temporal spaces.

Literacy domains and rationales

Using the results from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the OECD report (1997) considers three domains of literacy; prose, document and quantitative. Prose is the ability to analyse texts. Document enables the individual to identify and utilise written information in a variety of formats including forms, tables and maps. Finally, quantitative literacy is concerned with numerical information embedded in print, for example the ability to calculate the interest from an advertisement. Barton also discusses domains of literacy along with literacy practice and literacy events considering how literacy is used in different settings at different times by different people. An example of an event would be the reading of a bedtime story by an adult to a child. Literacy practices are the actual ways in which literature is used in cultural context with the users bringing prior knowledge to a given situation. In this way, literacy practices could be described as a transferable act. According to Barton (1994: 37) 'literacy events are the particular activities where literacy has a role...literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilising literacy which people draw upon in a literacy event.' Domains refer to where literacy events actually take place such as schools, church, work, home or one could add the government, the media and the family. Barton calls these domains of life, or 'ecological niches', where different literacies are understood and used. Barton points out that the three principles are not mutually exclusive. For example, school or office work is regularly undertaken in the home.

Wagner (1999) prefers to talk of literacy rationales. Whilst there are numerous rationales for literacy that have been applicable to different cultures at different times, Wagner explores the six that he considers most noteworthy, those of development, economics, society, politics and those which are endogenous and exogenous. By endogenous Wagner is referring to literacy programmes at a community level that are often delivered by voluntary or church organisations. Exogenous relates to the external pressures a nation faces to be seen to be progressing in both literacy and educational standards. Each has a part to play in the importance of literacy at any given time and covers, amongst other attributes, literacy for education or economic development, to tackle poverty, to increase the health of the nation and for making effective policies. Literacy at a micro level involves delivery by community, voluntary or religious organisations. Finally, at a macro level, literacy can be seen in terms of external pressures from other nations so that countries are seen to be progressing in literacy and educational standards. Hence, the current political discourse, which appears in policy documents, such as the Leitch report in England and the Lisbon agenda in Europe. The extent to which this type of rhetoric influences the format of present and future family literacy programmes in the case study areas will need to be explored.

Functional literacy

The term functional literacy became popular with UNESCO in the 1970s in connection with economic and development discourses (UNESCO, 1972; Levine, 1986; Rassool, 1999). Since then the concept of functional literacy has been widely used to justify literacy development programmes world-wide (Street, 1993). It is pertinent to the research questions relating to literacy skill gaps and the future development of family literacy programmes. Functional literacy was originally coined by Gray in 1956

following his survey work for UNESCO into reading and writing (Levine, 1986) which was subsequently used by UNESCO as a guide for a range of literacy programmes, predominantly in developing countries (Stubbs, 1980). Functional literacy originally considered literacies specifically in relation to local cultural contexts rather than as one generic level or set of skills that could be standardised for everyone regardless of an individual's circumstances or environment. As Stubbs comments, functional literacy, 'defines literacy as relative to the requirements of an individual within a particular society: it is the degree of literacy required for effective functioning in a particular community' (Stubbs, 1980:14). Gray's original definition did not link literacy to the workplace, or for that matter to any particular social setting (Levine, 1986) from which it should be measured. According to Levine who, in his book the *Social Context of Literacy* (1986), comprehensively tracks the changing definition of functional literacy by UNESCO, it was not until some time later, at the thirteenth UNESCO general conference in 1964, that functional literacy became an ideological discourse associated with economics and development. This shift occurred at the start of the five-year Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP).

In the resulting report, which evaluated the progress made by the programme in between 1969 and 1971, the importance of adequate adult literacy in the workplace was highlighted as a key factor for economic success stating, 'adult literacy is now considered by many a prerequisite without which many forms of capital and technical investment...lose their impact' (UNESCO, 1972: 10). Functional literacy has been widely criticised and challenged by educators such as Freire and the Berggrens (Street, 1993), as too narrow and too economically focused leaving no room for social, cultural or personal development of literacies or what Freire (1985) terms "conscientization".

Functional literacy aids economic growth, encouraging the workforce to be efficiently productive. In so doing, the workforce guarantees increased profits for the employers and the owners of businesses. Yet, as Street points out it does nothing for ‘...raising the consciousness of the person’s own position in a wider society and in particular their exploitation and its political and social causes’ (Street, 1993: 187). However, functional literacy is still on the educational agenda, at least in Britain. Now referred to as functional skills incorporating ICT, the DfES (now the DCSF) has recently launched a new timetable for their integration into all learners’ learning, from those taking GCSEs to adult learners, with recognised accredited qualification to be in place by 2010 (DfES, 2006e and f). This could have an impact on the focus of future family literacy programmes and the type of progression routes offered to participants. However, in this context, the focus is firmly on literacies for the economy rather than as a social practice or for pleasure.

Literacies as social practice

Not all literacy studies have concentrated on concepts, theories and economics. There have been many studies, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, which have explored literacy as a social construct at home, in the community and the workplace (Taylor, 1983; Barton, 1994; Hannon, 1995; Malicky, et al., 1997; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gadsen, 1999; Barton, et al., 2000; Atkin, 2000; Cairney, 2002). Many of these include various types of family literacy programmes. According to Pahl and Rowsell (2005), literacy is inextricably connected to belief systems and community values linking ‘...people to each other and to their shared histories’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005: 5). Everyday literacy practices such as diaries, emails and postcards, have the potential to tell the story of where an individual comes from. Such practices form our identity which,

in turn, shapes our future, ‘...literacy supports identity, and travels through our lives with us [leaving] traces of literate practices as we move through life’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005: 5). Rassool, (1999), notes that it is imperative that if literacies are to be viewed as a social practice they are ‘...contextualised within a general theory of society’ (Rassool, 1999: 46). For Rassool, literacies need to be, ‘...analysed in terms of its relationship with institutions, structures and processes and the social system in which they are grounded’ (Rassool, 1999: 46). Cairney (2002), believes there are many ‘manifestations’ of literacy and that ‘literacy in all its forms, can only be understood when we also study the people who use it... Literacy is in essence a set of social practices situated in sociocultural contexts defined by members of a group through their actions with, through and about language’ (Cairney, 2002: 159). Literacies are therefore culturally as well as socially specific.

Studying Hispanic Mexican migrant women in Los Angeles, Rockhill (1987) investigated how literacy was used as a tool of power in a new cultural setting that encouraged differences in gender identity. The interlinking concepts of race, class and ethnicity were taken not as separate elements to be investigated but as part of the whole. Using life history interviews, ethnographies of communities and classroom data for 50 working-class Spanish-speaking adults, Rockhill found that husbands used traditional ways of living as a means to dominate their wives that were inappropriate to their new social context. The result was that women were not allowed to go out alone or to learn English without the permission of their husbands. In this way, the husbands ensured their wives were compliant and, regardless of how little English the men knew, it ensured their dominant position over their women. Rockhill found many of the women undertook the written English tasks at home, such as form filling, but were unable to use

English as a communication tool in the community or the workplace. Their bilingualism was limited to the private sphere. Literacy was seen as ‘...women’s work, but not women’s right’ (Rockhill, 1987: 165). For Rockhill, literacy is viewed as a commodity to be gained rather than a right for all, a means of survival but not to be taken to the next level, that of functional literacy which leads an individual to be educated and empowered. Rockhill concludes that many of the women both desired to learn English and feared to do so because of the symbolism such learning brought with it, namely aspirations and changes. Fear of the consequences that they would be entering unknown territory for which they and their families were not prepared. ‘Once literacy carries with it the symbolic power of education, it poses a threat to the power relations in the family’ (Rockhill, 1987: 167), specifically to the husband-wife relationship. Rockhill found that the women were more likely to learn English if or when they were separated or divorced. However, as David cautions, ‘...educational involvement cannot be the sole, or even main, cause of family or marital separation and breakdown....increased educational opportunities for girls and women have led to different aspirations and expectations among women’ (David, 1993: 174). Nevertheless, it is a facet of family literacy programmes requiring consideration in this study.

The first study concerning family and literacy practices, as discussed in chapter 1, is frequently cited as Taylor (1983). Taylor explored literacy practices in the home of six white middle class, suburban families living in New Hampshire in the USA. Taylor was interested in the impact of family context on the development of a child’s use and understanding of literacy. Taylor sees the home as a filter for many forms of literacy including print. According to Taylor, the use of literacy in the home enables the family to function both internally and in the wider community. It provides children with a

context in which to develop literacy practices. Taylor, ‘...supports the view that literacy develops best in relational contexts which are meaningful to the young child’ (Taylor, 1983: 79). As far as education is concerned, being competent in literacy is seen as the key to accessing the rest of the curriculum (Hannon, 1995). Just as it prevents adults accessing cultural products, it equally ensures children who are struggling in literacy will, by default, also struggle in every other subject, even those not directly associated with literacy such as art, music or technologies. Whilst there is undoubtedly an overlap between home and school literacies, and indeed between other literacy domains such as home and work (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), what occurs in terms of literacy within the context of the family does not necessarily indicate the type of literacy or numeracy that is taught in classrooms. The former is often informal everyday literacies such as writing letters, reading newspapers or television schedules, making shopping lists etc (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Whilst the latter concentrates on academic, mechanical aspects of literacy that meet a predefined set of criteria where the ultimate aim is for the learner to have the capability to pass exams and in so doing demonstrate their literacy practices in a tangible, accredited, recognisable format. Often, literacy learning begins long before children enter the formal education system. It usually begins at home where, according to Teale (1986), it is encountered more as a ‘social process’ integrated into other activities. Teale found that for over 80 percent of reading and writing activities ‘...the focus of the activity...was not literacy itself’ (Teale, 1986: 192). The family is seen as one of the key influences on a child’s literacy progress and this is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Taylor believes that many family literacy programmes are based on deficit-driven models. They view the learner as lacking in certain skills which can be addressed by

additional education. Such programmes hold countless negative connotations; connotations that Taylor deems those who are encouraged to attend such programmes are already aware of. Potential learners understand that programmes are actually ‘...family “il-literacy” programs for “disadvantaged adults” and “poor children” which is why many simply avoid them’ (Taylor, 1997: 3). Further, many assumptions are made by the policy makers on behalf of the would-be learner. According to Gadsen (1999), such deficit models of delivery try to correct a literacy problem which is viewed by the policy makers as predetermined within a family. However, this is seldom undertaken with full knowledge of the contexts in which learning between family members is developed. For Taylor it is crucial that all literacy programmes consider local literacies, taking into account the diversity of families, the context of communities and the relevance of cultures. The gendering of literacy, especially in the home should also be considered.

Barton investigates how the literacy practices of individuals are situated in ‘...broader social relations...’ (Barton, 1994: 35), - including that of gender roles – and how people survive by networking and developing coping strategies. Barton utilises the findings from the qualitative four year ‘Literacy in the Community Project’ conducted in Lancaster, England (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) to illustrate his point. For Barton what counts is the type of literacy the learner needs; what use it is to them in everyday life, and what it will add to their quality of life, not whether or not they are able to pass a test or if they are part of a government target. Literacy is for the individual, the self, not for others. Motivation for effective literacy learning must come from within the learner (Atkin, et al., 2005). As Barton states, ‘adult literacy provision is required which responds to people’s perceptions, not solely to the priorities of governments and

international organisations' (Barton, 1994: 217). It is here that we begin to see a separation between political rhetoric and individuals' motivation to improve their literacy skills. Further, literacy was found by Barton (1994) to be a highly gendered activity both in the home and in society. Barton suggests that, in the home, men and women undertake specific literacy tasks. For example, women write the birthday cards and the shopping lists, taking care of the informal, personal literacies, whilst men write the cheques, take care of the bills and deal with formal types of literacy. However, a specific literacy role is not necessarily a sign of an individual's literacy ability. Because women do not generally fill out the cheques this does not mean they are not capable of doing so. Barton finds the home to be a rich source of literacy activities and a natural site of study for family literacy programmes.

The gendering of literacy in the home is further mirrored in the actual division of literacy activities in wider society, particularly in relation to the education of children where the mother or female carer is frequently, by default, responsible for the educational development and achievement of their children (David, 1993; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). This is particularly true in the primary years of learning when a child establishes key skills such as literacy and numeracy, which are assumed to be a given, forming the foundation on which all subsequent learning is built. It is also one of the main reasons why policy makers and researchers alike have become increasingly interested in the connection between the family and literacy acquisition.

Reviewing the existing work on family literacy programmes

Work in the field of literacy, and specifically in family literacy, is relatively recent. However, the research questions in the present study cannot be addressed without due

consideration of the literature available in this area and its historical context. A selected look at literacy studies is undertaken by Barton (1994), who found that prior to the 1990s there was little academic work in this area. Barton found that in 1991, there was a sudden increase in interest in the field as the topic became increasingly politically and socially popular. This coincided with an increase in global economic and workforce activity, as well as advances in new technologies, particularly the widespread use of computers both in the workplace and the home, which in turn led to the need for higher-level and new literacies as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Whilst there are many types of literacy, Barton concentrated on the literacy of print, taking a closer look at three studies, all of which researched literacy within the social context. The three studies are; Scribner and Cole (1981) *The Psychology of Literacy*, Street (1984) *Literacy in theory and practice*, and, the study of most interest to the field of family literacy research, Heath (1983) *Ways with words*. Using interviews, observations and psychological testing, Scribner and Cole (1981) studied the Vai, who live in north-west Liberia, to ascertain how they learnt to read and write. Street looked at Islamic villagers in Iran using ethnography and Heath took three Appalachian communities in the southeast of America and studied them for seven years using ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods. Heath examined literacy first in the home and then in the community before exploring literacy in schools. Heath was interested in the relationship between the three social spheres (the home, the community and the school) and the utilisation of literacies in everyday life. Heath concluded that literacy is complex, meaning different things to different people. Heath was the first to introduce the contrast between, ‘what literacy does *for* people and what people do *with* literacy’ (Heath, 1983: 26). Numerous case studies have since explored literacies across different spheres and contexts and their connectivity. However, the majority of studies have been conducted in

North America and Britain with some in Canada and more recently New Zealand, (see the work of Benseman (2002) onwards, particularly concerning the Manukau family literacy project).

As already discussed in the introductory chapter and above, Taylor (1983), is widely viewed as the first to conduct research into family literacy. Taylor was interested in how literacy was used and developed in the home. A criterion for inclusion in the study was that parents felt that one of the children in the family was successfully learning to read and write. Taylor's work began in 1977 as part of her doctoral studies employing ethnography as her main methodological approach. The study was not necessarily looking at a deficit model or a lack of engagement with literacies, rather it concentrated on the positive use of literacies within the family context. Unlike many of the subsequent studies, all parents who participated were deemed educated to a reasonable standard. Taylor explored how literacy learning occurred in the family environment by collecting and analysing literacies found around the home, including some produced by the parents and the children, for example shopping lists and paintings. Taylor concluded that reading stories and story-telling were important activities for enabling children to learn literacy skills. She comments, 'my interpretation of literacy and the social organisation of everyday life [is that] print is one medium through which children are learning to master their surroundings' (Taylor, 1983: 53). For Taylor there are '...many kinds of literacy and many kinds of families' (Taylor, 1997:3). Following this initial study her work progressed to consider a cross-section of international studies concerned with family literacy, all of which used similar case study methodology.

Since Taylor, there have been many research studies and a great deal written concerning various types of family literacy and related initiatives including formally delivered family literacy programmes, parental involvement projects and schemes linking the home with school (Brooks, et al., 1996, 1997, 2002, 2004; Hannon, 1999; Benseman, 2002; Federighi, 1998; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Cairney, 2002 and many others). A large amount of the research and writing has come from the USA and Britain, (Borg and Mayo, 2001; Brooks, et al., - as above; Hannon, 1995, 1999; Hannon, et al., 2006 and Wolfendale and Topping, 1996). At least two handbooks have been produced, one edited by Wagner in 1999 entitled *Literacy: An International Handbook* and, more recently, Wasik in 2004 produced a handbook of family literacy documenting its history, key concepts and types of services involved. However, this latter book, which is in excess of 600 pages, relates specifically to the USA, with only one external chapter by Hannon and Bird providing a brief, superficial overview of the English context. In America, programmes are reported to be highly formalised and include a range of initiatives such as: 'Parents as Teachers'; 'the Home Instruction Program for preschool youngsters'; 'parent-child Program'; 'motheread'; and 'Reading is fundamental' (Wasik and Herrmann, 2004: 14).

Researchers have also been interested in literacy learning outside the family, in the wider community, sometime termed literacies as a social practice (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Cairney, 2002). In the United States, Malicky, et al., (1997) looked at literacy learning within a community-based programme. This research, which was an urban case study, looked at five adults in a particular community. Qualitative methodologies employed included conversational interviews with two to three interviews over a six-month period being conducted, as well as classroom observations. The researcher, who

was also a practitioner, worked on the programme for approximately 200 hours during the time of the study to gain familiarity with the interviewees and the context. In analytical terms, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) interpretive naturalistic enquiry was used as the criterion for qualitative data analysis. Here 'trustworthiness' has a place of high importance and data collection in this way is encouraged to have credibility, conformability and transferability. However, it could be argued that the familiarity of the researcher with the participants served to bias the findings. This brings into question the objectiveness of the data collected and how it was analysed and interpreted. Participants may have given the researcher the responses she expected to receive. Conversely, the opposite may also be argued, that trust and familiarity led to openness and honesty from the interviewees.

The connection between a child's home background and its literacy development was further investigated by Teale (1986) in San Diego, USA. Over a three to 18 month time period, Teale, who used a case study approach alongside Lincoln and Guba's (1982) naturalistic inquiry, followed the literacy development of 24 preschool children aged between two and four, from different cultural backgrounds but all of whom came from low-income families. Teale was interested in the influences of the home background on the process of literacy learning. Teale concluded that, '...the observations of the low-income children provide[d] additional evidence for the contention that virtually all children in a literate society like ours have numerous experiences with written language before they ever get to school' (Teale, 1986: 193). The work of Hannon (1995), further suggests that pre-school literacy development with parents is important and that leaving literacy learning until a child enters school could be too late. Therefore, the age of the

children who are participating in family literacy programmes will be a key factor for this study to consider.

Until recently, fewer studies into family literacy programmes have been carried out in Britain compared with the United States. One of the first studies in England into the effectiveness of family literacy programmes was conducted by Brooks, et al., in 1996, which looked at the Family Literacy Demonstration Programme as mentioned in chapter 1. The evaluation, which resulted in the book, *Family Literacy Works* (1996), was on a larger scale than previous research in this area. The programme aimed to involve approximately 150 parents and 180 children aged three to six, in four deprived areas of England and Wales: Liverpool; Cardiff; Norfolk and North Tyneside. The BSA funded 75% of the programme with the remaining 25% met by local partners. Delivery of programmes commenced between January and April 1994 and ran for approximately two years. Courses ran for 96 hours over 12 weeks.

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach, including the gathering of quantitative data at the beginning and end of the courses from both parents and children. For the parents this took the form of a three-part test, which they were asked to complete to help the evaluation team gauge the written progress of parents attending courses. The level of vocabulary, reading and writing of the children were also assessed. The children's writing level was assessed by their early-years coordinator, who asked the children to produce a small amount of simple text such as their own name. Vocabulary and reading were tested using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Reading Recognition subtest of the Peabody Individual Achievement Tests, both of which had been employed in previous research for the National Child Development Study (NCDS) in 1992.

Finally, for the quantitative data, the research team indirectly gathered information on literacy-related activities in the home through interviews with parents.

The qualitative aspect of data collection included interviews conducted with parents and coordinators, documented observations of teaching practices and the perceptions of some children's teachers concerning the impact of the programme on the children. (Full details of the extensive methodologies used for the evaluation can be found in the full report on page 22 onwards). Brooks, et al., found that family literacy produced numerous benefits to both the parents and their children. The level of the child's vocabulary, along with reading and writing improved considerably. Parents were better able to help their children with literacy tasks, especially at home, boost their child's confidence and communicate more effectively with the school. A positive effect was also found on the parents' own literacy skills with 95% attaining some form of accreditation and 52% reporting a 'growth in their confidence' (Brooks, et al., 1996: xiii). Further, in the follow-up evaluation a year later entitled *Family Literacy Lasts*, Brooks, et al., (1997) reported many of the benefits to be sustained. On re-contacting 154 of the parents and 237 of the children who had participated in the original study Brooks, et al., concluded:

This follow-up study shows that the family literacy children have successfully maintained the gains they made during the courses, and that the parents have continued to widen their participation in education and society.

(Brooks, et al., 2004: 10)

In the original evaluation Brooks, et al., (1996: 1-2) also investigated the type of programmes covered by family literacy initiatives, finding they generally covered at least one of the following:

- Home visits to encourage literacy-related activities in the home
- School or community based programmes, which seek to encourage parental involvement in reading in order to benefit their children
- Programmes intended to improve the skills of parents with low levels of literacy
- School-based supplementary reading programmes for children
- Intergenerational programmes, i.e. programmes in which both parents and children receive teaching

Whilst the above piece of research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, including background information on the families who participated and information on literacy-related home activities, it was relatively small scale since it was confined to the four geographical areas of England mentioned above. The inclusion of a range of key players in the qualitative component of the data collection - namely the interviewing of parents, coordinators, children's teachers and the use of class observations - provides a methodological format, which could be adopted and adapted for use in this study. Although Brooks, et al., does not state the ratio of mothers to fathers attending the programme, the report does find that a bonus effect of the programme was that it acted as an access course for women, i.e. the course was used as a route into further education by mothers who attended the programme. This point is an important one for the study to probe if the research questions concerning learner progression routes and future opportunities are to be addressed. Furthermore, this lack of

clarification as to the mother/father ratio of parent learners is, according to Goldman (2005), a common failing in many research reports in this field.

Since the work of Brooks, et al., (1996, 1997) a large body of evidence has emerged in Britain, which confirms the numerous benefits family literacy programmes have to offer (Brooks, 1998; Brooks, et al., 2002; NIACE, 2003; Ofsted, 2000; Estyn, 2004; Wolfendale and Topping, 1996). As Camilleri (unpublished: 30) points out, ‘the evidence of positive findings is overwhelming and is probably sufficient proof to state that family literacy does work, at least in generic terms.’

More recently, Peter Hannon has written substantially on, and conducted several extensive studies into, literacy and family literacy programmes (Hannon, 1995, 1999; Hannon and Bird, 2004; Hannon, et al., 2006). In his article *Rhetoric and Research in Family Literacy* (1999) to the British Educational Research Journal, Hannon critically reviews the existing literature on family literacy programmes. The review raises many questions concerning the reliability of family literacy research and its use in policy decisions. For Hannon much of the research rhetoric concerning family literacy is ‘...largely calculated to persuade or influence others...’ (Hannon, 1999: 121) that family literacy is working and worthwhile. One of Hannon’s main criticisms is that ‘...although rhetoric has sometimes been informed by research, it has also obscured, misinterpreted, ignored and [even] exaggerated research findings’ (Hannon, 1999: 121). Hannon questions whether children who have parents of low literacy are in fact doomed to follow suit as the research alleges.

Further, children who have literate parents but who are struggling in school, are being excluded and are denied the opportunity of participating in literacy schemes because their families do not fall within the restricting criteria set for the desired target learners (Hannon, 1999). Hannon refers to such programmes as 'restricted'. According to Hannon some of the main barriers to attending programmes are physical, practical and emotional. Barriers include: parents not perceiving themselves as in need of literacy support; not necessarily wishing to tackle 'the need' even if one is recognised; not wanting to help with their child's literacy at home, or purely the practical barriers such as time and availability of childcare. Hannon also points out that, for the many disadvantaged families other issues such as a lack of employment or food are more significant and pressing problems than not being functional in literacy; a point raised by others such as Taylor (1997). According to Hannon '...much depends upon how parents are invited to take part, what they are asked to do, and the programme's responsiveness to different families' circumstances' (Hannon, 1999: 129). As for claims by researchers, which are then taken up by policy makers, such as Lazar, et al., in 1982, that restricted programmes produce socio-economic benefits when children who have attended programmes reach adulthood, Hannon is sceptical. He urges caution, citing the work of Feinstein (1998) and Bernstein (1970) on the limits of education in general, and Graff (1991) and Auerbach (1995), specifically, in relation to family literacy programmes potential to achieve such changes, especially the breaking of generational cycles of poverty. Hannon concludes, '...that rhetoric about restricted programmes in family literacy is poorly linked to available evidence' (Hannon, 1999: 134). It is therefore hoped that this study will go some way to providing evidence in one direction or the other, or, at the very least, it will highlight why this link is so difficult to make in a comparative, cross-cultural manner.

To try and resolve some of the research difficulties identified by Hannon in his critical review above, his latest work with colleagues Morgan and Nutbrown (2006) examined the experiences of parents attending family literacy programmes in socially and economically disadvantaged areas in the north of England. This group was then compared to a control group who had not attended such programmes. This interview-based study involved a random sample of 176 families with children who were three years old, taken from the waiting list of 11 local schools. Half of the families selected at random, were used as a control group, whilst the other half were asked to join the university research programme run by eleven teachers. Whilst some fathers were present, all those interviewed, 85 from the programme and 73 from the control group, were mothers. The programme addressed five main strands of literacy: environmental; print; books; early writing and oral language. It also utilised the ORIM framework, developed by Hannon in 1995. ORIM stands for ‘...*Opportunities* for learning, showing *Recognition* of the child’s activities, *Interaction* with the child on literacy activities and providing a *Model* of a literacy user...’ (Hannon, et al., 2006: 21). Programmes offered to parents were flexible, purposely and specifically designed to meet the ‘needs and interests’ of participants. Pre-existing programmes were not used. According to Hannon et al., (2006: 22), ‘the aim was not to provide a full range of adult education provision...but to offer a ‘bridge’ to parents who wanted to continue their own learning in a more formal or structured way’. There were five main components to the programme: home visits; provision of literacy resources; centre-based group activities; special events and postal communication. The study reported high take-up and participation rates compared to other research in this area. One reason put forward for this was the openness, or ‘non-stigmatising’ of programmes rather than them being ‘...restricted to families who were perceived to be in the most need...’ (Hannon, et al.,

2006: 42). This was one of Hannon's main concerns when he conducted the review of literature discussed above. Further, only ten per cent of all adults attended the adult education element of the programme as this was not compulsory. Hannon, et al., conclude that this could be because:

...parents' interest in their own education may not always coincide with their being ready to facilitate their children's development [therefore] – making adult education a compulsory part of a family literacy programme may reduce take-up and participation.

(Hannon, et al., 2006: 42)

This is an interesting point to consider when establishing the characteristics of family literacy programmes involved in this study.

Parental perspectives of family learning are also the subject of a report produced by Brassett-Grundy in April 2002 for the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. The report used qualitative data and case studies to investigate 25 family learning participants from two London Boroughs using five focus groups. According to the report, two in-depth interviews and one focus group with four non-participants were also conducted. All but one of those who participated in the research was female. The research found that participating parents saw family learning broadly in terms of activities, places, networks and benefits. Little difference was found in the perceptions of non-participating parents except for the number of disadvantages they perceived in attending including having to leave younger children with people they did not know, having to travel '...a long way to an unfamiliar place; the cost involved and time spent neglecting other commitments' (Brassett-Grundy, 2002:34). Overall, parents viewed family learning as 'incredibly positive'. However, it should be noted that the author stresses the findings are based on an extremely short, small-scale research investigation,

which in fact covered only a few weeks in Spring 2001, thus providing a ‘snapshot’ of views, which could be seen as geographically and temporally specific. Brassett-Grundy cautions against drawing generalisations. Whilst this example of a case study was not specifically labelled a comparative study, by its very nature the use of two or more geographical locations, even if they were within the same country, it qualifies as an example of a comparative educational study and serves as justification for the comparative case study methodological approach employed in this research.

Family literacy programmes are seen by Pahl and Kelly (2005) as a “third space” between home and school. This notion is based on the findings of a qualitative case study of family literacy programmes in Croydon and Derbyshire, England. The study included classroom observations and 67 teacher and learner interviews in rural and suburban settings. It considered the cross-domain use of literacies between school and home by such methods as a child’s rucksack. The BSA or ‘H’ model of delivery was explored where a common planned activity was the subject of each session. According to Pahl and Kelly:

Family literacy has been seen by educators as an attempt to join up home and school through a focus on shared literacy activities with parents and children, often on school sites, but drawing on home-based experience

(Pahl and Kelly 2005: 91)

They conclude that ‘...family literacy classes are sites where cultural experiences from home are recognised...’ (Pahl and Kelly, 2005: 95). The programme provided an opportunity for each domain to better understand the other and in so doing to draw on knowledge and skills previously unshared. This process could be seen as the first step to

parental involvement, which, according to Wolfendale (1996), is concerned with building links between the home, schools and the community.

Greater parental involvement in schools, usually by the mother (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), is a significant feature of family literacy programmes. The concept appears in much of the research literature connected to this field of study in the last ten years. In many countries, parents have traditionally remained outside the school gates (Borg and Mayo, 2001). There has been a view that the core business or role of schools is to teach children, rather than parents, despite home-school links and strong partnerships being encouraged in English primary schools since the publication of *The Plowden Report* as early as 1967. However, in recent years, particularly in Britain this situation has changed. Changes have been as a direct result of several policy documents. The '*Excellence in Schools*' report by the DfEE in 1997 viewed parents as key to a child's success (Crozier, 2000) and therefore encouraged greater parental involvement in education. More recently, there has been *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b), which followed Lord Laming's inquiry (2003). The inquiry was carried out as a result of the death of Victoria Climbié, an eight year old girl who died following gross neglect by her auntie and uncle who were supposed to be caring for her. The results of the inquiry led to the 2004 Children's Act. In the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper, family learning is highlighted as offering, '....opportunities to increase involvement in learning, to break down barriers between school and parents, and act as a link to targeted help and support' (DfES, 2003b: 41). Parents in England are now positively encouraged to participate in school life, academically and socially, from helping children read in class to taking them on trips outside of school. Further, with the exception of religious and certain specialist schools, parents must occupy at least one third of the places on schools' governing

bodies (DfES, 2006c). In a short review of literature undertaken by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) for the DfES, levels of parental involvement in schools were found to be closely associated with social class, poverty, health, the mothers' educational level and parental confidence. In some cases, parents were discouraged from being involved because the schools did not make them feel valued or wanted.

The review found parental involvement took many forms and the '...higher the level of attainment, [by the child] the more parents get involved' (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003: 4). Further, parents from socially deprived or working class backgrounds were less likely to be involved than middle-class educated parents were, having implications for the potential achievement levels of such children. In their executive summary Desforges and Abouchaar (2003: 6) concluded 'the achievement of working class pupils could be significantly enhanced if we systematically apply all that is known about parental involvement.' However, a recent discussion paper produced by the National Family and Parenting Institute in England which considers the effect of parental involvement in schools and on children's learning, points out that, although the findings of Desforges and Abouchaar are compelling '...evidence on the effectiveness of programmes designed to facilitate parental involvement is less convincing and less comprehensive' (Reynolds, 2006: 1). The paper distinguishes between parental involvement that happens naturally and that which is instigated by policy initiatives or school strategies. The main difficulty the Institute has with parental involvement literature is, '...the lack of clarity over exactly what type of engagement is meant' (Reynolds, 2006: 8), making what actually works under what circumstances unclear. The paper concludes that the attitude of schools and teachers towards parents is the main stumbling block to all types of successful parental involvement.

In one of the few studies concerning programmes outside of America and Britain, Borg and Mayo (2001), looked at parental involvement in working-class primary schools in Malta as a tool of empowerment. The Parental Empowerment for Family Literacy (Pefal) project (described in chapter 1), was aimed not at adult learning *per se* but the improved communication and involvement between parents and school. Until recently, traditional attitudes described above concerning parental involvement in schools were culturally engrained in Malta. However, according to Borg and Mayo, the situation has changed. Schools are now more open and receptive to outside influences, including parents who have moved from a supportive or representative role to one that is much fuller and more equal. However, as Borg and Mayo point out, this does not necessarily mean they always enjoy a good working relationship. Through a series of initiatives, parental involvement in Maltese schools has become increasingly valued and accepted as the norm. One key initiative was the publication of the draft National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) in 1998, which recognised ‘...parents as important partners in the educational process, and encouraged the education community to enhance the presence, participation and education of parents within schools’ (Borg and Mayo, 2001: 249). Parents are encouraged to engage in the schools for the benefit of their children’s and their own learning. All participants in the study were reported to be women, but not all were mothers, with at least one grandmother in the group. The initiative was found to help break down the barrier between parent and teacher, home and school as well as acting as a springboard into adult education and, particularly, to an environment conducive to the implementation of family literacy programmes.

As stated in chapter 1, Thomas (1998) reported on family learning in Canada, including specific family literacy programmes, using a series of case studies produced largely by

practitioners. The report covers a range of 12 programmes in eight provinces, each taking into account the context of the local community in which they were being delivered. However, the report is more a summary of provision and examples of good practice than an academic evaluation of the programmes on offer at the time.

Feminist pedagogy and women in education

Due to the high number of women shown in the literature to be accessing family literacy programmes (Brooks, et al., 1996; Goldman, 2005; Ofsted, 2000, Estyn, 2004), it is important to explore the field of feminist pedagogy. According to Pritchard Hughes (1995); Barr (1999) and Hayes and Flannery (2000); some of the main writers in this field, feminist pedagogy is born out of criticism that traditional feminist theorists such as socialist, radical and liberal feminisms were ignoring gender issues in adult education (Barr, 1999). The combining of many feminist perspectives resulting in no one identifiable theory is referred to as a Kaleidoscope of theories (Pritchard Hughes, 1995; Barr, 1999). The Kaleidoscope imagery is also used to illustrate how literacy or gender studies should be seen as interlinking and continuously changing within the local context (Cloke and Little, 1997; Barr, 1999; Flannery and Hayes, 2000). A relatively new theoretical area developed in the last ten years, feminist pedagogy comes from a realisation that the majority of individuals involved in contemporary adult education, whether formal or informal, higher education or community learning, are women. According to feminist pedagogy, assumptions have been made that all adult learners learn in the same way or have the same desired motivations and outcomes, an assumption, which has now been revealed as untrue (Luttrell, 1997). Adult learners are diverse and women learners within one group are heterogeneous (Wisker, 1996; Luttrell, 1997). The writings of feminist pedagogy naturally raise issues of identity, power,

hierarchies and gendered spaces. All of these are important concepts in the study of family literacy programmes and, particularly for this study, when investigating why programmes are funded and why learners attend.

Feminist pedagogy encourages women in education to have a voice and to find spaces in which to be heard; spaces which have traditionally been biased towards men (Barr, 1999). Educational models, where greater value is placed on ‘...assertive debate and objective truth...’ rather than on ‘...knowledge arrived at through connection and personal experience’ are cited by Barr (1999: 114), resulting in the silencing of women. Tisdell, (2000) also talks of learners’ voices as one of five key interrelating themes in feminist pedagogy. The other four concern: how knowledge is constructed; authority; shifting identities and ‘positionality; or dealing with differences based on the social structures of race, class and sexuality’ (Tisdell, 2000: 157). Tisdell concludes, ‘feminist pedagogy is about stories, especially about women’s stories’ (2000: 181) to facilitate women’s development in numerous educational circumstances formal or informal. Examples of application are given as ESOL, health education, human resources development, community-based education and, not least, literacy education. Luttrell (1997) believes that adult education can aid disadvantaged mothers in having a voice to become ‘...visible and valuable...’ but cautions deliverers of adult literacy, ‘...against family literacy programs and curricula, that may unwittingly deny or suppress women’s wishes for intellectual mastery independent of the needs of [their] children’ (Luttrell, 1997: 126).

Feminist writers such as Rockhill and Barr both view the education of adult women as a means of empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge. For Rockhill (1987: 156)

'...literacy is an excellent example of the individualising and totalising power of the modern state described by Foucault.....,' who emerges as possessing the key model of power for feminist education. For Foucault (1979: 27) '...power produces knowledge...' In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault claims that, 'there are...no power relations without the constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose at the same time power relations' (1979: 27). The two are inextricably linked. In relation to this study the literacy competencies, power and knowledge of the main actors within and between each social sector are significant factors to consider, particularly between men and women. According to Barr, Foucault sees power as 'productive' not as a possession as a Liberal or a Marxist would. This view poses two challenges. The first is '...to stop thinking of power as a possession of individuals and groups and see it instead as a network or dynamic of non-centralised forces' (Barr, 1999: 7). The second is that '...we have to recognise that such forces are not random but assume certain historical forms in which specific groups and ideologies do have dominance' (Barr, 1999: 7), manifested for example in the domination of men over women, particularly within the family setting. Barr believes that viewing power as a process rather than as an individual, an institutional or a group possession, allows for the conceptualisation of ongoing transformation and change. Power and, by implication, knowledge in this model becomes organic, constantly evolving rather than being static or given.

The regulation of behaviour through expected gender norms such as the domination of men and submission of women is, according to Bourdieu (2001), a curse on both sexes, a trap in which, '...manliness must be validated by other men' (Bourdieu, 2001: 52). Manliness is perceived as a duty that must be fulfilled to the satisfaction of other men as

well as satisfying the expectations of women. Bourdieu calls this symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The impact of gender inequalities and the legitimisation of the sexes are considered in one of his final works, *Masculine Domination* (2001). Bourdieu comments on discrimination and social perceptions of employment status being dependant upon labels attached which make them appear professional or non-professional. For example, cooks are generally assumed to be women who are unqualified and of low status, whereas chefs are mainly thought of as being men, having higher professional status. The same principles can be applied to the educational sector which, as we have seen above, has traditionally been dominated by men. Consequently, if men have always dictated the educational criteria such as the institutional structure, curriculum content and accepted achievable goals, women have been left with little choice than to work within the already established system, which is accepted as the norm. However, once women begin to challenge the system as a whole, it can result in changes not just in expectations but also to gender power relations (Rockhill, 1987). These changed expectations often lead to the empowerment of women, unbalancing power from above and below, and within the public and private spheres. Consequently, empowerment may have unforeseen consequences at home, in the community and in the workplace.

As discussed early in this chapter, women are often said to be responsible for both family and education, and particularly the success of their children in these spheres (David, 1993; Borg and Mayo, 2001; Smythe and Isserlis, 2004). When children fail to succeed in reaching their academic potential, it is frequently mothers, rather than fathers, schools or social conditions, who are blamed. According to Walkerdine and Lucey (1989: 173), 'the mother is often held responsible for the educational success of their

children'. The involvement of 'families' in education is usually taken to mean mothers. In educational terms 'parent' is generally a sub-text for 'mother'. As the literature has shown, this is particularly true for those attending family literacy programmes. The education sector, particularly when concerned with adults, families and primary schools, for both learners and educators, is predominantly a female gendered sector and generally accepted as such (Borg and Mayo, 2001). Borg and Mayo describe it as 'female territory', Goldman (2005) as 'feminised environments' and this is a key aspect of family literacy programmes to be investigated by this study.

Whilst the majority of programmes predominantly involve mothers, some research has been undertaken to investigate the role of fathers in family literacy initiatives. For example, Goldman (2005) considers the successful involvement of fathers – used in the broadest sense of the term - in their children's education. Goldman finds numerous issues confronting the ability of fathers to engage with the educational needs of their children. These include barriers to participation that are both physical and cultural, such as the timing of classes, which frequently occur during work hours, serving to exclude fathers from participation. According to Goldman, resident fathers, i.e. those who live with the child and the child's mother, are less likely to be involved in their child's learning both in and out of school than resident mothers. However, fathers do support their children's learning out of school in many other ways, for example, through hobbies, sport, family trips and reading with their children. Taking five high quality, large-scale nationally representative studies, Goldman concluded that the:

...fathers' greater interest and involvement in their children's learning and in schools are statistically associated with better educational outcomes for children...[and that]...mothers' involvement is no substitute for fathers' involvement

(Goldman, 2005: 12)

Further family learning programmes were found to produce, ‘...many perceived benefits for children and fathers including skill acquisition, greater confidence, a better father-child relationship and increased engagement with learning’ (Goldman, 2005:13). However, Goldman notes that the evidence for the family learning programmes is drawn from only small-scale evaluations. The non-participation of fathers is a significant aspect of this study and will be discussed further in the findings section of the thesis (chapter 5). Goldman’s report also identifies gaps in the research literature concerning fathers, one of which is the need for qualitative studies to complement larger-scale surveys into the attitudes of fathers, teachers and mothers into their involvement with children’s learning and the need to collect data directly from what Goldman terms ‘non-resident fathers’ rather than third hand from mothers or practitioners. In terms of this study, this can be translated into the intended gathering of data at each of the case study sites directly from non-participating fathers, as described in chapter 3.

