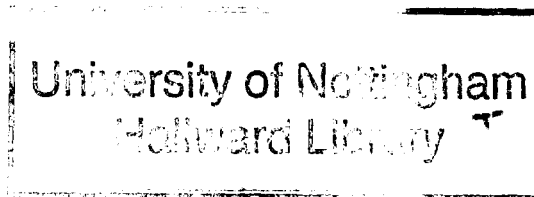


Choosing to Learn or Chosen to Learn:

A qualitative case study of

Skills for Life Learners



By

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Abstract

It has been estimated that as many as one in five adults¹ in England have difficulties with literacy or numeracy skills (DfEE, 1999). Raising the standards of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills amongst all adults of working age in England has become one of Government's highest priorities (DfEE, 2001a).

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) was launched in England in March 2001. Its fundamental aim was to allow adults to improve their LLN skills; identified as a crucial factor in enabling adults to be able to contribute fully to society, both socially and economically.

As a result of the strategy, some identified target groups, e.g. the unemployed and benefit claimants, have found that receipt of benefits has had 'conditionality' attached to it; that is they are required to undertake activities, including training, in order to be able to continue to receive welfare benefits.

This study considered the *Skills for Life* strategy in relation to an identified target group: long term unemployed adults attending training programmes provided by a private training provider, contracted on

¹ The term 'adult' is a highly contested one, being afforded many definitions by writers in the field. For the purposes of this thesis this term is used to refer to people aged between 19 and 65.

behalf of Jobcentre Plus to deliver *Skills for Life* training programmes. Their learning experiences whilst attending this training programme are explored, alongside the experiences of other adults with poor LLN skills also attending *Skills for Life* training programmes through other pathways: a 'hard to reach' group attending training at a further education college and a 'prisoner' group accessing *Skills for Life* training through the prison education system.

The research was conducted predominantly using a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interview was the primary research tool for gathering data for this study. These were supported by undertaking informal classroom observations and informal discussions. This provided an opportunity to triangulate the primary data and led to a robust data-set.

Using the conceptual framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu's thesis on the reproduction of culture, society and education, evidence is presented to support the argument that the *Skills for Life* strategy is being used as an apparatus of symbolic violence; legitimised through misrecognition.

The concepts of social and human capital are utilised to consider how, or if, the *Skills for Life* strategy is working to develop social cohesion and economic competitiveness within the adult workforce: one

identified mission of the strategy. I argue that the strategy is situated in a tense field between these concepts, rather than the envisaged complementary relationship.

Based on analysis of the data, I present evidence to support the argument that in the race to compete in the new global knowledge economy, Government has devalued the social networks upon which our society has historically relied for social stability. Further analysis of collected data provides evidence that making attendance at training provision a 'conditionality' of receipt of welfare benefits is unlikely to result in a significant increase in an adult's LLN skills. Whilst attendance at training provision can be increased through the use of interventions, such as sanctioning, this negative association acts as a barrier to an adult engaging in the training activities.

The major finding of the study is that adults do not engage in learning as a result of compulsion and, in fact, activity rejects engagement as a result of compulsion. This supports more than a century of learning theory that concludes that learning is most effective when an individual chooses actively to learn.

Despite a mounting body of research, developed through the work of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) and others, promoting a social practice approach to

teaching and learning LLN, activity continues to revolve around a functionalist, decontextualised delivery mechanism.

The thesis concludes with some suggestions for both policy and practice in the development of *Skills for Life* training provision. It argues that flexible training programmes which are linked to personal interests, whether social or vocational, will provide an improved framework in which to achieve the aspirations set out in the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a).

Preface

At the start of the new millennium my career took me in a direction I could not have anticipated. I was presented with a world that challenged all the assumptions on which my life had been constructed. That world belonged to adults who lived without the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills to enable them to either live without depending on friends and family or obtain employment readily. It was my assumption that all adults could read, write and undertake numerical calculations to a level that allowed them to live and work independently. Because of the compulsory nature of education for young people between the ages of five and 16 in England, it had not occurred to me that adults of recent generations would find themselves without these skills.

I was given the opportunity to work for a training provider, sub-contracted by a Government agency (Department for Work and Pensions) to provide training programmes for long-term unemployed adults (more than six months) who had been identified as having poor LLN skills.

Managing this provision allowed me to encounter, for the first time, a range of adults who were struggling with their LLN skills. Many of these adults recounted stories of feeling pushed from one training

programme to another by Government agencies; some told stories of finally being able to tell someone that they were struggling with their LLN skills and at last finding some training which would help them to develop these skills; many told stories of only coming to the training programme because they would receive a financial reward for doing so or because they would lose their welfare support if they didn't; others told stories about the frustration of attending a training programme to focus on developing their LLN skills and having to undertake work placements or accept any type of employment rather than continue with the training programme.

It became clear that for many of those attending the training programme there was a misunderstanding, or a mismatch, between their expectations of the training programme they were attending - its aims and objectives - and the purpose of the training programme as perceived by those contracted to deliver the training. Additionally, it became difficult for the practitioners responsible for working with these groups to gain participation from those adults who were attending the training programme because 'they had been told to'. Practitioners reported difficult behaviour and non-attendance whilst learners reported having to undertake meaningless activities that were irrelevant and decontextualised from their day-to-day activities.

At the same time, a new strategy was launched, called *Skills for Life*: a national programme to improve adult literacy and numeracy (DfEE, 2001a). By attending launch events it became clear that one of the identified groups of people targeted by the strategy were 'long-term unemployed adults' and there was a significant drive to enable and support this group of adults to develop skills.

This led to some significant confusion for me. The new strategy aimed to focus on up-skilling unemployed adults' LLN skills and yet the training programmes provided by the Government agency responsible for unemployed adults had a 'work-first' focus, stressing the importance of obtaining employment.

I needed to understand the apparent disparity between Government wants and learner needs.

In 2002 I was given the opportunity to undertake a doctoral research programme, of which this thesis is the culmination. Under the supervision of experienced colleagues in the field of Adult Continuing Education, I have been given the opportunity to explore the experiences of adults attending a range of *Skills for Life* training programmes.

It is my hope that this work will be of interest, and of value, to those with responsibility for creating policy. Particularly, I hope that policy-makers will, through this thesis, have the opportunity to reflect on how national strategies and policies actually play out for those 'on the coal face' who are the recipients of such policies.

Additionally, I hope that practitioners who have the opportunity to read this thesis are reminded once more that such adults cannot be considered as an homogenous group within society and it is only the standardisation of LLN that homogenises them; in all other ways they are as heterogeneous and diverse as any other group within society.

Throughout the period of this study it has been important for me to disseminate the ongoing findings of the research and to engage with the field. As a result I have had a series of papers published in a range of academic journals (see appendix F). These publications, whilst drafted by myself and based on the findings of this study, have been editorially developed with the support of my Supervisor, Dr Chris Atkin, who is identified as a co-author.

In addition, I have been a researcher in two significant pieces of work for the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and a research coordinator for the Lincolnshire and

Rutland Learning and Skills Council. These research programmes have also resulted in further publications, listed in appendix F.

Chapter One: Introduction

This introduction outlines the framework and content of the thesis. In addition, the rationale for the study and the research focus will be presented along with an overview of the policy context in which the study is situated. The case study area used and the institutions involved in the study will also be described. Finally, an overview of the thesis structure is provided.

Adult Education

Adult education in Britain has long been associated with an agenda of, and for, social change (Bowman, et al., 2000; DfEE, 1999; DfEE, 2001a; Bynner and Parsons, 1998). Participation in adult education is also identified as an important driver in affecting such change (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). This agenda has been heightened during the last 20 years, becoming a key Government priority and a central indicator upon which success is measured in education and in other areas, such as increased employment (DfEE, 1999; DfEE, 2001b; DfES, 2003). The need for the Government to have available a workforce which can actively participate in the employment market and contribute to the economic prosperity of the country has been a key reason for the growth of interest in adult education. Particularly, adults who have low levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) have become a target

for policy makers as such poor skills have been identified as obstacles which may prevent them from obtaining regular employment.

Education is the key to economic success, social cohesion and active citizenship. Our future national prosperity depends on the skills and abilities of our people. In a rapidly changing technologically advanced and increasingly competitive global economy, Britain needs a world-class system of education and training. The regular updating of skills and knowledge has become essential to maintaining and enhancing productivity and security in the workplace. (Labour Party, 1996: 2)

Defining Terms

It is important, at this stage, to provide clarification of some of the terms used throughout this thesis, and their application within this study, particularly 'adult', 'education', 'globalisation', 'lifelong learning', and 'employability'.

Adult

A broad discussion on the concept of 'adult' is provided by Alan Rogers (Rogers, 2003). The term 'adult' has been used historically, and continues to be used, in a number of ways: to refer to chronological

age, attitudes, values and beliefs. 'Adult', or 'adulthood' is often rooted to cultural specificity, sometimes seen as a social construct that holds various meanings and perceptions across cultures, time and space. Rogers (2003) provides definitions of what it means to be adult from a number of writers; ranging from adult 'defined as anyone aged twenty-one or over, married, or the head of a household' (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965: 26) to people defined as 'adults because they have assumed responsibility for managing their own lives' (cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999: 393); and moves this discussion forward to explore the relationship of adulthood to other associated concepts, particularly childhood.

Rogers argues that adulthood, in Western societies, is seen as the opposite to childhood and, as such, holds three signifying characteristics: maturity, autonomy and a sense of perspective in relation to self (Rogers, 2003); although recognising the idealist nature of such a definition. Importantly, notions of adulthood, and what it means to be adult, are fluid and ever changing with individuals constructing their own conceptions of what it is to be adult based on their own contexts of culture and society.

For the purposes of this thesis the term 'adult' is used as a chronological reference to people aged between 19 and 65, associated

with paid employment, rather than as a concept with associated value and belief systems, although these are implicit.

Education

'Education' is a term that is commonly interchanged with the term 'training'. Historically, these terms have very different meanings, with 'education' regularly referring to:

... organised and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life.' (UNESCO, cited in Jarvis, 1987:105)

Raymond Williams stated that education has at its heart three essential aims: to allow the individual to understand social change; to allow the individual to relate social change to their own context; and, ambitiously, to enable the individual to become the author of social change.