Considering this area of study is relatively new, there already exists a wealth of literature from which to draw. As the literature demonstrates, the predominant research methodology employed is qualitative in nature, frequently utilising the principles of ethnographic data collection techniques. However, as shown above, there are still many gaps to be filled in our understanding of how and why family literacy programmes work; the models which work best; progression routes available for learners; the rate at which opportunities are taken up following the completion of programmes as well as the long term effects, beneficial or otherwise, gained by families attending programmes. The research questions posed for this study are designed to address some of these gaps and, due to the comparative nature of the project, provide the opportunity to compare and contrast programmes in a range of cultural settings.

Theoretical framework

Having reviewed the relevant literature in the field of study, particularly concepts of literacy and family literacy, the work of the French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu emerges as an appropriate theoretical lens through which to examine family literacy programmes and to address the research questions; in particular, the characteristics of programmes in relation to policy aims, learner motivation, benefits and future development.

The theoretical framework consists of two concepts; Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) and *field* (Bourdieu, 1993) incorporating different forms of capitals, economic, social, human and symbolic. These will be offered as the main theoretical lens through which the data analysis and discussion will be based. Bourdieu is particularly appropriate in light of the importance shown of literacy across numerous sectors of society, especially its fundamental link to education, the family and the political economy. The second theory concentrates less on the political or economic aspects of literacy practices and more on social capital perspectives. Notions of social capital are employed as a supplementary theoretical lens from two perspectives. First, Bourdieu's thinking on various forms of capital: social; economic; human and symbolic, including the institutional, objectified and embodied state (Bourdieu, 1997). This reflects previous research findings in the field of family literacy, as highlighted in the review of literature, which clearly shows social-cultural context and parent-child relationships to be significant factors for the success of such initiatives. The second takes the notion of social capital in a broad sense, combining elements of the works of both Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1988); specifically concepts of networking, bridging, bonding, trust and social cohesion. Particularly relevant is Coleman's notion of the transferability of social

capital via human capital between family members being dependant upon the parent-child relationship, specifically in connection with educational achievement (Coleman, 1988:109). Further, justification for taking the social capital aspects of the three theorists' work to explore matters of education are provided by McGonigal, et al., (2007) who have also engaged with these ideas to investigate the impact of new educational and social policies currently emerging in Scotland. According to McGonigal, et al., (2007: 78) 'part of its [social capital] attraction is the way it can help us to think about institutional and social outcomes, and their processes and problems, in new or innovative ways.'

Despite the complexity of his writings, the work of Bourdieu has become popular over recent years within educational disciplines and amongst academics writing on education (Atkin, 2000; Lingard, et al., 2005; Thomson, 2005). Many scholars have interpreted the meaning of Bourdieu's writings and applied his thesis on social and cultural reproduction to a range of educational policy issues (Atkin, 2000; Thomson, 2005; and Van Zanten, 2005). Taking his theoretical inspirations from writers such as Marx and Weber, Bourdieu highlights issues of power, knowledge, hierarchies, attitudes and social spaces; all themes which appeared earlier in this review of the literature. Bourdieu takes notions of social action, ideologies, dominant classes and economic practices in society, developing them into new theories for the modern age, with much of his work focusing on what he terms *habitus* and *field*.

The notion of *habitus* appears much earlier in Bourdieu's works, in the late 1960s, than *field* (Jenkins, 2002). Derived from Latin, *habitus* originally refers to '...a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body' (Jenkins, 2002: 74).

According to Jenkins, prior to Bourdieu, *habitus* was incorporated into the work of thinkers such as Hegel, Weber and Durkheim. For Bourdieu *habitus* relates to the way in which individuals within a *field* cope or rationalise the social world in which they find themselves. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as:

...systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principles of the generation and structuring practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends of an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.

(Bourdieu, 1977: 72)

The 'principles of the generation', referred to by Bourdieu above, relate to how *habitus* is used as a mechanism through which family or wider cultural traditions are reproduced across history, accumulating in the attitudes and beliefs of the current generation. According to the principles of Bourdieu, *habitus* is '...acquired through the formative experiences of childhood' ... [Where]...The structural code of the culture is inscribed as the *habitus* and generates the production of social practice' (Nash, 1999: 177). Therefore understanding a family's history within its local context is crucial to understanding its *habitus*. *Habitus* helps explain why learners exhibit particular reactions to learning in general and family literacy programmes specifically, in this research. Gee (1992: 83), correlates his own definition of the 'soul' with that of Bourdieu's *habitus*, '...as the mental structures through which an individual perceives and appreciates the physical and social world'. Gee believes that individual experiences are dependent upon one's position in any given social space, be it the family, the school or the state and that these experiences develop the soul.

According to Jenkins, at the heart of Bourdieu's work on *habitus* lies its embodiment within real human beings; its strong connections to the body. Jenkins interprets Bourdieu's *habitus* as having three ways of existing through the relevant actors involved: inside the mind; through practices and interactions, both with other actors and their environment; and practical taxonomies, dichotomies or oppositions, '...which are at the heart of the generative schemes of the habitus, are rooted in the body' (Jenkins, 2002:75). *Habitus* is gained in childhood through a process of unconscious socialisation, intuition and experiences; it is not rational, conscious, learnt or calculated (Jenkins, 2002). It is embedded within us, in the same way as our ideological or ontological positions. It is acquired through the context in which we are raised. It goes unquestioned and explains why we act as we do. It 'causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent' (Bourdieu, 1977: 79). However, *habitus*, as a result of different experiences and connections, usually from outside the *field*, is not static, it can, and does, change over time. Therefore, employing *habitus* as a theoretical lens will help assess the impact of family literacy programmes on the *field*, which contributes to, and is a product of, *habitus*. According to Atkin (2000), family and schools represent the main *fields* through which *habitus* is acquired. This thesis considers the interaction of several distinct *fields*: adult education; the family; and policy at national and European Union level. Each *field* has its own set of rules reflecting the broader *habitus*; their own agenda which is influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by the 'other'.

Fields are defined by Bourdieu (1993: 72) as, '...structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants'. Numerous social *fields*

exist including *fields* of politics, philosophy, the family, education, art and religion. Each *field* possesses its own laws, logic, histories and ways of thinking as well as predetermined hierarchies of power, gender and status, which have developed over a period, forming the core *habitus* of the *field*. Members, or in Bourdieuan terms ‘agents’, of a particular *field*, share common, basic interests ‘...namely everything that is linked to the very existence of the *field*’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 73). *Fields* are defined by their relationship to other *fields*. The *field* of adult education, in which family literacy falls, is therefore defined in relation to the wider *field* of education and of the family. According to Jenkins (2002) Bourdieu’s *field* can be interpreted as an identified social space ‘...within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them’ (Jenkins, 2002: 85). Struggles transpire both internally and externally for any given *field* with the aim of establishing control, power and continued reproduction of the *field*.

‘The struggles which take place within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.

(Bourdieu, 1993: 73)

What is important in these struggles depends on the definitive goal of the *field* which, according to Jenkins, could comprise cultural goods, prestige, power, education or employment, amongst others. Bourdieu likens a social *field* to playing a game using different forms of capital: economic; cultural; or social, (see below) where the inhabitants of each *field* instinctively know the rules and possess the tools with which to play the game. In education, this is frequently applied to the ability of middle or upper class students knowing how to play the game ensuring they achieve maximum academic

success (Bourdieu, 1984). New ‘players’ to the *field* must, according to Bourdieu, pay an entrance fee, that allows them access to the *field* in question. The fee is to understand the *field* and to accept the game that is played within the *field*. It is not to challenge its very ethos or structures. According to the literature reviewed earlier, learners who attend family literacy programmes are unfamiliar with the education system, its qualifications and progression routes. They do not know how to play the academic game. It is outside their experience and often the experiences of others in their family and community. The notion of *fields* can therefore be used to investigate the impact of family literacy programmes on learners, by examining the effect of bringing together two traditionally separate *fields*, education and the family.

Various forms of ‘capital’ are considered by Bourdieu, largely within an economic framework, but going beyond simple economic theory. Bourdieu, often described as one of the founding fathers of the concept of social capital together with Putnam and Coleman (McGonigal, 2007), uses notions of capital to explain how the social world is structured and how it functions. The effect of human and symbolic capital is measured in relation to its potential impact on the economy of individuals and states. In his article, *The Forms of Capital* (1997) Bourdieu considers economic, social and cultural capital.

He describes each thus:

...as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

(Bourdieu, 1997: 47)

Ultimately, the latter two support and enhance the former ensuring maximum profits for individuals, nations and industries. Bourdieu believes cultural capital has three 'forms'; the objectified, institutionalized and embodied state. The embodied state exists within the mind and body; it is symbolic rather than actual. It takes time to acquire and can only be obtained by the individual through what Bourdieu terms 'self-improvement' and requires '...an effort that presupposes a personal cost...' (Bourdieu, 1997: 48). The embodied state is specific; it is what we know. It always remains with the individual who takes the time and effort to acquire it. It cannot be transferred in the same way as cultural capital in the objectified state can be transferred, for example money, houses or possessions. According to Bourdieu, the embodied state becomes part of an individual, forming their *habitus*. Transfer from one individual to another is a long, indefinite process; unquantifiable in economic terms. The objectified state is materialistic and media-orientated. It can be legally transferred to another person but, if that person does not have the embodied state, i.e. the knowledge of how to view, use, hear or interpret the physical goods transferred, they are unable to fully utilise their cultural capital. An example of this would be the *nouveau riche*, perhaps those suddenly made millionaires by lottery wins. Whilst money enables them to access any cultural goods they please, it does not necessarily make them appreciative of, or value, those goods. The experience will be outside their *field* with no *habitus* on which to draw, making the acquisition of the embodied state an almost impossible task.

Finally, the institutionalised state is overt cultural capital that is recognised by society as achieving a higher level of knowledge, it is '...sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formerly independent of the person of their bearer' (Bourdieu, 1997: 50). In educational terms, this presents itself mainly in the form of certifications and

qualifications that can then be traded-in or transferred in the labour market as proof of competencies in a chosen occupation. For example, a doctor or lawyer cannot practise without a license nor can a teacher teach without evidence of a teaching certificate. The desire for such evidence is in line with the current government's pre-occupation that, particularly under SfL, adult learners should be tested as proof of achievement. This will be an important point to consider in addressing the research questions concerning the characteristics and aims of family literacy programmes.

The concept of social capital appears in much of Bourdieu's work. It is linked to notions of 'connections' (Bourdieu 1993: 32), 'relationships', 'durable networks' and 'group memberships', resulting in a collectively-owned symbolic and cultural capital that individuals can first access and later benefit from (Bourdieu, 1997). However, social capital is not a given; it takes time and effort, not unlike cultural capital in the embodied state, to establish the right networks of connections with the right people at the right time and place to ensure maximum social capital return into economic capital. For Bourdieu, '...the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective...aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term...such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace, or even kinship...' (Bourdieu, 1997: 52). For Bourdieu the institution of the family is '...the main site of the accumulation and transmission of that kind of capital...' (Bourdieu 1993: 33). Ultimately, all capitals can be converted into economic capital and therefore, for Bourdieu (1997: 54), '...economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital'.

Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1988) also look at the concept of social capital, but from a more populist American perspective. Putnam considers notions of networking, bridging and bonding, whilst both Putnam and Coleman talk of trustworthiness and social cohesion; all of these concepts feature in much of the literature reviewed above, for example in Barton, et al. (2000). For Coleman, function defines social capital. 'It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two common elements: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors' (Coleman, 1988: 98). Actors can be organisations or individuals. Social capital can be seen as a productive resource, but it is not always beneficial. Putnam looks at social capital in relation to recent social changes in the USA. In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000) Putnam explores the decline in the membership of community organisations as an indicator of the general level of social capital and civic engagement; challenging Americans to restore community for future good by 2010. For Putnam (2000: 19), social capital '...refers to connections among individuals...' that lead to a shared understanding and trustworthiness. As citizens disengage with community organisations, they have fewer and fewer social networks resulting in an individualistic, self-sufficient insular society. Putnam views social networks as the lynchpin of society and bemoans their demise. For Putnam (2000: 19), 'the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value.' Social networks take different forms, but all incorporate either what Putnam calls bonding or bridging.

Bonding is largely internal, exclusive, described as '...a kind of sociological superglue...' (Putnam, 2000: 23). It occurs when members within a chosen social group or organisation form, often long-lasting, connections, for example church-based women's reading groups. Conversely, bridging is viewed as inclusive '...a sociological

WD-40' (Putnam, 2000: 23). It involves reaching out to others of similar interests across social structures, such as ecumenical religious organisations or what is commonly referred to in England as Churches Together. A national body since the 1990s with partner bodies in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, Churches Together in England brings together churches from different denominations. Its main aim is to find '...new ways to work and worship together' (Churches Together, 2007). For Putnam, bonding aids solidarity and cohesion, whereas bridging encourages linkages outside, and a broadening of one's immediate social context, or *field*. Putnam would like to see a greater level of social capital in American society but admits this will not be easy to achieve. He comments 'it would be eased by a palpable national crisis, like war or natural disaster, but for better *and* for worse, America at the dawn of the new century faces no such galvanizing crisis' (Putnam, 2000: 402). It seems perverse that, since the publication of his book, Putnam has had both his war and natural disaster in the form of 9/11 and the on-going conflict in Iraq, and Hurricane Katrina. It would be interesting to know if, outside of those directly affected, it has led to an increase in social capital within the USA. Social networks feature in some of the literature discussed in the preceding review, (for example Brassett-Grundy, 2002), as do concepts of bridging and bonding, particularly in relation to learner motivation for attending family literacy programmes and perceived benefits; two of the key research questions. Bridging and bonding also relate to the potential to develop closer parent-child relationships, another area this study investigates.

The parent-child relationship in educational terms, particularly for those attending family literacy programmes, comes strongly through from the literature (Brooks, et al., 1996). It is therefore appropriate to consider Coleman's notion of converting social

capital into human capital through that relationship when exploring how and why family literacy programmes work, since, in theory, they include both adults and children as potential learners. In his paper *Social capital in the creation of human capital* (1988), Coleman looks specifically at social and human capital within the family and the community. Coleman explains that human capital is an extension of physical capital.

Physical capital is tangible:

...created by changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them act in new ways. Social capital, however, comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action.

(Coleman, 1988: 100)

The link between relationships and those who facilitate action is most pertinent to this study; particularly relationships between tutors and parent learners, parent learners and their child and other parent learners. Coleman is particularly interested in the mechanisms allowing capital to be transferred to the next generation. Coleman takes the family background as a major influential factor in the ability of a child to achieve in school, dividing it into three distinct capitals: financial - relating to income; human - reflecting the level of parental education; and social capital - the relationship between parents and child. According to Coleman, children can only access their parents' human and social capital if the parents spend quality, meaningful time with their children. This depends on, '...the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child' (Coleman, 1988: 111). Therefore, if a parent is educated, possessing large amounts of human capital, but does not spend time with their child, for example in single-parent families or where both parents are working, the transfer will not, according to Coleman, occur. The lack of transference puts the child at risk of failing to reach his or her academic potential. Similarly, transfer will not take place if the

parent is actually present but the relationship between parent and child is problematic. Consequently, ‘...whatever human capital exists in the parents, the child does not profit from it because the social capital [the relationship] is missing’ (Coleman, 1988: 111). However, as McGonigal, et al., (2007) points out, in this model of social capital transfer, children are viewed as inactive, passive recipients of their parents’ cultural capital, whereas, in practice, children are influential ‘social actors’ within their own *field*. ‘Children generate their own social capital networks and, particularly in the later years of childhood, it may be these which are more influential than parents’ (McGonigal, et al., 2007: 89-90). The role of the child in the social capital transfer process should not be underestimated. Further, when considering the impact of family literacy programmes on literacy skills, the study will need to explore if the parent-child relationship is a two-way mutually beneficial process.

It could be argued, from consideration of the literature discussed above, that the two types of capitals presented by Bourdieu, on the one hand, and Putnam and Coleman, on the other, represent two distinct facets of this study. Utilising the first will provide a lens through which to view the research questions pertaining to the characteristics of family literacy programmes. It will enable an exploration of funding and policy rationale, their role in improving learner literacy and their future format. It will also allow potential progression routes, in the context of how any benefits might be converted into economy capital for the good of the nation state to be considered. Using the concepts of *habitus* and *field* will enable the exploration of how and why this might occur in the local context, as well as highlighting cultural and social processes, including those relating to power and engrained attitudes that may restrict such conversions. Drawing on the reviewed literature above, the second type of social capital relates specifically to the

learners' social interaction with other key players in the *field*. These players include teachers, tutors, fellow learners and their children, and other non-participating family members, particularly fathers. Social capital provides a theoretical lens through which these issues can be viewed and explored. Examining if and how social networks are established and the level of learner engagement with actors outside of their usual social *field* - namely the family home, particularly in terms of their involvement with schools - will be important aspects to consider through the Putnam-Coleman lens. Also important is the potential development of such concepts as bridging, bonding, social cohesion and trustworthiness. In addition, the social context in which the programmes are delivered will be significant. Combining these lenses will enable the characteristics of programmes to be holistically explored.

The theoretical framework used has been influential in the planning, data collection and analysis of this study, providing a directional lens through which to focus each activity. In planning the methodology and executing the fieldwork, the concept of Bourdieu's *fields* permits the inclusion of a range of sectors involved in family literacy programmes. These include adult education, the family, policy and primary education, which can be explored in relation to each other. For example, the theoretical framework will allow an exploration of the power relationships that are at play between the home and school *fields*. This is because each has its own logic, rules and specific histories that inevitably overlap, becoming intertwined to a greater or lesser degree, if the full academic and social development of a child is to be achieved. In this context, this should ultimately be the primary objective of both *fields*. Further, the investigation of hierarchies of power, gender and status within and between *fields* can also be undertaken. Particularly, for example, the position of women as mothers or primary school teachers who are

responsible for the education and social well-being of children participating in family literacy programmes and the status of parents in relation to teachers.

The inclusion of *habitus* permits the exploration of historical and contextual factors within each *field* to help gain an understanding of the current ideological positions of the various social groups involved with family literacy programmes. This will allow an investigation of the characteristics, funding and future of family literacy programmes in the study, especially in relation to current social policy rhetoric; for example the influence of social inclusion agendas and lifelong learning strategies. It will also assist in understanding why families, or identified individuals within a family are either reluctant or enthusiastic to participate in family literacy programmes. *Habitus* and *field* will help to explore why the key players of each *field*, both in terms of the deliverers and the recipients, are predominantly assumed to be female. Yet those who set the rules of the game within each *field*; those who have the power and status i.e. the policy makers who decide upon the levels and targets, as well as the parents who do not attend, for example the fathers, are assumed to be predominantly male. This theoretical framework allows the data to be examined to ascertain if these assumptions are in fact true and under what circumstances they are untrue.

Habitus and *field* provide a conduit through which the data collected can be explored. They will help to establish if the different capitals are reducible to just one, economic capital, with the improvement of literacy skills of those deemed to be below the expected set standard. However, the data will first need to establish if there is an impact on literacy skills of the learners and, if so, how the learner applies their new-found skills; in the economic or social *fields*, in the public or private sectors. Coleman and Putnam's

social capitals provide a tool to analyse the data from a conflicting but complementary perspective; that of the motivation of learners for attending programmes. There is also the question of perceived benefits, which potentially rest with social, rather than economic, drivers for self-improvement or for the advancement of others. For example, the children of the adult learners and the possibility of increased parental social capital from which children in the family *field* can benefit. During the analysis of data, *habitus* and *field* will be vital in drawing the conflicting areas together to help explain why different players from the different *fields* act and have the attitudes they do towards engagement with family literacy programmes, highlighting both differences and similarities. Presumptions as to the opinions of women engaged in family literacy programmes should not be made. However, Bourdieu's notions that there remains a gender diversion of labour within the home and in wider society should be investigated. Together, the theoretical lenses will complement each other, ensuring a holistic, representative picture of the characteristics of family literacy programmes, revealing the types that are successful, for whom and their future development potential. However, before the answer to these questions can be discussed the data collection needs to be planned and the fieldwork undertaken. An explanation of methodological design, with justification, and data collection processes is provided in the following Methodology and Methods chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

Having established the field of study and reviewed the relevant literature, this chapter examines the methodological approach that has been employed, challenges that have arisen from using the chosen methodologies which were highlighted by the pilot study, research limitations, and ethical issues. This chapter begins by exploring the epistemology and ontological position of the research. The chapter then justifies the methodological approach taken following the review of literature, which ensured the research tools were fit for purpose, building on, and complementing, previous research in this field. Finally, details of the fieldwork are presented, including the pilot study, research difficulties, ethical issues and analytical techniques.

The overarching question to be considered is what are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the case study areas? To address this question a series of sub-questions were identified as stated at the end of chapter 1. The reason programmes were funded; the key differences and similarities; why learners attended; the benefits, if any, programmes have on the literacy skills of learners; and the intended future direction of programmes, needed to be determined to answer the research questions. Issues of learner identity, gender and power, which came to light through the reviewed literature in chapter 2 (Barton, 1994; Taylor, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Heath, 1983), were also highlighted as areas of interest and possible sites of conflict requiring further exploration in relation to family literacy programmes. As a comparative piece of work, it was important that the case study areas selected had commonalities as well as differences,

which could be compared and contrasted. This was illustrated in the selection of the participating sites detailed in chapter 1.

Epistemologically, this study is formed by my participation in previous research carried out for the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) into adult literacy provision in rural areas of England, (Atkin, et al., 2005). According to Hollis (1995; 9) epistemology is ‘...the theory of knowledge’. The research found that family literacy programmes were one strategy amongst many being utilised by policy makers under the SfL agenda to address low levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills in adults. It was envisaged by policy makers that such interventions would lead to improved employment opportunities and enriched, fulfilled lives, as defined by society’s political and educational élite (DfEE, 1999; DfEE 2001). Ultimately, such initiatives are intended to eradicate social exclusion for marginalised groups and communities. Whilst this ideological position is to be applauded, it could be considered misguided, since those in positions of power are offering strategies based on their own ontological assumptions, (defined by Hollis as “what there is”), of the needs of ‘others’ (Lewis, 2001) in order that they, the ‘others’, can lead fulfilled, useful and economically productive lives.

My ontological and epistemological position inevitably had a bearing on the subject chosen for investigation and the study’s nature, design and interpretation. As stated in chapter 1, when justifying England as the benchmark for the inclusion of case study areas, I am British. I am also white, mature and female with an interest in matters of social policy, social inclusion and social justice. Of particular interest is the effect of government policies and rhetoric on families, education and the wider community. As a

policy researcher in the social sciences, I have been involved in a number of research projects focussing on adult education. My professional background and life experience permits a holistic approach to the interpretation of the data and an understanding from a variety of perspectives, not purely from an academic viewpoint.

Justification for methodology approach based on the research literature

According to the literature evidence reviewed in chapter 2, much of the research conducted in the disciplines of literacy, learning and families, takes a qualitative case study approach (Clope and Little, 1997; Hannon, 1995; Heath, 1983 and Taylor, 1983). Some large-scale, mainly quantitative, research has been conducted. However, these are very much the minority with most falling under national government evaluations rather than research projects undertaken by individuals. Three such examples are, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) report (2000), which surveyed current family learning practices in 28 Local Authorities across England. One of the report's main findings was the '...disturbing absence of men involved in family learning' (Ofsted, 2000:10). NIACE's 2003 evaluation of family learning programmes that were LSC funded, employed a range of data collection techniques, including the distribution of postal surveys to 150 LEA's in England. The final example is the Estyn Quality and Standards in Family Learning report 2004 (Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, equivalent to Ofsted in England), which investigated the contribution family learning programmes made towards children's achievement at Key Stages One and Three. In this case, a large number of organisations involved in family programmes were visited, pupils' work was assessed and operational and strategic reports were examined. This section concentrates on the case studies in the literature as evidence to support the methodological approach taken towards this

research study. The issue of comparative research is also discussed. As noted in previous chapters, the published literature concerning research into literacy, families, and learning is vast and frequently overlapping, which is often the case in concepts investigated by social scientists involving the structures of society and the actions of individual actors.

This chapter begins by looking at the literature and justifying the research methodology employed for family literacy including approaches to comparative education research. In the area of general literacy research, Barton (1994) considers three examples of case study methodology. These are the work of Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984) and Heath (1983). The latter two, Street and Heath, take the majority of their methodologies from an anthropological epistemology. A common theme through all three studies is that they were looking at specific social groups and assessing how literacy was being used within that context. The studies were conducted from either a psychological or sociological perspective, rather than an educational stance, which has since become the normal field of enquiry.

Taylor's (1983) early research in the field of family literacy, conducted in the USA, was also firmly based within the case study approach. In the area of adult community learning, Balatti and Falk (2002) used a case study approach to investigate three rural towns involved in such programmes in the state of Victoria in Australia. The main research techniques used by Balatti and Falk were ethnographic and conversation analysis using theory development. In April 2002, Brassett-Grundy also employed qualitative data collection under the case study technique. Twenty-five family learning participants from two London Boroughs took part in five focus groups. Two in-depth

interviews and one focus group, with four non-participants, were also undertaken. All but one of those participating in the research were female.

The majority of research studies reviewed in the literature consisted of standard qualitative methodology using case studies. Many studies used a combination of ethnography; participant observation both in the classroom and the home; modern participation where researchers endeavour not to interfere but simultaneously are not wholly passive; and in-depth, semi-structured and follow-up interviews with parents, teachers, coordinators, policy makers, learners and non-participants. The utilisation of conversational interviews, discussions and focus groups were also in evidence. Frequently, researchers gathered evidence of literacy practices from either the family home or the school environment. All studies involved two or more locations or families, sometimes geographically related to each other but sometimes not. Interviews may have been taped and transcribed, but this was not always the case. The majority of children involved in the relevant case studies were pre-school or primary school children, between the ages of two and ten. Larger studies made use of quantitative data which was generally collected by assessing learner literacy levels using established tests, before and after the intervention, as well as by postal surveys, telephone interviews and parental questionnaires (for example, various evaluations by Brooks, et al., 1996, 1997, 1998). Finally, many of the studies referred to, or implied that, there was a large proportion of mothers participating in family literacy programmes compared to fathers, but few actually state figures. Men are often not in evidence at all on the programmes. Goldman (2005) highlights this general deficiency in research, calling for all studies to explicitly stipulate whether participants in family literacy programmes are mothers or fathers. A notable exception is the work of Brooks, et al., (2004) for example, when reporting the

findings of the Sure Start initiatives in England for the BSA, the ratio of men to women involved in the study is clearly summarised. For each of the six programmes mentioned, women account for between 91% and 99% of participants (Brooks, et al., 2004: 33).

The predominance of females in family literacy programmes led to the examination of feminist pedagogies and, by default, issues of power, identity and empowerment. In so doing, further weight was added to the justification for qualitative methodologies as the best method of investigation. Barr (1999), David (1993), Hayes and Flannery (2000), Pritchard-Hughes (1995), Rockhill (1987) and Tisdell (2000) are some of the principal writers and researchers in this area. Their work could be viewed from a qualitative paradigm employing case studies to highlight the position, politically, socially and environmentally, of women learners and practitioners in education. Particularly useful is Rockhill's (1987) work looking at Mexican migrant women in Los Angeles. The emphasis in feminist pedagogy is placed on providing women, who are normally silenced, with a voice and finding the appropriate educational spaces in which that voice can be heard (Hayes and Flannery, 2000). Taking into account the preceding reviewed literature, a quantitative approach to data collection was not seen as an appropriate or viable option for this research project. Instead, predominantly qualitative methodologies were employed in the form of a small-scale comparative case study.

However, before any comparative research can be carried out Bereday (1964) believed it was imperative that the researcher read extensively about the area of study in question. According to Bereday (1964: 10), the researcher should also acquire three key competencies, '...a knowledge of the language of the area under study, residence abroad, and a never-ceasing watchfulness...to control his own cultural and personal

biases'. Bereday was concerned that the researcher should be prepared for the task and respect and understand the culture of study. Further, researchers should be aware of the cultural and ideological preconceptions they bring with them. Bereday asserts that it is not possible to undertake a comprehensive comparative study without actually travelling to the area in question and living amongst local residents to experience and understand the full context under investigation. For Bereday '...a knowledge of the language is the ideal...travel and residence abroad are keys to the selection of trustworthy tests and research techniques when the time comes to study schools systematically' (Bereday, 1964: 11). Bereday is most concerned that a student working in this discipline does not do so in ignorance. Therefore, not only were the areas involved in the case study researched and visited in advance, time was also spent at each location during the fieldwork stage of the data collection.

According to Gail, et al., (1982: 512), who reviewed key writers in the field of comparative education research, former students of Bereday, Noach and Eckstein, dismissed the traditional qualitative approaches to the discipline in favour of 'quantification' and hypothesising. As a result, large-scale comparative education studies became popular in the 1960s with the creation of the OECD (Holmes, 1981). Linked to economic investment and growth, cost benefit analysis and economic reward formed the main motivation to study the success or failure of different educational systems in the developed world, to assist those in developing countries. According to Holmes, probably one of the largest comparative studies of this era was undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), funded by the Ford Foundation. Originally, the study compared attainment in mathematics. This was because there was a perception that mathematics was not a

culturally specific subject. Later the study on mathematics was followed by several other subjects including science, literature and civil education. The study covered 20 countries over a seven-year period in almost 10,000 schools, involving over a quarter of a million students.

However, comparative studies do not necessarily have to be large, qualitative cross-national studies. Frequently, comparative examples of research are found within a small geographical area. For example, the study undertaken by Hughes (1997) in two Welsh villages (see later in this chapter) and the research into adult literacy provision in rural England by Atkin, et al., (2005).

One of the main difficulties in engaging with worldwide comparative education is defining the field of study in a standardised way so that it is uniformly understood and accepted by all concerned. This is particularly difficult to achieve when the definition of the comparative discipline itself is often contested. This difficulty is illustrated by the work of Carr-Hill, et al., (2001) in defining formal and non-formal education in different countries and is highlighted by the many terms used to describe family literacy programmes as discussed in chapter 2. Without agreed definitions for the field of study, analysis and comparisons can be challenging. It should be noted that sites selected for comparative study require an element of difference as well as similarity, as demonstrated in the literature, to enable the researcher to compare and contrast the objects of study (Taylor, 1983).

Methodological approach – ensuring fitness for purpose

Qualitative methodological techniques, which can be applied equally across all three participating case study areas, were felt to be the most beneficial way of answering both the main and subsidiary research questions. Such methods have frequently been used by previous researchers in the field for investigation into small-scale case studies. Whilst this approach yields a rich source of data it is often criticised: criticisms, which should, at this point, be acknowledged. The most commonly cited drawback to this methodological approach is that the findings cannot be generalised. When research is confined to a handful of areas or individuals, findings are often perceived as being only applicable to that place and time. However, Stake (1995: 7) points out that due to the in-depth nature of case studies, ‘certain activities or problems or responses will come up again and again’. These will allow the researcher to make generalisations on a theme, which can then be refined through further investigation. The aim of case study research is rarely to produce generalisations, rather it seeks to consider a particular concept or issue in depth, illuminating key points or, as Stake (1995: 8) comments, ‘the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation.’ Another point of criticism relating to case studies is that they tend towards the subjective, relying on individual interpretation. According to Stake, this is not just applicable to the findings but also to the research design, which is often adjusted to accommodate emerging themes as the project progresses. Interpretation always takes place within the ideological framework of the researcher because of his or her knowledge and experiences. For some the issue of interpretation is seen as too subjective and based on too small a sample. Case studies were not, therefore, felt by their critics to be a scientifically robust method of data collection or analysis. Stake (1995: 12), believes that a ‘good case study is patient, reflective [and] willing to see another view’. Furthermore, as long as the researcher is

aware of, and takes into consideration, the above issues, there is no reason why case studies cannot be a valid method of research.

This does not mean that quantitative data was completely ignored during this study. Secondary quantitative data from each case study area was requested and, where available, gathered to allow for triangulation, verification and contextualisation of the field. Such data included the number of learners attending courses in previous years; learner achievement levels; retention rates of learners; progression routes and funding levels. However, the main method of data gathering was qualitative, in the form of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews.

There often appears to be a conflict in educational research and social science in general, between which types of methodology to use. Positivists, first introduced by Comte in the nineteenth century (Cohen, et al., 2000), prefer the use of quantitative data, believing it leads to scientifically robust conclusions. Originating from the natural sciences, positivists like to test their theories through universal laws, so that outcomes can be generalised. Data needs to be empirical and quantifiable to ensure validity and truth; it cannot be disputed. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, qualitative methodology is less reliable and can rarely be generalised. Qualitative methods are derived from a phenomenological perspective, which relies on trends and themes emerging from the data. They are descriptive and open to interpretation, unlike empirical evidence that is thought to be more reliable and difficult to manipulate. Therefore, this study is phenomenological in that it is based upon, and values most, the use of qualitative methodologies, such as probing interviews and ethnography, which provides contextualisation, rather than statistics or experiments, which can be replicated time after

time. By its very nature, the conditions of the research when investigating family literacy programmes differ each time, for example, the learners who attend each session. Therefore, sessions are unique, each offering their own depth and richness of data. Further, qualitative data allows for the exploration of concepts, ideas and attitudes by the researcher with the subject, i.e. the interviewee, that is not possible with quantitative data.

During this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local or regional coordinators, adult practitioners and children's teachers or school representatives who participated in the delivery of programmes at each case study site. Classroom observations were undertaken in the spirit of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) participation model. In this model, the researcher does more than passively observe the situation, rather it is permissible for the researcher to interact as a participant observer. Lave and Wenger (1991: 39), advocate this kind of participation in research observation, terming it 'legitimate peripheral participation'. This was particularly important in family literacy sessions where everyone present was included in discussions and activities; it also helped to gain trust and rapport with the learners, all of whom were potential case study participants. Interviews were used where the gathering of women's stories, in relation to family literacy programmes, were designed to give previously unheard women, a voice (Luttrell, 1997; Hayes and Flannery, 2000). To this end, learners and ex-learners were interviewed in-depth, with the emphasis placed on conversational interviews. This allowed for the building of life histories and encouraged women to tell their own stories, since the majority of those interviewed were mothers, (See Tables 5, 7 and 9 below) in relation to any benefits or the possible impact of participating in family literacy programmes, whether negative or positive.

Interviewing both learners and ex-learners helped to establish whether any benefits or changes in attitude remained with the learner in the long-term. Learners accounted for the majority of interviewees in the study. Depending on issues of time and access, it was intended that a small number of interviews should take place with non-participating fathers to gain their views on the value of family literacy programmes and an insight as to why they did not attend provision. Again, conversational semi-structured interviewing techniques were employed in line with the case study approaches outlined above. Interviewing a variety of key players involved in different aspects of family literacy programmes, from those formulating and implementing policy (for example, the coordinators and practitioners), to the individuals who were or had been interacting with that policy, (namely the learners and the ex-learners), allowed for checking and triangulation of data for robustness, trustworthiness and credibility. This was particularly important in light of the lack of quantitative data available. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985: 307) triangulation of data, which is achieved by using different sources, methods and investigators, such as those described above, helps to give added credibility and validity to research findings.

Triangulation originally referred to, ‘...the use of two or more methods of data collection...a technique of physical measurement...’ (Cohen, et al., 2000: 112). It allows for the cross-checking and validation of findings obtained using one method of data collection by employing at least one other. In the case of this study, for example, data gathered from classroom observations was used to validate interviews with learners. Triangulation has numerous characteristics, including space triangulation (Cohen, et al., 2000). Space triangulation ‘...attempts to overcome the limitations of studies conducted within one culture or subculture’ (Cohen, et al., 2000: 113). This is pertinent to this

study in the light of the three different cultures involved. Therefore, by employing the same methodology across the three study areas it was possible to check the validity of common themes and attitudes of the corresponding groups of interviewees.

Interviews were, wherever possible, digitally audio recorded for purposes of verification and referencing, but were not necessarily fully transcribed. The primary data source remains the original audio recording, or notes taken at the time of the session in instances where there was no audio recording. Participant observation in the form of classroom visits provided an opportunity to gain valuable contextual information at each of the case study areas. Additional secondary qualitative and quantitative information was gathered during the course of field visits, in the form of resource guides and workbooks, worksheets, strategic documents and the findings of learner surveys that had been conducted locally.

Evidence to support the fieldwork structure

This section provides the main evidence for the structural approach taken to the fieldwork by compiling, recounting and summarising the main qualitative case studies, which have already been explored in greater detail earlier in this thesis. Hughes (1997) conducted a total of 29 in-depth interviews and three group discussions with women across two villages in Wales. In rural Lincolnshire, in-depth and group interviews with a small number of managers, adult returnees in higher and further education and learners on work-based training programmes were carried out by Atkin (2000). The comparative study by Atkin, et al. (2005) into the provision and support for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners in rural areas focused specifically on six rural counties of England. Here, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with policy makers, practitioners and

learners. Classroom observations were undertaken for a range of provision, including that of family literacy, in a variety of settings such as the work place, the community and further education colleges. Data were also gathered from strategy and provider meetings that were then used for triangulation, thus providing a holistic picture of provision and support.

In the USA, the research conducted by Taylor (1983) was firmly based within the qualitative case study approach. Taylor studied six families who were largely white, middle-class, suburban and living within 50 miles of New York City. Interview and ethnographic techniques were employed, as well as collecting and analysing literacy found around the home, for example shopping lists, children's paintings and drawings. Malicky, et al's., (1997) urban case study closely researched five adults in a specific community. Methodologies were wholly qualitative and included conversational interviews, with two to three interviews being held over a six-month period, and classroom observations. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Teale (1986) investigated 24 pre-school children, aged between two and four, from families on low incomes. Methodologies included interviews and modern participation, here the researcher tries to interfere as little as possible in the observations but may not remain completely passive. Transcribed notes gave descriptions of the home and the 'social literacy environment.' Pickerden (2002) conducted focus groups and one-to-one interviews to investigate the experiences of Muslim women in Birmingham accessing higher education. Finally in Malta, Borg and Mayo (2001) used a case study approach to interview 20 of the 30 individuals, mainly women, who regularly attended the parental involvement programme.

In addition, my own research experience of data collection in the area of adult education and specifically within family literacy programmes (Atkin, et al., 2005), led me to favour the methodological practices employed in this study. However, unlike a quantitative approach to data collection, which is usually remote from the subject and often conducted through such mechanisms as postal questionnaires or telephone surveys, the case study approach requires the researcher to have a greater level of interaction with the subjects under investigation to ensure the maximum richness in the data collected. This raised several ethical questions that needed to be carefully considered before the fieldwork stage of the research was undertaken.

Ethical considerations

Prior to carrying out the fieldwork, the planned methodological framework was submitted to the School of Education's Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nottingham for approval. The guidelines for all staff and student research at the School are based on the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines and can be found on the School's website at:

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/information-for-students/research-ethics>.

There were two main ethical concerns.

Firstly, the issue of interviewing children. Whilst the study aimed to look at family literacy as a whole, the children of parents participating in programmes were not directly interviewed. However, where children were present they were observed along with other elements of the session. Any information regarding the progress or impact of the child resulting from the programme was obtained through interviews conducted with adult practitioners, the parent(s) or the children's schoolteacher. Similarly, no plans were put

into place to investigate the use of literacy in the home or to conduct any tests pertaining to the literacy levels of either the parent or the children before, during or after the programme.

Secondly, the language barrier in Gozo was identified as potentially posing some challenges for the fieldwork, both logistically and ethically. Whilst the majority of citizens in Malta and Gozo are bilingual, (see chapter 1), those who are poorer, living in rural areas and of lower than average educational standard were more likely to be attending family literacy programmes. This is particularly so in light of the guidelines issued by the FES to schools that 60% of those recruited onto family literacy programmes should be 'in need'(per comms, 2005a). Therefore, potential adult learner interviewees were less likely to be fluent or competent in English than the general population, preferring to communicate in Maltese. This concern was resolved with the help of an interpreter provided by the FES. The use of an interpreter could have resulted in restricted responses and misunderstandings. However, an interpreter was needed in only a few instances. Using an interpreter proved unproblematic since the majority of those interviewed understood the questions asked in English, even if they were not confident enough to respond. Furthermore, responses given by the interpreter were comprehensive.

In addition to the above specific ethical concerns, all three case study areas differed considerably in terms of cultural setting. These differences, which ranged from social, to religious, to economic, needed to be handled sensitively. This was a particular issue in County Clare, where *all* provision was specifically aimed at disadvantaged, often vulnerable groups. In many cases, they had had negative experiences of the educational

system in the past, usually in childhood, and were generally sceptical of outsiders. This was especially true in the case of the Travellers and lone parents. The need to be sensitive to differing cultures and social groups, particularly to lone parents, was highlighted as one of the areas for caution at the pilot study stage.

Finally, permission to undertake the research was obtained at all three case study areas. In Herefordshire and County Clare permission was gained through the local family literacy coordinators. However, in Gozo permission had to be sought at national level. Before any educational research can be carried out in Malta, it must first be approved by the FES. Therefore, a written request to conduct the research, including the project proposal, was submitted to the FES for approval prior to the fieldwork. Permission was granted in October 2005.

Pilot study

The pilot study took place at Friskney village hall; a small rural village lying between Boston and Skegness on the east coast of England in the County of Lincolnshire (see Map 1). The pilot was conducted in November 2005, approximately two weeks before the fieldwork began at the first study site in Gozo. The pilot was conducted in Lincolnshire because it was felt to be comparable with the three case study areas for several reasons. Firstly, Lincolnshire is one of England's most rural counties and, as we have seen, the case study sites were also rural within the context of their country. Secondly, it was chosen for practical reasons. The County of Lincolnshire is situated in the East Midlands and lies relatively close to Nottingham, where the research was based. Thirdly, access was gained through personal contacts established during the NRDC funded rural adult literacy project (Atkin, et al., 2005) where Lincolnshire formed one of

the six case study areas that participated in the evaluation. Fourthly, the village of Friskney was chosen because of its ruralness within the county and, more importantly, because it was representative of typical family literacy programmes, in terms of delivery and funding, common throughout England. It was particularly comparable to programmes being delivered in Herefordshire in that sessions ran at a set time, for a set number of hours per week and for a predetermined number of weeks. Sessions in Lincolnshire and Herefordshire were both organised into the standard model of joint delivery with parent and child receiving separate instruction for the first part of the session followed by parent and child time together.

Finally, the pilot area shared many characteristics with the main case study areas demographically, economically and skills-wise. The population of both Herefordshire and Lincolnshire is predominantly British White (97%), (Atkin, et al., 2005). As discussed in chapter 1, County Clare and Gozo are also highly mono-cultural societies with a high level of indigenous residents. In each of the case study areas the levels of literacy and numeracy were a cause for concern, hence the development of family literacy programmes. In 2004 the BSA estimated Herefordshire and Lincolnshire to have similar low levels of literacy (17.7% and 16.3% illiteracy respectively) and numeracy (10.3% and 11.1% innumeracy respectively). In the case of literacy, both counties were above the national average (15%) and for numeracy just below (12%) (Atkin et al, 2005: 14). Funding for both English counties came from the local Council via the LSC.

The pilot was unusual in one aspect for programmes in England, in that the session took place in a village hall rather than the primary school which the children attended. This was down to logistics. The school, being rural and therefore small, did not have room to

facilitate the programme on the premises. However, the school was fully involved and committed to the programme and the village hall was located directly opposite and therefore within easy walking distance of the school.

Five semi-structured flexible questionnaires were prepared for the fieldwork: one for the adult practitioner; one for the local co-coordinator; one for the learners; one for ex-learners and one for non-participating fathers. The intention during the pilot was to test the learner and practitioner instruments. However, whilst arranging the pilot by telephone it became clear that an additional questionnaire needed to be compiled in case the opportunity arose to talk to the teacher of the children involved in the family literacy programme, making six instruments in all.

The session ran from 9am to 11:45am, just under three hours. The parent learners arrived up to 15 minutes before the session to help the adult tutor set out the tables and chairs in the hall. On the day of the visit, the session did not follow the usual format of parents and children working separately, then time together followed by a time of parent-only summing up. On this occasion, the parents had been invited to attend a church service during the first part of the session. The service concerned healthy eating, which the tutor intended to use as a topic-base for work with both parents and children. After the service, the adults arrived back at the hall with the children. The children then had their 'tuck' which consisted of a light snack and a cold drink, whilst the parents made hot drinks such as tea and coffee and ate biscuits. Subsequently, the parents and the children worked together before the children returned to the school. Finally, the tutor then recapped on the morning's activities with the parents.

The session was supposed to have a crèche but none materialised. The crèche was a pilot scheme which did not seem to be working effectively. The absence of a crèche led to many of the parent learners having to take care of the younger children themselves during the session.

There were seven parent learners present at the session. There were 15 adult learners registered including three grandparents, one of whom was male. On the day of the visit one of the learners brought her mother along to see what the programme entailed. All learners on the day of the pilot were female; six of the seven were mothers. All the practitioners involved were also female; the adult tutor, the children's teacher and the regional coordinator who was visiting on that day. The adult learners were mainly in their late 20s and early 30s. All had a child in the reception class in the village school.

Five interviews took place: one with the regional coordinator; one with the adult tutor; one with the children's teacher; and two with parent learners. Four of the five interviews were audio recorded. However, due to the conditions under which the interviews took place, the quality of the recordings was not of good quality. Because of a lack of childcare, time and accommodation constraints, all interviews took place in the room where the session was being conducted. Several of the interviews were interrupted at various points by children or other adults requiring attention. One of the major difficulties, but a reality in conducting fieldwork in this area, is fitting the interviews around the sessions. Parents tend to arrive for sessions after they have taken their children to school. After the session they are generally on a tight timescale to collect children from school, nursery or crèche. The adult-only components of the sessions usually consist of group work when it can be difficult to interview adults. Difficulties are

compounded, rather than alleviated, when the children arrive. Whilst it should always be the aim of researchers to conduct interviews with as little disruption as possible, in the case of family literacy programmes this leaves the researcher with conditions which are sometimes less than ideal.

Revision of methodological instruments

Following the pilot study, several adjustments were made to the interview instruments. In general the interview schedules worked well. However, some changes were needed. The practitioners' questionnaire required a slight alteration to the wording of question 5. From 'How are potential learners identified?' to 'How are potential learners, both adults and children, identified?' In addition to this change, a question concerning funding issues was added.

Learner questionnaires were constructed for use with parent learners in a variety of situations; learners who were the only or main carer of the child; learners who had a husband or partner, male or female; or where the child's father played an active role in the child's upbringing but did not attend the family literacy sessions; and finally for learners whose partners did attend. Two learners were interviewed, one had a husband and the other was a single mother. In the case of the latter interviewee, questions concerning the involvement of the father in the programme were approached with sensitivity and received without any difficulties. Overall, in both cases, the questionnaire worked well. However, some alterations were necessary. Question 7 asked 'how do you find the time and place of the class?'. This was found to come out naturally earlier in the interview and therefore removed from the schedule. The phrase, 'if anything' was added to several of the questions, namely question 4 and 9a.iii. Finally, the instructions for

question 10 were incorrectly numbered. This was resolved in the final version when all numbering was reassessed in line with the aforementioned changes. In the case of the coordinator's questionnaire all issues relevant to the area of family literacy were covered. However, there was a grammatical error resulting in the word 'face' being deleted from question 11. Finally, the interview schedule for the children's teacher worked well and alterations were mainly to correct minor typing errors. Final versions of all six questionnaires can be found at Appendix B.

The fieldwork commenced once the amendments to the interview instruments had been satisfactorily completed. The following section details the fieldwork, incorporating: the number of interviews conducted; sessions observed; and difficulties encountered at the case study sites.

Fieldwork

The project was designed with the intention of carrying out semi-structured interviews with six different types of people, or actors, i.e. the learners and the tutors, involved in family literacy programmes at each of the case study sites to ensure triangulation, holistic representation and validation of data. The intended interviewees were:

- Coordinators (or policy makers) responsible for organising and funding the programmes
- Practitioners who actually delivered the adult component of the session
- School teachers or representatives from the school of the children involved in the provision
- Learners currently participating in programmes

- Learners who had participated on the course or a similar course within the past two years – henceforth referred to as ex-learners
- Non-participant fathers of the children whose mothers were current learners

In addition, the aim was to carry out participant observations of at least four relevant family literacy sessions per case study area.

The following represent the initial idealised figures for the fieldwork per case study area: semi-structured, in-depth interviews with one policymaker or coordinator; one adult tutor and one children’s teacher per session to a maximum of four in each case; sixteen learners broken down to four per session; three ex-learners and three non-participating fathers. The maximum number of expected interviews totalled 31 per case study area, multiplied by three case study areas, giving a maximum expected number of 93 interviews, as summarised in Table 2

Table 2 – Proposed number of fieldwork interviews

Type of interviewees	Number of interviews proposed per case study area
Policy makers or coordinators	1
Adult tutor	4 (1 per session)
Children’s teachers	4 (1 per session)
Learners	16 (4 per session)
Ex-learners	3
Non-participating fathers	3
Total number of interviews per site	31
Total number of project interviews	93

For consistency and comparability, all fieldwork took place within a five-month period between November 2005 and March 2006 to ensure programmes were being delivered

within the same academic year. Prior to the fieldwork being undertaken, each site was visited to assess its suitability for inclusion in the study. During the fieldwork, each case study area was visited for a period of one week, when all the fieldwork data was collected. The exception was Herefordshire where, due to a timetable clash and the late cancellation of a session, it was necessary to make a return visit six weeks later.

There were two main reasons why the fieldwork was arranged within a concentrated time-span. Firstly, living in each area for a period afforded the opportunity to gain local cultural contextualisation that otherwise would have been extremely difficult to obtain simply by visiting the area for one session at a time. This allowed for what Guba and Lincoln (1985: 302) describe as orientation to, ‘...be certain that the context is thoroughly appreciated and understood.’ It provided an opportunity to soak up the local culture. Residence abroad also fulfils one of the three key competencies recommended by Bereday (1964) when carrying out comparative research. Whilst Guba and Lincoln concern themselves with ‘prolonged engagement’ (1985: 301), in the field, which suggests months or years rather than weeks, to enable researchers to test for misinformation and distortion and to provide an opportunity to build trust, they do not qualify exactly how long is required. For the purpose of this study, one week was deemed sufficient. Secondly, there were practical and logistical reasons for immersion in the field, the most obvious being the distance of all three sites from the University of Nottingham. In addition, timing of the fieldwork was dependant on the availability of the coordinators, programme timetables, school holidays and, in Gozo in particular, religious events.

In total, 94 individuals participated in interviews or focus groups across the three case study sites: 30 in Herefordshire and County Clare and 34 in Gozo. The majority of participants were female, 82 (87%) with only 12, (13%), being male, including the five non-participating fathers interviewed. The majority of interviews were audio-recorded. In each case, substantial written notes were also taken. Interviews lasted between six minutes, in the case of one non-participating father, to nearly 50 minutes for some of the coordinators and adult practitioners. In total, 17 family literacy sessions were observed: eight in Gozo, five in County Clare and four in Herefordshire. In addition, strategy and staff planning meetings were also attended, where appropriate and an invitation was extended. A full breakdown of the range and number of actual interviews conducted can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 - Total number of interviews conducted for all three case study areas

Type of Interviewee	No.
Coordinators	3
Adult practitioners	11
Children's teachers	10
Learners	48
Ex-learners	17
Non-participating fathers	5
Total No. of interviews	94

As Table 3 above shows, the initial proposed number of coordinators and learners to be interviewed was achieved. However, fewer adult practitioners, children's teachers and non-participating fathers were interviewed than planned. This was mainly due to the fact that fathers and schoolteachers were difficult to locate in County Clare. The number of

ex-learners far exceeded expectation. This was largely due to a focus group interview at an adult learning class in County Clare that consisted of a number of learners who had previously participated in family literacy programmes. Whilst Table 3 above provides an overview of the total number of interviews conducted, Tables 5, 7 and 9 provide a full breakdown of interviews conducted by case study area. These are presented in the following sections, which details the fieldwork undertaken at each of the case study areas.

Herefordshire Fieldwork

The Herefordshire fieldwork was carried out in December 2005. The intention was to visit four sessions out of a possible six; three in a morning and one in an afternoon. Sessions were delivered on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Due to timetabling constraints, it was not possible to visit a greater number of sessions because on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings two sessions were scheduled at different locations. The decision, concerning which sessions to visit, was made in conjunction with the local coordinator. Unfortunately, the Friday morning session was cancelled during the week necessitating a second visit, which took place in January 2006. Furthermore, during the fieldwork, I was invited to attend scheduled family learning and Herefordshire Council SfL meetings. This allowed for a fuller appreciation of the challenges facing the area and helped to me gain an understanding of how family literacy fitted with other strategies and adult provision locally.

All sessions took place in classrooms at primary schools; two of which were classified as voluntary-aided Roman Catholic schools. The schools varied in size from 130 pupils on-roll to 621 (DfES, 2007), with the Roman Catholic schools representing the smaller

of the two schools. Three of the sessions were on family literacy and one was 'Keeping Up with the Children' (KUWTC). Sessions ran for three hours per week over approximately 20 weeks, and two hours per week for five weeks respectively. The family literacy sessions began in October 2005 and were organised loosely along the standard BSA model, with parent learners meeting without the children for a period of time (usually about one hour) before the joint parent-child session; and then finishing the session separately. The children who participated were aged four to six years old. KUWTC did not include the children and was the only session visited where fathers attended. On the day of the fieldwork, none of the sessions had full attendance. Table 4 provides a breakdown of attendance levels per session visited in Herefordshire.

Table 4 - Number of learners per session for Herefordshire

Type of provision	No. of parent learners on register	No. of parent learners attending on day of visit	No. of children attending on day of visit
Family literacy 1	10	6	6
Family literacy 2	6	3	3
Family literacy 3	10	6	6
KUWTC	8	6	N/A
Total	34	21	15

(Key: 1, 2 and 3 represent the order in which the sessions were visited)

As Table 4 illustrates, KUWTC was the best attended session with an attendance rate of 75% on the day. Family literacy 2 was the least well attended with only half of the learners on the register attending on the day of the visit. In family literacy sessions 1, 2 and 3 the number of children matched the number of adult learners. Therefore, no child was present at the session without their parent and parent without their child.

Each session had two adult practitioners in attendance; an adult tutor who, in the case of family literacy, led the session and a children's teacher who took the lead at the

KUWTC session. Due to time constraints, interviews at KUWTC were focus group in nature, rather than individual. Table 5 below summarises the number of interviews conducted, the interviewee and their gender specific to Herefordshire.

Table 5 – Breakdown of interviews conducted for Herefordshire

Type of provision	Adult tutor		Teacher		Learner		Ex-Learner		NPF	Policy		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	
Family Literacy 1		1		1		4						6
Family Literacy 2		1		1		3						5
KUWTC					2	3						5
						(FG)						
Family Literacy 3		1		1		4						6
Outside of provision								5	2		1	8
Total		3		3	2	14		5	2		1	30
												4M + 26F

Key: NPF = Non-participating fathers / FG = Focus Group / Policy = interviews with a policy maker or local coordinator / KUWTC = Keeping up with the children

As Table 5 shows, the majority of interviews conducted in Herefordshire, 26 of the 30, were with women. The four men consisted of the two non-participating fathers and the two fathers who attended KUWTC. In total, three adult practitioners and three children’s teachers were interviewed, sixteen current learners, five ex-learners, two non-participating fathers and one local coordinator. A similar number of learners were interviewed from family literacy 1, 2 and 3, (four, three and four respectively) providing an even spread of data across the different sessions visited.

County Clare Fieldwork

The fieldwork in County Clare was carried out in March 2006. Five sessions were visited following consultation with the local Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) coordinator responsible for family literacy programmes in the County. Each programme had a different title, individualised to fit the needs of the target group. All programmes came under the banner of family learning delivered and organised by the VEC. At the time of the fieldwork, none of the programmes were delivered in schools. In total five sessions were visited. The first was entitled, *Fun things to do with your children*. It ran for two hours one morning a week for seven weeks. The second, family learning was delivered to a group of Traveller women, also in the mornings for two hours, over a period of ten weeks. Both programmes took place at community centres on estates in deprived areas located on the outskirts of Ennis, the main town in the county, and were open to parents who had children up to seven years old. The third programme, *Story Sacks for Lone Parents* ran for two hours a week for eight weeks and formed part of a larger programme of activities for lone parents trying to gain employment and skills. All three programmes were parent-only; children were not present at these sessions. *Family Crafts* was a programme offered specifically to non-indigenous mothers with children under four years of age; too young to go to school but old enough to begin to learn, especially oral and written English. This was the only programme, at the time of the fieldwork, which involved children. This was largely due to the fact that there was no crèche available where mothers could leave their children. Attendance rates were better in County Clare than in Herefordshire, with full attendance at the Story Sacks for Lone Parents session. The number of learners present at each session in County Clare is detailed in Table 6 below.

Table 6 - Number of learners per session for County Clare

Type of provision	No. of parent learners on register	No. of parent learners attending on day of visit	No. of children attending on day of visit
Fun things to do with your children	3	2	N/A
Traveller women's group	10	9	N/A
Family crafts	N/A No register	6	9 (including babies)
Story Sacks for Lone Parents	10	10	N/A
Total	23	27	9

Finally, a family learning session for grandparents attending a Day Centre was also visited, but discounted from the sample. This session was excluded because it did not fit with the remit of the research. Each session was facilitated by an adult practitioner who was employed by NALA. In some instances, a second adult was present to assist and support the session. For example, the local community worker attended the session in the case of the Traveller women's group. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview non-participating fathers in County Clare (see chapter 5, Section 3) and, due to the lack of school involvement, only one children's teacher was interviewed. A breakdown of the number of interviews conducted in County Clare during the field visit is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 – Breakdown of interviews conducted for County Clare

Type of provision	Adult Tutor		Teacher		Learner		Ex-Learner		NPF	Policy		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	
Fun things to do with your children	1					2						3
Travellers women group	1					7						8
Maths for fun	1			1								2
Family crafts						4						4
Story Sacks for Lone Parents	1					3						4
Outside of provision								8			1	9
Total for County Clare	4			1		16		8	0		1	30 All F

Key: NPF = Non-participating fathers / Policy = interviews with a policy maker or local coordinator

As Table 7 illustrates, all those interviewed in County Clare were female. The number of learners interviewed at each session varied from two, in “fun things to do with your child”, to seven, in the Traveller Women Group, and was dependant upon attendance on the day of the visit. Finally, a comparatively large number of ex-learners were interviewed in County Clare compared to the other two case study areas. This was because an opportunity arose to interview six ex-learners who had progressed to another adult learning programme, as one complete focus group.

Gozo Fieldwork

Fieldwork in Gozo took place during one week in November 2005. A programme of visits was organised by the local family literacy coordinator. In total, five locations were visited, covering six family literacy sessions and three different types of programme. Three of the sessions visited were Club Hilti, the main family literacy delivery programme on Gozo. Club Hilti is based on the English BSA model involving parents and children aged six and seven years old and. Programmes were delivered in primary schools outside school hours, twice a week, from 2:30 – 4:15pm, for one term of approximately 10 weeks. At least two activity practitioners attended Club Hilti, one activity teacher for the children and one for the parents. Both were employed by the FES. Due to the low level of English encountered at the second Club Hilti programme, a focus group, with an interpreter present, was conducted rather than individual interviews. The number of parents on this programme varied, averaging ten. During the week of the field visits, there were seven adult learners at the first session, nine at the second and three at the third. Table 8 shows the number of parents and children attending each session visited during the fieldwork.

Table 8 - Number of learners per session for Gozo

Type of provision	No. of parent learners on register	No. of parent learners attending on day of visit	No. of children attending on day of visit
Id f'Id 1	25	25	N/A
Homework Club	8	0	8
Club Hilti 1	7	9	7
Club Hilti 2	10	9	9
Id f'Id 2	24	24	N/A
Club Hilti 3	6	3	3
Total	80	70	27

Two of the sessions visited were Id f'Id, (translated as 'hand in hand'). An adult-only short programme, Id f'Id ran for five weeks. It was also delivered in schools, usually during the school day, for two hours once a week. The ethos of Id f'Id was very similar to that of KUWTC delivered in Herefordshire. However, unlike KUWTC, Id f'Id encouraged parents who had already attended programmes, particularly Club Hilti, to take the lead for the sessions in conjunction with a qualified tutor. This programme was more active and hands-on than KUWTC, but was still centred on the difficulties parents were experiencing in assisting their children with homework, particularly literacy (English and Maltese) and mathematics. Id f'Id was very popular with the parents; some sessions having as many as 25 mothers in attendance. In some areas, schools reported a waiting list. Visiting Id f'Id offered the opportunity to interview learners who were both current learners and ex-learners.

The third programme visited was the Homework Club. This was new to Gozo and ran in primary schools, twice a week for two hours, after school. The Homework Club involved older children in junior school, usually aged nine and ten, who were struggling with their homework and who had been identified as needing additional support after school. There were eight families enrolled on the session visited. In theory, at least one parent should be present at the Homework Club however, in practice this was not the case. In all three programmes, the practitioners were predominantly men and the parent learners were mothers. In addition, the Nwar programme, meaning 'blossoms' in Maltese was visited to allow for contextualisation. Nwar was a remedial 1-1 or 2-1 programme, which offered intensive support to children in the early years of secondary school that had been identified as struggling academically and socially for a variety of reasons. Nwar was delivered at an outpost of the University of Malta in Gozo, in the

evenings. It was compulsory for a parent to attend with the child. Nwar did not stipulate an end-date; children remained on the programme for as long as was necessary. A translator was provided by the FES for any participants who were not proficient in English. In addition to visiting the programmes, I was invited to attend the practitioners' weekly meeting where planning, resolving difficulties and exchanging teaching ideas took place. Table 9 summarises the total number of interviews conducted in Gozo.

Table 9 shows that there were more men interviewed in Gozo than at the other two case study areas. Of the eight men interviewed, three were non-participating fathers, one was a learner, one the local coordinator and three the adult practitioners responsible for delivering a range of family literacy programmes. In addition, Table 9 shows that a greater number of children's teachers participated in interviews in Gozo than at the other case study areas. This was because schools, and particularly head teachers, were actively involved in supporting the delivery of family literacy programmes in their school. They also felt that they had ownership of the programmes. This is discussed further in the findings in chapter 4, section 1b, under programme aims.

Table 9 – Breakdown of interviews conducted for Gozo

Type of provision	Adult Tutor		Teacher		Learner		Ex-Learner		NPF	Policy		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	
Id f'Id 1		1		1		1		2				5
HW Club	1			2								3
Club Hilti 1	1			1		4						6
Club Hilti 2	1			1		9						11
						(FG)						
Id f'Id 2				1				2				3
Club Hilti 3					1	1						2
Outside of provision									3	1		4
Total for Gozo	3	1		6	1	15		4	3	1		34
												8M + 26F

Key: NPF = Non-participating fathers / FG = Focus Group / Policy = interviews with a policy maker or local Coordinator / HW = Home Work Club

The fieldwork presented several challenges that are detailed in the following section.

Research difficulties

During the fieldwork, several difficulties and limitations were identified. The main challenge was that of time. Commonly, as anticipated following the pilot study, parents were only available for interview during the actual session. This meant that in some instances, time in which to conduct the relevant number of interviews at each session was limited, causing interviews, in a few cases, to be shorter and less in-depth than would be ideal. Frequently parents attended sessions between dropping children at childcare, at relatives, the nursery or at school and collecting them. Many learners also fitted attendance around work commitments. Adult practitioners and children's teachers inevitably had other teaching commitments immediately before or after sessions. In the case of the adult practitioners, this may have also involved building in travel time with

the next session taking place some distance away. This meant that practitioners, children's teachers and learners often needed to be interviewed during the session itself. This often resulted in the need to conduct up to six interviews in two hours. During the interview, it was still necessary for parents to pay attention to their children or, in some instances, for the parent to forego some of their own time of learning. Interviewing without some disruption of the session was therefore difficult.

Noise levels during sessions made interviewing and the audio recording of interviews challenging and in some cases problematic. Frequently, interviews took place in the corner of the room in which the session was held. In some instances, this led to interruptions during the interviews, especially by the children, similar to those experienced at the pilot study. However, the main obstacle was the noise level during interviews, which resulted in a great deal of background noise on the audio recordings, making some of the interviews difficult to transcribe.

Recruiting ex-learners and non-participating fathers was particularly challenging. Despite the efforts of the coordinators prior to the field visits, few ex-learners and non-participating fathers were willing to agree in advance to be interviewed. Therefore, interviews with these groups of participants were mainly arranged during the week of the visit. In the case of non-participating fathers, this was achieved by asking mothers who were participating during the session visits. Ex-learners were contacted on the recommendation of schoolteachers or practitioners. Fathers were particularly difficult to access with many unavailable at short notice due to work commitments. Further, the number of learners attending sessions on the day of the visit varied considerably. It was only feasible to interview learners who actually attended sessions on the day of the field

visit, resulting, in some instances, in a depleted pool of mothers from which to draw to arrange potential interviews with non-participating fathers.

Finally, on one occasion in Herefordshire, a scheduled session was cancelled at short notice during the week. This resulted in a second visit to the case study area at a later date to ensure the desired sample size was achieved.

Analytical techniques

Following the completion of the fieldwork, the data were transcribed. The analysis drew on the two theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter 2 and comprised a two-stage process. Firstly, the data from comparable respondents: i.e. the learner interviews; the adult tutor interviews; and the ex-learner interviews, were thematically explored across the three case study areas. This highlighted similarities and differences in the case study areas. For example, when learners were asked about the activities during sessions, many talked about the craft activities they were engaged in such as making books, puppets and playing games. After this initial stage of analysis was completed, further thematic analysis was conducted which cut across different participant groups to check for validity and truth. This strategy of crosschecking, along with evidence from the participant observations, provided a holistic contextualised picture of family literacy programmes within and across the three case study sites. This is in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggested interpretive naturalistic enquiry where 'trustworthiness' has a place of high importance, and data examination in this way is encouraged to provide credibility, conformability and transferability. To return to the example above concerning the activities within the classroom, interviews with practitioners, ex-learners and observations of sessions, confirmed that learning was

indeed conducted in a relaxed manner, predominantly through hands-on craft activities rather than via models of formal teaching pedagogies.

In addition, the analysis of findings was developed through the process of discussion and data presentation with academics and researcher. This included presenting and discussing findings at conferences and receiving constructive feedback from the reviewers of submitted journal articles to facilitate publication. A full list of conference papers and journal publications as a result of this study can be found at Appendix C.

Interpretations were taken for each case study area within the contextual setting in line with established methods of analysing case study data. As Barr (1999) stresses, there is a need to evaluate texts contextually, ‘...that is, in relation to the institutional and discursive context in which they are produced rather than abstractly’ (Barr, 1999: 105). In other words, analysis can only be truly undertaken within the specific social and cultural context of study and with a knowledge and understanding of said context. Feminist pedagogy favours open-mindedness when it comes to analysis of data, encouraging the development of ideas and themes as they emerge from women’s stories rather than conventional methods using pre-structured plans (Hayes and Flannery, 2000).

Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* (1977) and *field* (1993), incorporating economic, social and cultural capital, including the institutional, objectified and embodied state, (Bourdieu, 1997) power and gender (Bourdieu, 2001), as discussed in the review of literature in chapter 2, were employed as the main theoretical lens through which the data were analysed. A second theoretical framework using Putnam (2000) and

Coleman's (1988) notions of social capital, specifically concepts of networking, bridging, bonding, trust and social cohesion, were also employed. Particularly pertinent was Coleman's notion of social capital and the family in connection with the transfer of human capital into social capital by means of the relationship between the parent and child in connection with education (Coleman, 1988:109).

The concept of *field* is particularly appropriate when analysing family literacy programmes, since it allows a cross-cultural exploration of activity within and between several social *fields* simultaneously, primarily: the family; government policy; and education. It offers the opportunity to consider the various sub-*fields* such as adult education, compulsory education, local authority policy development and the role of mothers within the family. Since the notion of *fields* has the potential to transcend cultural contexts, these can then be compared and contrasted across nation states. Exposing the mechanisms at work within each *field* enables the study of relationships between the different *fields* and aids cultural comparisons. *Habitus* permits the data to be analysed within the particular cultural context in which it was gathered. Further, it offers the opportunity to assess the degree to which such attitudes, or *habitus*, are culturally specific and ingrained in the actors participating in the *field* of study, both professional and non-professional.

As a theoretical tool, *habitus* and *field* were used to address the research questions posed by this study: namely to establish the characteristics of family literacy programmes; to ascertain if and how they are funded and working; for whom; the key similarities and differences; and future opportunities for learners. For example, the theoretical framework was used to explore the power relations and tensions both within and

between the social *fields* involved in family literacy programmes, notably between the policy rationale for funding programmes and learner motivation for attending (Rose and Atkin, 2007), which could otherwise have been overlooked. Utilising this theoretical framework and incorporating notions of social capital facilitated the interpretation of the data particularly along the lines of key social *fields*, power relations within the *fields* and historical, long-established ideologies. Bourdieu brings to the analysis a middle ground between subjectivism and objectivism of why ideas are perpetuated between the family and politics that is not be viewed in the same way by other theorists. It helps illuminate the natural, legitimising the powerful over the powerless. The resulting findings from the analysis are presented in the following data and discussion chapter.

Chapter 4

Presentation and discussion of the research findings: policy perspectives and learners' profiles

The presentation and discussion of the research findings are divided over the next two chapters, 4 and 5. In this chapter they are presented broadly along the lines of policy rationale and logistics and in chapter 5 families and practitioners. The findings are discussed within the theoretical framework set out in chapter 2 using Bourdieu's concepts *habitus* (1977) and *field* (1993), and Putnam's (2000) and Coleman's (1988) notions of social capital. In both chapters, all sections are broadly based on themes arising out of the data collection and relate to the original research questions posed by the study. Therefore, it is appropriate to reiterate the research questions. The main research question posed by the study is:

What are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the three case study areas?

A set of sub-questions were designed to answer this principal question. They are:

6. What are the main aims of family literacy programmes?
7. Why do learners attend family literacy programmes?
8. What benefits, in terms of literacy skills, do family literacy programmes bring to the learners?
9. What are the key similarities and differences?
10. What are the future plans for family literacy programmes?

The main policy aim of family literacy programmes for the three areas involved in the study was, essentially, to re-engage adults from disadvantaged communities or 'hard to reach' groups, for example the Travellers in Ireland, within the *field* of education. Such groups were frequently said to have a collective *habitus* which undervalues learning, often resulting in members leaving school early (Ofsted, 2003). As discussed earlier, such adults are more likely to be poorer, have lower levels of literacy skills and to be employed in lower-paid, lower-skilled work than the general population (Frater, 1995; Bynner and Parsons, 1997; OECD, 1997; DfEE, 2001 and UNESCO, 2005b). In many cases, this has led to social exclusion, or at least to marginalisation. By engaging these potential learners in education, often by disguising it as helping their children, policy makers and deliverers alike hope adults will come to realise that they have deficiencies in their own skills which they will then seek to address (tutor Gozo), thus improving their chances of social inclusion. In this context, literacies are viewed mainly as political constructs rather than as a form of social practice. However, the research data found the overriding aim of parents attending family literacy programmes was to help their children achieve in school and, by implication, in life, where they had not. This mismatch, or lack of awareness, between political rationale for offering family literacy programmes and learner motivation, is one of the key aspects of the research findings. It should be noted that, as a case study, the findings are not presented as generalisable, but offered as illuminative for others who share similar contextual settings.

To protect the anonymity of those participating in the study and to ensure confidentiality, all locations and interviewees have been anonymised using a simple coding system. Locations visited are identified using the first letter of the area

followed by a roman numeral *i*, *ii*, *iii* etc. for example, (*Hiii*) denotes the third venue visited in Herefordshire. The number assigned to a location is purely arbitrary, relating to the order in which they were visited and not to its importance or a reflection on the form or quality of practice. In some cases, the venue may have been visited more than once to view different types of programmes; the number only conveys the venue and *not* the programme type, which will be identified separately. In Gozo and County Clare, five venues were visited and in Herefordshire, there were four. Table 10 sets out the coding system for fieldwork locations used in this chapter.

Table 10 - Location referencing of main family literacy programmes

	Herefordshire	Gozo	County Clare
Venue 1	<i>Hi</i> (FLLN)	<i>Gi</i> (Id f'Id)	<i>Ci</i> (Fun things to do with your child)
Venue 2	<i>Hii</i> (FLLN)	<i>Gii</i> (Homework Club)	<i>Cii</i> (Travellers)
Venue 3	<i>Hiii</i> (KUWTC)	<i>Giii</i> (Club Hilti)	<i>Ciii</i> (Maths for fun)
Venue 4	<i>Hiv</i> (FLLN)	<i>Giv</i> (Club Hilti)	<i>Civ</i> (Asylum mothers)
Venue 5		<i>Gv</i> (Id f'Id and Club Hilti)	<i>Cv</i> (Lone parents)

Whilst the coding is designed to obscure the locations visited, it may be possible to identify some of the venues, particularly those visited in County Clare. Here delivery was based upon specific groups or sectors of the community rather than generically for those with low literacy skills. To enable a full analysis and discussion of the data, it is important for context and understanding that these groups, but not the individuals within, are identified. For example, in County Clare one group consisted of lone parents, another of women from the Traveller community.

Similarly, to protect the identity of those interviewed, references for quotes will be presented as the area initial followed by the interview number. For example, a participant in County Clare who was interviewee number 66 will be quoted as C66.

The status of the interviewee will not be reflected in the code, rather this will become clear through the text, for example, ‘a tutor in Gozo commented’, or ‘an ex-learner in Herefordshire stated’. Further, in the case of the Herefordshire KUWTC focus group, (H40) quotes from individuals within the group are identified by a letter corresponding to their gender, followed by a number, for example, H40:2F equates to the second female in the focus group. Finally, it should be noted that quotes from participants in Gozo are in English, their second language, and as such, they are not always grammatically correct.

This chapter has two main sections. Section one begins with an overview of each case study area and explores some of the challenges they face in delivering family literacy programmes. It goes on to examine who is responsible for delivering programmes, how they are funded, how potential learners are identified, the programme aims from the point of view of the providers and the course content. Section two details and discusses the profile of the learners attending the programmes. Throughout both chapters 4 and 5, the data will be presented and discussed in a comparative manner, drawing out differences and similarities between the case study areas.

1 – Policy rationale and programme types

1a) Overview of the local context

For a full data analysis and discussion to occur, it is imperative to have an understanding of local context and attitudes. That is, the social *field* in which family literacy programmes were being delivered and the *habitus* of the local population, particularly towards education. Therefore, tutors and coordinators were asked to

describe the local area in which they were delivering programmes and to explain any specific challenges they perceived the area faced. In County Clare and Gozo, women were reported to be increasingly seeking paid employment outside the home. In Gozo, this trend was reported, by interviewees, to have become an increasingly common practice over the past decade, largely due to growing economic pressures on the family. One tutor in Gozo commented:

...most of the women are going out to work, because the prices are going up. I would say...for ten years now women must go out to work to cope with life...Before...very few percentage of the women go out to work, but now, most of them, they have to try and find some part-time job to cope.

(G19)

According to the interviews, the economic climate, which was said to be beyond the direct control of the individual family unit, increasingly dictated the roles and responsibilities undertaken inside and outside the home. In many cases, this forced women to undertake part-time employment in addition to running the home and to caring for the children.

Family literacy programmes were predominantly delivered in areas considered poor or disadvantaged, in line with funding requirements, especially in Herefordshire and County Clare. In the case of County Clare, several of the areas visited were reported, by tutors, to have a range of difficulties affecting attendance, including a high concentration of social housing and high levels of unemployment and illness, particularly at area *Ci* where the tutor commented:

...it is a poor area...there is a high concentration of local authority housing which people rent because they can't afford to buy their own. It's an unemployment black spot as well, so there is a high level of unemployment. As you can see from the students, there is a lot of illness. You know the poorer people are, the more ill health they have. And the other lady couldn't attend today because she had to bring the child to the doctor's. So you have

these problems with the lack of ability to attend, even though they have initially signed on to attend. (C55)

According to interviewees, several of the areas in County Clare had been awarded additional government funding to aid community regeneration, 'it's this thing called Area Development Management (ADM) and they get government funding to develop the local area' (C55). In one particularly deprived area of the county, multiple agencies worked in partnership because, 'the area was very deprived. It has inter-agencies working in the area to try and resolve the issues, which include drugs, alcoholism, anti-social behaviour and loose family ties' (C64), i.e. many in the community were related. Here, outside agencies from the professional *field* of care and welfare were trying to address ingrained attitudes inside a distinct social *field*, namely the Travelling community, which was considered to be in a position outside of mainstream society. As the literature already discussed has demonstrated, those with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to be found in such communities, making them appropriate locations in which to offer family literacy programmes. Family literacy programmes were being actively employed by local educationalists as a social inclusion tool and a way of attempting to change the long-standing *habitus*, the deep-seated attitudes of some local residents from dismissing, to valuing education and learning.

Many of the communities across the study areas were described as largely stable with little movement in or out of the local area, 'I'd say it's quite stable...there is some small moving population but it tends to be quite a stable population' (H35). In County Clare this applied equally to communities which consisted of a large proportion of Travellers who were reported, in practice, not to travel very far if at all,

‘there are very few who go travelling’ (C61). In the 1950’s, Travellers began to settle on social housing estates in the County and were described locally as ‘second generation travellers’ (C64). Despite Gozo being extremely small geographically, few people were reported to move out of the village in which they were born. One of the main reasons given for moving villages was marriage. Moving house was viewed as a major cultural change in an individual’s life with one tutor stating, ‘...we feel a lot of belonging to our village so we try and live next to our family homes’ (G16), despite the next village being only a few miles away, often within walking distance. This illustrated the importance of shared *habitus* and *field* for small communities in general, and in rural areas specifically, such as those found on Gozo. It was usual for local residents to remain within their known social *field* for most of their lives, where certain attitudes towards education, specifically its perceived lack of value in benefiting the community and relevance to local life, were embedded in its *habitus*. As a result of changes in local working practices, i.e. a move away from agriculture to the service industry, this view has only recently been challenged. However, not all communities were stable. In Herefordshire, the population at *Hi*, a Catholic school without a catchment area, described as a city school, was reported to have a higher level of fluidity than some of the other schools in the county. According to the teacher interviewed at the school (H33), children in *Hi* came from diverse backgrounds with many living three or four miles away. Children entering or leaving school during the year was also commonplace. Therefore, the social *field* was constantly changing, bringing new challenges and an evolving *habitus*. Those already in the *field* could either choose to accept or reject these new ideas and attitudes.

All three case study areas were described by coordinators and tutors as 'rural' in nature, within the local context. However, despite their rural nature, provision predominantly took place in areas that could be best described as well populated; on housing estates, around the main town or city of the study area, or in the larger villages. In Gozo, most of the villages visited were said to be traditionally agricultural, with *Giv* historically having the greatest number of farms on the island. It was also reported to be the poorest area on the island with the lowest levels of educational achievement. According to one tutor, following the demise of agriculture, *Giv* became a site for industry. However, in recent years this too had declined, with most of the factories reported to have closed. Production had moved to countries such as Tunisia or Morocco where labour was cheaper (G19). At the time of the fieldwork, this area was described by the tutor as in the process of reinventing itself. New employment opportunities were being created in the tourist and service industries, many of which required the local population to learn new skills. It also required a shift in *attitude* from viewing education and learning as being a low priority, to one of importance. This could be one reason for the interest in educational opportunities and the increasing popularity of new spaces of learning in the area, such as family literacy programmes.

1b) Programme aims

All programmes investigated during the study were underpinned by literacy and numeracy. According to the programme coordinators, programmes at each case study area ultimately aimed to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents and children. In Herefordshire, parents were offered the opportunity to undertake the new National Tests in literacy and numeracy at Level One or Two.

This provided learners with the opportunity to gain a tangible, certificated outcome, or what Bourdieu would term ‘institutionalized cultural capital’. It is the proof to society of progression and achievement, resulting from attending the programme. Introduced in England in September 2001, the National Tests were purported to provide adult learners who left school without any qualifications, particularly GCSE’s, the opportunity to gain a recognised equivalent accreditation. According to the Read, Write Plus section of the DfES website:

...the National Tests for Adult Literacy and Numeracy are directly based on the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy, allowing learners, tutors and employers to have a clear understanding of what has been achieved and value the resulting qualifications. (DfES, 2006d)

In this way adults were able to increase their cultural capital in terms of the institutional state by the gaining of symbolic capital, in the form of a nationally recognised qualification. This qualification can then be used as a springboard to access further courses, training or better employment opportunities, which would ultimately bring increased higher-level economic activity, from which the whole of society might benefit. However, the value of these certificates, as well as the robustness and relevance of the National Test in literacy competencies in its current, mainly multi-choice format, is questioned by many practitioners in the field. This was demonstrated by the drafting of a letter by members of Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) in September 2006 to The Guardian newspaper expressing such concerns. Unfortunately, the letter was not published. In Gozo the hope is that parents will recognise any skill gaps and seek for them to be addressed (G10). In County Clare, coordinators and tutors would ideally like family literacy programmes to encourage parents to look at their own literacy and numeracy skills, develop a

learning environment, which should lead to better home-school links, and foster a previously missing culture or *habitus* of lifelong learning. Thus, family literacy programmes were seen as encouraging the wider benefits of learning (Schuller, 2004), such as greater social inclusion for the learner, the family and the community. Irish tutors would also like parents to come to ‘...realise that they are the most important teachers,’ (C56). Essentially, as the Irish coordinator stated, programmes aim to stimulate intergenerational learning by:

...encouraging parents to work with...spend time with their children and to look at their own children’s learning in the way they learn and how they learn in their literacy and their numeracy. (C56)

Programme aims were reinforced from the perspective of the schools. In Gozo, programmes were viewed as forming part of school strategy improvement plans. One specific aim was to help parents understand current methods of teaching; particularly in mathematics. One head teacher in Gozo commented:

...when we discussed with our teachers the planning of the school development plan for the next scholastic year, we thought that parents needed help because parents don’t know about the abacus. The abacus is the mathematic system that was introduced in Malta, lately. Many parents don’t know how to help their children... because we are used to the old system. (G1)

Overall, schools in Herefordshire and Gozo embraced the programmes, taking ownership with a feeling that they had some level of control as to what was taught, how it was taught and who was involved. Only one school in Gozo felt family literacy programmes to be something that went on out of school hours and that it was over and above the normal teaching of the children, with little to do with an integrated school learning experience. This was the school in the poorest area, where

there was a *habitus* of education being traditionally undervalued. Here pupils were reported by tutors to have consistently underachieved. However, this general view was not the case in County Clare where, with the exception of *Ciii*, schools had little, if any input into the delivery of family literacy programmes.