The term 'training', however, is generally considered to be an activity which involves the transfer of knowledge and skills from an 'expert' or 'professional' to a 'new student or employee' in order that they (the student) becomes enabled to undertake the newly learned skill independently, usually within an economic environment (Jarvis, 1995). There is extensive debate and tension around these terms with the

value hierarchy associated with them being evidenced in discussions around curriculum models, academically and vocationally. An academic curriculum largely incorporates material that is deemed to be important in its own right without any real concern about whether the material should be used for economic activity. Such a curriculum often incorporates elements of cultural heritage with associated political and cultural value judgements. A vocational curriculum, alternatively, has its emphasis on using the incorporated material for other activity and is based on what participants will need to know in order to carry out this activity; the use of the new material is given more importance than the knowledge of the material.

Education, then, can be said to be largely associated with an academic curriculum and training with a vocational curriculum (Jarvis, 1995). Whilst, at first reading, the subject of this study (LLN) seems to align itself with an educational construct, I have chosen to align it with a vocational construct; that of 'training' and have used this term throughout the study. This is a decision based on Government usage of the terms within the *Skills for Life* (DfEE, 2001) strategy; LLN are identified as 'skills' to be learnt to increase one's employability. The concepts of LLN are discussed in detail in further chapters of this study but it is useful to understand these concepts as being significantly different from the 'English' and 'Mathematics' subjects that are core

curriculum subjects within the academic compulsory national curriculum of England.

Globalisation and the Knowledge Economy

'Globalisation' is an umbrella term used to explain increasing global connectivity, integration and interdependence in a range of spheres, particularly economic activity. The term has become increasingly popular during the 20th century to explain the relationships that exist to bind people into one global system of activity.

More recently Beck (2000) argues that globalisation is 'the *process* through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks' (Beck 2000: 11 in Jarvis, 2007: 40).

The rapid growth in globalisation is largely attributed in the literature to both the removal of international trade barriers following the end of the Second World War and significant advances in technology; being most commonly identified through three primary domains of activity: economic, social and political. This, in turn, has resulted in a 'global economy'. A global economy refers to the expansion of economies beyond national borders and includes the globalisation of production,

markets, finance, communications, and the labour force (Global Economy Definitions, 2006).

A 'knowledge-based economy' – a term popularised by Peter Drucker (1969) – refers to the use of knowledge to produce economic benefit. Drucker (1969) describes economic globalisation in terms of transition moving towards a 'knowledge economy' or 'information society'. The growth of this conceptualisation of knowledge as an economic activity is underpinned by accepting that knowledge and education can be treated as a business product, where educational and innovative intellectual products and services can be exported for a high value return.

The rise of globalisation, and the associated knowledge-based economy, has resulted in the development of goods and services that can be bought, sold and delivered via electronic networks. These concepts underpin the discussions going forward in this thesis, particularly how they have influenced the development of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) in England. Parallel to this, the rise of globalisation demands 'a more educated and continually educated, workforce' (Jarvis, 2007: 63) – a lifelong approach to learning that, importantly, is seen as the responsibility of the individual, not just the State.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is the key to the development of a society that is economically successful within a global market, and is also inclusive and just, according to Government (Hodgson and Spours, 1999). Lifelong learning as a concept has at its core the notion that learning takes place throughout one's life. The concept has acquired global recognition, with 1996 being declared the European Year of Lifelong Learning by the European Union. Lifelong learning is portrayed as the key to survival, being the foundation of learning organisations, a learning society and a learning culture (Kerka, 2000; Field, 2002).

The role of the State, in partnership with employers, arguably, is to provide learning opportunities from which individuals can freely choose and engage. Such a concept could perhaps be perceived as 'an inherently good thing and as such require little, or no, further justification' (Atkin, 2000: 258).

However, the association of lifelong learning with economic outcome has received criticism (Coffield, 1999), including turning education from a public good into a private commodity. By shifting responsibility to the individual, ignoring the socially constructed nature of learning and overemphasising instrumental and vocational learning, only those

activities that show a visible and quick return can be rewarded (Coffield, 1999).

Adult education has existed in Britain since at least the 18th century (Yeaxlee, 1929) remaining largely on the perimeter of educational provision, and being generally associated with the socialisation of young people. Following the Second World War, however, there was a rapid expansion in adult education that included the development of training programmes for unemployed adults (Field, 1992).

Lifelong learning has its origins in the concept of lifelong education which emerged during the 1960s as a humanistic and radical approach to education with the aim of transforming economic and social structures, such as capitalism, through an emphasis on informal learning across ones lifespan.

Lifelong learning gained further prominence during the 1970s with influential debates being undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the publication of the Faure report in 1972. This provided a largely humanistic view of learning, recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning for all people throughout their lifetime.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) approach to lifelong learning, however, developed a much more human capital view, conceptualising lifelong learning as 'recurrent education' (OECD, 1973) which enabled individuals to experience phases of paid work, leisure and learning. In Britain, the Russell Committee was appointed to advise Government on adult education policies and to support the creation of a number of pathways, including the provision of basic literacy teaching (DES, 1973). Due to the changing nature of the global economic market, 'lifelong learning as a concept became rooted on an economy of full employment' (Field, 2001: 8).

Following the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, noted above, lifelong learning became a part of national policy debates and has played its part in legitimating a wide range of policy activity. Field argues that lifelong learning has increasingly become 'a tool for the reform and modernisation of aspects of national education and training systems' (Field, 2001: 3) and consequently 'is likely to become one among many factors that are transforming the governance of late modern societies' (Field, 2001: 4).

Lifelong learning has, over three decades, been transformed from a humanistic radical approach to education to one with a focus on economy, skills and vocationalism. Field argues that:

By individualising the characteristics that justify employees and others in treating people differently, the trend towards lifelong learning also helps fragment the excluded, and encourages a search for individual solutions. And this pattern is reproduced through other areas of public life, as the welfare state switches its focus from 'passive support' to 'active strategies of insertion' – the most significant of which include training, so that individuals can acquire the skills and knowledge required for them to take active responsibility for their own well-being. Lifelong learning does not solely serve to reproduce existing hierarchies and inequalities but may potentially create and legitimate new ones. (Field, 2001: 13-14)

Whilst there is currently a clear emphasis on the economic benefits associated with the concept of lifelong learning, lifelong learning has a parallel discourse focussing on the development of sustainable communities through an agenda of social justice and a reduction in social exclusion.

By providing opportunities for lifelong learning, authors have continually argued that people will be better able to participate in, and take responsibility for, their communities (Freire, 1996; Street, 1995; OECD, 1996). However, as noted by Kerka (2000), dichotomies can be drawn between participants and non-participants, or learners and non-

learners, which may work to increase the divide between 'those who can' and 'those who can't'.

It is clear then that lifelong learning is an eclectic concept that is broad and multifaceted; it is intertwined with other concepts such as lifelong education, continuing education and adult education. However, it is also apparent that a contemporary understanding of lifelong learning is closely linked to economic values that tend to override humanitarian aims. Lifelong learning has 'become a means of achieving instrumental (economic) values, an end in itself that would enhance personal development' (Lee, 2007: 1). It is associated with activities that aim to improve knowledge, skills and competence and has become a policy goal for supporting economic growth.

Conceptualisation of Learning

The concept of lifelong learning is problematised by the interchangeable use by writers of the terms lifelong 'learning' and lifelong 'education' (Rogers, 2004; Rogers, 1992) and also by how 'learning' is regarded and defined. There are many authors contributing to discussions on theories of learning that can broadly be divided into four main schools, discussed below.

The behaviourist school forms the basis of all learning theories and contends that all learning involves observable changes in behaviour (Reece and Walker, 2000). Key writers in this school include Pavlov and his stimulus-response model of learning, Skinner's operant conditioning model of learning and Thorndike's law of effect (Armitage, et al., 2003). A second school is the gestalt branch, founded in the 1920's by Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler and Kurt Koffka. This school focuses on the mind's perceptive process and is based on the idea of whole structures and patterns. This approach considers learning as a complex process of interrelationships that occur as a result of engaging with new problems in the light of previous experiences (Jarvis, 1995). Thirdly, the cognitive branch of learning theory is based on the work of Piaget and Bruner who determined that knowledge was constructed through interactions with the environment, with learning occurring through experimentation and discovery: constructivism. Piaget's work focussed on the development of children and established that learning was development; going on to identify stages of sequential intellectual development.

Bruner's work followed on from Piaget's, stating that discovery learning was the most effective and authentic method of achieving a real understanding of the principles of a subject (Jarvis, 1995). The fourth school of learning is a humanist approach to learning that places emphasis on a perceived 'natural desire' of everyone to learn,

maintaining that learners need to be empowered and have control over the learning process. Theorists in this school include John Dewey, Carl Rogers and Malcolm Knowles. Knowles was largely responsible for the popularisation of the term 'andragogy' – the art and science of helping adults to learn, based on the notion of adults as self-directed learners. Rogers also placed emphasis on the self and contended that learning was acquired by doing and therefore experiential learning is the only true learning (Illeris, 2004).

These varying approaches to learning are usefully exemplified by Illeris (2004) who argues that all learning theories that achieve acceptance and legitimacy within the field clearly have value and beneficially contribute to the ongoing discussions around 'learning'. These differing theoretical approaches to learning, however, provide contrasting claims about the effectiveness of learning and about the relationship between learning and knowledge.

What is clear from these discussions is that learning occurs in a diverse set of ways, although what constitutes learning is very often associated with formal methods of education; therefore the interchangeable nature of the terms can be understood. Although education can be identified as a process through which learning can be facilitated, other forms of learning, termed non-formal (learning outside the formal learning system) and informal (learning from life), are considered to be

of equal value to that undertaken through more formal pathways (traditional teacher-centred environments) (Rogers, 2004). The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) is constructed to acknowledge learning of LLN only through formal mechanisms of skills acquisition via qualification achievements, limiting the recognition of the development of LLN via broader informal frameworks.