Family literacy programmes were seen by coordinators in all areas as the first step back into learning for adults. They offered not just the opportunity for the improvement of mechanical skills for economic reinvestment, but other, wider social benefits (Schuller, 2004) such as greater social integration and improved health. Engaging in education helps build different forms of capital: social; human; and identity (Schuller, 2004). The latter, identity capital, originates from social psychology and particularly the work of Cote (1997) who used the concept to explore the transition of teenagers into adulthood. However, Schuller believes the concept can be applied to transitions that occur throughout life. Cote considered education, family and occupation, to be the three main factors in building identity capital. For Cote, identity capital had two main assets; one tangible, relating to behaviour including qualifications, the other intangible, which are personality dependant, for example self-esteem. Family literacy programmes have the potential to help learners develop both aspects of identity capital, but particularly the intangible element.

1c) Funding and organisation of family literacy programmes

Funding for programmes in Herefordshire and County Clare, were a direct response to reports in the late 1990's that showed a high percentage of adults had low levels of literacy and numeracy skills that needed to be addressed, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2. These reports led to the implementation of the SfL strategy (DfEE, 2001) in

England and therefore Herefordshire, and the Irish Adult Literacy Strategy in Ireland and subsequently County Clare. Whilst each country has an overall policy of encouraging the delivery of family literacy programmes, there is no compulsion, even in Herefordshire where it falls within the national SfL strategy, for areas to offer programmes. In each case, delivery was dependant on local priorities and is one of the reasons why there is such a variety of provision in England. In Gozo, the FES provides a range of educational initiatives in the *field* of literacy and family learning support. The FES was described by the coordinator, ‘...as a service provider agency for the government which aims to address illiteracy’ (G10). The FES programmes are not specifically aimed at helping adult learners. The FES offered a range of family literacy programmes that were available to schools. Tutors for the adult learners and children, known as ‘activity teachers’, were employed directly by the FES to deliver programmes after school. Often they were teachers during the day, employed by the schools. The FES also offered tutor training.

In County Clare, the VEC, like the FES, was responsible for organising and delivering programmes and for employing their own tutors to carry out family literacy programmes. However, unlike the FES, the VEC had a remit to work specifically in adult education, including basic skills. This remit incorporated family literacy programmes, which were offered to their main pre-identified target learners, or ‘hard to reach’ groups that fell within the Adult Literacy Strategy remit. Target learners included the socially deprived, the rurally isolated, lone parents, those from the Traveller communities and asylum seekers.

In Herefordshire, the responsibility for delivering family literacy programmes fell to the Council. This sat within their Lifelong Learning Unit (LLU), which managed a variety of adult education provision. In addition to SfL, the BSA and the Campaign for Learning were reported by the local coordinator to have had an input. Herefordshire County Council acted as a broker, contacting and visiting schools to promote a range of family literacy programmes that were delivered in schools by tutors who were employed by the local technical college. This required tutors to work across two educational *fields*, adult and compulsory, simultaneously. This made for a complicated picture, particularly where funding was concerned. The local coordinator commented, 'it is quite hard employing tutors through the Tech...if I had my own tutors who I employed directly that would be easier. It's not perfect but it works' (H27).

In all cases, funding for family literacy programmes was centrally administered. In Herefordshire, funding came from government via the local LSC. Funding was not available to every school, only those within the county who had been specifically identified as being in need. As the local coordinator stated '...it's not open to any school, it is concentrated on areas of deprivation and for adults with low basic skills and usually the two will go together, but not always' (H27). The Council, as one tutor put it, was responsible for funding programmes locally, for 'holding the purse strings' (H33). This included reimbursing the cost of tutors with the college and the schools. Tutors felt that the funding structure in Herefordshire was complex. It made planning and delivering courses difficult. Tutors did not have a budget of their own and were not privy to how much funding was available for resources such as

materials and trips. One tutor felt it had significantly affected her ability to deliver courses stating:

...one day there is this impression that there is lots of dosh then the next day, no, we can't afford to do this...it's a bit embarrassing because I'd like to take the parents out, say 12 months ago, that wasn't a problem...but now it's a major problem... (H33)

In comparison with Herefordshire, funding in Gozo and County Clare was relatively straightforward. In Gozo, the FES was funded by the Ministry of Education. In addition, there was some European Social Funding (ESF) available in Malta, which allowed for a greater variety of delivery. However, at the time of the fieldwork the ESF did not apply to provision in Gozo. Tutors in Gozo were aware of funding. Tutors interviewed in Gozo had differing opinions as to the level of programme funding. One tutor stated, '...they give us all the resources we need' (G16). However, another tutor commented that whilst programmes were originally extremely well funded, this had subsequently been reduced, making it difficult to meet the cost of some of the activities such as cooking (G6). In such cases, parents were left to purchase ingredients. This was felt to be unfair, since parents already paid a small fee, three Maltese Pounds, for the session. It also had the potential to discourage some parents from attending the programme if they were unable to afford the additional cost, further excluding some parents from participating. This served to reinforce positions of social hierarchies, thus making overt the division between those who could afford to participate and those who could not. Courses in Herefordshire and County Clare were all free to the learner at the point of access.

In addition, in County Clare many of the learners received payment for attending programmes. This was because it either formed part of an overall course, for example

the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), a DES and ESF initiative, aimed at encouraging the long-term unemployed back to work; or it covered childcare, for example, in the case of the Traveller women. According to tutor interviews, the Travellers would not attend unless they were paid. Under VTOS, learners who had left school with little or no qualifications were given the opportunity to achieve a qualification known as FETAC, awarded by the Further Education Training Awards Council, as an alternative to a school leaving certification. This qualification was far more extensive than the English National Tests for adult Literacy and Numeracy discussed earlier. The linking of family literacy programmes to certification and ‘back to work initiatives’ in this way, demonstrates a desire by those in the policy *field* at national and local level, to equip learners with cultural capital in a tangible, nationally recognised institutionalised state. This cultural capital can then be presented to employers as a ticket, or passport, to access economic participation. The certificate symbolises proof that the owner has achieved an acceptable level of attainment. In theory, this can then be converted in the market place with the proviso that suitable employment can be found locally. The danger, especially in deprived communities, is that no such employment opportunities may exist.

Family literacy in County Clare was funded as part of the overall VEC’s budget, which came directly from the Department of Education. Whilst specific funding was identified for family literacy programmes, the amount allocated varied from county to county. Further, according to the coordinator in County Clare ‘...it should come specifically for family learning but it doesn’t always...not all counties do family learning’ (C56). The coordinator also felt that the VEC in County Clare had made

family literacy a high priority into which they had invested heavily over recent years. The coordinator commented that the VEC in ‘...Clare has always put a lot of money into family learning because they realise that the potential is quite great for...getting learners learning’ (C56). Additionally, funding had been received by the County to support family literacy programmes following the publication of the Family Learning Resource Guide (2000). The guide was developed as part of the Clare Family Learning Project and provided a ‘loose template’ for the delivery of all family literacy programmes in the county. In County Clare the tutors involved in delivery did not seem to concern themselves with any aspects of the funding structures or process. They had little or no knowledge of the funding arrangements. This side of the delivery process was left to the coordinator, with the tutors trusting that the decisions made at a strategic level would best serve local needs. There was an implicit trust by the tutors, in the hierarchy of the policy and funding *fields*.

Funding at each case study area was viewed by coordinators as short-term and constantly dependant upon budgets for the next financial year over which they had no control. Whilst coordinators reported a commitment to programmes in principle from funding bodies at central government level, there was no guarantee that funding would continue to be available in the long term. As the Herefordshire coordinator stated over the future of securing funding, ‘...we are fairly sure but obviously nothing is ever certain’ (H27). Family literacy programmes were found to be fluid, policy-trend dependant. Funding was limited, awarded in a top-down manner rather than from a needs-led perspective, to fit prescribed programme formats. Funders often required tangible outcomes to satisfy funding criteria, hence the opportunity for learners to take qualifications. This was especially the case in Herefordshire, with the

availability of National Tests in literacy and numeracy. Funding was, however, only one of the many challenges faced by the providers and the learners in the study areas.

Id) Perceived challenges to delivering family literacy programmes locally

The rural nature of the case study areas was cited as one of the main challenges facing coordinators in offering and delivering family literacy programmes. In Gozo, recruiting suitably qualified tutors was named as particularly difficult given the islands' combined micro-size and ruralness, leaving a small pool of suitable people from which to recruit. The overall *field* of family literacy delivery was found to be predominantly female. In Herefordshire and County Clare, all tutors, coordinators and children's teachers were women, as one might expect in a *field* of education traditionally seen as a female sphere (Borg and Mayo, 2001). However, in Gozo, whilst the participants were mainly mothers, the majority of tutors, and most of the leaders, (and all those interviewed), were men (five out of six). Two reasons were given by the local coordinator to account for this: first, the economic climate in which the high cost of living required most men to have two jobs to enable them to support their family; second, in Gozo it was neither common nor acceptable, for women to work outside the home. This latter point was corroborated by the data from the other tutors interviewed, all men, and confirmed by the data gathered from the participants, nearly all women. In Gozo it seemed preferable for the men, where possible, to have two jobs rather than for the women to work. Whilst there was financial pressure on the mothers to work, socially, in Malta, it was still perceived as less than desirable. Much of this was due to the continuing influence the Catholic Church exerts over the family. It could be argued, that the Church and the family are two opposing *fields* and that the Church is trying to maintain its power and control

over the family. The family appears caught between what is morally correct within society, the established *habitus*, and what is economically necessary. The family is caught between the ideals of the Church and the realities of modern life. In all three areas, the division of gender roles between men and women was strong. In many instances, it defined an individual's identity. This point is discussed in more detail later in the findings, from section 2 onwards.

The major challenge facing Herefordshire was the logistics of delivery, since several agencies were involved in the delivery process (see section 1c). Several other issues were raised across the study sites. These were: accessing small rural schools; transport; and the ability to provide appropriate, affordable childcare to learners with pre-school children whilst they attended the programmes. There was also the fact that many of the parents who were suitable to attend were working during the day when programmes were scheduled. Due to the reported rise in the number of mothers working outside of the home, this latter point was becoming increasingly applicable to mothers, as well as fathers. Childcare was also identified as a problem in County Clare, along with the need to formalise courses currently being delivered into coherent written formats for future use:

...we run a number of programmes and what we try to do is actually get them down on paper. I mean we have sort of had a rough outline. Obviously, we have our core programme, which is there in book form. But others we have set up, we haven't really got them written down on paper because we have both been delivering them. So I'm actually getting those now into some sort of structure. (C56)

In addition, one of the major challenges was seen as changing attitudes towards education that had been engrained in the local social *field*. This involved encouraging fathers as well as mothers to engage in family literacy programmes. Encouraging a

greater number of fathers to participate was seen as the ultimate goal by all three case study areas.

Tutors responsible for delivering family literacy programmes faced numerous challenges, some already mentioned, such as negative or indifferent attitudes towards education and the increasing number of working mothers. Other challenges were both logistical and context specific. Tutors generally felt challenges came as a result of areas having a high number of disadvantaged learners. Specifically, in Gozo, mothers were said to be less educated than their counterparts in Malta. Several of the mothers interviewed felt that their husbands were less educated than themselves. Some schools, such as the one visited in *Giv*, were reported to be low achieving with generational repeated poor levels of literacy and numeracy competencies and traditionally larger families. One teacher commented that here ‘...until recently many [parents] were illiterate’ (G20). Here many parents of the brighter children were reported to be sending them to better schools, elsewhere on the island, leaving the lowest achievers behind, thus exacerbating the situation. In Gozo, tutors reported that there was also an issue over religious obligations clashing with programme times, affecting both enrolment and attendance rates: another example of the influence the Catholic Church holds over family life in Maltese society. One tutor reported that it was sometimes difficult for parents to reconcile the expectations of the Church for children to attend religious instruction leading up to their first communion after school, with the academic needs of the child, stating:

The doctrine, religious classes that they have...as you know we have here a Catholic country, so the doctrine lessons are very important and they don't want to miss them and they are usually at the same time as Hilti...They prefer to go to the lessons because they are more important when they are religious.

They have to go to a good proportion of the lessons so they cannot afford to miss them, because if they do they will not be able to do the Holy Communion, the confirmation. (G19)

Traditionally the Catholic Church has been a strong *field* of knowledge and power, influencing how people in Gozo live their lives. The Church has strongly guided what is and is not acceptable and by whom. Thus, it has ensured the continuing reproduction of established roles within society (Bourdieu, 2001), particularly those pertaining to women.

In Herefordshire, further challenges included: teaching to mixed age and ability groups, the latter relating to both parent and child; along with an increasing number of immigrant children in the area. The ability of the adult learners was said to range from parents having a low level of literacy and numeracy to those with degrees ‘...purely because it is a numbers game’ (H52), as one tutor pointed out. This was confirmed by interviews with ex-learners in the area who came from a range of backgrounds, possessing a variety of skill levels. One teacher in Herefordshire reported that the attitudes of parents towards learning were a major challenge to delivering programmes. The teacher stated, ‘I think attitudes towards education is a big big problem, as much as there is still a big barrier with let’s say, some of the lesser educated parents, who feel the role of education is for the teacher and the teacher alone’ (H33). The school was finding this entrenched *habitus* difficult to address. Recruitment and retention of potential learners, along with a general lack of parental confidence and changing life styles, particularly the growth in seasonal work in the area, were also proving to be major barriers to delivery.

In County Clare, tutors felt that, despite a government directive that schools should have a greater level of parental involvement, they had not given schools specific instructions to work with the VEC. This lack of directive caused difficulties for the VEC as one tutor commented, ‘I see one of the biggest challenges is that the government hasn’t given direction specifically to the schools to link in with us, we have to try and sell ourselves in schools which is never helpful...’ (C55). This made it difficult, if not impossible, for the VEC to access schools and deliver family literacy programmes in the same way as it was possible to do so in Gozo and Herefordshire. As a result, it was rare for children to be formally involved in family literacy programmes in County Clare. Here the *fields* of adult and children’s education were, essentially, separate entities. Learner visibility, leading to stigmatisation in rural areas, was a further challenge. On the practical delivery side, making programmes pleasurable and interesting, whilst helping participants to improve their reading, writing and listening skills, were seen by tutors as both challenging and the key to success.

In many instances, there appeared to be a general lack of social capital and coherence, in terms of trust, networking and bonding, existing within the communities in the research. This was exacerbated when it came to the *field* of education. The general *habitus*, or consensus, from government policy makers was that these communities needed saving and that they should embrace the opportunity to change their *habitus* and extend their social *field*. Ultimately, they were obliged to accept the dominant ideology: that education was valuable and that improving literacy and numeracy skills, and thus the potential to enhance employment opportunities, through attendance at family literacy programmes, was one way of

attaining the necessary up-skilling. However, those from outside such communities, particularly the policy makers, need to question why potential learners would be motivated to engage in such up-skilling. Further, they need to consider the wisdom of accruing cultural capital, which in turn has the potential to be converted into economic capital, when employment opportunities in the local area were severely restricted. With limited employment prospects and a *habitus* reported by many of the coordinators and tutors interviewed across all the study sites, which did not value educational attainment, the answer may be found in the children of those attending programmes rather than in the learners themselves. This issue is discussed in greater detail under learner motivation in section one of chapter 5. As we have seen, each case study area had a range of challenges, many of which were common to all areas whilst others were specific to a particular locality. All were issues that needed to be addressed, to a greater or lesser degree, for the continuing delivery of family literacy programmes. One challenge all areas faced was how to deliver and promote courses.

1e) Types of Programmes: a question of terminology?

Despite the overall term ‘family literacy’, a wide range of programmes was found to be delivered under this one banner. Not surprisingly, the variety of programmes increased when different countries were compared. The introduction and review of literature chapters have already discussed at great length the difficulties with the term family literacy programmes. Issues have been raised over the many formats of delivery, types of programmes and content. Whilst recognising the variety available, for the purpose of this study the term ‘family literacy’ was agreed upon, defined as a formal programme of delivery, which occurs within a set time frame with a beginning and end date. Programmes were delivered at a designated geographical

location by at least one experienced facilitator, usually the adult tutor. Generally, the learners who attended had dependant children of pre-school or primary school age. Finally, the underlying ethos of the programmes was to teach literacy and numeracy skills. The results of the fieldwork support this complex picture of what constitutes a family literacy programme.

During the fieldwork stage of the study, a wide selection of sessions was observed across the three sites, seven in Gozo, five in County Clare and four in Herefordshire, as illustrated in Table 11. Two factors dictated which programmes were visited: firstly, it depended upon which sessions were running during the week of the visit; secondly, which sessions it was viable to visit due to distances or timetabling. For example, in Herefordshire a clash of timetabling, coupled with a limited number of suitable programmes to view, resulted in two separate visits to the area to ensure sufficient sampling. Table 11 summarises the sessions visited at each of the case study areas. Each is explained in greater detail later in this section.

Table 11 – Summary of family literacy programmes visited

Gozo	Herefordshire	County Clare
3x Club Hilti	3x Family Literacy Language and Numeracy (FLLN)	2x Family literacy 1x - Traveller women 1x - Lone parents (Story sacks)
2x Id f'Id	1x Keeping up with the children (KUWTC)	1x Fun things to do with your child
1x Homework Club*		1x Family crafts with Asylum mothers
1 Nwar*		1x Grandparents*
7 visits	4 visits	5 visits
* Peripheral to the main study		

In addition to the above sessions visited, interviews were conducted with a VEC tutor and a home-school link worker in County Clare (*Ciii*). In the latter case, programmes ran two or three times a year but were not operational at the time of the fieldwork. It was important to examine this aspect of programmes as it provided a rare opportunity to explore the relationship between schools and the VEC in Ireland.

As noted in the fieldwork section of chapter 3, the main joint programmes in Herefordshire were delivered under FLLN, whilst in Gozo it was Club Hilti. Programmes in Herefordshire, and England as a whole, predominantly involved children in the early years of schooling, usually between the ages of four and six. The delivery of programmes mainly took place in primary schools during the school day. In Gozo, (and in Malta), sessions were generally delivered in Maltese and/or English, in the early afternoon, directly after school (usually 2:30 to 4:30pm) with children aged six to nine, also using the premises of primary schools. In both cases, the place of delivery; primary schools; were traditionally viewed as learning spaces specifically designed for children rather than adults. Thus, family literacy programmes could be viewed as bridging, or linking, the *fields* of adult and children's education in a manner that has not been previously undertaken. This led to what might be termed, a new space of learning. Further, the schools were found to have made an input to the programmes in terms of either staff, content, or both. In addition, Herefordshire and Gozo both offered parent-only programmes which were closely linked to teaching in schools; 'Keeping up with the Children' (KUWTC) in Herefordshire and 'Id f'id' in Gozo. Both of these courses were shorter than the joint programmes and aimed at providing parents with the knowledge of current pedagogical techniques employed in schools to enable them to help their children

with schoolwork, particularly in literacy and numeracy disciplines. KUWTC and Id f'Id both seem to attract adults who were already well educated or slightly better educated and competent in their literacy and numeracy skills than Club Hilti and FLLN. Further, these programmes did not carry with them a remit to target specifically those perceived as 'in need', but were open to all who wished to participate. In County Clare, basic family literacy and story sacks, aimed at families with children aged up to seven years of age, formed the two main programmes pertinent to this study. A detailed breakdown and comparison of the key characteristics of programmes in all three case study areas can be found in Table 12.

All three case study areas offered a range of other programmes under the banner of family literacy, many of which were not visited during the fieldwork. This was due to the constraints referred to earlier in the chapter 3. Constraints included the fact that some programmes were not operational at the time of the field visits. Those found to be peripheral to the research study were; the Homework Club and Nwar in Gozo; Story Sacks and Fun to Talk in Herefordshire; supporting learning at home, the transition programme, family learning for grandparents, and supporting children's mathematics in County Clare. The main components of all programmes are detailed in Table 12, (page 184) including programme length, format and age of children attending.

As Table 12 shows, the major difference between Gozo and Herefordshire and County Clare was, as mentioned earlier, that there were no children involved in any of the programmes offered in County Clare, at least not in the same format. In County Clare, the two *fields* of learning remained separate and distinct, rather than

integrated. Schools and children were not pivotal to delivery in County Clare in the same way as the other two sites. The schools' only involvement in Ireland was reported by one tutor to be mainly the use of school premises in the evenings as a venue. However, even this was mentioned as being difficult to arrange. Club Hilti and FLLN were run along similar lines, with similar aims and objectives. The situation in County Clare was slightly different and can therefore be contrasted, as Table 12 illustrates. Club Hilti and FLLN programmes consisted of children and adults working separately then coming together during the session. This is known as the 'H' or BSA model, originating from the Kenan model as described in chapter 1. The lack of children involved in the programmes in County Clare raises many interesting questions, not least regarding the labelling of programmes as 'family' be it literacy, or as locally described, learning. This point is discussed in detail in section two of chapter 5, 'where are the children?'

Table 12 - Characteristics of each family literacy programme by area

Programme characteristics	Gozo	Herefordshire	County Clare
Length	Club Hilti Twice a week for 2 hours x 1 term (approx 40 hours)	FLLN Once a week x 3 hours total of 30 or 60 hours over 1 or 2 terms	Basic Family Literacy Once a week for 2 hours x 12 weeks
Times	After school 2:30-4:30pm	During the school day	Anytime
Venues	Delivery in primary schools	Delivery in primary schools	Anywhere appropriate
Format	Parent and child separate and joint sessions	Parent and child separate and joint sessions	Parent only – no joint taught sessions
Targeted or not	Open to all (60% remit for those in need)	Targeted at deprived areas but room for discretion	Targeted at disadvantaged adults, particularly lone parents, unemployed and the Traveller community
Children's age	6-9 year olds	4-6 year olds	No children
Comments	Delivered in Maltese and English alternate terms		
Length	Id f'id Short programme once a week for 2 hours for 5 weeks (10 hours)	KUWTC Short programme once a week for 2 hours for 5 weeks (10 hours)	Supporting children's maths 2 hours per week for 6-8 weeks
Format	Adults only	Adult only	Adult only
Focus	Usually maths focused. Seen as a progression from Club Hilti	Usually Maths or English focused	For parents with children aged 5-11 years old
Targeted or not	Not targeted	Not targeted	Targeted
Length	Homework 1 ½ hours per week	Story sacks 10 hours under the 'play and language' banner	Story Sacks 2 hours per week for 5 weeks
Children's age	9-10 year olds	Under 4 years old	Parents with children 0-10
Format	Joint and separate sessions. Not compulsory for parents to attend	Mothers and children under 4 years old	Formally no children attend
Length	Nwar Once a week for 1 hour for as long as necessary	Fun 2 Talk 2 hours for 6 weeks (12 hours)	Themed programmes 2 hour one-off sessions
Children's age	Aged 8-13	Under 4 years old	Parents of 5-12 year olds
Format	1-2 pupil/ tutor ratio Compulsory for parents and child to attend	Parent and child	Parents only
Comment	Remedial / last resort	To develop play and language skills	Short taster sessions

However, during the field visit, one session visited in County Clare did involve children. This took place with a group of mothers seeking asylum, one of the VEC target groups. All the mothers had children under the age of five; too young for school but old enough to begin the learning process. In this case, the children attended the session along with their mothers and joint learning took place, mainly through play, singing and craft making. The session provided mothers with ideas of activities to do with the children outside of the session and the children with an opportunity to begin recognition and oration of English. Many of the mothers brought babies, as well as toddlers, to the session, as no crèche facilities were provided and there were no fathers available for childcare. This programme provided the women with a chance to build relationships, exchange ideas and share experiences with each other, as well as with representatives of their adoptive country. The programme was not simply an opportunity for learning: it, or more specifically the tutor, was a conduit through which the local *habitus* could be accessed and understood.

In County Clare, as previously discussed, programmes were referred to by providers as family learning rather than family literacy. Yet nationally they were recognised to be and referred to in policy documents as family literacy programmes: as the title and content of the NALA report, *Working Together: Approaches to Family literacy* (2004) demonstrates. There seemed to be little, if any, difference between family literacy in Herefordshire and Gozo and family learning in County Clare, particularly in terms of content of delivery and the underlying policy aim of up-skilling adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy, to enable greater participation in the workplace. The focus was literacies as a political construct rather than as a social

practice. By raising awareness of parents' skill gaps and reintroducing them to the *field* of education, policy makers would, ideally, like such adults to recognise that improving their literacy and numeracy skills would allow them to compete in the current employment market. This, in turn, would enable parents to achieve a better standard of living. Literacies for pleasure, leisure or enjoyment were not promoted; instead, functional literacy competencies were preferred. Increasingly, government is telling educationalists and employers alike, that the workforce, young people and adults, must have the appropriate level of basic skills, including literacy, numeracy and ICT to allow them to fully participate in society (DfES, 2006e). The danger, implicit in such policy rhetoric for those who fail to up-skill, is that they will be left behind, slipping further and further into poverty, resulting in a continual spiral of disadvantage and exclusion. It would appear to be a matter of preferred wording or terminology, from the policy and funding perspective as to which term, family literacy or learning, is employed. According to the County Clare coordinator, family literacy is when the policy objective begins from the point that it is aimed at adults, '...and then it will then go on to the children.' Whereas family learning, '...is when you start off saying that if you want to support the children's learning...and then that will have a knock-on effect on your own learning' (C56). However, the underlying desired outcome from programmes is essentially the same.

As we have seen from the discussion on funding streams and objectives, programmes are placed in particular areas because of their close links to the social inclusion agenda. Particularly important is the improvement of employment opportunities through increasing human capital, which can then be reinvested locally or converted into economic capital. However, in Herefordshire tutors were willing to open courses

to higher-level learners to ensure a viable number of attendees, and to secure funding. This resulted in mixed ability adult sessions, which some tutors reported difficult to deliver due to the diversity of learner levels within one group. As one tutor commented, ‘...you’ve got parents in here with degrees. So you know it is making it pitched...’ (H52). This situation did not occur in County Clare where, as mentioned earlier, and shown in Table 12, all learners were specifically targeted following the implementation of the national adult literacy strategy. No such targeting was said to be occurring in Gozo. Whilst targeting had occurred in the past, family literacy programmes were no longer seen as ‘remedial’, working on a deficit model, but as a ‘primary intervention tool’, open to all (G16). However, according to interviews with educationalists, there was still a 60% remit to fill Club Hilti programmes with those identified as ‘in need’. In contrast, County Clare’s programmes were purely remedial. Herefordshire offered a mix, mainly to achieve numbers. In general, attendance and retention at Club Hilti was reported to be higher since Gozo reduced the requirement for fully targeted learner recruitment. In County Clare, the highest level of attendance was felt to occur when delivering to existing groups. One tutor commented ‘...sometimes we go into groups that are already in existence. They are wonderful, because they are there the whole time...’ (C55).

A structured, top-down approach to delivering family literacy programmes is evident in the formats described above. The power of the state currently determines who should learn, what they should learn and to what level learners should be skilled. Of course, this is not unique to family literacy programmes. Arguably, this format is followed for many, if not all educational initiatives, whether they are aimed at adults or children. In essence, the State decides what is good for potential (target) learners,

which is usually accepted by learners with little or no consultation prior to enrolment. It is only once learners are recruited that consultation on course content is entered into, and only within the confines of desired programme outcomes that are aimed at satisfying the funding bodies; again not an uncommon practice. However, within each individual programme there was the opportunity for learners to develop contextualised literacies for social practices that were directly relevant to their lives and that of their families.

As discussed and illustrated in Table 12, all sessions visited in Gozo and Herefordshire took place in schools, usually primary and predominantly Catholic. This was not surprising in Gozo where, as a Catholic country, the vast majority of schools were run by the Catholic community. However, it was not expected to be the case in Herefordshire. Here, two of the four programmes visited (50%), out of a total of six programmes scheduled to run the week of the fieldwork, were also delivered in Catholic schools. This was an unexpectedly high percentage. According to the DfES (2006f), at the time of the study only 9.7% of primary schools in England were Catholic. In Herefordshire that figure was below the national average, merely 3.6%, or just three primary schools out of 84. The high proportion of Catholic schools involved in delivering family literacy programmes in Herefordshire may have been purely coincidental, relating to the programmes running at the time of the fieldwork. However, it may indicate that the Catholic Church feels a responsibility or obligation to participate in opportunities that have the potential to improve the lives of families who are socially excluded or on the margins of society. In County Clare, no primary school delivery was observed. However, there was evidence that provision took place in schools, for example in *Ciii*. All sessions in Gozo and Herefordshire took place in

classrooms or school halls used for normal school activities; no separate, discrete or dedicated rooms were provided.

Delivering programmes in primary schools caused concern for some learners. Learners at the KUWTC programme in Herefordshire complained at having to sit on children's chairs for the duration of the sessions. In Gozo, this issue was considered prior to delivery taking place and adult chairs were made available or purchased. Whilst only one group commented on the children's chairs in Herefordshire, classroom observation confirmed that the practice of adults sitting on children's chairs was commonplace. Frequently, learners were obliged to spend two or three hours at a time on chairs designed for five to eight year olds. The utilising of primary schools as a space for adult learning could be viewed as advantageous in that parents were already familiar with their surroundings, in as much as they visited the school premises, even if it was only as far as the playground, on a daily basis. However, it carried with it at least two disadvantages. Firstly, as we have seen, the learning environment was directed fully towards young children, hence the small chairs, which may not always have been comfortable or conducive toward adult learning; a consequence of combining two traditionally separate *fields* of learning into the same space. The second disadvantage was the possible negative feelings some adults associated with schools, following a less than positive learning experience when they were younger. Thus making formal learning spaces appear unfamiliar and beyond the adults' normal *habitus*.

In County Clare, provision was reportedly delivered at a variety of venues including: community centres, libraries, shopping centres, schools in the evenings and,

according to the tutors, 'everywhere'. In reality, sessions in County Clare were observed at community, family, day-care and reception centres. In Gozo and Herefordshire, venues were part of the formal state educational system. This approach was often used to bring parents into schools, especially parents who have not had the best of experiences in school. This represented a crossing, or merging, of traditionally discrete social *fields* to allow policy makers to meet their underlying programme aims of raising the standards of literacy and numeracy in both adults and children, particularly from deprived social backgrounds. In relation to family literacy programmes, schools in Gozo and Herefordshire were seen as having two main roles; the first was to liaise between parents and children and the second was to identify potential learners.

If) Identifying potential learners

In Gozo and Herefordshire potential participants of family literacy programmes were usually identified by the school, normally the class teacher. This was also the case in *Ciii*, County Clare, the only example that was found of a school working with an adult education organisation and where the home-school link worker approached potential adult learners. In Gozo, whilst full targeting no longer exists, there was still a remit to select a percentage of children deemed to be in need of additional support. Frequently, the children's teacher identified which children were in need of additional support and they approached the parents of the child regarding enrolment onto programmes. Similarly, in Herefordshire the class teacher recommended children for the programme who they believed would benefit from attending, academically or socially (H17). Identification of such children was sometimes reportedly achieved by the reputation of the child's family. Often the family was

known to the school as traditionally underachieving in the *field* of education or the family *habitus* did not value the benefits that education had to offer. Often the family were reported as seeing education as irrelevant, especially in relation to the type of employment opportunities available in rural areas. When asked how the children were identified for the programme, one Herefordshire teacher commented, ‘we just know them...some of them are families that we have already had and others you just have to use your common sense.’ (H51). This gives weight to the theory of a generational cycle of deprivation, highlighting the reproduction of a low-status pedagogic ethos within the *habitus* of specific families and the importance of local knowledge. Repeated generational trends of low levels of literacy and numeracy skills were evident to schools and it was the children of parents who had attended in the past, but had not achieved academically, that were often identified to attend programmes.

Interviews with learners and ex-learners in Herefordshire confirmed it was the children’s teachers at school who had approached the parents. Several of those interviewed were approached directly by their child’s teacher to see if they would be interested in attending. Identifying children and parents in this way enabled the school, which forms part of the formal *field* of education, to ensure the reproduction of central social norms through the children.

Since school involvement in family literacy programmes in County Clare was minimal and child participation, in the format of the other case study areas, was rare (reasons for this are discussed in full in chapter 5), other methods of identifying potential learners that did not include the schools, were employed. Potential learners

in County Clare were specifically targeted using the knowledge base of specialist already working in the local community. These included community link workers, particularly in the case of the Traveller community; social workers; or public health nurses. These professionals would, according to one tutor, ‘...have done a lot of groundwork for us in certain areas...encouraging people they would know’ (C55). When programmes were introduced into new areas where such professionals were not known, or not available, potential learners were identified by general advertising in the area. However, the success of recruiting by this method was said to be very poor.

In the case of the *Id f’id* programme, parent leaders who had often already completed a Club Hilti programme were identified, not necessarily because of their academic abilities, but rather because of their perceived levels of social capital within the local community. These parents were chosen so that they would be able to encourage others in the community to participate, by utilising their social networks. By demonstrating to others the value of attending, they were actively contributing towards a change in *habitus* within the local *field*, highlighting the value of educational *fields* from a previously unexplored perspective. In some instances, programmes in County Clare were delivered to existing groups as part of a larger, on-going programme. For example, the story sack programme in *Cv* was delivered to lone parents on the full-time VTOS aimed at gaining FETAC awards. This verified institutionalised state cultural capital, which should have enhanced participants’ chances of finding future employment.

In essence, from a policy and funding perspective, despite the apparent all-inclusive openness of some of the case study areas, in reality all programmes were targeted at potential learners in deprived areas and at adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy. In general, the two can often be found together. In practice, compromises had to be made so that programmes obtained a sufficient number of learners to allow them to run and be economically viable. This was particularly true in Herefordshire where programmes were frequently open to non-target parents. This ensured sufficient enrolments to satisfy funding requirements, or, as one tutor put it, to play the 'numbers game' (H52). In addition, targeting parents was not felt to be a successful way of recruiting learners. As one teacher commented, '...it never works out, invariably the ones who want to come don't necessarily need to' (H51) and those who you want to attend do not want to. There could be a number of reasons for this, as one teacher pointed out, 'they may be anti-education or just not interested, also a lot of parents are working or just have little ones...they just can't commit to every week' (H32).

As discussed previously, it is recognised that those with the greatest need of improving their literacy skills are frequently those who have had less than positive experiences of the education system. Furthermore, in adulthood, they tend towards busy lives, making regular attendance at formal learning programmes difficult. In America the work of Porter, Comings and others, since 1999 at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), has closely examined the reasons behind adult learner persistence for those on low level courses. The NCSALL noted, that whilst adult learners, unlike children, choose to participate in programmes, a variety of positive and negative forces are at play. The NCSALL

believes that identifying these forces, strengthening the positive and reducing the negative, aids achievement and persistence (Comings, et al., 1999). Support for developing self-efficacy and the setting and achieving of goals, was found to be a key factor in success. Since it is often difficult for the target adult learners to commit to programmes, tutors reported parents who did attend had a wide range of ability levels from poor literacy and numeracy skills to those with degrees. For this reason, one school in particular in Herefordshire had tried to be more selective. They had discouraged parents who already had a GCSE from attending by informing them that the course was unsuitable (H51). This method of selecting potential learners can be seen as a top down approach, predominantly by women to women. Few self or outside organisational referrals were found to take place at any of the sites. Instead, potential learners were more likely to attend through recommendation of their peers. Current learners recommending the programme to others in the community by word of mouth, was found to be a common recruitment strategy. Those attending programmes were, by extending their *field* of activity and changing their *habitus*, even slightly, slowly influencing others in their community by personally recommending the programmes as valuable and enjoyable. However, once recruited, it was important to obtain the correct programme content if learners were to be retained and successful.

1g) Programme content: learning through fun and play

In the three main programmes across the sites, Club Hilti, FLLN and basic family literacy, the programme content was found to be remarkably similar. Sessions were lively and active, with the emphasis placed on learning as fun. The majority of sessions consisted of hands-on 'doing' type activities such as crafts, cooking,

sticking, drawing, and making games that had a literacy or numeracy component, directly or indirectly. In Herefordshire and Gozo, programme content appeared to be non-gender specific, catering for both boys and girls. Local relevance and learner interest were the main drivers. Tutors were keen to utilise the facilities in the community. For example, in Herefordshire, learners, both parents and children, were often taken to join the library or to the shops. The first aided literacy development and increased literacy use, especially reading for pleasure, whilst the second helped develop numeracy skills. By encouraging learners to become familiar with the literacies available within their own environment, learners were able to see the relevance of what they were learning and how it could be applied to everyday situations. One tutor in Herefordshire commented that delivering in a non-rural school made these types of activities easier than when in a fully rural school stating, ‘...there is more flexibility with little trips out’ (H33). Although sessions did not always take place in the classroom, none of the sessions visited were off-site. In Gozo, local information and events were also incorporated into the sessions. For example, at the time of the Gozo visit Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II was visiting the islands to open the Heads of Commonwealth meeting. As a result, at one of the sessions visited, parents were shown how to transfer a picture from a book to a piece of card. Parents would then use this technique to make the front page of a book with the children at home. The picture of a queen was used for illustrative purposes.

Tutors in Gozo constantly consulted with the children’s class teacher, to ensure that the course content fitted with the National Minimum Curriculum, where necessary. This was particularly important for those involved in the Homework Club. In Herefordshire, loosely relating the course content to the Foundation stage of the

children's curriculum and class activities, such as phonics or rhymes, whilst meeting individual needs, was important. Learner led, flexible course content, was seen as essential in County Clare with tutors reporting that without this learners '... would walk and not come back again' (C55). However, tutors here did loosely follow a course booklet, which had been developed by Clare VEC. Table 13 shows the type of activities observed at each site during the field visits for all programmes and compares them to those reportedly undertaken during the course as described by the learners and tutors.

Table 13 – Activities for the main family literacy programmes

	Gozo	Herefordshire	County Clare
Reported By Tutors	How to read Abacus Role play Crosswords Word-search games	Letter sounds Flash cards Phonics Capital letters Story Sacks Making books Puppets Nursery rhymes Shopping Cooking Curriculum linked	Books Speech bubbles Crafts, puppets - measuring Rhymes
Reported By Learners	Digit recognition Maths at home How to read a book with kids Building sentences Cooking Crafts – cut Drawing Stories Games Word matching	Brush up our English Phonics ICT Go shopping Glueing & sticking Puzzles Making games – books Stories sacks Play games Puppets	Maths for the kids – like school Puppet making Stone paining Play-dough Painting Drawing Crafty Hands-on Fun – dancing Singing
Observed	Cooking Transferring pictures to make book covers Making masks – animals Worksheets describing animals and masks Instructions to follow for making or cooking on boards or worksheets Games Stories Playing football Travel guessing game	Capital letter work Writing exercise Explanation of maths methods used in school Exchanging loaned books Making Christmas cards Christmas tree decorations Making books Shopping game Nursery rhymes Sounds Planning of next session	Encouraging discussion / communication with child Cutting pictures to make a jigsaw Making St Patrick day cards Role playing Speech bubble Meals book for budgeting Folding a shirt Nursery rhymes Crafts Story sacks – painting Stone painting

As Table 13 shows, there was a discrepancy between what the tutors and learners felt occurred during sessions. Tutors reported a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy based activities than was perceived by the learners. Very little structured mechanical literacy or numeracy learning was reported to be taking place by the learners, in a traditional, formal manner that they recognised. It was mainly

contextualised or embedded within the activities that were undertaken, hidden from the view of the learners. As one tutor in County Clare commented, 'its quite discreet, people wouldn't know that they are coming to a literacy class' (H55). The method of embedding literacy and numeracy into adult programmes in a contextualised relevant way, be they SfL or vocational programmes, has become an increasingly popular mode of delivery in England over the past ten years, since the implementation of the SfL agenda, (see the work of the NRDC, especially Casey, et al., 2006). However, first discussed in the work of Dewey in 1897, embedded learning is not a new concept. The exception to this hidden, embedded learning was the Id f'Id and KUWTC sessions, which were overtly and specifically to help parents with their children's mathematics or literacy homework. Table 13 also shows that, across the three areas, despite the varied cultural context and the age of the learners, content was similar. For example, in all three case study areas learners were observed making some form of crafts. In Gozo they made masks. In Herefordshire, they made Christmas decorations and in County Clare they made St Patrick's Day cards. There was a strong link exhibited in all sessions between play, crafts, rhyme and learning literacy and numeracy skills. According to the interview data, this was to ensure learning took place whilst at the same time making learning fun. One tutor in Gozo described the content of sessions and the reason for combining fun and learning in this way:

Cooking and crafts, all in an educational manner. We are cooking we did crafts today, so the instructions were on the board so they have to read, they have to read, and its also interesting activities to help them to read. (G19)

Similarly, one of the tutors in County Clare commented on integrating craft activities into numeracy learning:

...you could actually say we used a bit of numeracy in designing the puppets, that they had to cut out, and measure and place the eyes and the nose and they had to put the things together. We would try to do it quite discreetly.