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

Adult learning as a voluntary activity is mythical, argues Kerka, who proposes that 'learning society rhetoric, financial incentives, and employer and social pressures are resulting in a new form of compulsory learning, learning as a "life sentence": a new form of social control' (Kerka, 2000: 5). This view is supported in the work of Coffield (1999) and Illeris (2003) and is discussed in more detail in following chapters. A more inclusive vision of lifelong learning is

proposed by Atkin (2000) who argues learning that involves the extension of human potential should be seen as 'an intrinsically worthwhile endeavour' (Atkin, 2000: 5) and one worthy of investment in its own right without a direct association with economic values.

Current Government policy clearly identifies lifelong learning, and the subsequent investment in education and training (knowledge and skills), as the foundation upon which individuals can advance their employability and contribute to the creation of a competitive economic market. Government identifies education and training as important concepts in the creation of social justice. As such, there is recognition by them [Government] that the changing labour market is likely to further marginalise and exclude individuals who lack basic LLN skills (Hodgson and Spours, 1999). In an effort to address this issue, Gordon Brown (then Chancellor of the Exchequer) proposed the most appropriate response to such inequality and social exclusion was to develop an approach based on equality of opportunity and lifelong learning through a reforming of the welfare state. Education and training was to increasingly play an important role in helping people off welfare benefits and into economic activity.

In reforming the welfare state to meet both these economic and social cohesion objectives, Government focussed on the 'Welfare to Work' strategy; a central pillar of Labour's overall political approach (Hodgson

and Spours, 1999). This strategy, developed during 1993 and 1996 when Labour was not in power, was 'designed to address the issue of long-term unemployment, break the spiral of escalating spending on social security and end the dependency culture' (Hodgson and Spours, 1999: 49). Whilst the system, incorporating various strands, is primarily designed to take people off welfare benefits, there is also a focus on personal responsibility and employability so that individuals can enter and progress within flexible labour markets. This is a significant policy shift for the new Labour Government with a new focus on personal responsibility and accountability and is a key issue of debate within this thesis.

When the Committee on Widening Participation, chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy, presented the influential report 'Learning Works' (FEFC, 1997), it set out a radical vision to engage and draw back into learning those who, traditionally, had not taken advantage of educational opportunities. Particularly, the focus was on those with no, or inadequate, qualifications, suggesting that a return to learning offered opportunities to break free from cycles of economic disadvantage and social exclusion. The report also argued that the then welfare benefit system was in desperate need of reform, observing that the system inhibited, rather than facilitated learning as a progression to work, noting 'people who are unemployed are less likely to study than those in work' (FEFC, 1997: 70). The report

concluded by suggesting a programme of 'welfare to learning' should be initiated alongside a 'welfare to work' programme. Implicit in the report is the notion that individuals who find themselves considered as 'inadequately qualified', 'economically deprived' or 'socially excluded' agree with these statements and do want to 'break free' from this cycle, although it is not clear whether anybody actually asked them?

Government is removing itself as the sole agency responsible for financially supporting individuals through the welfare system and is placing much greater emphasis on the individual to take responsibility for financial security with Government providing mechanisms through which this can be achieved.

What, arguably, separated this initiative from its predecessors is the emphasis on one-to-one help, high quality education and training and follow-through elements (Hodgson and Spours, 1999). The aim of this policy approach, particularly for long-term unemployed adults, was: 'to remove barriers to unemployment, combat employer prejudice, increase motivation, restore self-confidence and, where necessary, increase their employability' (Employment Service, 1998 in Hodgson and Spours, 1999: 54).

Such interventionist approaches to education, training and learning, in all its forms, can arguably be seen as an attempt by the dominant,

powerful, group in society to control the reproduction of society, specifically the power relations (Bourdieu, 1992). Equally, as will be explored throughout this thesis, such interventions could lead to breakdown in historical formations of our society and, ultimately, to social fragility as the nature of policies move towards individual accountability and responsibility.

Successive policy documents presented by the Labour Government focus heavily on the need to build a learning society (Hodgson and Spours, 1999) with all individuals having an entitlement to lifelong learning. The development of shared responsibility and shared benefits are key components of such an approach, with the state, employers and individuals all playing a significant role in this approach, implying both expectations and obligations for all parties concerned. The key issue here however, is whether this is 'opportunity' or 'obligation'.

This approach to welfare was informed by experiences of reform in other countries, such as the United States of America (USA), where 'cycles of dependency' upon welfare had started to break down through the adoption of strategies that had taken a 'work first' approach. Morgan (2001) describes a particular welfare policy, employed in the State of Wisconsin, which required benefit recipients to participate in work, or work-related programmes, in order to receive welfare benefits. This policy emphasised structured job-search and job

placement, combined with time limits for receipt of benefits and penalties for non-compliance. The policy has been regarded as largely successful because of the reduction in the number of people in receipt of welfare benefits (Morgan, 2001).

During its time in opposition (1993-1996), the Labour Party

... developed a conviction that the most effective ways of promoting skills and reducing social division was by tackling levels of literacy, long-term unemployment and providing opportunities for individual participation and skill development. (Hodgson and Spours, 1999: 69)

What was new about this approach was the scale of the programmes and initiatives developed in this area and their linkages with LLN training strategies (considered to be the basic skills for individual independence, both economically and socially) and their parallel association with the promotion of social inclusion, as well as market competition (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2003; NRDC, *passim*). In pursuing this agenda, Labour acknowledged it was prepared to use compulsion with unemployed people in order to bring them, along with the population generally, up to a required minimum of LLN skill².

² A 'minimum' literacy standard has been qualified by Government as Level 2 – equivalent to a grade A*-C in GCSE examinations, generally undertaken at the completion of compulsory school)

This thesis will consider the appropriateness of setting such a standard as a 'blanket' requirement for the entire population and consider particularly the work of Bynner and Parsons (2005), and Parsons and Bynner (2006) whose work has evidenced that, in fact, it is individuals who hold LLN levels at Entry 2 or below that are mostly significantly marginalised when seeking employment. The Government prioritised their focus on 'raising levels of numeracy and literacy among young people and basic skills among adults, tackling long-term unemployment and promoting employability' (Hodgson and Spours, 1999: 82).³ This approach was adopted, despite evidence that it was regarded sceptically by both:

... the unemployed and employers who, respectively, see schemes as something you're forced to go on, with little prospect of a real outcome or something that only the most recalcitrant of the unemployed participate in (Finn, 1997 in Morgan, 2001: 169).

Language, Literacy and Numeracy

The discourse surrounding the use of words such as 'language', 'literacy' and 'numeracy' is problematic and it is as yet unclear how

³ It is interesting in this quote to see the link of terminology 'numeracy and literacy' with young people and 'basic skills' amongst adults; in reality, as discussed later in this chapter, the use of multiple 'jargon' terms to describe and discuss an individual's language, literacy and numeracy has only added to the confusion apparent in this evolving agenda.)

such terminology is understood by many audiences involved in this area of work, including Government, policy makers, and not least employers and employees who appear to link level to job role or function. It continues to be difficult to filter the many and varied interpretations of these terms into one uniform, agreed and understood definition. Many assumptions are made regarding these terms that only act to increase the confusion amongst those either using or being faced with such terminology.

The term 'language, literacy and numeracy' in England has evolved over the life of the *Skills for Life* strategy out of terms such as 'basic skills' and is used to refer to adults with poor LLN skills. Terminology has similarly evolved in line with a move from a focus on negatively charged language, such as 'illiterate' and school-rooted terms, such as English and mathematics. During the 'Right to Read' campaign of 1972, the collective term 'basic skills' was popularised. However, during the last five years this term has undergone multiple replacements, including 'essential skills', a return to the use of the terms 'English and maths', extension of literacy and numeracy to 'language, literacy and numeracy' and, more recently, a move towards 'functional skills' to try and gain a common understanding of these various terms – both for learners who were struggling to interpret what the various different terms actually meant and also to achieve commonality in the use of terms amongst the sector. In reality, as will

be evidenced later in this thesis, the majority of adults are generally more familiar and comfortable with the more traditional terms: 'English and mathematics'. Whilst these terms can have negative emotional connotations connected to previous formal educational experiences, they have a common understanding and interpretation. The introduction of the new terminology has created confusion amongst learners, and continues to be highly contested by academics. In the drive to remove stigma from terms associated with 'illiteracy', the field has moved towards the most judgemental of negative terms – '*functional*'. This use of this term suggests that those who are unable to evidence, through assessment, competence against a standardised assessment, are 'disfunctional' or are in some way unable to participate in a 'functioning' society.

The term 'literacy' continues to be a highly contested one (Street, 2004), traditionally being associated predominantly with reading and writing activities. Whilst literacy has long been promoted by UNESCO as a human right and an instrument of liberation and development; global discussions around literacy are often associated with discussions around overcoming 'illiteracy'. This is clearly illustrated by the work of the United Nations in the presentation of the eight Millennium Development Goals, drawn up in September 2000, and the six Education for All goals reaffirmed in Dakar in 2000, following their launch, in 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All. Both

these sets of goals incorporate the eradication of adult 'illiteracy'. In its Global Monitoring Report (2006): *Literacy for Life*, UNESCO identify literacy as being crucial for economic, social and political participation and development and also as the key to enhancing human capabilities with wide ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship; in essence the promotion of civil society.

The term 'literacy' then originates from the word 'illiteracy' which has historically been used pejoratively to describe an individual who is unable to read or write (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). This view has been hard to shake off and the stigma felt by individuals who find themselves unable to affect the practices of language, literacy and numerical competence at an independent level, are still evident in today's society. This is further compounded by many adult literacy programmes commonly modelled on formal models of teaching and learning programmes built for children; with the inclusion of formal measures of progression and assessment and often being frequently decontextualised from their life experiences. This inclination veers significantly from the notion of contextualised and meaningful learning proposed by Dewey in the early 20th century and also, significantly, denies the experiences that adults bring with them to the teaching and learning environment. Rogers (2002, 2003) argues that what

differentiates an adult learner from a child learner are experiences, expectations and personal agendas and these should instrumentally inform and frame the development of teacher-learner relationships in which learning as an adult takes place.

Written language, one component of literacy, is the most common medium through which communication is undertaken. Written language is used in various ways but always forms part of a discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1996). However, literacy communication takes a multiplicity of forms, including visual, written, spoken, signally by signing, performance of the body, pictorially, technologically and via music to name a few (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). These diverse media use very different genres both within and between them to 'talk' or interact with their audience. It is these multiplicities that come together under the umbrella term of literacy. What is common among them is the intention to engage with, or be engaged by, an audience. However, the use of the term literacy, within policy discourse, has a very different meaning and will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Language, when written, spoken or signed, provides a framework of structure in which our existence – our culture and society - is created (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Barton (1994) takes this view as a starting point for his discussions of literacy, describing literacy as a

social activity which operates in a variety of discourses, or speech acts, across a variety of domains, involving literacy events and literacy practices: social practices. The term 'literacy practice' he explains as the socially acceptable, or unacceptable, ways in which a literacy action can or cannot take place. Such practices, he argues, are closely associated with 'literacy events', and are explained as 'venues' or points of interaction. Barton's research (1994) explores how the activity of literacy, which he argues is part of an environment, influences, and is influenced, by that environment. He proposes that literacy is ecological in nature and can only be understood in social practice terms as it deals with the complexity of people's lives as they live them, and cannot be isolated from them. This is an idea initially developed by Vygotsky (1978) who used an ecological approach to contrast his theoretical framework in which he stated that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition by tracing how children's internal thinking develops out of external social interactions with other people. This ecological approach to language and literacy development is supported through the work of many authors (Street, 1995; Rogers, 1992; Gee, 1992; Hamilton, 2000), often being referred to as a 'radical literacies' approach or 'new literacy studies'.

Barton uses the term 'literacy' to define a variable that encompasses aspects of reading, writing, literacy and language (Barton, 1994) and

argues that literacy has social meaning, with social constructions being built out of individual or social networks of attitudes, actions and learning. He discusses language through a constructivist view that considers language as it has been; is being and continues to be used and evolve; seeing language as a dynamic social activity that serves the purpose of the person or people using it. For Barton, literacy is rooted in the contexts of people's socio-economic status, their culture and ethnicity, and is policed within the social networks of these realities. This is in direct contrast to the more traditional view of language that considers language solely in terms of its structure.

A statement made by UNESCO in 1962 defines a literate person as one who:

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

This is a 'functional' view of literacy, in contrast to the view of the 'new literacy' studies. Functional literacy is largely associated with a 'skills set' which has universal applicability, underpinned by the idea that there is one literacy which every one should learn in the same way

(Mayor and Pugh, 1987). Gray first used the term 'functional literacy' in 1956 (Stubbs, 1980) to describe literacy in relation to the requirements of an individual relative to a particular society; 'the degree of literacy required for effective functioning in a particular community' (Stubbs, 1980: 14). Such an approach is closely linked to an economic model of employment rather than social networks and is often associated with imposing literacy on individuals, rather than starting from one's own perceptions of need.

However, if one maintains a constructivist approach, (Barton, 1994) it becomes apparent that literacy practices derive from the environment in which lives are constructed and lived. These activities are influenced by the culture in which one holds their 'social network', defined by Baynham (1995) as:

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

Social networks are informed and framed by the similar experiences of individuals who share values, faiths and belief systems, such as extended families, school peer groups, work colleagues and other groups with whom they may be attached.

Nevertheless, such experiences and influences are also likely to be affected by governance and contested issues of power and social hierarchy, through processes of self-policing of the state and society (Foucault, 1980). Foucault's reconceptualisation of power as a positive, as well as a negative force is a radical reformulation of the theory of power. He extends the proposal that power is a positive force to the idea that all power relations are potentially reversible and unstable, and that wherever domination is imposed, resistances will inevitably arise. Power, he theorises, does not only work through techniques of repression or inculcation but through strategies of normalisation. However, Foucault's examination of power relations within institutions considers only how power is installed within institutions, not how power is experienced by subjects; a fundamental aspect of this study.

Power penetrates all literacy events and practices (Street, 2004) and, if one considers literacy to be a social activity then it must be acknowledged that it functions within the framework of power (Barton, 1994). Freire (1996) recognised this complexity, asserting that most social relations are relations of oppression with the poorest in society evidencing the poorest skills, being the least powerful and being the most oppressed. Freire popularised this radical view of literacy in response to the decade of functionalist literacy programmes provided by UNESCO during the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, Olson (1977)

challenged the dominant claims for literacy for adults being made by UNESCO, stating:

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

(Olson, 1977: 12)

Fairclough (1989, 1992) extended this thesis further, exploring the connection between language use and unequal relations of power. He considered how language contributes to the domination of some people by others (the literacy event). Power, described and understood by Fairclough, as parts, or domains, separate from each other and form a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination. Such power relations, he suggests, arise from ideological assumptions that embed particular conventions; such as the pedagogical approaches and practices used for adult literacy programmes. These include, for example, the decontextualisation of literacy teaching being 'done' to adults using a formal school-type approach. These conventions are significantly dependent on the political power relations that underpin

them and act as a means of legitimising existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the occurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted.

Debate continues regarding the extent to which language can sit outside literacy and whether literacies inform language or is informed by language, or both. Criticism is routinely cited regarding how such literacies or languages can be suitably or effectively measured and assessed; with different approaches only acting to highlight the ongoing debate (Tuijnman, et al., 1997; OECD, 1997).

The issue of who needs to be literate, for what purposes and in what functions has become a matter of social and political policy and reality, rather than simply a curricular decision (Goodman, 1987).

In a similar way, numeracy is also a deeply contested concept (Coben, et al., 2003) with many interpretations of what elements of knowledge, skills and numerate behaviours make up 'numeracy'. Currently, in England, according to Coben, et al:

... numeracy covers the ability to: understand and use mathematical information; calculate and manipulate mathematical information; interpret results and communicate mathematical information – all of these at a level necessary to

function and progress at work and in society in general (Coben, et al., 2003: 3)

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

What emerges from the literature is a significant debate around the use and content of the terms 'literacy' and 'numeracy'. However, for the purposes of clarity, I have chosen to frame the discussion in this thesis using the functional definition of basic skills, provided by the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001), which is predominantly drawn upon by the field:

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

Employability

Associated with the discussion of *Skills for Life* training programmes in this study is a parallel discussion of employment and employability.

Whilst employment can readily be defined as a contract between two parties – the employer and the employee, and unemployment can be seen as the condition of not having employment; employability sits at the interface of these two concepts. Employability can be defined as:

... the key to future social cohesion and job security is seen to be in developing the employability of the potential and actual British workforce. (Finn, 2000: 387)

Employability, significantly, refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment and consequently obtaining new employment if necessary. Employability refers to an individual's capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market. Such employability is reliant on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that an individual possess, the way these can be used in future employment and how these are presented to prospective employers.

Whilst employability skills have traditionally being closely associated with vocational and academic skills, there are wider associated skills

required by employers to ensure successful entry into the labour market, such as information about the labour market and appropriate training pathways, where necessary, to support entry into different sectors of employment.

Commonly, discussions regarding employability, and the ability of an individual to become employed and sustain employment, describe three main elements (Hillage and Pollard, 1999: 83 in Finn, 2000: 387):

- (1) the ability to gain initial employment, hence the interest in ensuring that “key skills”, careers advice and an understanding of the world of work are embedded in the education system;
- (2) the ability to maintain employment and make “transitions” between jobs and roles within the same organisation to meet new job requirements; and
- (3) the ability to obtain new employment if required, that is, to be independent in the labour market by being willing and able to manage employment transitions between and within organisations.

Improving employability is at the centre of labour’s strategy

...for modernising the country and building a nation which is both socially cohesive and economically competitive. The aim is to “build security through employability” by helping people to

develop and adapt their skills as the needs of the labour market and economy change. (DfEE, 1997 in Finn, 2000: 384)

Current Government policy is aimed at the development and accreditation of such knowledge and providing frameworks through which individuals can be supported to move from unemployment to employment, drawing on three key elements (a) raising basic standards of education, (b) the creation of a culture of lifelong learning, and, (c) the use of the welfare to work strategy.

The Labour Government has made a direct link between a person's employability and a person's LLN competence. When investigating the effects of poor LLN on employment, Parsons and Bynner (1999) found that unemployment was likely to lead to deterioration in an adult's LLN skills with such adults having fewer employment opportunities. Additionally, they found that those with low LLN skills experienced more unemployment, less continuous employment and were more likely to be in receipt of welfare benefits than those with LLN above Level 1 (Parsons and Bynner, 1998).

The term 'Level' is used in this study to refer to the range of criterion of LLN that has been developed to meet qualification standards, comparable with other qualifications within England. These standards

have been devised by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and applied to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Level 1 is the nationally recognised standard of functional literacy (QCA, 2000) in England and is the current threshold of LLN level identified by Government as the minimum one should hold in order to be employable (DfES, 2003). However, interestingly, Government expects all adults to continue working to develop their LLN skills to level 2 (the equivalent of 5 A*-C grade GCSEs) in order that they are able to achieve and sustain continuous employment.

Entry level, which has three sub-levels, of which 3 is the highest, is the foundation level of the National Qualifications Framework in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and is the level below Level 1. Confusingly, Entry Level and Level 1 are roughly equivalent to Levels 1 and 2 of the International Adult Literacy Survey scale, respectively.

Table 1 offers a comparison of LLN levels in relation to other qualifications in England.

Table 1: Comparison of Qualifications and Levels in England

National Qualification Framework	Below Entry 1	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Language, literacy and Numeracy												
Approximate age range		5-6	7	9	11-14	16	18+	21+	21+			
GCSE (D-G)												
GCSE (C-A)												
A Level												
Undergraduate												
Masters												
PhD												

(Adapted from the National Qualification Framework, 2004)

This table highlights (in row two) the levels at which LLN are assessed and teaching and learning opportunities are provided. Row three acts as an indicator of age: that is the age at which, according to QCA and NQF, individuals are most likely to achieve each level. It is clear from this table that the Government anticipates that most individuals should achieve a minimum of Level 1 in their LLN competence between the ages of 11-14 and have achieved Level 2 by the age of 16. These expectations of achievement are grounded in the compulsory schooling system in England. A national literacy strategy for primary schools was introduced as a result of presented evidence that just 57% of children were achieving a school Level 4 in 1996 (National Literacy Trust, 2006).⁴ The national literacy strategy has received significant and continuous investment by Government and, although it has its critics, (Philip Pullman, the award winning children's author amongst them (Guardian, November 2005)), is still considered to be successful in raising the achievements of young people going through the compulsory schooling system; evidenced through key stage examinations and assessments. However, such confidence in the strategy has recently been challenged following the findings of a high profile international study that identifies England dropping its rating for literacy from third to nineteenth place in the *Progress in International Reading Literacy study* (Kennedy, et al., 2007).