(C55)

When asked what she felt worked best, one of the tutors in Herefordshire stated, 'I think the children and parents like diversity, stories, colour and crafts' (H33). Frequently, learners had something tangible to take home at the end of a session, e.g. a puppet, a book, a Christmas card; building cultural capital that was tangible or in the objectified state. However, the literacy or numeracy content of a session, particularly in the early stages, was often hidden from the view of the adult learner. No-one promoted the main programmes directly as a means of adults improving their literacy and numeracy skills. They all introduced it, at least initially, as a means of "helping your child". As one tutor in Herefordshire remarked:

...part of the marketing of family literacy is that I don't think you should say, "come on this course to improve your own skills because you are crap at them", obviously we sell it as working with the children. It's a positive message, a much more positive message. And I think it is actually very threatening to say, "would you like to come on a literacy course, you are obviously so stupid that you need the help"...however you parcel it up...

(H33)

Despite disguising or playing down the literacy and numeracy content of programmes or the intention that potential participants should address their own skill gaps, all areas were finding it difficult to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of parents on courses. This was particularly true for those parents who they would most like to attend. However, for those who did attend, the message that programmes would help parents help their children achieve at school was one that worked well. It assisted retention rates and formed the main motivation for learners to attend

(discussed in full in section one of chapter 5). Further, there were clear linkages for the children in Gozo and Herefordshire between the content of the sessions and their learning in school. By linking family literacy content to the school curriculum and current methods of pedagogy, there was a greater probability of increasing a child's chances of academic success, thus improving their cultural capital in terms of the institutional state. This was also evident in the content of programmes in County Clare, even though schools did not generally have any input. However, the VEC tutors continuously attempted to link the *field* of adult education, specifically literacy and numeracy, to the learning stages that would be comparable to the *field* of primary school education relevant to the age of the adult learners' children.

It is important to understand how a session is constructed in relation to its content. The following examples give a flavour of sessions visited. Each is typical of the main programme delivered, with one example being drawn from each of the case study areas.

Example session 1 - Club Hilti (Giii)

This joint parent-child session took place at a primary school in a classroom. It officially started at 2:30pm however, the majority of parents arrived between 2:45 – 3pm. There were seven mothers and seven children, aged six and seven years, at the session. There were nine on the register, but on this particular day two were not present, reported by other learners to be ill.

The participants were divided into two groups, the children in one room and the adults in another. The adult tutor explained what the children were doing in the other room: making headbands using the theme of Space. The tutor used a lot of hand gestures and visuals to demonstrate the stories, games and headbands that the children were making. He explained that the adults would be asked to tell a simple story or play a game concerning space with the children when they came together. The tutor urged them to encourage them to speak and read English with their children. During the adult-only part of the session, mothers were also shown how to take a drawing from a large book and trace it onto sugar paper to transfer onto card to make a small book of their own at home. This was part of an on-going project, which they were undertaking with the children at home, similar to making story sacks. The mothers had to help the children give the 'book' a title, a cover and a story. In this particular case, the drawing was of a queen, to fit with the royal visit that was occurring in Malta and Gozo that week.

The children then joined the adults. In the joint session, everyone made meteorite balls, similar to coconut snowballs, using an English recipe. Mothers were asked not to give the instructions of how to make them in Maltese. They were encouraged to find another way of explaining the method if the child did not understand what to do, for example by using hand gestures. The tutor recommended that either the mothers read the recipe to the child, getting them to do the cooking, or the children read it for themselves.

Comment:

This session was lively, active and, in some ways, quite informal. The adult learners were comfortable asking questions of the tutor or looking for points of clarification. The session was predominantly focused on improving the English levels of the children and increasing the confidence of the mothers to enable them to work with their children. The mothers were made to feel that they were capable of helping their

children achieve the tasks set. They were also provided with skills and strategies, which they could transfer to the home. The activities during the session encouraged parent-child bonding and understanding. The cooking task was particularly challenging for six year olds to accomplish in a second language. However, everyone seemed to enjoy the session.

Example session 2 – FLLN (Hi)

This joint parent-child session took place at a primary school on the edge of Hereford city in a spare classroom next to the nursery. All the furniture was therefore child-size. The session ran from 9am -12 noon. The programme lasted for 24 weeks, or two school terms. Learners were in the middle of the course. The session was the last one before the Christmas break as the tutor had field trip commitments at the College, which took priority. There were six mothers at the session. Originally, there were ten registered, but a number had withdrawn, as they were unable to commit for the duration of the programme.

The mothers spent the first half of the morning, once they had all arrived, making tea or coffee, having a biscuit and a chat and preparing the session for the children. As it was nearly Christmas, this involved making stencils, cutting out paper and arranging craft items so that they would be able to make items with the children such as Christmas or thank you cards or tree decorations. At the same time, they worked on capital letters and exchanged books, which they had taken home the previous week. A very informal, softly, softly approach was taken to literacy learning. The tutor was trying to encourage them to use the library more. The parents were very quiet during the session, stating that it was because they were enjoying themselves and concentrating on the activities.

The children, and their schoolteacher, joined the session at 11am until just before 12 noon. When they arrived three of the parents introduced the session to the children. It was the first time they had done this. The tutor hoped that they would take on more of this role in future weeks, with the tutor taking a back seat. The mothers sat on adult sized computer chairs whilst the children sat on the floor. For the remainder of the session the mothers and the children completed their chosen Christmas activity. Before the children left to go back to their classrooms, they sang 'We wish you a merry Christmas' to the mothers and showed everyone their finished craft.

Comment:

It seemed strange that the mothers who introduced the children to the activities chose to do so by sitting on adult chairs, whilst the children sat on the floor, particularly as the adults sat on the children's chairs for the rest of the session. This seemed to convey insecurity amongst the mothers concerning their confidence in putting themselves in front of the children. It also highlighted power hierarchies between

adults and children. Overall, the session was noisy, with an emphasis on fun and craft making. However, there was clear evidence of literacy learning embedded within the activities. Finally, the children appeared to enjoy working with their mothers and vice versa. The children were proud to show everyone their finished craft. The children and the mothers clearly found the environment one in which they felt safe to express themselves and in which they could improve their mother-child relationships.

Example session 3 – Family literacy – Traveller women’s group (Cii)

This session took place at a community centre on the edge of the county’s main town. The estate on which it was located had a high proportion of Traveller families. However, most were permanently resident, with few reported to go travelling. Officially, the session started at 10am finishing at 12 noon. Some of the learners arrived late, throughout the morning, and others left early. In total, the nine women who attended the session were aged between 20 and 31 years. They were younger than in most other sessions visited across the sites. They had, on average, two or three children each, all under the age of six. Many of the women knew each other and several were related. No children were present at the session.

The session began very low-key, with participants engaging in social chat, making tea and eating cake and biscuits. This was followed by recapping the work of the previous week. This had included: looking at how adults and children learn; how mothers could help their children to learn; recognition that parents are the most important teachers from birth; and the encouragement of greater communication and discussion with their child. The tutor then explored the merits of using open and closed questions with the children to stimulate discussion and information exchange. The tutor was keen to reaffirm that what the mothers were doing with their children at home was right. New concepts were then introduced e.g. demonstrating how long it takes to extract answers from children and how mothers need to listen to a child. This was achieved by first playing a guessing game with items in a cloth bag. Mothers then followed instructions on how to fold a shirt. They also learnt a nursery rhyme. Mothers were then asked to share how they had helped one of their children to learn over the past week. Finally, they went over the nine rules for the session that had been agreed the first week. These included switching mobiles off, trying to arrive on time, confidentiality and not all talking at once.

At 11am, there was a 15-minute tea and cigarette break before they embarked on the final 45 minutes, which consisted of craft making. On this occasion, it was making St Patrick’s Day cards. The aim was to take the principle of making the card home, so that they could do it with their children. Before the session closed, the tutor discussed progression routes for further courses with the mothers. Some mothers expressed an interest in learning IT, one mum justified IT for the funding by stating, ‘...if we learn how to do computers, we can help the children as well.’ One or two of the mothers did not rush off when the session finished, but stayed to clear up and talk; obviously enjoying the opportunity for social contact outside their normal habitus.

Comment:

This session consisted of only the adult learners, all of whom were mothers. In many ways, the session is very similar to the other two examples. However, this session was far more chaotic than the others visited. There was a constant flow of learners in and out of the room, arriving late, leaving early and having smoking breaks. They clearly found it difficult to work within a set structure: this concept was noticeably outside their experience. The session had a very flexible framework. Mothers exhibited a greater level of general chat between themselves during the session. The session concentrated on building the confidence of the mothers' so that they would be able to improve their relationship with their children, particularly through improved communication skills. Literacy and numeracy was little in evidence, being fully embedded into the activities of the session. Finally, the women were given plenty of opportunity to express themselves and their concerns. The session was fully interactive, non-hierarchical and flexible to suit their needs, both in terms of the learning and life-styles, of these particular learners.

This section of the findings highlighted discrepancies between the general policy aims for family literacy programmes and actual content and delivery. Whilst improving literacy and numeracy skills, be it of the adult, the child or both, underpinned the ethos for provision, the tutors, in most instances, were actively trying to disguise the literacy and numeracy content. This was achieved by embedding, incorporating or disguising it into activity-based learning. In each case, conscious decisions in the policy *field*, nationally, have been made to ensure all citizens have a predefined acceptable level of literacy and numeracy skills. This level has been set hierarchically by those in the dominant *field* of power, to allow everyone

the opportunity to function effectively in the global economic climate of the present and foreseeable future. However, those perceived as ‘in need’ have not been consulted on this policy. Rather, it has been imposed upon them from a dominant *field*, which assumes that a change in *habitus*, for such individuals or communities, would be both beneficial and welcomed. Having explored the fundamentals of family literacy programmes in the case study areas, the following section turns its attention to the learners, examining who attends family literacy programmes and why.

2 - Who are the learners?

The majority of parent learners who attended all programmes during the field visits were women, with 94% of learner interviews - 45 out of 48 - conducted with mothers. All of the women except one, a grandparent in County Clare, were mothers with young dependant children. The three male learners consisted of two fathers in Herefordshire and one brother in Gozo. There were no men present at any of the family literacy programmes visited in County Clare. Overall, there was therefore, a distinct lack of fathers attending programmes. This was in line with previous research findings for participation levels of fathers on similar programmes, as discussed earlier in chapter 2 (Brookes, et al., 1996; Goldman, 2005; Ofsted, 2000). Participation by extended family members was also found to be uncommon. Data provided by coordinators and interviews conducted with tutors and ex-learners, confirmed this trend towards family literacy programmes being largely dominated by mothers, with all 17 ex-learners interviewed also being mothers. Essentially, learners participating in family literacy programmes at the time of the study equated to ‘mothers’, rendering family literacy programmes predominantly a mother-specific *field* of adult education. However, more men were found in Gozo than at the other

two sites consisting of one male participant, one male coordinator and three male tutors. In Herefordshire, men were only in evidence at the KUWTC session; with both of the men interviewed attending this particular programme. No men were involved in the delivery or organisation of FLLN, with all those involved in programmes at the primary schools also being women. In County Clare, no men were found at any level or in any capacity at the time of the study. With the predominance of females in all aspects of family literacy programmes, the *field* goes beyond being mother-specific. It can be described as principally, a feminine environment (Goldman, 2005).

Table 14 provides a detailed breakdown of learner profiles participating in the interviews, including their age, marital status and sex. The table shows that all participants interviewed lived locally, with 32 of the current participants (67%) born in the immediate vicinity. A further five had lived in the area for the majority of their lives. Only four had been in the area less than two years, with three of these being women asylum seekers. The evidence shows that provision was being delivered in communities that were largely stable and had developed their own set of *habitus* over several generations within a particular social *field*. The Travellers were reported by tutors (C61 and C64) to be frequently viewed by the local community as a separate ethnic group outside of the community, with their own set of *habitus*. Despite the lack of mobility of those attending programmes, participants did not necessarily know each other prior to enrolment. Programmes gave mothers the opportunity to interact with other mothers from different parts of the same community, extending their boundaries and, by implication, broadening their experiences. Mothers were

exposed to new ways of thinking and to new values, particularly where education was concerned.

Table 14 shows that, there were 98 children between all the learners who participated in the study. The most common number of children was two per adult learner, most frequently seen in Herefordshire, with 10 out of 16 participants having two children. The Table also shows that participants in County Clare were most likely to have only one child, (six) which can be largely accounted for by the high number of young mothers in the County Clare sample, compared to the other two sites.

Table 14 (below) shows that learners attending programmes in County Clare were, on average, younger than those attending in Herefordshire and Gozo. In each case, only one learner was found to be under the age of 25, with the majority of learners in their late 20's to early 30's. One father was in his 50's and one mother was in her late 40's. In County Clare, 6 of the 16 learners interviewed, nearly one third were under 25 years of age. This was due to the majority of the Irish participants coming from two particularly disadvantaged social groups, lone parents and the Traveller community. The latter group are known for having more than the average number of children, often five or six, at a younger than average age (Clark and Greenfields, 2006: 43).

Table 14 – Profile of learners interviewed

Vital statistics	Gozo	Herefordshire	County Clare	Totals
Gender				
Female	15	14	16	45
Male	1	2	0	3
Ages				
< 25	1	1	6	8
26-35	6	8	9	23
46-45	6	5	1	12
46-55	3	2	0	5
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=48)
Marital status				
Married	16	9	6	31
Separated	0	1	0	1
Partners	0	1	2	3
Divorced	0	3	0	3
Single	0	1	5	6
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N= 13; md = 3)	(N=44; md = 4)
Local	16	16	16	16
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=48)
Time living in the area				
Born in area	15	8	9	32
> 15 years	1	3	2	6
5 – 15 years	0	4	1	5
< 5 years	0	1	4*	5
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=48)
Age left school				
< 16	1	0	4	5
16-18	14	16	8	38
> 18	0	0	1	1
Still at school	1**	0	0	0
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=13; md = 4)	(N=44; md = 4)
Total number of children per learner				
1	2	1	6	9
2	5	10	4	19
3	1	3	5	9
4	2	1	0	3
5+	0	1	1	2
	(md = 6)			
Age range of all children	All at 1 to 26 yrs, with 7 at 4 to 6 yrs	All at 1-15 years old, with 17 at 4 to 6 yrs	2 months to 13 yrs, with 18 at 1 to 3, and 6 at < 1	Ranges from < 1 to 26 yrs
Sex of all children				
Girls	9	16	13	38
Boys	10	24	22	56
	(md = 4)			(md = 4)
Working***				
Yes	5	10	0	15
No	10	6	16	32
Student	1	0	0	1
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=48)
Taken past courses				
Yes	5	12	7	24
No	11	4	9	24
	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=48)

Key: *All learners were asylum seekers. ** This learner was the brother of one of the children standing in for his mother on the day of the interviews. He was 18 years old and still a student. *** Includes full or part-time work, md = missing data.

The majority of learners interviewed left school between 16 and 18 years of age. Participants from County Clare, in this case all mothers, were found to be most likely to have left school early, with four (25%), of those interviewed having left before the age of 16, all of whom came from the Traveller community. The tendency for Traveller children, both boys and girls, to leave school at an early age, with many failing to attend secondary school at all, is well documented (Ofsted, 2003; Commissions for Racial Equality 2006). Viewed alongside the data that this group was also the younger mothers with the highest number of children, it raises questions over the ingrained low-value their *habitus*, through community and family, places on education and the status of women. Their attendance at programmes, such as family literacy, highlights how these mothers were making conscious decisions to develop that *habitus*. Attending programmes extended their social *field* through new experiences, both educational and social. It created a new *field* of space, specifically for their own use. Overall, the ability range of the learners in County Clare was narrower than it was in Gozo and Herefordshire. This was because, in County Clare, provision was specifically targeted towards disadvantaged groups who, as already discussed at length, had a greater instance of low literacy and numeracy competencies (Frater, 1995; Bynner and Parsons, 1997; Barton, 1994). In Gozo and Herefordshire, the learner ability range was found to be much wider. In both cases, several mothers had taken courses at college or undertaken job-related training, for example, in accountancy, secretarial work or nursing.

Over two-thirds of those interviewed (69%) were not in paid employment, either full or part time, at the time of the study (See Table 14). There were several reasons for this. None of the mothers in County Clare worked. Some were not allowed to work,

due to their conditions of stay in the County, applicable to the asylum seeker women. Others did not work because the wider course on which they were enrolled, of which family literacy played only a small part in the case of the lone parents, did not allow them to work. Rather, it aimed to make the mothers employable after a set period, usually twelve months. At the other two places of delivery, the women were free to work if they so wished. However, many had made a conscious decision not to work but to take on the role of full-time mother. As one mother in County Clare commented:

...it's the way I want it to be. I want to be at home when my kids come in from school in the afternoon. I want to be there in the mornings to put them out to school. Fortunately, I am in a position where I don't have to work.
(C54)

At the Traveller women's session, less rational choice and a greater level of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), was in evidence. The tutor of the session commented that the women lived in a 'very patriarchal society' (C61). Within the Traveller community, symbolic violence masqueraded as free choice for women. The right to choose, including the option of whether to work outside the home or not, appeared to be conscious and rational (Bourdieu, 2001), when in fact it was an illusion. It was designed and perpetuated by the long-established *habitus* within the unique *field* of the Traveller community. Here, symbolic violence operated predominantly on a patriarchal model aimed at retaining cultural stability and hierarchies of power, in this case through masculine domination. Whilst none of those interviewed overtly stated the reason they did not work was because they were not allowed, or that it was not acceptable, it was implicit within the general conversations, which took place throughout the session and the general attitude the women displayed towards the men. For example, some were conscious of ensuring

that they returned home at the agreed time. It seemed unusual for them to be out of the home alone, without the children. Others discussed how the father was happy to sit with the children for a little while, as long as the mothers handed over the payment they received for attending the programme. Neither of these expectations was questioned or seen as unreasonable. Rather, they were accepted by the group as the norm, an unspoken agreed *habitus* of male-dominated power hierarchies within their particular community.

Table 14 also shows that more women were employed in Herefordshire than at the other two sites. The phenomenon of mothers working in Gozo, as already discussed in Section 1 of this chapter from the tutors' perspective, was confirmed by learners to have become increasingly common over the past ten years. This resulted from increased living costs, requiring many families to have a second income to survive financially. Where women were employed, or indeed where they had previously undertaken courses, at all sites, it was predominantly related to traditionally female sectors which were viewed as women's work e.g. nursing, childcare, catering, or in retail, including supermarkets and clothing shops. Such employment has conventionally been viewed as low status, extensions of women's work in the home requiring few skills, or at least skills that are not highly valued by society i.e. those associated with childcare. For example, several of the mothers described themselves as a cook, rather than a chef. The former is seen as a low status low-paid woman's role whereas the latter is viewed as a higher-status, well-paid male career (Bourdieu, 2001).

The fact that the mothers unquestioningly take on traditional female occupations and are quite content to do so, would be viewed, in Bourdieuan terms as ‘...below the level of conscious...’ (Bourdieu, 2001:95). It is another example of symbolic violence, which ensures the retention of the established social order, particularly the hierarchies of power. It guarantees reproduction, favouring masculine dominance and, by default, female subversion. By learners maintaining the gender division of labour, Bourdieu would disagree that the mothers are making conscious or practical choices of how family tasks are divided. Instead, Bourdieu would argue that it is using the mechanism of misrecognition, which are not an error or incidental but planned, formulated and predetermined, to ensure the reproduction of sexual identities. It confirms Bourdieu’s view that the traditional divisions between men and women still exist:

...men continue to dominate the public space and the field of power (especially economic power – over production), whereas women remain (predominantly) assigned to the private space (domestic space, the site of reproduction)...or to...the welfare services...and education....

(Bourdieu, 2001:94)

Feminists would also view this supposed free choice with suspicion, seeing it as a way in which men can regulate the behaviour, movement and dependence, of women to maintain positions of power and knowledge (Hayes and Flannery, 2000; Pritchard Hughes, 1995).

Finally, Table 14 shows that the majority of current participants - 31 out of 48 or 65% - were married. All those interviewed in Gozo were married, displaying the most traditional family structures. In Gozo, as in Malta, divorce remains illegal. The Catholic Church was reported by tutors to have a strong influence on the lives of

people and the policies of the State. This was illustrated earlier in the chapter, (section 1d) when discussing, not only women working, but also the conflict mothers face in choosing to send their children to family literacy programmes or religious instruction for their first Communion. Traditionally dominated by men, the Church is seen by Bourdieu as one of the main sites for the reproduction of social norms, in particular the, ‘...perpetuation of the order of genders’ (Bourdieu, 2001:85). This was clearly seen to be the case still in Maltese society. Despite a strong Catholic influence in Ireland, a greater variety of family forms was found in County Clare and Herefordshire, with a mixture of married, separated, divorced and single (lone) mothers. More traditional family structures were found amongst the Traveller women, with the majority of those interviewed already married – five out of seven - despite these mothers being the younger of the participants. A further characteristic of this group, is that marriage frequently takes place in their late teens, especially for the girls, and is regarded as being for life (Clark and Greenfields, 2006: 34).

To summarise, the evidence shows that the majority of learners enrolled on family literacy programmes, at the time of the study, were mothers who were not working or were working part-time in low-skilled, traditionally women-centred, employment. Often these jobs could be described as extensions of the work the mothers carried out at home. Further, the majority of mothers were married and all participants lived locally. The profile of learners shows that most came from stable communities with traditional gender roles and responsibilities within the family, even where a father figure was not present. The *field* of the majority of learners had shaped their *habitus* in traditional ways: ways in which many of the mothers did not appear to be interested in opposing. The narrowness of the employment undertaken and the

contentment of the majority of mothers to remain at their current level (an issue of progression discussed later), has implications for the policy aims of those funding family literacy programmes: particularly for those wishing to up-skill and improve potential learners' economic capital for reinvestment in the workplace.

Having concluded that, in this context, adult learners were predominantly mothers for whom the development of economic capital is of low priority, the following chapter will consider what motivated learners to attend, the role of the wider family and the perceived benefits and impact of family literacy programmes.

Chapter 5

Presentation and discussion of the research findings: benefits and motivation for attending

This chapter presents and discusses the remaining research findings. Whilst chapter 4 focused on policy aims and objectives, and learner demographics; chapter 5 centres on the experiences of learners. It concentrates on the subsidiary research questions of why learners attend programmes and the perceived impact and benefit of doing so. This chapter is divided into five sections. Section one considers learner motivation for attending programmes. Section two examines the role of the children. Section three provides an opportunity for the views of non-participating fathers to be presented, a facet of the subject area that is rarely discussed. Section four looks at the benefits and impact of family literacy programmes on the learners (adult and child), the wider family, the community and the economy. Finally, section five will summarise the key points raised by the research findings presented and discussed in both this and the previous chapter. As stated in chapter 4, the data will be presented and discussed in a comparative manner, drawing out the difference and similarities between the case study areas, to answer the research questions, specifically why learners attend and the impact of programmes on the literacy skills of the learner.

1 - Motivation: why do mothers attend family literacy programmes?

The overriding motivation of learners and ex-learners interviewed in this study to attend programmes, was to help their children achieve at school and to understand their child's learning, rather than to improve any deficiencies in their own skills or their own employment opportunities. Parents were concerned that they did not have

an understanding of the current pedagogical techniques employed by teachers to enable them to help their children meet the demands of the current school curriculum. This concern was strongest in Gozo and Herefordshire, where programmes were closely linked to the school curriculum. It was less overt in County Clare, but still formed a strong undertone for attending. All mothers wished to learn what their children were learning in the manner the children were being taught, so that they were in step with the teaching methods of the school. Mothers wanted to support the school, to ensure their children had the best possible chance of reaching their full potential. The mothers who participated in the focus group in Gozo, all agreed that they came because it was in their children's best interest to do so. Comments from learner interviews across the case study areas included:

I thought it important for my daughter and younger son and I thought if I learnt something it could help both my children. (G22)

Really, to get to know the basic needs like the writing, the writing skills and how I could help my son...at school. (H30)

Just to find out more about teaching in schools and how I can help. (H48)

You learn how they are dealing with mathematics in class. It is different to the way I learnt it and you learn how to be with your children when they are doing their homework...to help him with his homework and understand what he is learning. (G5)

For my son, I want him to learn. (C68)

It's nice to see and come and find out more about the children and the issues. (C60)

I mean I enjoy reading but he can't get it at all, that he's so behind now. (H47)

To learn how [son] is taught how to read...just how they learn to learn at school. (H49)

I'd hoped that by going back, I could learn more about how they teach the teaching methods so that I could support that at home. (H34)

Different theorists have different opinions of social capital. Putnam (2000) holds a very optimistic view of social capital, which is invariably positive, whilst Bourdieu (1997) points to the darker side of social capital and its ability to aid social control. However, for Coleman (1988), social capital is not only desirable, but it should be transferable from one generation to another. Coleman views the ability of parents to transfer human capital to their children through social capital, via the parent-child relationship, as a key factor in the educational growth of any child. The confidence and competence of the parent to share or disseminate their own knowledge in an understandable format to the children is a crucial part of this process. Parents in the study reported an inability to share their knowledge because children were not taught in the same way as they had been. Pedagogical methods have changed since they were at school (Wells and Claxton, 2002). It was irrelevant what type of programme they were attending; how or where that programme was delivered; or who was delivering it. Parent learners, mainly mothers, attended to gain a better understanding of their child's development at school and current pedagogical methods being employed, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. As one mother in Gozo explains:

...because I had my younger daughter and they had changed the system, and [it] was something strange for all of us, it was completely different. (G3)

Another commented:

The Abacus, it's new, I wish to be with my kids and help them with their homework, so I can understand at home. (G23)

Mothers in Herefordshire made similar statements concerning motivation for both FLLN and KUWTC programme:

Just to help with her learning, because things have changed so much as well. (H50)

Really, to update my skills so that you know what you're helping with is the methods they are using in school. (H40: 3F)

I came because I couldn't understand homework especially maths, so I was a bit concerned I couldn't help her... (H40: 1F)

It's just years since I was at school so I wanted to know how they were teaching children...they were bringing homework home and I had no idea where to start with it. (H40: 2F)

The need to understand the current pedagogic process used to teach their children was just as true for the parent learners in County Clare, as it was in Gozo and Herefordshire. This was despite it being rare for children in County Clare to be present in sessions (see section 4), or for programme content not to be necessarily directly influenced or related to the school curriculum. One learner commented that her main motivation for attending was to 'learn more about the children and get a break' (C59), from the home environment. Parents frequently described themselves as lacking in confidence to help their child at home. Principally, this was because of their lack of ability in the topic area and their lack of understanding of the current pedagogical mechanisms used within schools. Despite many parents in Gozo and Herefordshire being competent and educated to a nationally accepted standard, they were not able to help their children to fulfil their academic potential. This was

because the transfer of parental knowledge, in a way that was helpful and understandable to their child, was difficult if not, in some cases, impossible. In County Clare, the educational levels of mothers were noticeably lower than they were in Gozo and Herefordshire. This was mainly due to the fact that programmes in County Clare were specifically targeted at deprived groups. Attending programmes gave parents confidence, as well as tools of understanding with which to help their children learn. It also provided them with a new *field* of experience.

All parents interviewed were keen to give their children the best possible start in life, regardless of their own educational level. According to interviews conducted with tutors and coordinators, many parents had had negative school experiences. This was particularly so for those in the Traveller community in County Clare, who were reported to have suffered physical and psychological abuse at school. One interviewee commented:

...most of the parents, especially the Traveller parents, have had terrible experiences in school...they seem to say things like, “[when] the bus was late for school and we all got hit as we got off it,”...something like that was common... And the Travellers they just remember being shoved to the back of the class and given crayoning. (C56)

According to the coordinator and the tutors, the majority of mothers recognise that the situation had vastly improved over recent years. Many parents had begun to realise that their children needed to be better educated if they are going to participate fully, economically and socially, in society when they reach adulthood. As one tutor in County Clare commented of the Traveller mothers, ‘they want better opportunities for their kids...they want their children’s lives to be better than their own’ (C61). This realisation came particularly in the light of the growing number of migrant

workers that had entered the Country since 1999. Many were from Africa, but also from Eastern European countries, especially the newer EU member states, for example, Poland (Labour Relations Commission, 2005: 5). According to the Commission, the number of non-EEA (European Economic Area) work permits issued between 1999 and 2004 had increased more than five fold from 6,250 to 34,067. Since 2004, the number had decreased, due to the expansion of the EU that entitles many migrant workers to seek employment without a work permit. The migrant workers were reported to be working in low-paid low-skilled sectors, for example, in hotels and catering, on the industrial estates and at the airport. Effectively they were reducing already limited employment opportunities for those at the lower end of the job market. There appeared to be a general awareness amongst family literacy participants in County Clare across several groups of this encroachment by migrant workers. As one lone parent mother commented:

I'm not being racist or anything, but a lot of the Polish have taken a lot of the jobs and foreign people are getting a lot of the jobs around town, part-time, everything. (C70)

Migrant workers were reported to be willing to take positions that were traditionally the preserve of the Traveller communities, with one tutor commenting on the economic predicament the Travellers were finding themselves in:

They are a group under threat by foreign nationals. They are losing a lot of their privileges to vocal Nigerians and some are quite angry about that, giving them an interest in doing something about it... (C61)

That interest seemed to include ensuring their children were suitably equipped for the workplace in the future. One way to achieve this was through better education, via such initiatives as family literacy programmes. Interestingly, three of the four asylum women interviewed were from Nigeria. Whilst these women were not in a position to participate in the local economy at the time of the study, they were found to be keen to access family literacy programmes as a means of assimilating their children into Irish society and of engaging their children into learning at a young age, often pre-school.

Many mothers in Gozo felt that the demands of the current education system placed an unacceptable level of pressure on children and mothers. Mothers reported children were required to undertake and complete a great deal of homework daily, before they were allowed to progress in class. Some commented that the children had little time to play during the school term, because of the volume of compulsory homework. Comments on the intensity and amount of homework included:

...it's a lot of stress on a six-year-old kid. (G13)

I do intend to keep practising in the summer...right now with homework and all that and we don't have much time. (G15)

...we have to play with maths and even at home, we have to cook about weight, like coins you have to buy you have to play, just cooking and making you have to show them. (G3)

The demand for parents, usually mothers, to make connections between activities at home and literacy and numeracy learning at school, made mothers anxious that they were instructing their children in the correct way. Mothers were finding it stressful, ensuring homework was completed in line with the school's requirements. They

were anxious that their child should progress at the designated rate rather than fall behind. The obligation felt by the mothers to ensure their children succeeded was confirmed by one tutor in Gozo who stated, ‘...the school homework and the school stuff is on the mother’ (G19). The educational environment appeared to be extremely stressful for children so young, especially when they were expected to achieve in two languages, Maltese and English, as well as at mathematics. Parents, particularly mothers, who were powerless to influence the *field* of educational policy *per se*, saw it as their duty to their child(ren) to ensure they did not fail or fall behind. Even if the expectations of those in power were seen as unacceptably high, by attending family literacy programmes mothers validated the legitimacy of the state to impose such pressures and standards on their children through the educational *field*. This was even the case when they did not fully agree with such policies and when they felt that the volume of homework was too great for their child. Several mothers reported that homework policies were having a direct effect on family life, so much so, that they had made changes in their family practices to accommodate the homework. Some complained that attending the programme was time consuming as there remained general homework to be completed once they returned home with the child on the programme. In addition, some mothers had other children at home requiring help with their homework. As one mother in Gozo stated, ‘I have my boy, when I go home I still have to do his homework afterwards’ (G13).

Mothers gave three other main reasons for attending programmes. They were not necessarily the motivation for attending in the first instance, but reasons why they enjoyed attending or continued to attend: firstly, the opportunity for social interaction with other parents, particularly other mothers; secondly, to spend more time with their child and thirdly, because the child was shy or lacked confidence.

The first: social interaction with other mothers helped some to overcome feelings of isolation they were experiencing, which resulted from being at home with the children on a daily basis. Many of the women, across the case study areas, lived in traditionally structured family *fields* where gender roles were divided along traditional lines. This resulted in mothers predominantly operating within the private sphere of the home, perhaps extending into the local community. However, fathers were active in the wider public sphere outside the home, mainly in the world of work. This was particularly true in the case of the Irish Travellers, as we have already explored, who, tutors felt, lived in a highly patriarchal community. Some of the lone mothers interviewed in County Clare felt particularly isolated from the rest of the community, restricted to the home. Mothers also felt that attending programmes provided them with the opportunity to share with other mothers difficulties they were experiencing with their children, both at home and school, academically and personally. They valued the friendly, flexible way in which programmes were delivered by the tutors. Comments included:

...something to do, you get sick of being in the house. (C58b)

To get out, to mix with other people. (C53)

I wanted to get out and do something. (C72)

It's nice to get together and discuss the things they do. (G15)

To meet people and learn how to speak and enjoy. When I come, I enjoy myself and talk to people. (C69)

Everyone shares problems, not just their problems, but their difficulties about maths because that's what it's all about. Sometimes other problems are solved when speaking to the other parents. (G3)

Being with the people really, using my brain again. When you are at home all day every day you lose touch with what's going on. It's nice to be doing something and using your imagination. (H27)

It's just so friendly and informal. (H50)

Interacting with other mums was good because you got to know lots more. (H44)

Attendance enabled the building of networks, not just with other parents, but also with the schools, teachers and community workers. Programmes opened up a world of possibilities that many had no idea existed, extending their usual *field* of activity. Parents reported the value of sharing learning and the difficulties of being a parent, with other parents, as well as the value of making new friendships. Mothers were able to develop new networks by bonding with other mothers who shared a similar, if not identical, lifestyle. Whilst the communities involved were small and close-knit, with many of the mothers having lived in the area a large proportion of their lives, technically sharing the same social *fields*, this was not always apparent in practice. Frequently, learners did not know other mothers prior to attending the programme. The exception to this was the Traveller women, many of whom were related. The mothers felt that attending the programmes gave them an opportunity to have time to themselves, away from both their children and their children's father. One stated, 'it gives me a couple of hours to myself and to have a chat' (C58). According to tutors, learners bonded quickly. In this way, they formed a new social *field*, which contained its own set of rules and hierarchies. Classes became female-dominated *fields* in their own right, where men were largely excluded (see chapter 5, section 3). Mothers found time and space for themselves. They were able to discuss specific difficulties relating to their children's education and development with each other. All this was undertaken in a non-threatening, non-hierarchical, non-judgmental environment.

Here they did not perceive themselves as being judged for who they were or to which community they belonged. Rather, they saw it as a supportive environment, which reassured mothers that what they were doing with their children was normal, right and helpful. In short, family literacy programmes helped to build the confidence of the mothers to empower them to help their children.

The second reason, to spend more time with their children, was only applicable to learners in Herefordshire and Gozo, since the children were not, in the main, present at sessions in County Clare. This was particularly important for mothers who had several other children. These mothers found attending family literacy programmes a way of spending quality time with a specific child, at a stage when the child might be feeling vulnerable, i.e. just after starting school. This was particularly noticeable in some of the comments made by mothers in Herefordshire:

...to have a bit of time with my daughter on my own really and see what we can do together. (H31)

Because I work evenings, I don't get to spend a lot of time with [my son] now that he's at full time education. It's a way of me getting involved in what he is doing so that we are spending that quality time together. (H38)

I like the participation that we do with the kids. (G15)

...it gives me time with the youngest one. I quite fancied this course, especially when he comes over and I can have time with him on my own.
(H29)

According to Coleman (1988), the quality of the parent-child relationship has the potential to dictate the level of social capital. In turn, this aids the transition of cultural capital from the parent to the child, or if we accept that a child is also a

social actor (McGonigal, et al., 2007), from child to parent. Even where a parent has a high level of cultural capital, for Coleman, it will only be successfully transferred to the child if the conditions of the parent-child relationship allows. This ‘...depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child’ (Coleman, 1988: 111). The chance for some parents, mainly mothers, to spend more time with their child through family literacy programmes, provides the opportunity to increase the possibility of social capital transfer from parent to child. In turn, this encourages a child’s full educational growth to be achieved. In theory, this should decrease the potential for social exclusion later in life, by aiding social inclusion. However, during this process, parents also gained capital from the children, in terms of confidence and an understanding of the school’s pedagogic strategies and the child’s related needs.

Thirdly, again not in County Clare, parents reported attending because their child was shy or lacked confidence. Mothers stated:

I decided to come because...[he] is a very timid and shy boy and it takes him a while to settle in anywhere...I thought it would build his confidence up if I came and worked with him... (H28)

...he is a little bit shy, I thought it would be good for him to be in a small group, maybe make more effort for him to get together with others and talk. (G15)

I thought it would benefit [my daughter], because at home I don’t get the chance to interact as much as I’d like with them and to help her settle into Reception, because she was very unsettled when she started. (H37)

I decided to come because my eldest boy is a very timid and shy boy and it takes him a while to settle in anywhere...I thought it would build his confidence up if I came and worked with him...I thought it would be nice for the two of us really. (H28)

Programmes were seen as a way of helping the child through a transition period, encouraging bridging between the home and school *fields*. This is the key relationship that these programmes aim to strengthen. It also provided the child with the opportunity to build its own networks and encouraged bonding with its peers and teachers. In addition, mothers liked the fact that classes gave them ideas for activities to do with the children at home or strategies that they could use, particularly for reading. Comments included:

...it gives you ideas to do things that you wouldn't perhaps have. I think in different ways, it shows how you can read a book and...the different ways children learn different styles. (H 29)

I like the making things. (H39)

They give us the information, like on phonics and phonic sounds...it gives you an idea of other years as well, how they progress and what they learn when they progress. (H49)

The ideas, I knew some things but I didn't do them at home, like looking at a can's weight and labelling, the different kinds. (G4)

...he can tell us more of how to explain, for example how to read. I have to press her ear, when I want her to read I have to press her ear. It's like a joke. How to play and how to learn at the same time. (G22)

Overall, mothers took responsibility for both their children and their own learning, not an uncommon position for mothers to take (David 1993; Smythe and Isserlis, 2004). Many mothers felt it was their responsibility to ensure that their children succeeded at school, to give them the best chances possible in life. That is not to say that fathers were uninterested in their child's education, only that the day-to-day responsibility fell to the mothers. Mothers were anxious that their children were not

seen as falling behind, especially because of their own lack of understanding. This was particularly true in terms of how the school teaching system worked. As we have seen, this was a particular issue in Gozo. Here, mothers felt a great deal of pressure from the school system to ensure their child continuously made progress and reached targets, from an early age. This pressure, felt by mothers on family literacy programmes to ensure their child's success, is not, according to Tett (2001) unique.

Rather Tett comments:

...the assumption that pervades many parent education programmes is that it is not the fault of the schools if they fail to educate disadvantaged children, rather it is the mothers who are blamed and they in turn blame themselves, for the institutional failure of schools.

(Tett, 2001: 193)

This is so even if the expectations of the institutions are set too high.

It was apparent from the interviews, that the majority of women in the study had made a conscious decision to take on this responsibility. It is unclear as to whether this decision was completely conscious and open or if there was a sub-text directing the mothers to take traditional gender roles that made it appear conscious. It could be a case of misrecognition, achieved through the process of each learner rationalising their attendance as the natural course of action for the good of their children: a misrecognition of what is free will and what is predetermined, by internal and external power relations in the *field*. The external misrecognition comes from the organisational structures of society, such as the educational system. Internal misrecognition is born from the '...traditional cultural belief systems about fathers as economic providers, and mothers as childcarers (Goldman, 2005: 13), fitting with the *habitus* of the local community. Mothers saw the education of children as their role.

The fathers' role was seen as going out to work to provide financially for the family. In all of the case study areas, a traditional division of gender roles within the family was evident. It was particularly strong in County Clare, where mothers did not challenge the established order but worked within it, conforming to social norms and regulating their own behaviour accordingly.