⁴ Confusingly this is approximately equivalent to Entry 3 on the adult LLN level.

Ongoing research continues to identify that there is a great deal of work to be done in developing the LLN competence of the available adult workforce within England to a minimum level in order to be able to achieve this aim (OECD, 1997; DfEE, 1999; DfES, 2001; DfES, 2003a), not least attracting those with these needs into training programmes.

In her work on adults with LLN needs, Parsons (2002) identified two types of adult LLN learner: the motivated learner who recognises the need to improve skills and seeks to do so and, secondly, the latent learner who, whilst having a LLN need, is unlikely to seek support to improve skills. The latent learner she describes as one who has a negative view of the future resulting from a past likely to include poor socio-economic conditions, limited schooling and a poor employment history. The challenge for the Government, Parsons argues, is to be able to motivate adults identified as possessing a 'latent' need to address their LLN skills if they are to achieve their aim of increasing the LLN needs of these adults, resulting, ideologically, in positively influencing the social and economic wellbeing of the country.

Research Focus

In adult education, resistance to learning is a well-known phenomenon, often being explained as an issue of motivation or founded in prior

experience (Illeris, 2003; Wedege and Evans, 2006). Adult LLN learners often appear particularly resistant to learning skills (Parsons and Bynner 1998). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that many adults considered as having poor LLN skills, when asked about their skills level, do not perceive themselves as having poor LLN skills. Therefore, they do not feel they need to develop their skills as their current skills level, they feel, is sufficient to meet their requirements on a day-to-day basis (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994). However, research goes on to suggest that adults with poor LLN skills are more likely than the general population to be on lower incomes, be unemployed and be more prone to ill health and social exclusion (DfEE, 1999, 2001; Parsons and Bynner, 1998, 1999, 2006). Improvements in one's LLN skills, therefore, is likely to impact positively on an individual's life, both socially and economically.

This research study explored the experiences of adults attending *Skills for Life* training programmes; to provide illuminatory indications of how such experiences can provide some implications for both policy and pedagogic development in England in relation to LLN training provision.

To support the process, a research question and supporting sub-questions were constructed and are now presented.

Research Questions

As outlined throughout this chapter, this research study explored the experiences of adults attending *Skills for Life* training programmes, and was guided by the general question:

What are the experiences of learners attending *Skills for Life* training programmes who have chosen, or have been chosen, to attend training?

In order to explore this question, the following sub-questions were constructed:

Adult Education

1. How do adult *Skills for Life* learners understand their language, literacy and numeracy skills?

Choice

2. What types of training programmes are available to adult *Skills for Life* learners?
3. Do *Skills for Life* training programmes positively influence an individual's economic and, or, social capital?

Policy

4. How do learners choose *Skills for Life* training programmes?

Policy Context

In 1997 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published 'Literacy for a Knowledge Society'. This report, the second in a series of three reports commissioned by the OECD to compare the standards of adult literacy globally, highlighted the findings of the survey that compared adult literacy standards across 11 industrialised countries. The conclusions suggested that the literacy skills within the workforces of all the countries involved in the survey were poor. Particularly, it highlighted the need for countries to increase the LLN skills of their adult population in order to be able to continue to compete effectively in the global economic market. The report makes recommendations that a lifelong approach to learning be adopted by countries, supported by Governments through policy interventions (OECD, 1997).

Also, in 1997 a new Labour Government, elected in the UK following 18 years of Conservative rule, identified education as a priority target. In fact, a key manifesto motto during the election campaign was 'education, education, education' (Labour Party, 1997).

Following receipt of the OECD report (OECD, 1997), the new Government, appointed a Working Group, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, to provide an independent review of the literacy and numeracy

capabilities of the adult workforce in England. (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland responded independently to the OECD report.) When reporting in 1999, Moser stated that as many as seven million adults in England had literacy and numeracy needs which did not meet the Working Groups' applied definition:

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

The report went on to confirm that this lack of functional literacy and numeracy was likely to be having a real impact on the ability of the economy to increase its productivity (DfEE, 1999).

In response to the findings and recommendations, the Government launched '*Skills for Life*: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills' (DfEE, 2001) which provided a framework for cross-departmental working in an attempt to ensure a collaborative approach to work - to support the development of LLN skills within the adult workforce.

The rationale underpinning the strategy was to tackle and eradicate the 'burden' of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy through the introduction of a suite of interventions, including:

Initiating radical changes to the education and training system for those learning literacy and numeracy skills in order to raise standards and boost levels of achievement. New national standards, new materials and a common core curriculum leading to national tests will make sure that the same approach to teaching and learning, based on the most effective practice, is adopted across the country. We [the Government] are introducing new, more effective ways of assessing need and better teacher training and setting up a new research centre and rigorous national inspections to monitor standards.

(DfEE, 2001a: 7)

In addition, the Government promised a national promotional campaign to inform adults how and what they should do to improve their skills and where they could go to get help to meet this goal.

The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy were published in 2000 by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), in conjunction with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), to ensure a consistent approach to LLN teaching and learning. These standards formed the basis on which the further initiatives, identified above, were built.

The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy in England are specified at three levels: Entry level, Level 1 and Level 2 with Entry level being further divided into three sub-levels: Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. These levels have been set out to illustrate in detail the small steps required for adults to make progress. The adult national curricula for literacy and numeracy were constructed in line with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and underpinned by the national standards developed by the QCA to provide a framework in which *Skills for Life* teaching and learning could take place. The curricula provide teachers with a comprehensive framework to help identify and meet each learner's individual learning needs, including examples of teaching strategies that can be used to meet these needs. For teachers and learners alike, the introduction of core curricula ensured a common approach to LLN teaching and course content.

To further support the development of LLN skills, national tests for adult literacy and numeracy were launched in September 2001. These tests reflect the national standards and enable all stakeholders to have a clear understanding of what competences have been tested and the attributable value of the resulting qualification. The tests for both literacy and numeracy consist of 40 general multiple-choice questions and can be undertaken at Level 1 or level 2.

As mentioned above, a further aim of the strategy was to raise teaching standards amongst adult literacy and numeracy practitioners

who had previously had little scope or opportunity to acquire accredited qualifications in the teaching of their subject. Since September 2002 a new professional programme has been developed and put in place to enable both existing and new practitioners wishing to specialise in teaching adult literacy and numeracy to meet the requirements of the national standards by undertaking a subject specialist qualification in either adult literacy or adult numeracy. It is envisaged that this professional suite of qualifications will assist in raising the professional profile of this sector, aligning it more closely with teaching staff that have subject specific degree qualifications.

Quality assurance mechanisms, through national auditing and monitoring, were also implemented through the strategy. The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (now renamed the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit) was set up to undertake this task. In addition, all teaching became eligible for inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) which began work in April 2001.

Alongside these changes to LLN pedagogy and organisation, the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) was created as a centre dedicated to research and development in this field. Established by the DfES in 2002, and initially funded for five years, it includes an expert and experienced consortium of partners, largely drawn from the university sector, including the University of Nottingham, which were identified as having specialist

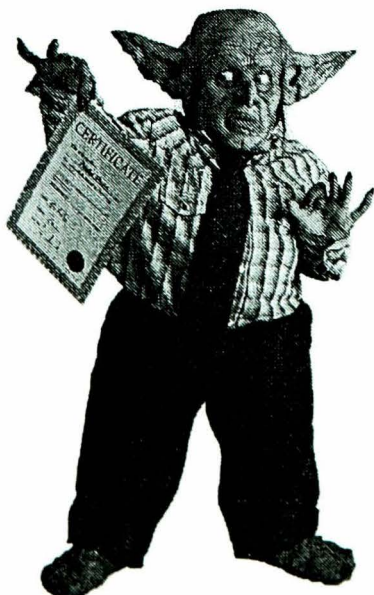
academics working in the fields of literacy and numeracy. The aims of the NRDC are to improve teaching practice and inform Government policy through the generation of knowledge, by creating a strong research culture and by developing professional practice (NRDC, 2004).

In order to attract adults into training programmes a national media campaign was launched. 'The Gremlins' campaign - identified as the most recognisable and successful media campaign ever launched by Government - aimed to encourage adults to overcome their fears of learning by presenting a range of real life examples of where improved LLN skills would prove helpful (Papen, 2005). Some examples of the images used in the campaign are illustrated on the next page:



In this image the 'gremlin' is surrendering to the fact that he should attend a training programme to improve his LLN skills set, after persistently recognizing the limitations of his current skills set in his daily life.

This image represents the confusion that may be felt by people who do not have the necessary numeracy skills to deal with their domestic finances.



This image represents success and shows that skills can be improved, and recognised through qualification achievements.

The strategy has had, and continues to have, a huge impact on all those involved in education in the post-school sector in England (Crawley, 2005). The stated mission of the *Skills for Life* strategy is 'to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first-century society' (DfEE, 2001: 3). It is one of the biggest overarching policy drives ever to take place in post-school education in England, attracting massive Government investment (3.7 billion pounds by 2006) (House of Commons, 2006), to ensure the strategy is embraced and penetrates all areas of training, including community education, private training providers, prisons, workforce training and further education colleges in a way few policies have.

Whilst the strategy has a focus on economic goals it is also seen, and supported, by Government as part of a wider social policy focussed on 'inclusion' (Papen, 2005). Interestingly, the strategy estimated that 'at least 32% of all unemployed people have literacy, language and/or numeracy needs, which in part prevent them from improving their employability and finding secure work' (DfEE, 2001: 13).