None of those interviewed, current or ex-learners, stated that they attended the programme primarily because they wanted to improve their own literacy or numeracy skills. A small minority, mainly those in Herefordshire, did recognise that they had some difficulties with reading, writing or numbers that needed to be addressed. For example, one learner in Herefordshire commented, 'I tend to write a capital letter when it shouldn't be there' (H30). Another felt it gave her the opportunity to update her own skills. One mother saw the benefit of having time without the children in the second half of the session, '...to focus on the skills that you need to brush up on' (H37): in this case, question marks, punctuation and full stops. For one learner in Herefordshire with low literacy skills, the tutor provided not only practical help, but also confidence building. The mother commented:

...we have to do writing and things like that, so she's trying to build our confidence up on that...she showed me how to do paragraphs...full stops and capital letters and helped me to do pieces of writing. (H39)

One reason, amongst many, that one ex-learner gave for enrolling on the programme, was that she had poor maths skills. Learners reported programmes were enjoyable and fun to attend, with few expressing any criticism.

However, a minority were less keen on some aspects. For example, those interviewed in the focus group in Herefordshire (*Hiii*), (See chapter 4, section 1e), objected to having to sit on children's chairs. However, that was all that was available in the classroom, because the environment was tailored towards children rather than adults. One learner in Herefordshire (H39) disliked having to do the writing element of the programme, preferring the craft activities. In County Clare, one mother did not like the drawing component of the story sack sessions, as she felt she was not very good at drawing. Several of the mothers in County Clare, across different groups, particularly the asylum mothers, felt that the sessions were too short, requesting they be extended. The logistics of fitting the course around homework activities, other children and family responsibilities, was a particular concern for two of the mothers in Gozo. However, it was not a criticism of the programme *per se*.

As we have seen, the overriding motivation for parents to attend programmes was to help their children achieve academically. In so doing, it provided the children with the opportunity to access their parents' cultural capital, which the mothers hoped would assist their children in obtaining a better life than their own, on reaching adulthood. The next section explores the role of the children in family literacy programmes at the case study areas.

2 - Where are the children?

The presence of children at sessions was an important element of family literacy programmes in Gozo and Herefordshire, but not in County Clare. Both the main programmes in Gozo and Herefordshire, Club Hilti and FLLN, were organised first as separate sessions of learning, then as joint parent-child time together. However, despite the modelling of family literacy programmes on the Kenan model of delivery,

as previously discussed, requiring parent-children time both together and apart, no children were in evidence in programmes in County Clare. Family literacy programmes were separate from children's learning. Whilst they might attempt to help parents understand how the child was taught in school, or to develop language and literacy skills before a child attended school, programmes did not combine the sub-*field* of children's education with that of adult education. The children did not attend sessions with a school teacher. Sessions were not planned to include the children. Separate sessions for the children, with a teacher of their own to complement the adult delivery, did not take place. This was because, in general, there was little communication, collaboration or interaction, between the two *fields*. There was a feeling by some tutors in County Clare that the schools '...just...want to be left to do their own thing and they can't see the benefits to parents' (C56). Some participation by children was evident, but not in line with the other two case study areas. This mainly occurred in the session with the asylum seeking, women where children under the age of four years old, including babies, were present. However, no separate structured sessions were provided for either mother or child.

Despite schools receiving Directives from the Ministry of Education to work more closely with parents in schools, (see chapter 4 section 1d), at the time of the study no remit or Directive, had been issued that schools should work more closely with the VEC, for this to be achieved. The VEC and the schools could be seen as a site of natural linkage. Here, the delivery of family literacy programmes, especially in areas of deprivation, could take place, encouraging parental participation and involvement in schools. This has the potential to build social capital bridges between two separate educational *fields*, the school *field* and that of adult education. This could be achieved by using the site of the family as a bridging agent and a possible ally in

raising the achievement of children. The underlying aim of this approach, to encourage greater understanding between the different social *fields* regardless of who is used as the conduit, was reported to have had a positive impact on the relationship between home and school in both England and Malta.

The VEC coordinator in County Clare would ideally have liked schools to recognise the importance of family literacy. The VEC was found to be enthusiastic to make links with schools. However, schools were either resistant or reluctant to allow the VEC access. Tutors felt that the schools were not so much resistant to the idea of family literacy programmes but rather, wanted to be left alone to get on with the task in hand; namely that of teaching the children, not the parents. One tutor pointed out that parents often only become visible in Irish schools when a problem occurred, stating:

...parents, they don't tend to fit into the equation unless there is a problem. And then they have to go to the parents' evenings. The only opportunity they have is the enrolment when they come in to sign the enrolment form. And then there is a queue of people behind you and you don't want to ask lots of questions. There are very limited opportunities for parents to actually ask questions about the school... (C55)

Therefore, in County Clare, the two *fields* of the family and education were distinct, separate entities.

However, schools were not completely closed to outside intervention, or to the involvement of parents and the community. Home-school link workers were a recent innovation in Ireland under the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (Department of Education and Science, <http://www.education.ie>). They had been introduced to improve parental involvement in some deprived areas, mainly in areas

of urban disadvantage. However, some were working in disadvantaged rural communities. There was one such worker in County Clare. The link worker was a nun who had previously been a primary school teacher for 25 years. She appeared to be working successfully, not only with the VEC, but also with a number of other agencies in the area, to tackle underlying issues in the community. These included drugs, alcoholism and high unemployment. This was the only example found where a school was actively involved in any form of family literacy delivery. The school was located in a particularly deprived part of County Clare, consisting of a large number of Traveller families. The home-school link worker commented that the area had, ‘...low expectations to achieve, especially educationally, from the parents, the children and traditionally the school and wider society’ (C64). A designated parents’ room was provided by the school for the delivery of programmes. Sessions ran two or three times a year for a period of six to 12 weeks. Unfortunately, during the week of the visit, there were no active sessions planned, nor any in the near future.

Programme content was reported to be activity-based crafts, with an underpinning of literacy or numeracy. This was incorporated discreetly into the sessions, in line with other programmes. Whilst the children did not actually receive any separate instruction to consolidate learning, the children were actively involved in sessions with adults, but not necessarily their own parents. The schools liaison officer, who worked closely with the VEC tutor, reported that, traditionally, parents did not interact with the school. However, according to the link worker (C64), ‘having opened the gates the school is finding that many of the parents are returning’. Sometimes they returned to be involved in further family programmes; sometimes simply to help with shared reading. This is an activity that in Herefordshire, and in England in general, has, for many years, been taken for granted that parents will

undertake. Indeed, it has become an essential part of literacy in primary schools. In this context, family literacy was being used as a tool to help address some of the specific issues faced by those described, by the tutor as leading ‘fractured lives’ (C64) in disadvantaged communities. These communities exhibited a specific set of values and beliefs, often contradictory to, and outside of, the wider *habitus* of the area. The sub-*habitus* of this particular community viewed education as a negative, rather than a positive, activity.

One reason for the absence of children in programmes in County Clare could be that the VEC is a secular organisation, whereas the majority of Irish schools were reportedly managed by the Catholic community. Unlike Herefordshire, Gozo and County Clare have a high proportion of catholic schools, representative of their respective countries, Malta and Ireland. Traditionally, schools have been predominantly closed *fields*, to all but those involved in the teaching of children. Interviews with coordinators and tutors, (C55 and C56), revealed that parents have been viewed as a distraction having no place in schools. They are viewed as offering little or no expertise in the area of children’s education. Likewise, parents have not necessarily viewed themselves as having anything of value to offer schools. Until a few years ago, such attitudes were culturally ingrained in Malta. However, according to Borg and Mayo (2001), the situation has recently changed. Schools are now more open and receptive to outside influences, including parents, who have moved from a supportive or representative role, to one that is much fuller and more equal. However, as Borg and Mayo point out, this does not necessarily mean they always enjoy a good working relationship. Through a series of initiatives, parental involvement in Maltese schools has become valued and accepted. One particularly initiative, was the publication of the draft National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) in

1998 which recognised, ‘...parents as important partners in the educational process, and encourages the education community to enhance the presence, participation and education of parents within schools’ (Borg and Mayo 2001: 249). Parents are now encouraged to engage in the life of the school, for the benefit of their children and their own learning. Parental involvement in Malta is now valued, and is perhaps one of the reasons why family literacy programmes were popular in Gozo. A similar change in *habitus* amongst teachers in County Clare, and Ireland in general, is required if family literacy programmes are to include and benefit the children. Schools need to see parents as a help, not a hindrance; as a resource on which to draw, rather than a threat.

Tutors interviewed on the ground in County Clare, felt that the addition of children into the programmes, with the backing of schools, would be beneficial to both parents and children. They felt that family literacy delivered in schools could help to demystify what occurs inside the school gates, helping parents better understand how the school system and curriculum operates. It was felt that under the current arrangements there was very little opportunity for parents to ask questions about the school or to be proactively involved in helping their children to reach their full potential. The school *field* seemed, at the time of writing, to be a separate entity from that of the rest of the learning community, particularly adult education. There was an insistence, conscious or unconscious, that the two should remain disconnected *fields* of delivery. Unfortunately, due to their lack of involvement in family literacy programmes, it was not possible to canvas the views of the schools in County Clare on this matter, beyond the one example discussed above, of the home-school link worker.

The study found that the main family literacy programmes in Gozo and Herefordshire, did include more than one family member, even if it was predominantly only the child and the mother. In County Clare, sessions were generally mother-only, at least at the formal point of delivery. However, this does not mean that programmes were less effective in County Clare than they were in Gozo or Herefordshire, only that they were different. As Hannon and Bird (2004) point out, there is no conclusive evidence that combined adult-child programmes, as opposed to separate child or adult programmes, are better, either in terms of cost or effect. Family literacy in County Clare refers to the wider dissemination of knowledge within the family *field*, outside formal structured sessions. In all areas, the role of the father, in relation to the child's education, was predominantly undertaken informally at home, by transferring the pedagogical knowledge the mother gained in the formal, structured session, to the father and other family members.

3 - 'I don't leave it all to her': opinions of non-participating fathers

Originally the intention was to interview three non-participating fathers at each of the case study sites, to gain a male perspective on family literacy programmes. However, this proved difficult, with only five non-participating fathers actually interviewed, three from Gozo and two from Herefordshire. The sample was selected by approaching the mothers attending sessions on the day of the field visit, who then volunteered the fathers to be interviewed. The resulting data should be considered in this light. It was not possible to interview non-participating fathers in County Clare because, in the case of two of the four sessions, for the lone parents (*Cv*) and the asylum women (*Civ*), fathers were not an everyday part of the families' life. At *Ci*, no fathers were available at the time of the study. For *Cii*, the women Travellers,

fathers would not consider being interviewed without being financially reimbursed for their time.

Interviews explored barriers to the fathers' attendance: what, if anything, would encourage them to participate; the impact they had seen as a result of the mother and child attending; and their general opinions of the value of family literacy programmes. A copy of the interview schedule used for non-participating fathers can be found at Appendix B. Due to the size of the sample, the findings of these interviews cannot be generalised, even within a specific case study area. However, they can be used to verify the findings of the interviews with the mothers, both current and ex-learners. They also provide an insight into the opinions of non-participating fathers concerning family literacy programmes.

Four of the fathers interviewed were economically active; the fifth was unable to work at the time of the study due to ill health. The four who were working were employed in a range of occupations from nursing to retail work. All had attended job-related training over the course of their working life and in some cases this was on-going. The fathers were not adverse to the idea of lifelong or continuing education, particularly if it furthered their own employment prospects by improving their economic capital. In turn, this was perceived as having a positive impact on the quality of family life, in the form of increased wages or enhanced employment prospects. This was the opposite view to the mothers, who saw education first and foremost in terms of the benefit to their children, rather than to themselves. Each non-participating father saw their role within the family, as being the main 'provider'. They viewed childcare and education largely as the responsibility of the mother. However, they did not dismiss the idea of role reversal, providing it made

economic sense. Therefore, it would appear that economic necessity, rather than gender, ultimately defined the roles undertaken by the adults within the family.

On the surface, there was a stark contrast in the attitudes of the two small groups of fathers. The fathers in Gozo appeared more open to attending, whilst those in Herefordshire appeared more closed. Of the three non-participating fathers interviewed on Gozo, one had attended a family literacy session four times, when his wife had been unable to attend due to work commitments. One father had attended once, again when the wife was unable to attend. The remaining father had considered attending, but had not actually attended. Neither of the two fathers interviewed in Herefordshire had ever attended or considered attending. When asked why not, the younger of the two Herefordshire fathers stated, it was because 'I'm the breadwinner at the moment' (H46). Combining full-time employment with the child's education, in a formal setting during working hours, was outside the fathers' *habitus*. It was a *field* rather than an individual position, dictated by socially expected norms.

Whilst fathers in Gozo were more open to the idea of attending, the general *habitus* of all fathers was that this responsibility should fall on the mother. There was a dominant notion amongst all the fathers that the children's education was the mothers' responsibility. It formed part of her role and was effectively an extension of the home. These were her duties to which the men were peripheral. The consensus was that the fathers' main role was to provide for the family, by going out to work. One father in Gozo adhered to particularly strong traditional divisions of gender tasks within the family. He pointed out that his wife attended because she was the "mum" and that, 'I'm here for work and well, she works too but...a woman is a woman and a man is a man' (G21); even though, at the time, the father was on long-

term sick leave and had the time to attend programmes. Even where the mother took any form of paid employment, children and the interaction with school, was still viewed as her responsibility. The genderfication of family roles may have been for practical reasons. However, it could also be viewed as a mechanism of misrecognition to ensure consistency and the continuation of *habitus* by male domination. Ultimately, this relies on the reproduction of social roles, to maintain the illusion of moral and social order and power status. In this way the powerful position of the father remains unthreatened. The true reason for gender-specific roles within the family can only be known within the relevant family unit and the context in which that family resides. However, it would seem that for most of the families in the study, it was the former, practicalities and economics, that was the main driver, as opposed to the latter, that of retaining male-dominated hierarchies. Nevertheless, fathers, even the one quoted above, were not opposed to the idea of attending formal sessions *per se*. One non-participating father from Herefordshire stated that he would consider attending if roles were reversed:

...if it was the other way around and [his wife] was the breadwinner, the income supporter and I was the one looking after the kids I would do it, to keep me occupied...' (H46)

However, whilst he was working full-time, he did not have the time to attend, nor did he view it as his responsibility.

Time was the main reason fathers gave for not attending regularly or for not considering attending. This was largely due to a combination of commitments outside the home and the timing of sessions, since all took place during normal working hours. No programmes ran in the evenings or at weekends. This made it

impossible for the majority of fathers to attend regularly. As one father in Gozo commented:

I would like to, but I am afraid time is a problem; probably time-management is a problem here. I am involved in so many things, that finding the time to go is difficult. (G17)

When asked if changing the time would encourage him to attend, he thought it probably would:

Yes, probably, the evenings would be much better, early evening would be much better because it is straight after school at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Usually, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon you are at work or doing something else. It is very difficult because I work shifts. Having them at 2 o'clock means splitting the day. That means you would have to stop doing what you are doing at, for example, 1 o'clock or 12, whereas, if it was later then you would probably do your day's work, say to half past four or five. I think it would be a better idea. (G17)

Another reason given for not attending by fathers was that the majority of participants were women. Sessions were seen as predominantly a female *field* where the fathers felt uncomfortable. Since the majority of participants were mothers, this was hard to deny. One father reported that, when he had attended, he was the only man amongst 20 women. The consensus from the interviews with the mothers was that fathers would be more likely to attend if separate sessions specifically targeted at fathers were available. This was viewed as preferable to them having to fit into an already existing female-dominated *field*. Interviews with fathers served to support this view.

When fathers were asked what would encourage them to attend, changing the time of sessions or economic role reversal were two suggestions made by fathers. This would

ensure attendance did not affect their work commitments and that the father had the time to attend. Whilst the first may be feasible for programme providers, the second is beyond their scope. One father in Gozo also suggested a formal invitation from the school, inviting them to attend the programmes. He felt that currently, ‘...the invitation seems to be an informal thing that the mothers apply for and go with their children, but I don’t think there is ever a formal application or invitation’ (G17). Interviews with some of the mothers showed that many had assumed the father would not have time or would not be interested in attending. Therefore, frequently fathers had not been given the opportunity to attend. One particular father suggested not only a formal invitation, but also better advertising of the programmes. In this way, fathers would at least be able to make an informed choice of whether or not to attend. Finally, fathers in both Gozo and Herefordshire said they were more likely to attend if the mother told them it would help the educational development of their child. One father in Herefordshire commented, he ‘probably wouldn’t need encouragement to go if [his wife] said it would help him [his son] if I did go’ (H42). Whilst fathers may have been willing to attend if specifically asked, interviews with the mothers showed that not all mothers would be happy for this to occur.

The majority of mothers in Gozo and Herefordshire did not object, in principle, to fathers joining the programme. They felt it would help fathers to bond with their child and provide them with an insight into teaching and learning in school. However, they preferred their own husbands or partners not to attend. They viewed this time and social *field* as something special either for themselves, or for themselves and their child, or both. One mother commented that having the father attend, ‘...would get just like being at home again wouldn’t it? It probably wouldn’t work actually, with the two of us...It’s mine and [my son’s] time...’ (H29).

Encouraging a greater number of fathers to attend was seen as recreating the home environment, resulting in the child playing one off against the other, rather than a special time that the mother and child could share together. This would, potentially, increase bonding and trust. Finally, this could then be used to build social capital, in Coleman's terms, for the benefit of both mother and child. The Traveller women in County Clare were particularly keen that sessions remained women only. Comments included; 'I wouldn't like it (C59)', 'I wouldn't like men to be here' (C58). Interviews with fathers confirmed that if both parents were present it could be seen as overpowering for the child and simply replicate the home environment.

However, the lack of participation by fathers in formal family literacy programmes did not mean fathers were not interested, or did not take an active role in the educational development of their children. Nor did it mean that the fathers did not learn following the mother and child's participation. Fathers reported that they regularly read to their children, implementing literacy strategies for reading which the mother had learnt in class. One father in Herefordshire went beyond reading, creating drawings and making templates, which the mother had then taken to the session to help develop the story sacks that were being created as part of the programme. The father commented that whilst, 'I'm not involved in it as much as [his mother]...we do it together a bit...' (H46).

The involvement of the mother and child in family literacy programmes was shown to have a clear impact on the way the father viewed educational progression. It seemed to lead to a changing *habitus* within the family *field*. It also led to an increased understanding by the father of current pedagogy of teaching and learning

because of the transfer of knowledge gained by the mother to the father at home. In

Gozo one father commented:

I'm learning through what they tell me. The fact that I have not attended, I spend time with the children and what they learnt they pass on in their own way, even [their mother]. When she learns something new, she comes home and tells me. (G17)

This finding is an important one for funders particularly in County Clare, concerning the significance of joint parent-child sessions. If, as the interviews with non-participating fathers suggest, knowledge *is* being transferred from the mothers to the fathers, when the fathers are not present, then there is no reason to suggest that the same dissemination of learning is not occurring between the mothers and the children when the child is not present. Whilst there is no actual evidence to support this theory, it is a reasonable assumption to make. At the very least, it is providing mothers in County Clare with the tools and the potential opportunity to develop social capital or bonding relationships with their children. It provides the possibility of unlocking parental human capital and ultimately assisting in the child's educational growth. However, if this is occurring without the children being present, i.e. in the family *field*, two opposing questions need to be considered. First, how much more effective could family literacy programmes in County Clare be, particularly in developing the mother's social capital, in allowing the child access to human capital, if the child were present? Second, does it matter if the child is present or not? The following section, which considers the findings in relation to the perceived impact and benefits of family literacy programmes at the three case study areas, may go some way towards addressing these two points.

In general, it appears that the roles and responsibilities concerning a child's education within the family were allocated along the lines of what was practical, rather than to maintain masculine domination or female subordination. Mothers rejected suggestions of role reversal, preferring to take the responsibility on for themselves, whilst the men concentrated on going out to work. In some instances, particularly in Gozo, mothers appeared to be educated to a higher standard than the fathers. Consequently, the mothers viewed themselves as being in a better position to engage in the education of their children. One mother in Gozo, an ex-learner, stated that she attended rather than her husband because, '...he knows that I have more education, school and things, capable of the school maths and literature' (G4). One of the fathers in Herefordshire confessed, 'I'm a bit thick anyway...She's a bit brainier...' (H46). The mothers appeared to be more comfortable with the school environment. One mother in Gozo commented that her husband was, '...not very keen on school, he's a bit backwards, low self-esteem...' (G3). Mothers saw themselves as in control, having a voice, making decisions, which were best for their children and their family. They did not, in the main, feel oppressed or in need of 'saving'. They were all too aware of the rise in feminism and equal opportunities, but chose to run their families along the lines of traditional gender roles. When asked if her husband would attend one learner in County Clare responded, 'you're joking, my husband takes them fishing, he takes them swimming he takes them out on the boat...he does those things with them' (C54).

Interviews conducted with the small sample of non-participating fathers, confirmed that this view of *habitus* regarding the gender division of family labour, was shared by the fathers as much as by the mothers. This was not to say that the fathers did not assist in their child's schoolwork, or were not willing to be involved; it simply meant

that they did so in different ways. However, feminist pedagogy would argue, and the work of Bourdieu would concur, that the mothers were not choosing these roles freely. Rather, the roles were a product of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1971) which, through the illusion of misrecognition and the hierarchies of power within the family *field* were constantly reproduced, from one generation to the next. This ensures that the division of gender roles in this ‘traditional’, yet ‘practical’, way is viewed as natural and that the woman does have a choice. However, arguably human beings never have complete freedom of choice. Choice is always limited to the options of which an individual is aware. Choices cannot be made for options that do not seemingly exist. Misrecognition allows both mothers and fathers within the family *field*, to rationalise their roles for the good of the family, making them self-referencing and self-perpetuating. In this way, fathers continue to dominate the public sphere in the *field* of economics and employment whilst mothers remain, where they have always been, relegated to the private sphere of the home and family. They are largely dependant upon the economic activity of the man to ensure their own and their children’s survival.

Having chosen to attend family literacy sessions, let us now consider the perceived benefits and impact, if any, of attending programmes for the learner, the child, other family members and the wider community.

4 - Perceived benefits of family literacy programmes

To the learner:

This section of the data and discussion chapter examines the perceived benefits and impact, if any, of family literacy programmes and what this means in terms of the

progression routes pursued by learners. To obtain a holistic view, all those interviewed, both practitioners and learners, were asked about the impact and benefits of attending programmes. In some cases, especially in Gozo, coordinators and tutors felt that, due to the short time some of the programmes had been running, it was too early to measure or comment on their impact. Learners were asked what difference attending the programme had made to them. Frequently, what motivated a learner to attend a programme, or what they liked about the programme, was also reported to be the perceived benefit of attending. The most frequently reported benefit was increased confidence in the mothers' ability to help their child with their schoolwork. This was followed by spending one-to-one quality time with their child. These benefits were also recognised by the non-participating fathers. Many learners felt it was too early to say what the benefits of attending were, in line with the comments received from the tutors. This was especially true for learners in Gozo where several mothers had attended only a few sessions at the time of the interviews.

Perceived benefits included being able to get out of the house and meet people and the ability to share common, child-related problems, particularly those linked to children's learning in school. Socialisation was a key benefit, identified by tutors and learners alike. Attending programmes enabled mothers to extend their small, familiar family *field* to include other, like-minded mothers with children of a similar age and stage of learning. This was true whether the children were present or not. In essence, family literacy programmes acted as the common bond amongst the group. Benefits included giving parents ideas for activities they could carry out at home, and the programme being seen as informative. For one of the asylum mothers, it was helping her and her child improve their English skills. An asylum mother commented 'It has

made me a better mother...it makes me feel alive' (C67). The above points are illustrated by the comments of mothers below:

Confidence to help child:

I feel more out-going, confident and less stressed out. (C70)

I'm able to do more now with [my daughter], like last night she cut up the paper for me and we stuck it on together. (C53)

When [my daughter] is trying to do her reading and that I'm not trying to jump in like before, I know how they do it in class. (H49)

...to know you're not the only one in that boat, we all have problems with the teaching. (H40:1M)

It has made me more aware of what she is doing in school, especially her learning and how I can help her, especially the sounding of words...' (H48)

These quotes are just some of the examples of how mothers felt as a result of attending the programme. They mainly illustrate how the mothers had gained confidence from attending programmes, to help the child with their schoolwork in a manner that was helpful to the child, providing consistency with the teaching at school. Despite the absence of children or a direct school link, mothers in County Clare also reported feeling more confident. Tutors in all three areas reported a noticeable growth in general parental confidence. This was not necessarily just amongst the parents on the programme helping their children, but in the way the parents interacted with other members in the group, improved relationships with their child and a greater involvement in the school. One tutor in Herefordshire commented, 'the biggest benefit I have seen is confidence in the way they behave

towards their children, but also as people' (H33). By allowing mothers the opportunity to understand the literacy development of their child, their attitude towards being able to help their child shifts from a negative to a positive perspective. This was particularly evident in County Clare, in relation to the Traveller women. Here the tutor reported that the mothers, who traditionally were not brought up to value educational attainment, were 'beginning to see the benefits directly for their children' (C61). This was a positive change in *habitus*, previously outside their *field* of experience, resulting in the desire for their children to learn.

Socialisation:

Well it's just nice to be meeting people in the morning...it takes it out of yourself. You crack up if you stay at home all day, every day, by yourself. (C72)

It's nice to have a break from the other two and have adult conversation really. Because when you are at home all day with children, you don't have any adult conversation, it's all baby talk. It's nice to be normal again. (H28)

Even meeting with other parents and talking about common problems, besides obviously, getting these tips they can use at home. (G14)

The above quotes illustrate how important it was for some of the mothers to be able to extend their boundaries beyond the *field* of the home. Providing mothers with the opportunity to develop bonds with other mothers in similar positions was an important benefit of attending. For many of the mothers interviewed, their *field* was normally inward looking concentrating on the home. Attending gave them the opportunity, not only to expand that *field*, but also to build new social networks, bonds and trust. When those from the feminist pedagogy perspective talk of giving women a voice, allowing women to have a space of their own in which they can

express themselves, family literacy programmes is one of the places in which this can be realised. It is not so much that the women who were interviewed were oppressed, deliberately or consciously. Rather, they were in the habit of not interacting with wider society, outside of their own home, even within their own local community. The time and energy it took to look after children of all ages left little room for these mothers to engage in activities outside the home. There were few opportunities for them to experience greater social inclusion. Attending family literacy programmes was frequently viewed as a mechanism that allowed greater social interaction to occur. Many of the tutors commented on this increased social bonding between learners within the group, even after only a few weeks of attending. One tutor in Gozo commented, ‘they will help each other if they have problems, they work as a team’ (G19).

Ideas for activities at home:

It’s not just for us this time. It’s more for the children. It’s something you could do at home with them... (C71)

It has given me ideas of...what we can do at the weekend when we do have time together. (H38)

Mothers recognised that ideas gained in class were transferable to the home environment. The ability to take ideas from one social space and use them in another made the learning relevant to the mothers, making it contextualised and useful. It is widely accepted that learning is more successful when the learner can see the purpose or objective behind the learning (Atkin, et al., 2005; Schuller et. al., 2004; Rogers, 2004; Taylor, 1983). Mothers were genuinely grateful to the tutors for the opportunity to gather new ideas in this way. Tutors also saw the eagerness of mothers

to transfer skills between settings. One tutor in Gozo measured the benefits by the number of questions mothers asked during sessions, as well as by the request by some mothers for additional tasks that could be carried out at home.

Quality time with the child:

I feel like I've done more things with [my daughter], whereas if I didn't come here I don't have much time to do stuff at home, because there is always something that needs doing. (H37)

It taught me to be a little more patient with my son. (G4)

Finally, the above two quotes sum up the feelings of many of the mothers across all three areas. They show how mothers valued the time with their child as a real benefit. Again, it encouraged mothers to transfer skills from the school *field* to the home environment. Greater bonding between mother and child was reported, thus, in turn, increasing the social capital available, regardless of the educational level of the mother. Non-participating fathers also acknowledged a noticeably stronger bond between mother and child since the programme began. One father in Gozo had noticed that his wife had stopped shouting at the children and started playing with them. One of the non-participating fathers in Herefordshire felt that his wife had a better understanding of how to read with their child. The other Herefordshire fathers saw the mothers' attendance, along with bringing home her own work, as a good example to their child stating 'I think it's a good bond with the mum and child' (H46).

As we have seen from the demographics of the learners presented in Table 13 (chapter 4), the ability and background of learners varied. However, the educational

level or social standing of a mother was not questioned or used in any way to mark out one learner from another. The fact that everyone was there to do their best for their children was all that counted. Many of the classes observed exhibited signs of strong bonding as a social group in its own right. In some instances, learners covered a diverse section of the local community. However, all learners were accepted as having a legitimate, equal right to attend. This was particularly in evidence in the KUWTC session visited in Herefordshire. Here, learner ability, age and background were wide-ranging. This was exhibited in many ways, from how learners dressed to how they spoke. The following case study profile provides a flavour of the KUWTC session visited. It illustrates why the learners attended; their concerns, particularly towards keeping up with current teaching methods in schools; and the benefits gained.

A case study profile - KUWTC

On the day of the visit, five learners attended the KUWTC session in Herefordshire, three mothers and two fathers. All lived locally but not all were local. Two of the learners had lived in the area all their lives, one for 20 years and the remaining two for five years. Three of the five worked, with both the men engaged in full-time employment. Ages ranged from late twenties to early fifties. Two were married, two were divorced and one was single. Their children ranged from six to thirty-four years of age.

The consensus was that they had decided to attend the programme to help their children with their schoolwork. All were floundering with the current pedagogical techniques, particularly in mathematics and literacy. They wanted not only to help their child but also to ensure consistency with the school. To achieve this, they needed to be aware of the working of the school system. Attendance enabled them to 'get more involved with the school' (2F) 'see other people's point of view...to learn from other people' (1F) 'we can sort of bounce ideas off of each other' (2F) (Comments from the group).

They reported that their children enjoyed the fact that they were attending, even though the children were not present at the sessions. One of the fathers summed up the feelings of the group, 'I've found my daughter gets quite excited because daddy's going to school' (2M). The group had been taught how the children learn to write and use phonics. Despite the course only running for five weeks, by week four – the week of the visit - benefits were already in evidence. Between the group, many of the benefits discussed earlier were reported, including: greater confidence to help their children with schoolwork; the opportunity to share problems; consistency; and strategies with school teaching that could be used at home. One of the fathers felt that homework was 'traditionally boring'. Whilst one of the mothers felt homework was unnecessary. She felt that the time children had in school should be sufficient to teach them commenting, 'they have all this time from nine o'clock in the morning to twenty past three in the afternoon, surely that should be enough? I mean, they still got to be kids ain't they?' (1F). This was a similar sentiment to that expressed by some mothers in Gozo regarding the pressure children were under to achieve at school and its inevitable knock-on effect on the rest of the family, particularly the mother.

Learners did report an impact on the whole family, feeling that attendance helped with all of their children, especially if other children had learning difficulties. As far as progression went, it depended very much on what was on offer, when and if they could fit it in with the rest of their lives. No one expressed an interest in courses to further their own learning. They all felt that the course had been useful, with information presented in an interesting way. Despite the learners coming from a range of social backgrounds, each clearly respected the others' opinions. A strong bond between this group of diverse parent learners was evident after only four sessions.

Whilst most parents reported benefits in terms of how they could now help their child, a few, mainly mothers from Herefordshire, reported improved benefits to their own learning. These mothers saw the programme as a means of improving their own literacy skills, such as the use of capital letters and full stops. One learner in Herefordshire felt it had helped her to improve her writing, 'like doing the Ys properly' (H30). Another felt that it had helped her writing 'full stops and all that sort of stuff' (H39). The tutor had helped this particular learner with a whole range of literacy skills, including paragraphs, capital letters and writing letters. It had given the learner a confidence boost in a safe, non-threatening environment. This learner, with her lack of literacy skills and lack of confidence to address them as an adult, was the ideal profile of the target learner for family literacy programmes in both Gozo and Herefordshire. Unfortunately, she also appeared to be the exception rather than the rule.

Despite one of the tutors in the Herefordshire area claiming, 'a sizable number decide to carry on and do further literacy activities' (H35), in the overall sample of learners and ex-learners, these mothers were the exception. This would suggest that the motivation to improve these skills are based around helping their child, rather than improving the learners own literacy or numeracy skills *per se*. Some learners felt that the programme had provided them with the chance to discover future opportunities. However, again, this was mostly viewed in terms of opportunities or further courses, which would benefit their children, rather than themselves. This point is discussed in detail later in this chapter under 'progression'. Even where benefits were expressed in terms of confidence, it was measured in terms of *their* confidence to help *their* child. This was so even in County Clare, where the children did not participate and courses were not necessarily connected to the children's

school curriculum. With so much of the talk about the children, let us now examine the impact and benefits to parents of attending family literacy programmes for the child and the wider implications for the family.

For the child / wider family:

It is widely accepted that there are many benefits to participants, especially children, arising from attending family literacy programmes (Brooks, et al. 1996; Hannon and Bird, 2004). However, the actual impact on participants attending joint programmes is difficult to measure (Hannon and Bird, 2004) and is not confined to academic benefits. Many of the benefits cited by Brooks, et al., relate to the parents rather than specifically to children. Even where attempts have been made to ascertain impact, it could be argued that, because a child develops rapidly during their primary years, it is almost impossible to state with certainty that family literacy is the intervention which has led to change. No attempt was made during this study to measure, in any scientific way, the benefits to children, academically or socially, either before or after the programmes. This was due to time, resources and ethical considerations. Instead, the aspect of benefit to the children was explored in the interviews, particularly those with the mothers, non-participating fathers and the children's teachers. In addition, there was a particular interest in the children's reaction to the parents attending the programme. This was assessed through the interviews with parents and teachers and via classroom observation. As we have already seen, in most instances, sessions involving children took place in primary schools. This meant that parents engaged with the children in the children's *field*. It was on the children's terms, rather than in the adults' *field*, i.e. the home, which is the usual forum for parent-child relationships within this age group. The majority of the data in this sub-section comes from the Gozo and Herefordshire interviews, the exception being the interviews with the

asylum mothers. However, mothers in County Clare were also asked for their opinions on the difference the course had made to their children. They provided a slightly different, but nonetheless valid, perspective.

The majority of learners reported that their child really enjoyed them coming into school with, he or she 'loves it' being the most common response. Children looked forward to their parents attending, some becoming upset if their parent was unable to be there. When mothers were asked what the child liked about them attending, many felt as this mother in Herefordshire, 'I think it is just the fact that mum's coming to school' (H48). Observations undertaken in the classroom, in both Gozo and Herefordshire, confirmed this acceptance of the presence of the parents in school. It did not appear to cause the child any form of distress having their parents in school. They did not seem to view school as their own domain, in which the parent had no right to intrude. They welcomed the attention. They were not in any way embarrassed or resentful of this intrusion into their *field*. Given the young age of the children participating in programmes, this finding is not altogether surprising. Many children were in the very early stages of schooling and, until recently, they were used to seeing their mothers during the day. Mothers represented a stability and familiarity that provided the child with the confidence to participate in a positive learning environment. A mother in Gozo felt her son was pleased that she came to school. It showed him that she was interested in what he was learning. She told her son 'if I come I learn more...' (G5). A mother in Herefordshire echoed this sentiment, 'he thinks that I'm learning and going to school as well and he likes that idea. He thinks that I am being taught which I am in a way' (H28). Non-participating fathers also commented that the child enjoyed the mothers' presence at school. In County Clare, where the children were not attending, the mothers reported that the children were

looking forward to what they would eventually be taking home to share with them. The children of the learners on the KUWTC parent-only programme in Herefordshire were also said to like the fact that their parents were coming into school, with one mother stating her child felt it was ‘brilliant.’

Generally, children were said to enjoy attending programmes. They were often disappointed if they could not go, and liked the routine. In Gozo one mother reported, ‘my child, she loves it, when she wakes up she says, “do we have Club Hilti today?” She is disappointed on a Saturday when we don’t go’ (G12). Attending the programme provided some children with the encouragement or reason to attend school on days when they were otherwise reluctant to go. One mother in Herefordshire stated, ‘...if he is on an off-day and he doesn’t want to go to school, I say I’m coming to school today and he can relate to that’ (H 29). Mothers’ attendance at school strengthened the bond of relationship between parent and child. At the same time, it gave out positive messages about learning to the children. Thus, it created the optimum conditions for the child’s educational growth and fostered a positive *habitus* towards education and learning.

Whilst there was no concrete evidence, in the form of pre- or post-literacy evidence, such as statistics, tests or assessments, the consensus from parents and teachers, was that children attending programmes had exhibited improvements in their academic work and their social skills. Specifically noted was the child’s increased level of confidence. Non-participating fathers also reported changes in the children’s reading habits and behaviour since attending the programmes. One father in Herefordshire noted, ‘everyday I come home he’s reading a new book. He’s got a handful of new words’ (H46). The other Herefordshire father commented, ‘his reading is coming on’

(H42). In Gozo, one of the children who was described by his father as shy stated, 'I've noticed he has become more open and trying new things' (G17). Whilst some mothers, particularly those in Gozo, felt it was too early to see any benefits, others did report an increase in their child's confidence, along with a greater willingness to read or do their homework, which was previously lacking. One mother in Gozo felt her child was happier to do homework and was more obedient. Another mother commented of her son, 'I mean, he looks forward to reading these days...now he is more interested, he is picking up more' (G15). A third of mothers reported improved sentence structure by their child.

Mothers in Herefordshire also noticed an improvement in the literacy skills of their children. For example, one child was reported to be '...a lot better with her letters' (H48). Another mother observed, 'she couldn't write her name, but now she is getting there slowly.' (H31). Children were reported to learn faster, picking up concepts and strategies as the programmes progressed. One mother commented:

...she tends to pick up things a bit quicker. When she comes across a word like dog she will do 'd ,d, d,' makes the sound and works it out for herself. (H49)

Whilst such reported improvements are encouraging, it is difficult to establish if they are a direct result of the family literacy intervention or simply a part of the child's natural development. Mothers, fathers and teachers, all believed that the family literacy programme did have some positive impact on these educational steps. Having the opportunity to build a relationship with their child was also important. For one mother, it gave her something in common with her son, with whom she had a volatile relationship, giving further validity to Coleman's argument that the better

the relationship between mother and child, the greater the chances are of educational development, through improved access to social capital. It also highlights how extending one's *field* of activity can lead to changes in *habitus*, as a consequence of being introduced to new experiences. This change was found to be applicable even where the children were not in attendance, for example KUWTC, Id f'Id and in County Clare generally.

The Traveller women's sessions in County Clare frequently resulted in mothers taking home a finished activity for the children, such as a card or a book. The children were reported to look forward to this gift. Some of the Traveller mothers felt that attending the programme made their children curious about what the mother was learning, thus extending the child's *field and habitus*. It allowed the children to view learning not specifically as an activity restricted to children, but one in which adults can also engage. This opened up the possibility that the children might see learning as an on-going, continuing process that can take place outside the school environment. This concept was not traditionally accepted within the wider Traveller community. The Traveller mothers were keen, almost proud, to show their children what they had accomplished. Whilst the lone parent mothers in County Clare had not actually taken home the finished Story Sack at the time of the interviews, many commented that their child was eagerly awaiting the finished article. One mother commented, '...it's a way we could possibly bond and I'm sure it will mean a lot to him when I do eventually take it home' (C72). Despite the young age of the children attending the asylum mothers' programme (all were under five), the reaction of the children to the programme was not dissimilar to that of the children in Gozo and Herefordshire. Improved language, behaviour, an eagerness for the day of the session and increased confidence were all reported. Few of the children had English as an

oral or written language, yet their mothers reported positively on the effects of the sessions. Specifically, there was great praise for the enthusiasm and patience of the tutor who took the session. Comments included:

His English is coming on. (C66)

At least he is learning something. (C68)

My daughter can hold a crayon and scribble single nursery rhymes in English, her favourite is 'I love you, you love me,' from Barney on the TV. (C67)

They can now paint and read letters themselves, they are happy and good for when they go to school. (C69)

The asylum mothers highly valued the opportunity the programme gave their children to learn, prior to starting school. The perceived benefits identified by all parents were confirmed by interviews with the children's teachers.

All three teachers interviewed in Herefordshire agreed that a growth in the confidence of the children was the major change they had observed. One teacher commented:

The main thing is confidence. Developing their confidence is a big thing and developing personal and social skills and sharing it with a small group. Once that is established, we see a big improvement, more confidence and more skills. (H32)

In addition to increased confidence, which led to improved self-esteem, motivation, and identity capital, teachers in Gozo felt that attending programmes gave parents a better understanding of the school. In turn, this improved the parents' ability to work

with their child. Some children were reported to have started reading and writing. Therefore, the benefits of a closer, better-understood parent-child relationship led to improved academic performances by the children. Children were actively benefiting from their parents' social capital. It was now accessible in a positive, non-confrontational way. As a result of attending family literacy programmes, fathers reported changes in *habitus* in both the mother and the child, particularly in relation to attitudes to school work, together with increased bonding. Fathers further noted the whole homework experience was conducted in a much calmer way by everyone since the programme began.