Together with the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published an Employment Green Paper entitled 'Towards full employment in a modern society' (DWP, 2001) in which the Government confirmed its

aim to focus on raising the level of LLN amongst adults of working age, in order to avoid any adverse impact on economic growth. The stated objective within the report is to deliver work-focused support for all those of working age on out-of-work benefits, whether unemployed or economically inactive.

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

As a result of the mounting research evidence (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994; Parsons and Bynner 1998, 1999; Brooks, et al., 2001) suggesting that some unemployed adults (a target group of the *Skills for Life* strategy) was reluctant to address their LLN skills, a series of pilot schemes were established by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through Jobcentre Plus, to test whether training programmes with attached incentives or sanctions would result in more individuals commencing and, perhaps more significantly, completing training provision. Incentives included additional financial rewards, and

sanctions included the possibility of withdrawing welfare benefits. As a result of these pilot schemes, in April 2004, a full roll-out of the incentive and sanction scheme was launched.

The targets set by Government were considered optimistic at best: 750,000 learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills by 2004 and 1.5 million learners by 2007 (Papen, 2005). However, the first target was achieved earlier than expected and, similarly, the subsequent target was announced as achieved in February 2007 by the skills minister, Phil Hope, who stated that 1.6 million people had gained qualifications as a result of Labour's *Skills for Life* programme:

Meeting one of our major skills targets is fantastic news and I would like to congratulate all the learners and staff across the country whose hard work has made this possible. Over 1.6 million adults have improved their skills and transformed their lives, taking vital steps towards better employability and social inclusion. (Kingston, 2007)

The Study Area

The study was conducted across Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire, a central area of England. Nottinghamshire was one of the areas selected to participate in a series of pilot studies being conducted by the DWP in which adults identified as being long term unemployed (six months or more) and evidencing LLN skills below Level 1 were targeted to attend training programmes through a variety of measures. In one area of Nottingham, adults were offered additional financial incentives to attend training programmes; in another area adults were advised that they would face potential financial penalties and sanctions if they did not attend training programmes. The notion of choice in relation to a suite of possible training programmes, and the possible influence of decisions and choices in relation to a learner's attendance at training programmes and on the learners' experiences, are central to the study. It was, therefore, considered appropriate that these areas be used as a case study area for this research.

Additionally, these areas are included in those parts of the country who have been most affected by changing employment markets. Historically, the economy of these areas has largely been based on industry, manufacturing and coal mining but, over time, has moved to an economy based on more service-based industries, such as customer services and hotel and leisure services.

Historically, Nottingham has relied heavily on a strong mining industry and an equally strong textile industry, specialising particularly in the manufacturing of lace. These industries have collapsed and Nottingham now offers the majority of its employment opportunities through services industries.

South Yorkshire was also involved in the study. The private training provider involved in the study had training provision in this location. Again, this was an appropriate area to include in the study as it has, like Nottingham, undergone dramatic and significant changes to its employment market. Employment in the South Yorkshire region was traditionally based on coal mining and steel working, both industrialised occupations demanding high levels of physical strength but little in the way of academic skills. Again, changes in the employment market in this area have led to a demand for more knowledge-based skills and have left those without these skills struggled to secure new employment opportunities.

Overview of Case Study Areas

Nottinghamshire

The County of Nottingham is divided into two areas: Nottingham City and Greater Nottingham. Nottinghamshire County had a total population of 748,510 with 366,118 males and 382,392 females in 2001 (Census, 2001).

Interestingly, it can be seen from Table 2 that 67% of Nottinghamshire’s population are between the ages of 16 and 64, compared to a national average in England of 62%.

Table 2: Age Structure of the Population of Nottinghamshire

Age, Years	Nottingham (No)	Nottingham (%)	Greater Nottingham (No)	Greater Nottingham (%)	England (%)
0-15	49,800	18.1	115,600	18.3	19.75
16- 59/64	183,800	66.6	404,500	64.0	62.0
60-65 +	42,000	15.3	111,800	17.7	18.5

Source: Office of National Statistics, Mid-Year Estimates, 2004

Unemployment

The unemployment rate in Nottinghamshire is higher than the national average; although, over the past five years, there has been a small decrease in the Nottingham City unemployment rate and a more significant decrease in the Greater Nottingham rate, as can be seen in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Unemployment rate in Nottingham (April 2006)

Area	Claimant Unemployed (No)	Unemployment Rate (%)	5 Year Change (%)
Nottingham City	7,950	4.3	-2.2
Greater Nottingham	11,411	2.8	-8.4
England	813,412	2.6	1.3

Source: Office of National Statistics Claimant Counts, April 2006

The unemployment rate is the number of claimants as a percentage of working age residents. Figures are rounded.

Skills Levels

Whilst the proportion of the population educated to A-level and degree standard is higher than the national average, this proportion can be accounted for by the large student population attending the City's two universities: the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University. There is also clear evidence; however, that a significantly higher percentage than the national average of the population have qualifications below Level 1.⁵

⁵Level 1 is used by the Government as one of the benchmark indicators of an individual's ability to obtain employment.

Table 4: Level of Qualifications Held by People of Working Age in Nottinghamshire (2003)

Highest Qualification	Notting -ham (No)	Notting -ham (%)	Greater Nottingham (No)	Greater Nottingham (%)	England (%)
Level 4/5 + eg degree, professional	35,000	20.9	99,000	26.9	25.0
Level 3 eg A Levels	28,000	16.6	59,000	16.1	14.7
Level 2 Eg 5+ A*-C GCSEs	22,000	13.3	54,000	14.6	15.3
Level 1 Eg 1+ GCSE at any grade	27,000	16.0	54,000	14.6	14.9
No qualifications	37,000	22.0	60,000	16.3	14.8
Other/ Unknown	19,000	11.2	42,000	11.4	15.2

Source: Labour Force Survey, March 2003 - February 2004; ONS

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South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire is a district of a much larger region: Yorkshire and the Humber, which also incorporates North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Hull. South Yorkshire is comprised of the Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield areas and has a total population of 1,266,338, with 617,531 females and 648,807 males (Census, 2001).

The age structure of South Yorkshire’s population correlates closely with the national average for England and Wales, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Age Distribution of the Population of South Yorkshire

Age, Years	South Yorkshire (%)	England (%)
0-17	20.1	22.7
18-29 and 30-64	56.8	61.4
65 +	23.1	16

Source: Office of National Statistics, local area labour force survey, 2003

Unemployment

From Table 6 below it is evident that 77% of the population in South Yorkshire are of working age, and that 76% of this population are economically active, indicating that 24% of those who are of working age are not economically active.

Table 6: Summary of the Working Age Population and Economically Active Population in South Yorkshire, by percentage

Population of South Yorkshire	Population (No)	Population (%)
Working Age Population	775,000	77.3
Male	401,000	82.7
Female	374,000	72.3
Economically Active	586,000	75.7
Male	323,000	80.6
Female	263,000	70.4

Source: Office of National Statistics, local area labour force survey, 2003

Of the nine regions in England, national census records (Census, 2001) note that Yorkshire and the Humber have the fourth highest regional economic inactivity (neither employed nor actively seeking work) for males (16.9%, compared to the national average in England of 16.1%), the fourth highest for females (27.3% compared to the national average in England of 26.6%), and the fourth highest overall (24.9%, compared to the national average in England of 21.2%).

Particularly noteworthy is that male economic inactivity increased by 3% in the region during the period 1992 and 2005. This figure is of particular interest to the study. The changing nature of employment in this region, as in Nottinghamshire, has resulted in a rise in male unemployment, particularly males who have historically undertaken manual occupations and where evidence of poor LLN skills has been identified. It is this group of adults who are now attending a *Skills for Life* training programme, largely provided by private training providers, through Jobcentre Plus, DWP.

South Yorkshire continues to have a high dependence on manufacturing industries for employment. In Barnsley and Rotherham, for example, over 20% of employment is in the manufacturing industry, compared to a national average of 15% (Census, 2001).

Skills

South Yorkshire has a significantly higher percentage of its population with no qualifications at 35.9%, compared to 29.1% for England and Wales (Census, 2001). Of the 376 local authorities within England and Wales, Barnsley has the 10th highest percentage of population with no qualifications, Doncaster the 30th highest and Rotherham the 42nd highest. Sheffield is ranked at 103, but it is still within the top 30% of authorities with the highest rate of no qualifications.

It is evident from the table below that in every area of South Yorkshire the population also has a higher incidence of poor literacy and numeracy skills than the national average of England.

Table 7: Proportion of working age population with poor literacy skills and poor numeracy skills by area of South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire Area	Poor Literacy Skills (%)	Poor Numeracy Skills (%)
Barnsley	28.3	30.6
Doncaster	27.3	29.3
Rotherham	27.6	28.9
Sheffield	26.0	26.7
England	24.0	24.0

Source: Basic Skills Agency, Adult’s Basic Skills, 2001

Overview of Training Providers and their Training Programmes

Training programmes which target excluded groups and, particularly, skills programmes for the unemployed, have been in existence for a considerable time and can be justified, according to Field (2002), because this group lack the skills that employers require and such training programmes enable them to acquire these skills. In developing and reviewing the employment and training programmes for the unemployed, the Government clearly set out their objectives to 'deliver work-focused support for all those of working age on out-of-work benefits, whether unemployed or economically inactive' (Webb, 2003: 8). Brooks, et al., (2001a), argues that a major motivator for an individual attending basic skills provision is a desire for self-development and the recognition that if they improve their literacy and/or numeracy skills, they are likely to secure employment or a better-paid job.

Long term unemployed adults who are identified as possessing poor LLN skills, through a process of formal assessment using instruments constructed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA, 2002), are referred to a training programme entitled Basic Employability Training (BET). This process is undertaken through referral by Jobcentre Plus⁶ advisory staff to contracted specialists who are independent of them. Adults being

⁶ The Government-funded employment agency facility and the social security office in England.

considered for this programme are required to undertake a skills assessment. If they evidence basic skills below Level 1 in literacy, numeracy or both, they are referred to BET. This programme forms part of a suite of training programmes provided by Jobcentre Plus under the umbrella of Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA). This suite of programmes is seen by Government as:

A vehicle for tackling the basic skills and other barriers to employment faced by people with the most severe basic skills problems ... but the key aim of the provision remains to move people into work. (Webb, 2003: 13)

Such programmes last for a fixed period of 26 weeks and incorporate periods of job search activity, work placement activity and intensive basic skills support. Success, on this programme, is measured in two ways: by obtaining employment or by achieving a *Skills for Life* qualification. Should a participant complete the training programme and remain unemployed they are unable to re-enter the programme unless they evidence a further 26 weeks of unemployment. Once a participant has achieved an Entry 3 qualification, they no longer qualify for entry into the BET programme.

Adults, who it is felt by Jobcentre Plus staff may be eligible to attend the BET programme, but who decline to attend either the skills

assessment or the BET programme itself, can be 'directed'⁷ by Jobcentre Plus staff to attend. If adults continue to decline to attend either the skills assessment or the BET programme then 'sanctions'⁸ can be imposed in the form of lost welfare benefits.

Adult who are eligible to attend, and do, automatically receive a training allowance and reimbursement of travel costs to and from the site of the training programme. Adults who achieve a *Skills for Life* qualification at Entry 3 or above also received a financial reward (one hundred pounds).

Whilst this is not an unreasonable position, this approach will be questioned during this study. The core exploration for this study is to consider the experiences of individuals who have not self-selected or chosen to undertake LLN training and explore these alongside the experiences of individuals who have self-selected, or chosen to undertake such training.

⁷ Refers to the requirement of a client in receipt of welfare benefits, to undertake an action at the request of their welfare support worker or advisor

⁸ Refers to the suspension or withdrawal of welfare benefits to clients who do not undertake an action at the direction or request of their welfare support worker or advisor

Private Training Provider

The private training provider involved in this study offers training services across the East Midlands and Yorkshire Regions of England. It offers a wide range of training programmes, specialising in programmes with young people aged 16-18 who are working in vocational settings and attending training provision one day per week. Additionally, it is contracted to deliver a number of training programmes on behalf of Jobcentre Plus, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), including Basic Employability Training. As noted previously, these programmes are provided for adults from age 25 plus, who are unemployed, in receipt of welfare benefits and have been identified as having poor LLN skills.

Further Education College

The Further Education College involved in the study is one of the largest colleges of further education in the United Kingdom, with a wide range of full and part-time study programmes. It offers a wide programme of training programmes from foundation level programmes, through to undergraduate degree level training programmes, offered across 14 academic schools. Its campuses are spread across seven sites within the Greater Nottingham area of the East Midlands. It

attracts students from the East Midlands region as well as a small number of international students.

The College offers a large suite of training programmes to support and develop the acquisition of LLN skills for adults. As well as having dedicated, discreet LLN classes, it also runs courses in which the LLN acquisition is embedded and contextualised. Examples of such programmes include pottery classes, digital photography classes, art classes, history classes and IT classes. Learners can access as many of these classes as they choose. The classes run across the week (Monday to Friday) both during the day and in the evenings, and occasionally at the weekends, depending on demand. Classes are pre-designed using a scheme of work and then differentiated to the learners needs, making use of individual learning plans. Learners do not receive any financial incentive for attending the training programmes provided here, although enrolment and participation is free at the point of entry.

HMP Prison

The prison participating in the study is a large male remand prison, housing between 500 and 550 inmates. Some inmates are awaiting sentencing and the remainder have been sentenced and are awaiting transfer to a prison in which to carry out their sentence. The turnover

of prisoners is high with approximately 70 per cent of offenders staying less than four weeks with some staying only days. With their very short stay in the prison, few learners are able to gain a qualification in any area of learning.

The prison offers a range of educational and vocational training programmes, subcontracted to a college of further education. The level of training programmes offered to prisoners range from foundation level through to degree level, although predominantly courses are provided in the following curriculum areas: literacy and numeracy, social and life skills, and information and communications technology (ICT). The programmes are offered on a 'workshop' basis and learners can access between three to five workshops per week, either in the morning or the afternoon during the week, but not at weekends or in the evenings. There are places for up to 10 learners in each lesson. Full time access to the educational programme is not available. Learners are paid 75 pence per session to attend each workshop. Inmates who chose to undertake alternative 'work' workshops are paid £3.00 per session.

The programme provided by the prison, once again, offered dedicated, discreet basic skills classes. At the time of the study these classes were not linked by a LLN theme but were run as discreet programmes.

Although classes were held as a group, learners engaged in LLN classes were largely working on their own individual learning plans.

Thesis Structure

This chapter has positioned the research within the field of lifelong learning and provided the research focus and research questions. The policy context for the study has been outlined and an introduction to the study area, along with the institutions involved in the study and their training programmes has also been presented.

The following chapter (two) will consider in detail the literature that has been explored to frame and inform the study. As the study is particularly interested in choice within adult learning experiences in a particular context: *Skills for Life*, the literature reviewed considers the notion of choice within training programmes for adults. Additionally, the literature associated with human and social capital is explored to inform and frame future discussions.

Using the concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu, chapter three explores the usefulness and applicability of his thesis as a lens to guide this research process.

This chapter is then followed by a detailed presentation of the methodological approach adopted for the study and the research design. This section incorporates a detailed description of the research sample and the construct of the research design to allow for ethical considerations, reliability, validity and triangulation. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the data collection methods used and the various research tools designed to support the compilation of data as well as the system used for analysis of the data.

The findings resulting from the fieldwork are then presented. These findings are analysed and discussed, using the voice of the research participants where appropriate to provide authenticity to the study, and drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter three to frame and inform the arguments.

The concluding chapter of the thesis draws together the study, providing a synopsis of the key emergent themes and findings from the study. The final conclusions drawn from the study are presented. To conclude this chapter, some time is given to considering the implication of the findings for those involved in this area of education and, particularly those involved in constructing policy, as well as for practitioners and researchers.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Chapter One has provided the opportunity to consider the evolution of adult LLN in England. This chapter will now consider literature that directly frames the response to the research question(s). As this study is particularly interested in adult learning experiences in a particular context: *Skills for Life*, the literature presented is focussed particularly on concepts of choice within training. Additionally, literatures relating to theories of human and social capital are investigated. However, it should be recognised that whilst all reading undertaken has informed the study in some way, a selection process of literature that highlights most influentially the discussions taking place has been used.

Using a collection of concepts provided by Pierre Bourdieu, this section then explores the usefulness and applicability of his thesis as a lens through which the collected data can be considered. Of particular interest to this study is the concept of *symbolic violence* and its association with *misrecognition* and *legitimisation* within the social construct of the pedagogic actions of practitioners. Also, the role of other actors in operationalising the strategy, including politicians, administrators and, indeed, the adults themselves is explored through this lens. In order to understand the mechanics of symbolic violence, however, it is also necessary to understand the construct of culture and society. Bourdieu provides an opportunity to consider these constructs

in his discussions around *habitus*, *doxa* and *field*; these concepts are also unpicked. Following a detailed discussion of these concepts, their applicability to the study is considered.

This chapter reviews the existing literature relevant to the research questions shown on page 59 to inform this study, focussing on adult LLN learners, the development of policies associated with this group and perceptions around choice associated with training opportunities. In this way I will position this study within the existing body of knowledge in the field of enquiry and also consider how this study may offer additional illuminatory findings for the field.

Predominantly, this literature review will act as a first step in responding to the research focus of this study, allowing for comparison of published work with this study. Additionally, the study will consider the variety of research approaches taken in previous studies. The identified literature will act to identify key authors in the field and to construct a framework within which this study will be undertaken.

This review of literature has been assembled under three broad themes: adult language, literacy and numeracy; policy developments surrounding this group of learners and perceptions of choice and, thirdly, the social and economic capital measures associated with adult

LLN learners. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the literature reviewed.

Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy

Whilst this study considers particularly the learning experiences of adults undertaking LLN programmes since the launch of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a), it is important to review such provision prior to its introduction to understand how current developments have been influenced by past practices.

Following the introduction of compulsory schooling in England under the Elementary Education Act of 1880, for children aged between five and ten, and then up to the age of 14 under the Fisher Education Act of 1918, an assumption emerged that everybody who has been through this system were able to read and write effectively. The first indication that this was not the case was the establishment by the Army of Basic Education centres for recruits during the Second World War (Papen, 2005).

Hamilton and Merrifield (2000) offer an overview of adult basic education (ABE) in England; an umbrella term regularly used to refer to adults undertaking training programmes associated with the development of LLN skills. This starts with the launch of the *Right to*

Read literacy campaign in 1973 - considered to be 'the first adult literacy campaign to take place in a Western European country' (Hamilton and Merrifield, 2000: 249) and was the largest scale indication that adult literacy within developed countries may be a matter for concern.

Prior to this time LLN development was largely linked to needs in developing countries with UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation), as noted earlier, being instrumental in supporting efforts to overcome illiteracy in these countries. ABE provision in England during this time was sporadic and disparate, often being provided by local community groups and going largely unnoticed but, nevertheless, serving approximately 5,000 learners in England and Wales (Haviland, 1973).

The success of the *Right to Read* campaign was evident through the provision of funds from central Government to support the campaign and through the support of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) by raising awareness in general and developing a dedicated series intended to publicise learning opportunities.

Following the introduction of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), ABE became a permanent feature within the further education sector of England and Wales (Hamilton and Merrifield, 2000) and

consequently was destined to become a programme which focussed on qualification outcomes and related functionality, linked to economic wellbeing.

The development of adult LLN provision during this time saw a significant shift in the approach and ethos of adult LLN teaching and learning - from one which was largely perceived as liberal, having an emphasis on self-development to one which included a discourse of human resource investment and achievement; relating LLN skills with functionality and associating LLN skills with employment opportunities and economic success (Hamilton and Merrifield, 2000).