In general, family literacy programmes appeared to have little or no impact on the wider family at the time of the visit. Many learners in Gozo reiterated the point that it was too early to comment, or that they had not noticed any change in the rest of the family directly resulting from them attending the programme. In County Clare, a wider family was often difficult to find, particularly in the case of the lone parent and asylum mothers, where family members were limited. However, there was some evidence from the interviews, mainly those conducted in Herefordshire, that non-attending siblings were benefiting from the programme. This was particularly relevant to younger siblings. Benefits were identified in two specific ways. Firstly, they were being introduced, in what mothers perceived as the correct way, to reading and language skills early on, toeing, as it were, the hegemonic literacy line. Secondly, the parents, having gained confidence and understanding of current pedagogical systems, were fostering a more positive learning environment in the home from which other children could benefit. Parents had gained a greater awareness of the issues faced by the children. They had also acquired the skills to make learning fun, where previously it might have been confrontational. The

comment below from one mother in Herefordshire, who attended the programme with her five-year-old daughter but not with her three-year-old twins, illustrates this point:

I've got the fridge magnets with the words. We match the words when she comes home from school and the other two are picking it up as well. We say they will probably be reading by the time they go to school at this rate. They are picking it up quickly. (H48)

Another mother felt that the younger child was definitely getting a head start. In one instance, ideas such as the shopping activities gained during the session were adapted to suit the older child, who suffered from Downs Syndrome and required improved social, in addition to academic, skills. Several of the parents on KUWTC also felt that it was helping other children at home. An ex-learner in Herefordshire commented, 'what I learnt I'll pass on to [my younger daughter] to teach her' (H41). An ex-learner from County Clare also felt other children in the family had benefited. This mother had attended one of the programmes offered in *Ciii*, the only area where, through the VEC and home-school liaison partnership, both the children and the school were actively connected. She had introduced the ideas from the course to her younger child commenting:

...my smaller guy, as well he's just six,...even the maths he gets a lot better grades...We even use different games that we have and different shapes like triangles, squares you know all the shapes around the board. Even those things you can see where they apply. They are things that you wouldn't have been doing at home before, you know. I've been getting new ideas and they all add up. (C62)

Therefore, the data in this study clearly shows that benefits will not always go solely to the targeted child. This, along with improved parent-child relationships for all

children in the family, serves to provide the optimum conditions for a child to thrive and develop academically and socially. Disseminating good practice was not restricted to the mothers' ability to utilise the learning. One mother in Gozo noted that the child who attended the programme shared her learning with other members of the family when they returned home. Several mothers also reported that fathers were involved in gathering some of the materials required for the programme, in particular, downloading images off the internet for the books in the story sacks. But are benefits long-term, or are they only applicable for the duration of the course? To try and establish an answer to this, data, particularly from the interviews with the ex-learners, needs to be evaluated.

Longer-term effects: perspectives of ex-learners

To gain a longer-term perspective on the effects, if any, of family literacy programmes, the opinions of ex-learners, all of whom were mothers, were gathered. Similarly, to the non-participating fathers' sample, the sample of 17 ex-learner interviews was relatively small and difficult to obtain. It relied predominantly on the knowledge of the local coordinator or tutors. It was also self-selecting in that it was only possible to interview those who could be found and were willing to be interviewed. Naturally this skews the data towards those who were either more likely to have continued with similar courses or who enjoyed the experience. Caution should be taken as to how typical the findings are: rather they should be viewed as specific to the ex-learner. However, their value is in the recurring themes across the study areas, even within such a small sample. The majority of ex-learners had attended a family literacy programme within the past two years, but some had attended up to six years previous. Many ex-learners reported benefits along the same lines as those explored earlier. Benefits for ex-learners focused predominantly on the

advantages to their child in addition to how it had given them confidence and patience to help their child with their schoolwork. They particularly mentioned the value of reading strategies and mathematic techniques learnt during the programme. They reported such strategies as being on-going in the home, not used just by themselves, but also by other family members, especially the father. Mothers also noted improved confidence and social skills in the child. One mother in Herefordshire stated, 'I do think it improved her confidence...I like to think that it has helped her mix with others better' (H45), thus improving her daughter's social skills. Although, the mother did point out that it was '...difficult to know what she would have been like if she hadn't done the course' (H45).

For one ex-learner in Herefordshire, the benefits were expressed in terms of her child and herself. She commented:

For myself, I've been able to get back out, face the fact that, yes I need to get back out to work, that I can be useful. (H43)

She went on to say:

And for [my son] I think he's a lot more confident at school...it used to be that he used to get frightened if he was changing class with a different teacher. It doesn't worry him now he knows that he can trust them straight away, rather than waiting and passing judgement. (H43)

Attending the programme had allowed this mother to recognise her own human capital, in that she had value outside the home *field*. It gave her ideas of what she would like to do in the future, beyond the domestic *field*, whilst at the same time utilising the skills she had acquired in the home. As a result, this mother had recently taken up a post as midday supervisor at the local school. Ideally, she would have

liked to train as a teaching or classroom assistant but felt that in her late 40's she might be too old. Both of these aspirations are traditionally viewed as female dominated *fields* of employment, drawing on the skills required to run a home and raise a family. At the same time, such employment paths conveniently fitted around the family, allowing the mother to carry on with her duties at home.

Ex-learners reported missing the social interaction side of the programme. They also missed the opportunity the programmes gave them to gain ideas, share experiences with other mothers and have quality time with their child. Several expressed a desire to attend a second course, whilst others, particularly in Gozo, had already progressed from one type of family literacy programme, Club Hilti to another, Id f'Id. In these cases, they often took on roles with an element of responsibility, such as becoming a parent leader. Parent leaders were invited to talk with parents at schools, where they shared the benefits of family literacy programmes, particularly the value of the suggestions and ideas that they had learnt. This was something that tutors felt the mothers would not have had the confidence to do previously. The original programmes acted as a catalyst, engaging the mothers in learning. In turn, it increased their confidence levels so that they were able to encourage other parents to participate in similar learning opportunities. In so doing, they became advocates for learning within their local *fields*. They were able to recommend the programme to other mothers in the community, acting as a bridge between the school and community *field*. They broke down some of the barriers between the two *fields* by becoming involved in the schools, gaining an understanding of the educational system and generally serving to demystify the school *field* beyond the school gates. Thus, they helped begin the process of changing the *habitus* towards education amongst local mothers. This was particularly evident in *Giv*, possibly the poorest of

areas in which programmes were visited. One teacher in *Giv* felt that education was now seen as a priority. It was a way of improving the future chances of children that had not been available to parents in the past. This represented a definite shift in *habitus*, towards valuing the potential role of education in improving a child's life-chances compared to previous generations. The success of this strategy was proven by the large number of mothers that enrolled on each course, on average 25 mothers attended. In some cases, there was a waiting list of mothers from outside the immediate area wishing to participate, since no such programme was offered in their own village.

In line with the views of current learners, the majority of ex-learners gave positive feedback regarding the programmes, with only three expressing any negative feedback. One ex-learner in Gozo (G3) disliked the constant interruption by mobile phones and parents ignoring the tutor when he was talking. In County Clare, one felt there had been too much writing. Finally, an ex-learner in Herefordshire (H34) was fairly critical of the literacy programme in terms of its structure and content. However, she admitted that this was largely due to the fact that neither she nor her son, were suitable candidates to attend, since both had literacy skills beyond that expected of participants. However, this example does highlight potential difficulties faced by providers when programmes are opened up to all interested parents, either to achieve numbers to satisfy funding criteria, to ensure that providers appear inclusive. The following case study provides a summary of how this ex-learner felt about her experiences of attending family numeracy with her daughter and then family literacy with her son.

Case study of an ex-learner

Not all ex-learners felt that their child had benefited from the experience of attending. One mother, an ex-learner in Herefordshire, had attended family literacy programmes with both her children, first numeracy with her daughter, then literacy with her son, the following year. She had found the first experience worthwhile whilst the second less so. She put this down to two main factors.

The first was that her son could already read well before they attended the course. They frequently spent a great deal of time reading at home. The mother was well educated and fostered a learning environment, a positive *habitus* towards learning and education, at home. The data shows that this mother was not the type of learner usually recruited to this programme. Therefore, the outcome was unsatisfactory for both mother and child.

However, the second reason for failure with her son but success with her daughter, was felt to be as a direct result of the children's personalities. The daughter enjoyed the hands-on activity nature of the sessions, whereas her son actively disliked this kind of learning environment. Further, she stated 'I'd say that he responded better when he sat on other mums' tables...he didn't want to make what I was going to make, but he quite liked what the other mums did.' This child is clearly an example of a child who did not, even at an early age, appreciate his mother's intrusion into his new *field*. He was almost resentful of her presence. This did nothing to improve the bonding of their relationship or his ability to access his mother's social capital, even though it was higher than most other mothers from the outset.

Despite these difficulties, the mother felt that the programme was valid with much to offer. However, she would think twice before embarking on any similar kind of programme with her son. This example, perhaps above all, illustrates the difficulties that can occur when there is a wide range of abilities amongst participants, highlighting the importance of targeting adult learners who are at an appropriate level for the programme.

Finally, having considered programme benefits predominantly within the social *fields* of the home and the school as reported by a range of interviewees, it is necessary to review the data concerning benefits to the wider community and the economy, including avenues of progression.

Benefits to the local community: Filling local skills gaps and improving participants' literacy levels

The interview data shows that few learners, past or present, intended to enrol on courses that would address their skill needs in the near future. Indeed, many felt it was too early to consider further courses, preferring, as one mother in Herefordshire commented to take it, 'one step at a time' (H29). The majority of parents who had considered progression were keen to go on further courses, providing they continued the process of helping them to help their children with their schoolwork. Courses also needed to fit in with their ability to take care of their children, namely they should be scheduled during school hours. They were interested in gaining cultural capital that was embodied within them, i.e. symbolic, rather than actual: cultural capital that they could use to help their children. Those who did express an interest in continuing with adult education, at some point in the future saw their progression paths in terms of largely traditional female centred courses or employment: more an extension of the work they were already undertaking, such as childcare worker or classroom assistant. This is perhaps not surprising considering that the majority of those interviewed were mothers. Family literacy programmes were, therefore, viewed as a 'stepping stone', gradually taking the mothers from the home into the *field* of adult education. In this way, mothers would slowly become introduced to the *field* of learning. This was preferred to encouraging the mothers to attend literacy or numeracy courses in colleges or adult community centres, which would be seen as alien, outside their *habitus*. This was particularly important since many of the mothers had low-levels of educational attainment and many held education in low value. Some had limited experience outside the family and were not confident in their academic abilities.

There was some secondary statistical evidence from Herefordshire and County Clare, which showed that some learners did progress to other courses and other forms of employment. In 2003/4, a follow-up survey conducted by Herefordshire FLLN of 30 ex-learners, found two-thirds (20), all of whom were women, had been encouraged to enrol on further courses. However, less than half (nine), of these had actually done so. In four cases, the reason stated for not enrolling was that they did not have the time. This was largely due to pressure of work, particularly an increase in working hours from part to full -time. Of the nine who had enrolled on other programmes, three were other FLLN programmes: family numeracy; KUWTC; and a family literacy course with a younger child; one helped at a school; two were studying for an NVQ to become teaching assistants; one was on an ICT course; one on a counselling course; and one an A-level English course. Returns for KUWTC showed that a higher proportion of learners were encouraged to enrol on other courses, 12 out of 15 respondents, again all women. However, in practice only a small number, four out of the 12, had done so. The chosen courses were primarily for women and their family: family numeracy; choices for women; and childminding. Only one course, for medical secretaries, was undertaken at the local college. The findings of this small follow-up survey in Herefordshire, supports the findings of this study, that progression is predominantly focused on traditionally accepted female courses or employment. Whilst such courses stretch the mothers' experience beyond their known *habitus*, they did so largely within the boundaries of the social *fields* with which these women were already familiar.

Further, none of the study participants in Herefordshire stated they would be taking one of the national tests for literacy or numeracy. However, the figures for Herefordshire 2004/5 show that overall, 30 learners were entered for the tests at

levels one or two. Of the 30 entered, 28 passed, providing them with a tangible certified outcome from the programme in the form of recognisable institutionalised cultural capital.

According to the local coordinator, County Clare conducted a postal survey with parents who had previously attended family learning programmes. The survey found that 60% had gone on to do other courses of one type or another. Accredited courses cited included: computing; childcare; and personal and social development. Again, female sectors figured strongly.

All three case study areas had some form of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) available to the learners. Advisors usually visited sessions to discuss possible future options arising from the programme. These varied greatly depending on whether the advisors were linked to the providers or if they were independent. In County Clare, IAG was often linked to community workers who were attached to specific deprived communities. Here, future options were dependant upon specific funding streams allocated to aid social inclusion. The County Clare coordinator commented, 'we would never leave a family learning course without actually finding out what they [the learners] wanted to do and either supply it ourselves through family learning, or we would get guidance in...' (C56). For Gozo and County Clare, it was typically courses offered locally by the organisation providing family literacy, either the FES or the VEC, or in the case of Herefordshire the local College.

Over two-thirds of the mothers were content to work part-time or not at all. Many did not intend to increase their economic activity in the near future, especially those who had children of school age. The intention of learners was to use any skills gained on

programmes to help their children with their schoolwork. There were no concrete examples of participants actually filling local skills gaps at any of the three study sites. Whilst tutors and coordinators commented that women had gone on to do other work, there was little evidence to support this at the time of the visits. Ex-learners, who had progressed, were most likely to have undertaken work relating to children and the school, for example, childcare, school midday supervisor or crèche worker. However, most mothers did not enter the formal economy. They preferred to progress onto courses that would benefit their children, such as *Id f'Id*. Alternatively, they were not in a position to work, at least not in a full-time capacity. This was usually because they had younger children still at home. When current learners expressed future plans, they were clearly linked to traditionally female dominated or child-friendly employment, e.g. teaching assistants. In County Clare, there was evidence from the coordinator of progression within the community by some learners who have gone on to help with a family resource centre. This represented an increase in social capital as opposed to economic capital. But it should be noted that this had taken some time, more than four years, and it had been achieved by only a handful of learners. The greatest variety of potential employment was in County Clare, where several learners were considering working in hotels or in the retail sector. Again, this work was seen as flexible, fitting in with school hours and the needs of the family. It is also further evidence of employment that was, in effect, an extension of the home *field*.

Further, no one actually identified any skills gaps in the local economy. Most programmes were delivered in areas of high deprivation and unemployment with little or no opportunity for higher-level skills training within the immediate area. Many of the learners had limited access to transport, preferring to access courses that

were close to home, within their local *field*. There was no evidence to suggest that they would consider travelling further afield to access better employment opportunities. The vast majority would need to accomplish this within school hours, severely limiting their scope of possible economic activity.

5 - Summary of findings and discussion

The areas chosen for the study faced many challenges. The interview data shows that the expansion and survival of programmes depended largely on funding that was directly linked to policy decisions. In Gozo, it was specifically dependant upon the outcome of a review into adult education being conducted by the Ministry of Education. Herefordshire and County Clare would like to extend provision, particularly into new venues and communities, but again, this was funding dependant. County Clare would particularly like to spread sessions throughout the county and try to connect more closely with schools.

For Herefordshire, one of the main challenges highlighted was learner recruitment but, with the exception of the Home Work Club, this was not an issue in Gozo, where there was frequently a waiting list, especially for Id f'Id. Mothers frequently attended Club Hilti more than once with the same or a different child, or attended both Club Hilti and Id f'Id simultaneously: so strong was the desire of mothers to ensure they were fully informed as to current school teaching practices and equipped with the literacy and numeracy knowledge necessary to help their children succeed in school. In County Clare, family literacy programmes were said to work best when entering existing groups such as those on Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) courses. In Gozo the recruitment of suitable tutors was cited as one of the major obstacles to delivery. This was mainly attributed to the rural nature of the area,

resulting in there being only a small pool of experienced potential tutors from which to draw.

Family literacy programmes, as defined in this study, were, in reality, mostly reaching mothers. It was the mothers who were seen as defective in *their* educational skills. It was the mothers that the dominant policy *field* was trying to attract, intentionally or not. It was the mothers, the gatekeepers through whom the children need to be accessed, who were encouraged to be socially inclusive.

For their part, the main motivation for mothers to attend programmes was to give their children the best chances in life. Often these were chances that the mothers themselves had never had, or were not in a position to take even if offered. They were willing, indeed often eager, to participate in further learning opportunities provided it enhanced the prospects for their children. They were beginning to show signs of slowly changing a *habitus* which had traditionally undervalued or dismissed educational gain. Many were able to see the relevance and importance of education in the context of their children's future. Whilst the majority of fathers' did not attend programmes, mainly for practical reasons, the data showed that they did value the learning that took place through family literacy programmes. The fathers grasp of new concepts and the transference of knowledge gained concerning educational strategies through the mother attending programmes, goes some way towards demonstrating that the absence of children in the delivery of programmes in the County Clare model may not be as detrimental as it first appeared. If transition occurs between mothers and fathers, and mothers and children, who were not attending, there is no reason to suppose it is not similarly occurring in parent-only models. As to the characteristics of family literacy programmes, why learners attend,

the benefits on literacy skills and the future, these are the questions with which we began and will finish, with the summary discussion in the final chapter.

Chapter 6

What are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the case study areas?

In chapter 1, the research began by asking the question “what are the characteristics of family literacy programmes in the case study areas?” Three European countries, England, Ireland and Malta, with comparable family literacy programmes, were selected to participate in the study. Within each country, one case study area was identified: Herefordshire, County Clare and Gozo respectively. The research aims and sub-questions were detailed at the end of chapter 1. The questions were designed to explore the main aims of family literacy programmes in the three case study areas including their key differences and similarities; why they were funded and the policy rationale behind the drive to offer provision; why learners are motivated to attend, incorporating who the learners are and the benefits programmes can offer to their literacy skills. The study also considered the aspirations of, and progression routes taken by, learners who have attended courses, as well as the future direction of programmes. This final chapter summarises the findings in relation to these research questions. Whilst directly addressing the questions, the sub-headings of this chapter reflect that, as a comparative study, the final discussion needs to be presented in terms of how the questions compared and contrasted, not only between the case study sites, but also between each other, to draw out differences as well as similarities. Finally, this chapter justifies the originality of the study; states its contribution to the body of knowledge; and considers possible areas for future research in the field of family literacy programmes. However, it begins

by presenting the final pieces of data relating to future improvements to family literacy programmes, as suggested by the adult learners who participated in the study.

Future plans: suggested improvements to family literacy programmes

One measure of the success of family literacy programmes could be the willingness of learners to recommend programmes to others. Whilst this did not explicitly form one of the main sub-questions, it is important to examine word of mouth recommendation by learners to others in the community when considering the benefits and future development of family literacy programmes. All learners, current and past, who were interviewed, said that they would recommend the programme they were attending because it was fun or interesting, or they learnt strategies and skills that were useful to them in helping their child learn. Attending programmes also allowed them to spend time with both their child and other adult learners – usually mothers - in similar situations. One mother in Herefordshire felt programmes helped mothers become more involved with the school, as well as with the work their child did in class. It gave them a better understanding of how and what their child learnt. One mother particularly liked the opportunity that attending the programme offered for gaining interaction with other mothers, enabling the sharing of ideas to help with their child's academic and general development. This was an additional benefit for those attending, over and above the general aim of family literacy programmes.

The opportunity for social interaction was also a major motivational factor for mothers initially joining the programme (see chapter 5, section 1). Learners on KUWTC felt it enabled parents to reinforce the teaching that took place at school, providing the children with consistency of teaching methods. Further, it bolstered the confidence of parents,

reassuring them that they did have the ability to help their child with schoolwork. One parent commented, ‘...it’s not rocket science...a lot of it you already know, it’s just reinforcement...’ (H40:1M). In County Clare, mothers enjoyed the learning, having fun and helping their children progress. One mother remarked on the value of the course as, ‘...to kind of open your mind...to new ideas’ (C72), allowing her to extend and evolve her *habitus*, albeit slowly. A mother in Gozo stated, ‘...it is very good for me, I share it with others...’ (G24), thus improving bonding, networking and overall social capital beyond the social *field* of family literacy, where the learning was taking place, to the wider community or family *fields*. Such learning experiences have the potential, over time, to effect a change in attitudes towards education and schools for parents and children alike. Additional changes in attitudes for the parent, and ultimately the *habitus* of the whole family, are likely to include the increased ability and confidence of parents to help their children with school work; develop their own learning; and positively alter their perceptions of the ‘other’ of which they had previously little or no experience. This was especially so since many of the learners, particularly in County Clare, felt isolated from large parts of society, often restricted to the home or the immediate geographical area.

When considering the future direction and development of family literacy programmes; as raised in one of the study’s sub-questions; it is important to note the opinions of those who have completed programmes. However, although ex-learners were asked directly if, on reflection, there were any improvements they would like to see, few suggestions were offered to either the format or content. The lack of suggestions implies that they were happy with the way programmes were set up and delivered and, where applicable, with their link to the children’s school curriculum. Several mothers in Herefordshire and

County Clare would have liked more time in the sessions. In Herefordshire, this applied to both more time for the adult-only and the joint adult-child components of the session. One mother commented, ‘... [it] didn’t seem long enough...’ (H44). In Herefordshire, both learners and ex-learners expressed concern and frustration that sessions with one tutor had been cancelled due to the tutor’s commitments at college taking priority. This was as a direct result of the complex way in which programmes in Herefordshire were organised (see chapter 4, section 1c). The cancelled sessions had not been re-scheduled to compensate the learners, who felt that this was unfair, leaving them short of their allocated programme hours. This highlights a particular difficulty for those coordinating provision in Herefordshire with the current system of out-sourcing to tutors from the local college. In Gozo, some learners would have liked to have been offered a follow-on course, commencing when their children progressed to the next school year. They felt that this would have helped them keep abreast of any new strategies that they might need to help their children at school.

Finally, one ex-learner in Herefordshire was unhappy with the title of the programme, feeling that the name was unhelpful and derogatory. This was also mentioned by those on the KUWTC programme, where one learner commented that it sounded as if they were inferior, inadequate and behind the children; unable to cope. According to the ex-learner, the negative connotations of the title had apparently been discussed at some length with fellow learners during the programme. Several of the other mothers were unhappy, feeling singled out as unable to read and write:

...Well, I think we all thought that...I think people think oh, are they picking on us because we’re not very good at literacy? I didn’t know what to think of the title at the beginning. (H45)

It should be noted that this comment came from an ex-learner who had competent levels of literacy skills, having obtained eight 'O' levels at school and who stated that she had 'a bit of a passion for English' (H34). Further, this mother was approached to participate not because of her low literacy or numeracy skills but because her child was very shy and lacked confidence. Nevertheless, it illustrates the stigma felt by some mothers, who were approached to attend, until they become familiar with the programme. However, no alternative titles for either programme were suggested and it is difficult to see how any title would not hold some negative connotations that could be misconstrued. Whilst 'family literacy' or KUWTC may not be ideal, in general, the majority of learners, past and present, seemed to take the title as given, being interested more in what actually occurred on the programme than its title.

The perception by learners that programmes work on a negative, deficit model despite the efforts of tutors not to make this appear so, corroborates the views of writers such as Gadsen (1999) and Taylor (1997), reviewed in chapter 2, that learners were aware they were on family il-literacy programmes and that they were deficient in some way. This negative image made recruitment to programmes, particularly in Herefordshire, problematic. Negative connotations resulting purely from the title of programmes could be one reason why providers have found it difficult to attract suitable potential learners. Attending programmes could be viewed by parents, particularly mothers, as an admission that they were lacking in literacy skills. Barton (1994), would suggest that they have admitted that they are diseased and in need of curing. Therefore, by implication, they are viewed by society, and even themselves, as incapable of helping their child reach its full potential, as such a cycle of underachievement reoccurs generation after generation (Bynner and Parsons, 2006; OECD 1997). However, as

learners and ex-learners in Herefordshire pointed out, the title of the programme is not necessarily a reflection of its actual characteristic or content. The ex-learner interviewed enjoyed the programme, finding it beneficial to herself, her child and other members of the family. This outcome can be seen as one measure of a successful programme. Highlighting such benefits could potentially be used to promote programmes, attract learners and to overcome the stigma that some may feel the title of programmes suggests.

Policy rationale and learner motivation

The characteristics of family literacy programmes, the main research question, was largely determined by government funding priorities, which, in turn, was found to be driven by current policy discourse. However, the study found that learner motivation for attending, also a key research question, did not always coincide with policy rationale. Policy discourse at all three case study sites centred specifically on literacy and numeracy as essential skills for citizens if they are to fulfil their potential. This includes full participation in the life of the nation in all social *fields*, particularly the family, education, the workplace and politics. In each case study area, the rationale for family literacy programmes appears under the social inclusion agenda. In England, it is specifically SfL led with the aim of economic up-skilling and the gradual changing of *habitus* towards valuing education. This is achieved by promoting an appreciation of the benefits that education can bring. In policy discourse, literacy is viewed as a skill, one of Barton's (1994) literacy metaphors, and a mechanism for improved life chances. However, this research shows that literacy is much more than just a tool to be utilised for economic survival or integration. It is also an essential social skill which provides the

owner, not only with the confidence to function in wider social settings outside of their established *field*, but also with social capital that can be shared with others.

Many of those attending family literacy programmes, or members of their family, particularly in County Clare, were reported by the tutors and coordinators to be suffering from poor health. Learners often missed sessions because they, or their children, had to attend medical appointments, either at the local doctor's or the hospital, making it difficult for tutors to plan sessions and for learners to keep up. Programmes in County Clare were specifically targeted at learners in areas of social deprivation, of high unemployment and with poor health. Programmes were aimed at improving the quality of life for those in this particular *field* by using literacy education as a civilising tool. As we have seen, the link between ill health and low literacy skills has long been recognised, (ALBSU, 1982), along with the link between power and knowledge. Those who possess literacy skills within a specified social *field* are at an advantage over those who do not (OECD, 1997; Freire, 1993), with the former capable of exerting influence and setting the agenda over the latter. This results in education and literacy policy being delivered by, or imposed upon, one group by the other, making it appear the natural course of action. Bourdieu (1977) terms this process 'misrepresentation'. It is something for which the 'receivers' should be grateful to have the opportunity to access, but it is not offered accidentally or on their terms, rather it is pre-designed by policy to achieve predetermined targets which '...contribute to the reproduction of the social world...' (Bourdieu, 1977: 164). The ultimate political aim may go unrecognised by the 'receivers'.

However, learner motivation for attending was not necessarily, or even primarily, for the adult to improve their own literacy skills, but to help their children succeed in school. Competent literacy skills were seen as the main route to accessing the curriculum (Hannon, 1999). Many of the learners were beginning to realise that their children needed to be better educated than themselves if they were to have successful employment and life opportunities when they left school. Whilst this point may be seen as an obvious one, it represents something of a major shift in *habitus* for many of the parents that family literacy programmes are intended to engage, particularly in County Clare where programmes are only funded for those groups who are deemed as disadvantaged. Literacy was viewed as one of the keys to achieving this goal. This demonstrates a slow shift in *habitus* for the mothers attending programmes, particularly for those from the Travelling community in County Clare where traditionally, education, especially that which is academically rather than vocationally focused, holds little or no value. Here, high-level qualifications are generally not required of adults, neither for a man in his working life or a woman in the home (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). The evidence clearly shows that required outcomes for attending programmes differ between the learners and the policy makers. Each has their own agenda, an agenda that was remarkably similar across all three case study areas.

Practitioners frequently found themselves compromised, trying to serve two masters at the same time. Practitioners had to balance meeting policy and funding objectives, including achieving targets, tangible outcomes and evidencing institutionalised capital, against the needs of the learners at a local and individual level. This was primarily to help their children; to interact with other parents; to have the opportunity to network; to bond with their children; and to gain a better understanding of the school environment.

Such policy aims have the potential to build social capital for reinvestment in the community and family *fields*, but not necessarily in the way that the policy makers envisaged. For example, parents who had attended programmes told others of their value, thus recommending them to friends and family and raising awareness of programmes in the wider community. However, few learners were concerned with taking literacy or numeracy tests to gain certificates or planned to take their learning to a higher level, for example, by engaging in college courses, in the foreseeable future.

Do family literacy programmes benefit literacy skills or improve parental social capital to aid children's academic achievement?

The data clearly shows that the majority of parental learners were mothers and their motivation for attending, across all three case study areas, was inextricably linked to the ways in which it would benefit the educational development of their children. For many learners, programmes were only seen as successful if they benefited the learning and development of their children, rather than the parent, whether the child was present or not. Parents wanted to give their children the best possible chance in life. Ensuring their children's literacy and numeracy skills were developing at the correct rate for their age, was seen by many parents as the key to their children accessing the whole of the curriculum. Ultimately, this would lead to improved employment opportunities, particularly for the Travellers in County Clare, where pressure was felt as a result of migrant workers taking their traditionally reserved, low-skilled, low-paid jobs. Many parents reported that the child involved in the programme had improved academically as a result of attending (See chapter 4, section 6). However, the overall benefit to parental literacy skills appeared to be negligible, primarily because improvement of these skills was not the main reason parents attended.

Children's teachers reported benefits to the children on the programme in line with the findings of Brooks, et al., (1996). Mothers also felt that there were benefits to their other children who were not attending. Learners, particularly on KUWTC and I'd f'Id, were concerned that their skills and knowledge of current pedagogic techniques were outdated and confusing to the children, providing them with conflicting methods of learning. They did not feel able to help their children without first being helped; they, mainly mothers, were experiencing difficulty in transferring their knowledge to the child (Barton, 1994), but all wished to know how this could be done effectively. In addition, learner progression, one of the concerns of this research, was seen in terms of provision that would further help the parent to help the children achieve their full potential at school rather than improve the literacy or numeracy skills of the parent.

Who attended family literacy programmes?

The nature of the *field* of family literacy programmes, for both practitioners and learners, was predictably found to be dominated by women. In the case of the learners, it was overwhelmingly mothers that attended. In Herefordshire and County Clare, all practitioners were also women. However, in Gozo, both male and female practitioners were present: predominantly female for I'd f'Id, which was delivered during school hours and mainly male for Club Hilti, which took place directly after school. The data provides two explanations for this difference. Firstly, it is a reflection of a culture where it is still predominantly men who are employed outside the home. Whilst for women, especially mothers, working full or part-time was reported as becoming increasingly popular, it was still not regarded as the norm, perhaps because of the strong influence the Catholic Church retains over the lives of the populace. Secondly, due to the rising cost

of living reported in Gozo, many men were reported to have taken a second job to ensure the survival of their family.

The data also shows that mothers who attend programmes chose to do so. They perceived themselves as having a voice, especially in the role they play in their children's education. Feminist pedagogic writers, such as Barr (1999), Tisdell (2000), Luttrell (1997) and Rockhill (1987), should be pleased that mothers now feel they are in a position to choose how they want to construct the life and learning opportunities of both themselves and their children. Even if, for the casual observer, it would appear that in so doing they are conforming to traditional gender stereotypes: falling into what seems to be submissive gender roles of father as the breadwinner and mother as the homemaker and carer. In fact, it is purely a logical, logistical and practical solution to running and organising their lives. Further, the lack of fathers attending programmes does not seem to be an issue for the majority of mothers in the study; they are content that programme participants consist mainly of mothers. Having both parents in attendance was seen to be counter-productive. It would not allow the mother to have a designated time with their child, to bond and to develop social capital and an understanding of their child's needs. It would simply recreate the conditions that existed at home. Finally, mothers preferred to have time to network with other mothers whose children were at similar academic and developmental stages, with whom they could share experiences; something that they felt would be difficult to accomplish in the presence of the fathers. Mothers did not object to the attendance of men in principle, however, they would prefer it not to be the father of their child. Given that the majority of those involved in the planning and teaching of programmes were also women, with

the exception of Malta, the study clearly shows that the sphere of family literacy programmes is primarily a female *field*.

In the interviews with mothers and fathers, interviewees saw the role of the father in terms of a child's education as different to that of the mother. Fathers frequently underpinned and supported at home the learning that took place on the programme, including the learning, if any, of the mother; for example by implementing reading strategies. In this way a change in *habitus*, albeit a slow change, towards education was cascaded down from the mothers attending the programme to the fathers in the home. Fathers did not attend because they were uninterested in their children's education, but mainly because of the timings of the programmes. It was not possible or practical to attend with work commitments that had to take priority, as suggested in the literature by Goldman (2005). Whilst they were few in number, non-participating fathers also recognised that programmes were female dominated *fields* in which, if they attended, they would feel awkward and uncomfortable. The education of the child was the responsibility of the mothers; it was predominantly her role to liaise with the school, bridging the two *fields*.

Differences: bridging and bonding across social fields

One of the main differences between the three case study areas was the level of school involvement, both in terms of their involvement in the programmes *per se* and the involvement or relationship between the family and the school. There appeared to be two different models of delivery. In England and Malta, schools were, for the most part, full and willing participants in family literacy programmes, enabling delivery to be mainly as described in the Kenan model. Indeed, in England the schools were relied

upon, not just as a venue for delivery or to identify potential learners, but also to provide a teacher for the children's component of the programme. However, in Ireland school involvement, a crossing of the two *fields* was the exception rather than the rule. Despite numerous efforts afforded by the VEC, and the implementation of home-school link workers, family literacy programmes in Ireland were, at the time of this study, essentially separate from children's learning. The children did not attend sessions with a school teacher; sessions were not planned to include the children; and separate sessions for the children with a teacher of their own to complement the adult delivery did not take place; because, in general, there was little communication, collaboration or interaction between the two *fields*. Whilst parental involvement in Maltese schools is a relatively new phenomena (Borg and Mayo, 2001), it has become increasingly valued and accepted to such an extent that it was deemed essential for the delivery of all types of family literacy programmes. However, as reviewed in the literature, there is a school of thought which suggests there is little evidence that joint programmes are necessary, or even that they yield the best results (Hannon and Bird, 2004). The findings of this study would support this since, overall, learners were satisfied with programmes and found them beneficial whether or not they directly involved the children or the school.

Justification of originality

This study is original in that it is the only study into family literacy programmes to have combined these three specific countries, England, Ireland and Malta, and the particular case study areas within, for comparative analysis. Further, the study was conducted in a predominantly rural context. In most of the literature reviewed, the majority of evaluations and critiques of family literacy programmes have been collected from largely urban settings. Furthermore, the study has examined programmes that were

already established, rather than orchestrated for research purposes. The analysis was undertaken completely independently. It was not commissioned either by those in policy or by any organisation with an interest in promoting, or otherwise, family literacy programmes. It is unique in that this study cannot be replicated in its entirety, due to its sociological component. For example, even if the same programmes were re-visited, different learners would be attending.

The theoretical framework was distinct, marrying, as it did, Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* with the opposing views of Putnam and Coleman's social capital, providing an original critique of family literacy programmes. This theoretical lens enabled the spotlight to be shone on the social, economic, physical, historical and emotional context of the case study areas, to provide a holistic picture of the *habitus* and *field* within each area. The lens shows that the individuals who engage with family literacy programmes are not just humans as economic capital for economic gain, but that they are sophisticated products of their *habitus* and *field* and that social capital, specifically between parent and child, is an important element. Alternative frameworks show how mechanisms and structures such as the family, the economy or the nation operate in isolation, rather than within society as a whole. An example of this is the way in which the lens illuminated the changing *habitus* of the Travellers who participated in the study. They were beginning to value education for their children as a way of securing the future of their children and ensuring they will enjoy better lives. This is being undertaken on two accounts: firstly, in the context of the wider social *field* that is seeing changes in the Irish workforce and skill requirements, at a national and local level, following the expansion of the EU. Secondly, Traveller women are starting to find

their voice and feel empowered, if not for themselves then for their children, despite the traditionally patriarchal *habitus* of the community.

Finally, the use in the study of interviews from a range of key players in the field of family literacy programmes from each of the case study areas, particularly non-participating fathers, gives it originality. Frequently, researchers have concentrated on the learning or experiences of either the parents, or children, or they have investigated aspects of policy and funding. Few have combined data from all the key players, including an admittedly small sample of fathers and ex-learners. In essence, this study provides a unique and original comparative insight into the characteristics of family literacy programmes in three specific areas of Europe.

Contribution to knowledge

Many of the unique aspects of this research study outlined above have ensured its contribution to knowledge. Of particular note are the insights provided by the study of how each of the different types of players involved in family literacy programmes relate to one another, largely regardless of cultural differences. This study has contributed to the body of knowledge by the dissemination of its findings, formally and informally, in an academic context. As a consequence of this research project, the findings and theoretical framework have been shared through a number of media and for a range of audiences including; academics, policy makers and practitioners. There have been four peer-reviewed papers published. This work has been presented at three international conferences. (See Appendix C for full details and references.) In addition, a copy of this thesis will be sent to each of the participating study areas, which they will hopefully find

interesting, informative and useful for planning and delivering family literacy programmes in the future.

Further research

This study highlights the need for further research into family literacy programmes in several areas. First, there needs to be greater exploration of non-participating fathers and the role that they play in the education of their children and their wives or partners, to establish how they can be supported in that role, without necessarily having to attend formal programmes. Second, the lack of knowledge and longitudinal data gained from the tracking of learners, both parents and children, who have participated in programmes over a period of time, for example after five years, needs to be researched further. Following on from the work of Brooks, et al., at Sheffield, a longitudinal study would be invaluable in identifying the long-term benefits and changes, if any, of attending programmes. It would enable a picture to be drawn of how learners employ their new skills in the home, the community and the wider employment sector, informing policy makers of potential long-term benefits. Third, the sustainability of family literacy programmes, in the light of shifting policies and threats to funding, needs to be investigated. Fourth, research is needed into the immediate and medium term benefits on the children who participate in programmes, using before and after measures, which take into account social, as well as academic progression; particularly the benefits of the relationship and bonding between mother and child in terms of social capital. Fifth, an assessment of the influence of the programme on younger siblings is needed, particularly to assess if programmes are able to address generational cycles of underachievement when children are exposed to changes in *habitus* from an early age. Sixth, wider research should be undertaken in Ireland to ascertain the level of participation by schools

in counties outside the study area to establish if any schools are involving parents. A comparative study to determine if programmes delivered within schools with involvement by the school are more successful than those delivered elsewhere is required.

Finally, the last area to be investigated, in England, is an evaluation of the impact on funding and provision of family literacy programmes under the newly formed government Department for Innovation, University and Skills (DIUS). Formed in June 2007 by Gordon Brown when he became prime minister, the department has been constructed from elements of the old DfES, now the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), notably further and higher education and skills, and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI). This is important because, to date, whilst family literacy programmes are funded by the LSC, essentially they have been an initiative which crossed both the adult and compulsory educational *fields*. It is unclear if such collaboration will still be possible under the new department, which is predominantly focused on up-skilling adults for the economy.

A final comment: The long wait

Having considered the research evidence, it is clear that the underlying policy rationale for supporting and implementing family literacy programmes in all three case study areas, namely to raise literacy levels in adults, is valuable and commendable. However, it is unashamedly linked to the policy discourse of increased economic activity in a global arena; the transference and accumulation of human capital and its potential as economic capital is, at best, unsatisfactory, yet, perhaps not surprising and even inevitable when governments must compete in an increasingly global economy and

when funding and resources are limited and must be prioritised. The desire that parents should achieve their aspirations is laudable *if* these are the same desires as the adult learners, mostly mothers, and *if* there are progression opportunities available in the local *field*, which can be capitalised upon. However, the evidence shows that the desired outcomes of learners are focused firmly on helping their children both academically and socially, especially those learners who lead fractured lives, such as lone parents or Travellers or those living in social housing.

The data shows that one of the most valuable aspects of family literacy programmes is its ability to be employed as a conduit in increasing bonding between mother and child. This allows the child greater access to the mother's social capital, which in turn offers the possibility of helping the child to achieve its academic potential and ultimately break generational cycles of poverty and underachievement: a main motivational factor for many of the mothers interviewed.

The evidence from this study suggests that the full benefits of current family literacy programmes, and therefore the policy return, may not become apparent for some time. Changes of *habitus* within social *fields*, particularly those of the family, take time. Family literacy programmes are likely to have the greatest effect when the children, whose parents are presently involved in programmes, become adult and parents themselves. When these children enter the workplace, their communities and general society, they will hopefully have a new *habitus* that values education. Furthermore, they should have acquired increased levels of skills and abilities, making them sufficiently equipped to meet the challenges of the future in all social *fields*, and enabling them to become a fully participating national, European and even global, citizen.

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APPENDIX A

The Lisbon Agenda

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

LISBON EUROPEAN COUNCIL

23 AND 24 MARCH 2000

The European Council held a special meeting on 23-24 March 2000 in Lisbon to agree a new strategic goal for the Union in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy. At the start of proceedings, an exchange of views was conducted with the President of the European Parliament, Mrs Nicole Fontaine, on the main topics for discussion.

I. EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC REFORM AND SOCIAL COHESION

A STRATEGIC GOAL FOR THE NEXT DECADE

The new challenge

1. The European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy. These changes are affecting every aspect of people's lives and require a radical transformation of the European economy. The Union must shape these changes in a manner consistent with its values and concepts of society and also with a view to the forthcoming enlargement.
2. The rapid and accelerating pace of change means it is urgent for the Union to act now to harness the full benefits of the opportunities presented. Hence the need for the Union to set a clear strategic goal and agree a challenging programme for building knowledge infrastructures, enhancing innovation and economic reform, and modernising social welfare and education systems.

The Union's strengths and weaknesses

3. The Union is experiencing its best macro-economic outlook for a generation. As a result of stability-oriented monetary policy supported by sound fiscal policies in a context of wage moderation, inflation and interest rates are low, public sector deficits have been reduced remarkably and the EU's balance of payments is healthy. The euro has been successfully introduced and is delivering the expected benefits for the European economy. The internal market is largely complete and is yielding tangible benefits for consumers and businesses alike. The forthcoming enlargement will create new opportunities for growth and employment. The Union possesses a generally well-educated workforce as well as social protection systems able to provide, beyond their intrinsic value, the stable framework required for managing the structural changes involved in moving towards a knowledge-based society. Growth and job creation have resumed.
4. These strengths should not distract our attention from a number of weaknesses. More than 15 million Europeans are still out of work. The employment rate is too low and is characterised by insufficient participation in the labour market by women and older workers. Long-term structural unemployment and marked regional unemployment imbalances remain endemic in parts of the Union. The services sector is underdeveloped, particularly in the areas of telecommunications and the Internet. There is a widening skills gap, especially in information technology where increasing numbers of jobs remain unfilled. With the current improved economic situation, the time is right to undertake both economic and

social reforms as part of a positive strategy which combines competitiveness and social cohesion.

The way forward

5. The Union has today set itself a ***new strategic goal*** for the next decade: *to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*. Achieving this goal requires an ***overall strategy*** aimed at:

preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society by better policies for the information society and R&D, as well as by stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness and innovation and by completing the internal market;

modernising the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion;

sustaining the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects by applying an appropriate macro-economic policy mix.

6. This strategy is designed to enable the Union to regain the conditions for full employment, and to strengthen regional cohesion in the European Union. The European Council needs to set a goal for full employment in Europe in an emerging new society which is more adapted to the personal choices of women and men. If the measures set out below are implemented against a sound macro-economic background, an average economic growth rate of around 3% should be a realistic prospect for the coming years.

7. Implementing this strategy will be achieved by improving the existing processes, introducing a ***new open method of coordination*** at all levels, coupled with a stronger guiding and coordinating role for the European Council to ensure more coherent strategic direction and effective monitoring of progress. A meeting of the European Council to be held every Spring will define the relevant mandates and ensure that they are followed up.

PREPARING THE TRANSITION TO A COMPETITIVE, DYNAMIC AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

An information society for all

8. The shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy, prompted by new goods and services, will be a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs. In addition, it will be capable of improving citizens' quality of life and the environment. To make the most of this opportunity, the Council and the Commission are invited to draw up a comprehensive eEurope Action Plan to be presented to the European Council in June this year, using an open method of coordination based on the benchmarking of national initiatives, combined with the Commission's recent eEurope initiative as well as its communication "Strategies for jobs in the Information Society".

9. Businesses and citizens must have access to an inexpensive, world-class communications infrastructure and a wide range of services. Every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society. Different means of access must prevent info-exclusion. The combat against illiteracy must be reinforced. Special attention must be given to disabled people. Information technologies can be used to renew urban and regional development and promote environmentally sound technologies. Content industries create added value by exploiting and networking European cultural diversity. Real efforts must be made by public administrations at all levels to exploit new technologies to make information as accessible as possible.

10. Realising Europe's full e-potential depends on creating the conditions for electronic commerce and the Internet to flourish, so that the Union can catch up with its competitors by hooking up many more businesses and homes to the Internet via fast connections. The rules for electronic commerce must be predictable and inspire business and consumer confidence. Steps must be taken to ensure that Europe

maintains its lead in key technology areas such as mobile communications. The speed of technological change may require new and more flexible regulatory approaches in the future.

11. The European Council calls in particular on:

the Council, along with the European Parliament where appropriate, to adopt as rapidly as possible during 2000 pending legislation on the legal framework for electronic commerce, on copyright and related rights, on e-money, on the distance selling of financial services, on jurisdiction and the enforcement of judgements, and the dual-use export control regime; the Commission and the Council to consider how to promote consumer confidence in electronic commerce, in particular through alternative dispute resolution systems;

the Council and the European Parliament to conclude as early as possible in 2001 work on the legislative proposals announced by the Commission following its 1999 review of the telecoms regulatory framework; the Member States and, where appropriate, the Community to ensure that the frequency requirements for future mobile communications systems are met in a timely and efficient manner. Fully integrated and liberalised telecommunications markets should be completed by the end of 2001;

the Member States, together with the Commission, to work towards introducing greater competition in local access networks before the end of 2000 and unbundling the local loop in order to help bring about a substantial reduction in the costs of using the Internet;

the Member States to ensure that all schools in the Union have access to the Internet and multimedia resources by the end of 2001, and that all the teachers needed are skilled in the use of the Internet and multimedia resources by the end of 2002;

the Member States to ensure generalised electronic access to main basic public services by 2003;

the Community and the Member States, with the support of the EIB, to make available in all European countries low cost, high-speed interconnected networks for Internet access and foster the development of state-of-the-art information technology and other telecom networks as well as the content for those networks. Specific targets should be defined in the *eEurope* Action Plan.

Establishing a European Area of Research and Innovation

12. Given the significant role played by research and development in generating economic growth, employment and social cohesion, the Union must work towards the objectives set out in the Commission's communication "Towards a European Research Area". Research activities at national and Union level must be better integrated and coordinated to make them as efficient and innovative as possible, and to ensure that Europe offers attractive prospects to its best brains. The instruments under the Treaty and all other appropriate means, including voluntary arrangements, must be fully exploited to achieve this objective in a flexible, decentralised and non-bureaucratic manner. At the same time, innovation and ideas must be adequately rewarded within the new knowledge-based economy, particularly through patent protection.

13. The European Council asks the Council and the Commission, together with the Member States where appropriate, to take the necessary steps as part of the establishment of a European Research Area to:

develop appropriate mechanisms for networking national and joint research programmes on a voluntary basis around freely chosen objectives, in order to take greater advantage of the concerted resources devoted to R&D in the Member States, and ensure regular reporting to the Council on the progress achieved; to map by 2001 research and development excellence in all Member States in order to foster the dissemination of excellence;

improve the environment for private research investment, R&D partnerships and high technology start-ups, by using tax policies, venture capital and EIB support;

encourage the development of an open method of coordination for benchmarking national research

and development policies and identify, by June 2000, indicators for assessing performance in different fields, in particular with regard to the development of human resources; introduce by June 2001 a European innovation scoreboard;

facilitate the creation by the end of 2001 of a very high-speed transeuropean network for electronic scientific communications, with EIB support, linking research institutions and universities, as well as scientific libraries, scientific centres and, progressively, schools;

take steps to remove obstacles to the mobility of researchers in Europe by 2002 and to attract and retain high-quality research talent in Europe;

ensure that a Community patent is available by the end of 2001, including the utility model, so that Community-wide patent protection in the Union is as simple and inexpensive to obtain and as comprehensive in its scope as the protection granted by key competitors.

Creating a friendly environment for starting up and developing innovative businesses, especially SMEs

14. The competitiveness and dynamism of businesses are directly dependent on a regulatory climate conducive to investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Further efforts are required to lower the costs of doing business and remove unnecessary red tape, both of which are particularly burdensome for SMEs. The European institutions, national governments and regional and local authorities must continue to pay particular attention to the impact and compliance costs of proposed regulations, and should pursue their dialogue with business and citizens with this aim in mind. Specific action is also needed to encourage the key interfaces in innovation networks, i.e. interfaces between companies and financial markets, R&D and training institutions, advisory services and technological markets.

15. The European Council considers that an open method of coordination should be applied in this area and consequently asks:

the Council and the Commission to launch, by June 2000, a benchmarking exercise on issues such as the length of time and the costs involved in setting up a company, the amount of risk capital invested, the numbers of business and scientific graduates and training opportunities. The first results of this exercise should be presented by December 2000;

the Commission to present shortly a communication on an entrepreneurial, innovative and open Europe together with the Multiannual Programme in favour of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship for 2001-2005 which will play an important role as catalyst for this exercise;

the Council and the Commission to draw up a European Charter for small companies to be endorsed in June 2000 which should commit Member States to focus in the abovementioned instruments on small companies as the main engines for job-creation in Europe, and to respond specifically to their needs;

the Council and the Commission to report by the end of 2000 on the ongoing review of EIB and EIF financial instruments in order to redirect funding towards support for business start-ups, high-tech firms and micro-enterprises, as well as other risk-capital initiatives proposed by the EIB.

Economic reforms for a complete and fully operational internal market

16. Rapid work is required in order to complete the internal market in certain sectors and to improve under-performance in others in order to ensure the interests of business and consumers. An effective framework for ongoing review and improvement, based on the Internal Market Strategy endorsed by the Helsinki European Council, is also essential if the full benefits of market liberalisation are to be reaped. Moreover, fair and uniformly applied competition and state aid rules are essential for ensuring that businesses can thrive and operate effectively on a level playing field in the internal market.

17. The European Council accordingly asks the Commission, the Council and the Member States, each in accordance with their respective powers:

to set out by the end of 2000 a strategy for the removal of barriers to services;

to speed up liberalisation in areas such as gas, electricity, postal services and transport. Similarly, regarding the use and management of airspace, the Council asks the Commission to put forward its proposals as soon as possible. The aim is to achieve a fully operational internal market in these areas; the European Council will assess progress achieved when it meets next Spring on the basis of a Commission report and appropriate proposals;

to conclude work in good time on the forthcoming proposals to update public procurement rules, in particular to make them accessible to SMEs, in order to allow the new rules to enter into force by 2002;

to take the necessary steps to ensure that it is possible by 2003 for Community and government procurement to take place on-line;

to set out by 2001 a strategy for further coordinated action to simplify the regulatory environment, including the performance of public administration, at both national and Community level. This should include identifying areas where further action is required by Member States to rationalise the transposition of Community legislation into national law;

to further their efforts to promote competition and reduce the general level of State aids, shifting the emphasis from supporting individual companies or sectors towards tackling horizontal objectives of Community interest, such as employment, regional development, environment and training or research.

18. Comprehensive structural improvements are essential to meet ambitious targets for growth, employment and social inclusion. Key areas have already been identified by the Council to be reinforced in the Cardiff process. The European Council accordingly invites the Council to step up work on structural performance indicators and to report by the end of 2000.

19. The European Council considers it essential that, in the framework of the internal market and of a knowledge-based economy, full account is taken of the Treaty provisions relating to services of general economic interest, and to the undertakings entrusted with operating such services. It asks the Commission to update its 1996 communication based on the Treaty.

Efficient and integrated financial markets

20. Efficient and transparent financial markets foster growth and employment by better allocation of capital and reducing its cost. They therefore play an essential role in fuelling new ideas, supporting entrepreneurial culture and promoting access to and use of new technologies. It is essential to exploit the potential of the euro to push forward the integration of EU financial markets. Furthermore, efficient risk capital markets play a major role in innovative high-growth SMEs and the creation of new and sustainable jobs.

21. To accelerate completion of the internal market for financial services, steps should be taken:

to set a tight timetable so that the Financial Services Action Plan is implemented by 2005, taking into account priority action areas such as: facilitating the widest possible access to investment capital on an EU-wide basis, including for SMEs, by means of a "single passport" for issuers; facilitating the successful participation of all investors in an integrated market eliminating barriers to investment in pension funds; promoting further integration and better functioning of government bond markets through greater consultation and transparency on debt issuing calendars, techniques and instruments, and improved functioning of cross-border sale and repurchase ("repo") markets; enhancing the comparability of companies' financial statements; and more intensive cooperation by EU financial market regulators;

to ensure full implementation of the Risk Capital Action Plan by 2003;

to make rapid progress on the long-standing proposals on takeover bids and on the restructuring and winding-up of credit institutions and insurance companies in order to improve the functioning and stability of the European financial market;

to conclude, in line with the Helsinki European Council conclusions, the pending tax package.

Coordinating macro-economic policies: fiscal consolidation, quality and sustainability of public finances

22. As well as preserving macro-economic stability and stimulating growth and employment, macro-economic policies should foster the transition towards a knowledge-based economy, which implies an enhanced role for structural policies. The macro-economic dialogue under the Cologne process must create a relationship of trust between all the actors involved in order to have a proper understanding of each other's positions and constraints. The opportunity provided by growth must be used to pursue fiscal consolidation more actively and to improve the quality and sustainability of public finances.

23. The European Council requests the Council and the Commission, using the existing procedures, to present a report by Spring 2001 assessing the contribution of public finances to growth and employment, and assessing, on the basis of comparable data and indicators, whether adequate concrete measures are being taken in order to:

alleviate the tax pressure on labour and especially on the relatively unskilled and low-paid, improve the employment and training incentive effects of tax and benefit systems;

redirect public expenditure towards increasing the relative importance of capital accumulation – both physical and human – and support research and development, innovation and information technologies;

ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances, examining the different dimensions involved, including the impact of ageing populations, in the light of the report to be prepared by the High Level Working Party on Social Protection.

MODERNISING THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL BY INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND BUILDING AN ACTIVE WELFARE STATE

24. People are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies. Investing in people and developing an active and dynamic welfare state will be crucial both to Europe's place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring that the emergence of this new economy does not compound the existing social problems of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty.

Education and training for living and working in the knowledge society

25. Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives: young people, unemployed adults and those in employment who are at risk of seeing their skills overtaken by rapid change. This new approach should have three main components: the development of local learning centres, the promotion of new basic skills, in particular in the information technologies, and increased transparency of qualifications.

26. The European Council accordingly calls upon the Member States, in line with their constitutional rules, the Council and the Commission to take the necessary steps within their areas of competence to meet the following targets:

a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resources;

the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010;

schools and training centres, all linked to the Internet, should be developed into multi-purpose local learning centres accessible to all, using the most appropriate methods to address a wide range of target groups; learning partnerships should be established between schools, training centres, firms and research facilities for their mutual benefit;

a European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills; a European diploma for basic IT skills, with decentralised certification procedures, should be established in order to promote digital literacy throughout the Union;

define, by the end of 2000, the means for fostering the mobility of students, teachers and training and research staff both through making the best use of existing Community programmes (Socrates, Leonardo, Youth), by removing obstacles and through greater transparency in the recognition of qualifications and periods of study and training; to take steps to remove obstacles to teachers' mobility by 2002 and to attract high-quality teachers.

a common European format should be developed for curricula vitae, to be used on a voluntary basis, in order to facilitate mobility by helping the assessment of knowledge acquired, both by education and training establishments and by employers.

27. The European Council asks the Council (Education) to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity, with a view to contributing to the Luxembourg and Cardiff processes and presenting a broader report to the European Council in the Spring of 2001.

More and better jobs for Europe: developing an active employment policy

28. The Luxembourg process, based on drawing up employment guidelines at Community level and translating them into National Employment Action Plans, has enabled Europe to substantially reduce unemployment. The mid-term review should give a new impetus to this process by enriching the guidelines and giving them more concrete targets by establishing closer links with other relevant policy areas and by defining more effective procedures for involving the different actors. The social partners need to be more closely involved in drawing up, implementing and following up the appropriate guidelines.

29. In this context, the Council and the Commission are invited to address the following four key areas:

improving employability and reducing skills gaps, in particular by providing employment services with a Europe-wide data base on jobs and learning opportunities; promoting special programmes to enable unemployed people to fill skill gaps;

giving higher priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model, including by encouraging agreements between the social partners on innovation and lifelong learning; by exploiting the complementarity between lifelong learning and adaptability through flexible management of working time and job rotation; and by introducing a European award for particularly progressive firms. Progress towards these goals should be benchmarked;

increasing employment in services, including personal services, where there are major shortages; private, public or third sector initiatives may be involved, with appropriate solutions for the least-favoured categories;

furthering all aspects of equal opportunities, including reducing occupational segregation, and making it easier to reconcile working life and family life, in particular by setting a new benchmark for improved childcare provision.

30. The European Council considers that the overall aim of these measures should be, on the basis of the available statistics, to raise the employment rate from an average of 61% today to as close as possible to 70% by 2010 and to increase the number of women in employment from an average of 51% today to more than 60% by 2010. Recognising their different starting points, Member States should consider setting national targets for an increased employment rate. This, by enlarging the labour force, will reinforce the sustainability of social protection systems.

Modernising social protection

31. The European social model, with its developed systems of social protection, must underpin the transformation to the knowledge economy. However, these systems need to be adapted as part of an active welfare state to ensure that work pays, to secure their long-term sustainability in the face of an ageing population, to promote social inclusion and gender equality, and to provide quality health services. Conscious that the challenge can be better addressed as part of a cooperative effort, the European Council invites the Council to:

strengthen cooperation between Member States by exchanging experiences and best practice on the basis of improved information networks which are the basic tools in this field;

mandate the High Level Working Party on Social Protection, taking into consideration the work being done by the Economic Policy Committee, to support this cooperation and, as its first priority, to prepare, on the basis of a Commission communication, a study on the future evolution of social protection from a long-term point of view, giving particular attention to the sustainability of pensions systems in different time frameworks up to 2020 and beyond, where necessary. A progress report should be available by December 2000.

Promoting social inclusion

32. The number of people living below the poverty line and in social exclusion in the Union is unacceptable. Steps must be taken to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by setting adequate targets to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year. The High Level Working Party on Social Protection will be involved in this work. The new knowledge-based society offers tremendous potential for reducing social exclusion, both by creating the economic conditions for greater prosperity through higher levels of growth and employment, and by opening up new ways of participating in society. At the same time, it brings a risk of an ever-widening gap between those who have access to the new knowledge, and those who are excluded. To avoid this risk and maximise this new potential, efforts must be made to improve skills, promote wider access to knowledge and opportunity and fight unemployment: the best safeguard against social exclusion is a job. Policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination combining national action plans and a Commission initiative for cooperation in this field to be presented by June 2000.

33. In particular, the European Council invites the Council and the Commission to:

promote a better understanding of social exclusion through continued dialogue and exchanges of information and best practice, on the basis of commonly agreed indicators; the High Level Working Party on Social Protection will be involved in establishing these indicators;

mainstream the promotion of inclusion in Member States' employment, education and training, health and housing policies, this being complemented at Community level by action under the Structural Funds within the present budgetary framework;

develop priority actions addressed to specific target groups (for example minority groups, children, the elderly and the disabled), with Member States choosing amongst those actions according to their particular situations and reporting subsequently on their implementation.

34. Taking account of the present conclusions, the Council will pursue its reflection on the future direction of social policy on the basis of a Commission communication, with a view to reaching agreement

on a European Social Agenda at the Nice European Council in December, including the initiatives of the different partners involved.

PUTTING DECISIONS INTO PRACTICE: A MORE COHERENT AND SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Improving the existing processes

35. No new process is needed. The existing Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the Luxembourg, Cardiff and Cologne processes offer the necessary instruments, provided they are simplified and better coordinated, in particular through other Council formations contributing to the preparation by the ECOFIN Council of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. Moreover, the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines should focus increasingly on the medium- and long-term implications of structural policies and on reforms aimed at promoting economic growth potential, employment and social cohesion, as well as on the transition towards a knowledge-based economy. The Cardiff and Luxembourg processes will make it possible to deal with their respective subject matters in greater detail.

36. These improvements will be underpinned by the European Council taking on a pre-eminent guiding and coordinating role to ensure overall coherence and the effective monitoring of progress towards the new strategic goal. The European Council will accordingly hold a meeting every Spring devoted to economic and social questions. Work should consequently be organised both upstream and downstream from that meeting. The European Council invites the Commission to draw up an annual synthesis report on progress on the basis of structural indicators to be agreed relating to employment, innovation, economic reform and social cohesion.

Implementing a new open method of coordination

37. Implementation of the strategic goal will be facilitated by applying a new open method of coordination as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals. This method, which is designed to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies, involves:

fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;

establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;

translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;

periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

38. A fully decentralised approach will be applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership. A method of benchmarking best practices on managing change will be devised by the European Commission networking with different providers and users, namely the social partners, companies and NGOs.

39. The European Council makes a special appeal to companies' corporate sense of social responsibility regarding best practices on lifelong learning, work organisation, equal opportunities, social inclusion and sustainable development.

40. A High Level Forum, bringing together the Union institutions and bodies and the social partners, will be held in June to take stock of the Luxembourg, Cardiff and Cologne processes and of the contributions of the various actors to enhancing the content of the European Employment Pact.

Mobilising the necessary means

41. Achieving the new strategic goal will rely primarily on the private sector, as well as on public-private partnerships. It will depend on mobilising the resources available on the markets, as well as on efforts by Member States. The Union's role is to act as a catalyst in this process, by establishing an effective framework for mobilising all available resources for the transition to the knowledge-based economy and by adding its own contribution to this effort under existing Community policies while respecting Agenda 2000. Furthermore, the European Council welcomes the contribution that the EIB stands ready to make in the areas of human capital formation, SMEs and entrepreneurship, R&D, networks in the information technology and telecom sectors, and innovation. With the "Innovation 2000 Initiative", the EIB should go ahead with its plans to make another billion euro available for venture capital operations for SMEs and its dedicated lending programme of 12 to 15 billion euro over the next 3 years for the priority areas.

II. COMMON EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

42. The European Council has welcomed the Presidency's preliminary report on "Strengthening the Common European Security and Defence Policy" which reflects the work carried forward by the Presidency, together with the Secretary-General/High Representative, within the General Affairs Council in accordance with the remit from Helsinki.

43. The European Council welcomes in particular the fact that the interim bodies foreseen at Helsinki have now been established and are starting to function effectively and that the Council has identified a process for elaborating the headline goal and identifying national contributions so as to meet the military capability target set at Helsinki.

44. The European Council looks forward to the further work that the Presidency, together with the Secretary-General/High Representative, will pursue in the Council and to the Presidency's overall report to the Feira European Council, as called for at Helsinki, including proposals on the involvement of third countries in EU military crisis management and the further development of the EU's relationship with NATO in conformity with the Helsinki European Council conclusions.

45. The European Council furthermore appreciates what has so far been achieved in the non-military crisis management track. It invites the Council to establish by or at Feira a Committee for Civilian Crisis Management.

III. WESTERN BALKANS

46. The European Council reaffirms that the peace, prosperity and stability of South East Europe are a strategic priority for the European Union. The European Council notes the progress achieved over the past year but also the serious challenges which the international community still faces in the Western Balkans. The European Council welcomes the report submitted by the Secretary-General/High Representative, together with the Commission, on the Western Balkans.

47. The European Council confirms that its overall objective remains the fullest possible integration of the countries of the region into the political and economic mainstream of Europe. The European Council confirms that the Stabilisation and Association Process is the centrepiece of its policy in the Balkans. Stabilisation and Association Agreements will include economic and financial assistance and cooperation, political dialogue, approximation with EU legislation, cooperation in other policy areas and free trade. Such agreements should be preceded by asymmetrical trade liberalisation. The European Council urges the countries of the region to work together and with the Union to make a success of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

48. The European Council, mindful of the Tampere European Council conclusions, recalls the

upcoming Adriatic Conference, sponsored by Italy in cooperation with the European Union, which will be held in Ancona on May 19-20. It will enhance Adriatic cooperation in the fight against organised crime, smuggling and illegal immigration and will promote cross border cooperation.

49. The European Council urges the Commission to make proposals to ensure fast-track procedures and speedy and effective assistance.

50. The European Council emphasises that in the FRY a democratic, cooperative Serbia, living at peace with its neighbours, will be welcome to join the European family. With that perspective the Union will maintain its action for democratic change in Serbia. Selective sanctions aimed at the regime will remain a necessary element of EU policy as long as President Milosevic stays in power. The European Council appeals to the Serbian people to take their future into their own hands and to reclaim their place in the family of democratic nations. The EU for its part will not only continue to support the democratic opposition, but will also develop a comprehensive dialogue with civil society. Serb NGOs should be encouraged to engage with other NGOs on a regional basis in the framework of the Stability Pact.

51. The European Council urges the Commission and all parties involved, including the Danube Commission, to start immediately on the steps necessary to clear the Danube for navigation by the summer.

52. The European Council supports Montenegro's efforts to achieve democratic reform and economic prosperity. The European Council underlines the urgent need for substantial assistance to Montenegro in order to ensure the survival of democratic government and to avoid another serious crisis in the region. In addition to the EIB study on the possible expansion of its activities to Montenegro requested by the Council, the European Council asks the competent institutions to take without delay the necessary decisions on the funding, within the appropriations available for 2000, of projects, programmes and other forms of assistance which would help to alleviate the immediate financial needs of Montenegro, if necessary by resorting to EU budgetary reserves, as well as macro-economic assistance. In this context, the European Council welcomes the official inauguration of the Reconstruction Agency in Thessaloniki today.

53. The European Council reaffirms its commitment to UNSCR 1244 as the framework for the international community's efforts in Kosovo. It commends the work of UNMIK and KFOR in pursuit of the Resolution's objectives as well as that of the OSCE. Achieving Serb participation in the interim administration and the municipal elections in autumn 2000 will be important steps towards the stabilisation of the situation in Kosovo. Lasting stability in the region can only be ensured taking into account the legitimate interests of the neighbouring countries of the FRY with full respect for territorial integrity and for existing borders.

54. The Union's special responsibility in the region means that it must play the central role in providing international support for Kosovo. It is determined to ensure the success of the international effort in Kosovo. To this end, it recognises the need to provide support in a much more co-ordinated, coherent fashion, and to ensure that the efforts of the Union and its Member States receive appropriate recognition. The EU has already taken the major role in contributing to reconstruction in Kosovo, providing 30,000 KFOR troops, 800 civilian police and 505 million euro funding, as well as leading the economic reconstruction pillar of UNMIK.

55. The international community needs a more coherent and action-oriented strategy for providing economic and political support to Kosovo and the region. The European Council reaffirms the vital contribution of the Stability Pact, under its Special Coordinator and EU Special Representative, in this respect. To strengthen the central role of the EU, the European Council invites the Secretary-General/High Representative, under the authority of the Presidency and the Council, and in full association with the Commission, to ensure the coherence of EU policies towards the Western Balkans, to strengthen the impact of its contribution and to enhance coordination with the Stability Pact and other efforts of the International Community. They should bring forward action-oriented proposals for this purpose at the next meeting of the General Affairs Council. The upcoming Regional Funding Conference is a key moment for the joint efforts of the international community in South Eastern Europe.

IV. RUSSIA

56. On the eve of the presidential election in Russia, the European Council reaffirms:

the importance of the development of a genuinely effective and working strategic partnership in accordance with the PCA, the EU's common strategy and successive Presidency action plans, so that they can work together in the many areas of common concern, to bring peace, stability and prosperity to Europe on the basis of common values and shared objectives;

the need to this end for Russia, in regard to Chechnya, to abide by its commitments, in particular:

to put an end to the indiscriminate use of military force,

to allow independent investigations of human rights violations,

to allow the competent international organisations and observers to perform their mission freely,

to pursue without delay the search for a political solution.

57. The European Council sees the Cooperation Council with Russia on 11 April and the planned EU-Russia Summit as important occasions for the achievement of these objectives. To the same end the European Council mandates the Tróika to travel to Moscow as soon as possible after the election of the new Russian President, to reaffirm to him and his Government the EU's approach to and concerns about a relationship which is so important to both sides.

V. INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

58. The European Council takes note of the progress of the Conference's work as well as the Presidency's intention to present under its own responsibility a comprehensive report to the Feira European Council.

VI. OUTERMOST REGIONS

59. The European Council takes note of the report recently presented by the Commission on measures aimed at implementing Article 299 (2) on the outermost regions and invites it to submit its initial proposals to the Council.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED TO THE LISBON EUROPEAN COUNCIL(1)

Presidency note on Employment, Economic Reforms and Social Cohesion
Towards a Europe based on Innovation and Knowledge
(5256/00 + ADD1 COR 1 (en))

Commission report
eEurope – An information society for all
(6978/00)

Commission contribution
– An Agenda of economic and social renewal for Europe
(6602/00)

Commission communication on Community policies in support of employment
(6714/00)

Commission communication: Building an inclusive Europe
(6715/00)

Commission communication: Social trends: prospects and challenges
(6716/00)

Commission communication: Strategies for jobs in the information society
(6193/00)

Commission report on economic reform:
Report on the functioning of product and capital markets
(5795/00)

Contribution of the Council (ECOFIN)
(6631/1/00 REV 1)

Contribution of the Council (Labour and Social Affairs)
(6966/00)

Contribution of the Council (Internal Market): Cardiff Economic Reform Process: internal market
aspects
(7130/00)

Opinion of the Employment and Labour Market Committee
(6557/00)

Presidency report "Strengthening the common European Security and Defence policy"
(6933/00)

Report on the Western Balkans presented to the European Council by the Secretary General/High
Representative together with the Commission
(SN 2032/2/00 REV 2)

Draft report from the European Council to the European Parliament on the progress achieved by
the European Union in 1999
(6648/00 + COR 1 (gr))

Footnotes:

(1) *The preparatory documents concerning employment, economic reform and
social cohesion can be found on the Presidency's internet site at: <http://www.portugal.ue-2000.pt/>*

APPENDIX B

Interview schedules

2005/06

1 – Semi-structured interview schedule for Policymakers / Coordinators

Name.....
M / F.....

Date & time of interview.....

Organisation.....

Job
title.....

Length of time family literacy programmes have been running.....

1 – What constitutes a family literacy programme? (Key components, aims)

2 – What is the current policy concerning family literacy programmes?

(Context - government or local led / is it part of a social inclusion agenda / part of SfL / numeracy?)

3 - How is family literacy funded? (Who funds / long or short term / target driven – outcomes)

4 – Who is responsible for delivering family literacy programmes locally?

(Schools / Adult education / Voluntary organisations / combinations / tutor qualifications & gender)

5 - Where do family literacy programmes take place? (Schools/community venues/ home)

6 - What level of collaborative partnership working is required to implement family literacy programmes? (Nationally / locally / organisations involved / individuals involved)

7 - Who are the target learners, how are they identified? (Socially deprived learners or areas / ethnic groups / young or lone mothers / open to all / lit or num skill deficit / gender mix or specific)

8 - What benefits, if any, have you seen to the learners, their communities and/or wider society in general as a result of family literacy programmes?

(Improvement of children's attainment or attitude / learner progression to better employment or education - examples / changing attitudes locally / **Figures to support the above**)

9 – What progression routes are available to learners? (Employment / college / IAG / are progression routes gender biased options?)

10 - What are the future plans for family literacy programmes?

(Locally / nationally / funding / target learner/ learner numbers / Inclusion of men / **IF** no plans explore why not)

11 – What, if any, are the specific challenges delivering family literacy programmes face locally? (Any rural issues - access / attitudes to education / gender / childcare / poverty / perceived benefits / employment)

12 - Is there anything else you would like to add not already discussed?

2 - Semi-structured interview schedule for practitioners

Name.....M / F.....

Date & time of interview.....

Job title / Qualifications.....

Location of provision / organisation.....

Length of time delivering family literacy programmes.....

Number of sessions delivered by tutor per week.....

Location of all sessions.....

1 – I'd like to know about the local area, its industry – traditionally and currently (population size, fluidity– inward or outward migration, ethnicity, age, is it a disadvantaged or wealthy part of the country? / Attitudes towards women & mothers & paid employment)

2 – What kinds of family literacy programmes do you deliver locally?
(Name of programmes / duration / session times / lit / num / other / mapped to children's learning)

3 – What are the specific challenges in delivering family literacy programmes in this area? (Rural issues such as access / attitudes to education / gender / childcare / poverty / language / perceived benefits / employment / expectations/ educational levels)

4 - Who attends family literacy programmes?
(Locals / newcomers / parents - gender / grandparents / careers / average age / employed or not)

5 – How are potential learners identified?
(Encouraged by the school / referred by other organisations i.e. mothers groups / self-referred)

6 – What motivates learners to attend? (To help children / improve own skills / get a job)

7 - How do you make learning relevant in the local context?

(Specific subjects with local relevance / build on previous knowledge / individual interests / local work)

8 – What type of literacy / numeracy is used on the course? (Content - Is it gendered i.e. female specific? / led by the learners / prescribed by the organisation etc)

9 - Which partner organisations do you work with to deliver family literacy programmes? (School / Welfare / child services / employers)

10 - Where are family literacy programmes delivered?

(At primary schools / nurseries/ community venues / colleges / homes)

11 – What benefits have you seen as a result of family literacy programmes to both the parental learner and their child(ren)?

(**Parent** - Confidence / greater social interaction / improved skills / **Child** – improvement in school work, ability, attainment, confidence)

12 – What progression routes, if any, are available to parental learners once the course finishes? (College / *employment* / none / who advises them / when / are progression routes gender biased options?)

13 – What benefits, if any, have there been to the local community?

(Parent participation in community i.e. school governors / voluntary or political organisations / recommending the programmes to others / any gender specific activities including voluntary)

14 – What are the future plans for family literacy programmes in this area?

(Expansion of venues / widening access to others / IF no future plans, why not / what will replace it?)

15 – What do you think works best?

16 – Any other comments

3 - Semi-structured in-depth interview schedule for adults participating in family literacy programmes

Date.....

Name.....M / F.....

Course.....

Venue.....

Length of time the learner has been attending the course.....

Background information

1 – I’d like to know a bit about your background:

1a) Do you live locally / how far is it from here?

1b) How long have you lived here?

1c) Where do you come from originally?

1d) How many children do you care for – ages / gender

Motivation

2 – Why did you decide to come to this class?

(Referred / self-motivated / for child(ren) / recommended by a friend / knew others attending)

3 – What do you like about the class?

(Relevance / interests me / meeting people / time for self / confidence / tutor / activities / enjoyment)

4 – What, if anything, do you dislike about the class? (Tutor / the time / the activities)

5 – What kind of activities do you do during the class? (Worksheets / creating games / solving lit or num problems learners have / work with the children)

6 – How does your child respond to you being here? (Looks forward to it / indifferent)

Impact:

7 – What difference has attending the course made to:

7a) You (Has learner achieved goals? / unexpected outcomes / community participation/work/ confidence)

7b) Your child (Improvements at school / confidence / concentration / increased use lit, num at home)

7c) The whole family (Impact on – other children, older or younger / partner / wider family / friends)

Progression:

8a) – What are you planning to do when the course finishes? (Further courses / work - type / no plans)

8b) – Would you recommend the course to others? (Explore why or why not / if they already have & who to)

Gender issues:

If the learner who is being interviewed is a mother:

9 -Does your husband / partner / child's father ever attend the class?

NO - go to question **9a**

YES - go to question **9b**

9a) If NO why not? (Work commitments / time / not seen as his responsibility)

9ai) When you go home do you share what you have learnt in the class with the child's father? (Explore how and when)

9aii) Would you prefer your child's father to come to the class with you? (Explore)

9aiii) What, if anything, would encourage your child's father to come too?

9b) If YES – how often does he attend?

9bi) Why do you both attend?

9bii) What do you think are the benefits of you both attending? (To all)

9c) How would you feel if (more) men / dads attended the class?
(Inhibited / self-conscious / it would be better – how & who for?)

Additional demographic information

1e) Do you work, if so where?

1f) How old were you when you left school? (Subjects taken / grades obtained)

1g) When did you last do any courses or training? (Where / levels / type / why)

1h) Marital status?

1i) Which age group are you? Under 25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56+

10 – Any other comments / information

4 - Interviews with non-participating fathers

Name.....

Date, time & place of interview.....

Course connection.....

1 – Have you ever considered going to the family literacy classes?

1a) If Yes - What stops you from going to the classes? (Time / work / not his place / not interested / childcare / cost)

1b) If No – Why not?

2 – What would encourage you to go to the classes? (Changes of time / location / different learning / separate male-only sessions / different course content)

3 – What changes have you seen as a result of your wife / partner / child's mother attending the classes? (More literacy home / greater confidence child or mother / child's improvement school)

3a) in your wife / partner

3b) in your child(ren)

3c) in the home

4 - Do you think the classes are a good idea? (Explore why or why not)

5 – Has the fact that your wife / partner and child(ren) have attended the course made any difference to you? (Explore why or why not)

Demographic information:

6a) Age group Under 25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56+

6b) Occupation

6c) Length of time living in this location

6d) Place of birth

6e) Age of leaving school

6f) Qualification / training

7 – Any other comments / information (Is the father involved in the child's education in other ways i.e. attends parents evening or helps out at clubs, trips etc)

5 – Semi-structured interview schedule for ex-family literacy learners

Date of interview.....

Name.....M/F.....

Name of Course attended.....

Venue of course attended.....

When the learner attended the course / duration.....

Motivation

1 – Why did you originally choose to attend the course? (Referred / self-motivated / for child(ren) / recommended by a friend / knew others attending)

2 – What did you do before the course? (Nothing / housewife / worked – where / training)

3 – What did you like best about the course? (Relevance / interests me / meeting people / time for self / confidence / tutor / activities / enjoyment / learning content / being with the child)

4 – What did you like least about the course? (Tutor / the time / the activities)

5 – What, if anything, do you miss about the course? (Support for self or child / friends)

Impact:

6 – What difference, if any, did going to the course make to:

6a) **You** (were learner goals achieved? / Unexpected Outcomes / community participation / employment - type / confidence / further learning)

6b) **Your child** (Improvements at school / confidence / concentration / increased use lit, num at home)

6c) **The whole family (including younger children & husband / partner)** (Impact on – other children, older or younger / partner / wider family / friends)

6d) **What, if any, benefits do you still see as a result of the course?**
(Longer-term impact)

7a) – **Would you recommend the course to others?** (Explore why or why not / if they already have who to)

7b) **Are there any improvements you would like to see to the course?**
(Content / mixed gender learning / times / venues...)

Additional demographic information providing the participant is willing:

8a) Age group? Under 25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56+

8b) Marital status before the course / after the course

8c) Number / age / gender of children cared for during the course

6 - Semi-structured interview schedule for children's teachers

Name.....M / F.....

Date & time of interview.....

Job title / Qualifications.....

Location of provision / organisation.....

Length of time delivering family literacy programmes.....

Number of sessions delivered by tutor per week.....

Location of all sessions.....

1 – What is your role in delivering family literacy? (Children only / combined / other)

2 – Who else do you work with on the programme? (Reception teacher / adult tutor / head teacher / any social services)

3 – What are the specific challenges in delivering family literacy programmes in this area? (Parental attitudes to education / language / expectations / parental educational levels)

4 - Which children participate in family literacy programmes? (Age / gender / socioeconomic & family background)

5 – How are children identified for the programme?

5a) By the school – who? class teacher/ head / other

5b) Recommended by outside organisations (i.e. social services)

5c) Parental request

6 – What type of literacy / numeracy activities do you do with the children? (Content / led by the learners / prescribed by the organisation etc)

8 – What changes have you seen in the children as a result of the programme? (Improvement in school work – ability, attainment, confidence / social skills)

15 – What do you think works best with the children?

16 – Any other comments

APPENDIX C

Publications and conferences

Publications:

Rose, A. & Atkin, C. (2007) Family Literacy in Europe: separate agendas? *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*. 37(5), pp. 601-615

Rose, A. & Atkin, C. (2007) Family Literacy Programmes in Europe: Do the children need to be there? *RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) Journal*, 63 pp.28 - 34

Rose, A., & Atkin, C. (2007) Strengthening home-school links through family literacy programmes: a comparative European case study, In **Phitiaka, H. & Symeonidou, S. (Eds)** *Conference proceeding of the European Research Network about Parents in Education*, (Ernape), *Schools and families in partnership looking into the future*. pp. 340-349

Rose, A. & Atkin, C. (2006) Family Literacy Programmes: a comparative European perspective of local and global, In *Human Development and Adult Learning "Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Development"*, Faro, University of the Algarve, pp. 129-140

Conference presentations:

August 2007, ERNAPE - European Research Network about Parents in Education, University of Cyprus, Paper: *Strengthening home-school links through family literacy programmes: a comparative European case study*.

October, 2006, ESREA - Research Network on Human Development and Adult Learning, University of the Algarve, Paper: *Family Literacy, a comparative European perspective of local and global*.

September 2006, BAICE - British Association for International and Comparative Education, University of Belfast, Paper: *Family literacy in Europe: A policy mismatch?*

January 2008, NIACE - Family Capital Conference, Paper: *From social capital to family capital: the benefits of family literacy programmes across cultural boundaries*.