Whilst the provision and purpose of adult LLN provision has dramatically changed and developed so, to, have the definitions of exactly what LLN is. Definitions used in policy today are most often linked with England's position in the global economic market. Papen (2005) provides a useful model into which differing functional, critical and liberal approaches to LLN can be positioned:

Functional literacy has been defined as:

A person is literate when he [*sic*] has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading,

writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills toward his own and the community's development. (Gray, 1956: 24)

It is clear from this definition that the term 'literacy' is used to describe a person's reading, writing and numeracy practices and associates this practice with an ability to provide for themselves economically and for their community socially. However, missing from this definition is speaking and listening, or oracy. Additionally, this definition could readily be misinterpreted to suggest that individuals without the identified skills-set are less able, or even unable, to contribute to their community in any meaningful or useful way, either economically or socially. This type of definition is closely allied with quantifiable outcomes that can be measured through testing and assessment activities. Literacy, using a functionalist model, is considered as a set of discrete, technical skills that exist independently of the culture and society in which they are constructed. Underpinning this approach is a perceived responsibility of each individual to ensure their development of such skills; any deficits should be identified and rectified in order that they are able to function effectively within the economic market.

Critical literacy, often referred to as 'radical literacies', is used to describe a pedagogical approach to literacy. Rather than associating literacy with the functions of reading and writing, it associates reading

with the working and functioning of the world and, particularly, the development of an understanding of world constructs, focussing on dualistic concepts such as justice and injustice, power and oppression. This approach was popularised particularly through the work of Paulo Freire, who viewed literacy as a tool through which learner's could develop a critical reflective action in relation to the environment which they inhabit, enabling a radical consideration of domination through the existence of power relations between groups (Freire, 1996). The focus here, however, is much less about the technical components that contribute towards or encompass 'literacy' and much more about literacy as a tool for empowerment and emancipation (Papen, 2005).

A third model associated with literacy is a **liberal literacy** tradition, regularly referred to as 'new literacy studies', which connects literacy with welfare, provided for the disadvantaged sectors of society by the middle classes. Informed by a humanistic view, it embraces literacy as activity linked to self-development and leisure pursuits, such as creative writing, available across the age groups, regardless of economic potential. Once again, this view does not consider components of literacy which may impact or influence economic activity but are more closely allied with an individual's personal and social development, contextually linked to personal interests and goals.

The model which dominates today's LLN practices and services are undoubtedly linked to a functionalist model; arguably the most deficient of the three models. This model holds the individual accountable, not only for their successes but equally for their failures – failure to achieve the minimum level of LLN – which, theoretically, enables them to function satisfactorily within both the economy and also socially. Arguably, this is not a view shared by those who have been deemed to have deficient LLN skills (see Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994).

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

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

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

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

This definition of adult LLN is readily identifiable as a functional one, regarded as comprehensive because it considers literacy, oracy and numeracy, implicitly applying to native and non-native speakers of English (Brooks, et al., 2001). However, this is not to say it is without its problems. As Brooks, et al., (2001) point out, this definition does not consider Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning of basic skills. In constructing this definition, Brooks, et al., (2001) break down each component of literacy, oracy and numeracy, identifying literacy as a term used to cover both reading and writing; oracy as a term used to cover speaking and listening and numeracy as a component of mathematics, with an emphasis on the practical application and use of mathematics. This numeracy focus draws on the work of Willis (1998) who states that 'to be numerate is to function effectively mathematically in one's daily life, at home and at work' (Willis, 1998: 32). This has been further developed within the United Kingdom (UK) to combine arithmetical and number skills with elements of geometry and statistics' (Foxman, 1998: 1). Brookes, et al., conclude that such an approach affords a very functional, mechanistic interpretation of LLN, as it is based on skills competence within a given context, establishing standards and levels of functionality (Brooks, et al., 2001).

Adults, self-reporting their LLN skills, provide significant discrepancies between what constitutes 'functional' for Government and what constitutes 'functionality' for the individual adult:

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

This is the central tension between the self-assessment of an adult's LLN competence and the assessment by formulated tools linked to an externally constructed and imposed framework of standards; this is a point for consideration in this thesis. An adult in this country is considered to have achieved LLN functionality when they can evidence competence at an identified minimum level (Level 1) as noted in the previous chapter.

Whilst a functionalist approach has broadly been adopted in England, an alternative does exist and has a growing body of support. This approach is seen as an alternative vision to the dominant economic focus of LLN policies (Hamilton, 1998): literacy as a social practice. This view of literacy argues that LLN programmes should be about much more than just a desire to ensure individuals are more able to enter the economic market and be productive agents in that field; but that they should encompass a much wider agenda, concerned with

active citizenship, political participation and individual development leading to empowerment. A central tenet of this approach is a recognition that adults are regularly involved in a host of literacy practices and events and hold a significant amount of skills that go unrecognised through assessment and testing. These practices are undervalued, both by the individual holder of the skills and by agencies acting on behalf of Government to develop policies and assessment practices. Rather than attributing focus to the deficiencies that exist in an individual's LLN skills, this approach aims to acknowledge the existence of these skills and work with the individual to build on, and develop existing skills that are contextually relevant and meaningful to the individual's life.

This thesis considers both a functionalist approach and a social practice approach to the development of adult LLN, arguing that the dominant approach to policy development is based on assumed need, rather than on needs expressed by learners. A social practice approach starts from recognising the diverse range of literacies that exist, arguing that the contribution to society can be of equal value to a functionalist approach. Indeed, each approach could arguably complement and usefully inform the other and do not need to be seen as directly opposing, or polarised views.

As noted earlier, LLN provision moved from being something of a 'Cinderella' activity in the 1970s to becoming a central feature of Government policy by the late 1990s.

The prioritising and centralisation of this provision was the result of two significant events that occurred almost simultaneously in 1997. The first was the publication of the second in a series of three reports, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), entitled 'Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society' (OECD, 1997). Alternatively known as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the report presented a comparison of literacy standards globally. It was the only survey in the series in which the United Kingdom (UK) participated and concluded that 'educational attainment has a large effect on income in all countries studied' (OECD, 1997: 6), revealing that in order for individuals to maintain a minimum level of literacy skills, it is necessary for them to be used throughout one's life span.

These findings are confirmed by Parsons and Bynner (1999) who identified that employment, and particularly unemployment, strongly related to levels of literacy proficiency, with those who are more literate being more likely to have better jobs, higher levels of productivity and earning and being less vulnerable to long term unemployment. Those with low skills, they identify, had a greater chance of being unemployed and being more likely to experience longer

durations of unemployment. Additionally, adults with low-level skills are identified as being seriously disadvantaged with respect to accessing the labour market.

The IALS survey (OECE, 1997) concluded that whilst:

Literacy is not the only determinant of employment levels, strong literacy rates make a labour force more productive and employable over the long run, providing incentives to attract capital investment and job creation. Continuously upgrading the skills of the populations and workforces through strategies for lifelong learning should be part of the policy response to tackle poor, low-wage jobs and persistent unemployment (OECD, 1997: 12).

Throughout the OECD report, the term 'knowledge society' is used to convey the notion that literacy is an essential requirement for the active and equal participation of all citizens in social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life, with participation being the premise upon which social stability and economic development are based (OECD, 1997). Interestingly, following publication of this survey, the Government withdrew its cooperation to participate in the final survey.

The second important factor which affected changes in LLN provision in England was the change in Government in 1997 from a Conservative

Government (which had been in place since 1979) to a new Labour Government which had used the slogan 'Education, Education, Education' (Labour Party, 1997) as a key manifesto strategy during its election campaign. The Labour Government continues to consider education as its biggest economic policy and human capital investment.

Following its successful election to Government, and the outcome of the IALS (OECD, 1997), the Government commissioned a major review of adult basic education (DfEE, 1999) as the first action in a series of consequent policy developments that aimed to ensure the UK's continued participation in the global economic market. Throughout the subsequent series of policy introductions, which aimed to ensure a buoyant economic market, the Government remained committed to developing adult basic education as part of a wider social policy (Papen, 2005).

The main findings of the review: *A Fresh Start*, were published in 1999 and reflected those of the IALS (OECD, 1997), stating that one in five adults in England were considered not to be functionally literate, with considerably more facing problems with numeracy. The report argued that such limitations were likely to be having a real impact on the ability of the British economy to increase its productivity. Moser (DfEE, 1999) concluded the report by offering 21 separate recommendations for change, proposing an implementation plan for these changes in the

form of a national strategy, fully supported by the Government holistically. The recommendations included a national strategy with set national targets, an increase in participation on training programmes made available through a wide range of medias, including workplace, community settings, trade unions, unemployment programmes and family programmes, the introduction of an inspection framework, the development of a specialist teacher training qualification and the development of core curricula and supporting qualifications. It was further recommended that such provision should be financially supported by Government, be nationally coordinated and underpinned through a programme of research (DfEE, 1999).

There was now significant evidence and justification for the development and implementation of a national strategy to work to eliminate low levels of LLN from the population (DfEE, 2001a). Evidence from a range of reports now showed that the population was more likely to be able to participate more readily and more fully, economically and in society more generally, if it was able to increase LLN standards (ALBSU, 1993; Parsons and Bynner, 1998, 1999, 2001, DfEE, 1999, 2001a).

Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills was published on 1 March 2001; the mission of the strategy being:

... to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first-century society.

(DfEE, 2001a: Forward)

The strategy sets out in some detail the Government's approach for tackling low levels of literacy and numeracy apparent amongst the adult population. The strategy largely embodies the findings of the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) and further identifies priority target groups with whom the strategy aimed to engage and where it was felt the most impact could be made. Priority target groups included prisoners and those supervised in the community, unemployed people and benefit claimants, public sector employees, low-skilled people in employment, young adults and other groups at risk of exclusion (DfEE, 2001a).

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001a) has become the biggest overarching policy drive that has ever taken place in post-compulsory education being supported by significant investment from Government (Crawley, 2005).

Using the research questions outlined previously on page 59, this thesis questions how adults assess their LLN skills and asked what their experiences of undertaking *Skills for Life* training provision had been. Additionally, the study explored the range of programmes available to

them and asked what provoked them into attending the training programme at this time?

This section of the review of literature offers the reader an overview of the development of adult basic skills education since the 1970s. It has highlighted the change in discourse from one in the 1970s which focused on a liberal, student-centred approach to supporting adults with low levels of LLN skills; to one that considers a lack of literacy and numeracy skills as an individual deficit which needs to be remediated in order to ensure the adult population are appropriately skilled to become economically engaged in the 'knowledge society'. This approach to LLN development is a much more functionalist approach and considers their acquisition purely from a 'skills' perspective, seeing such skills as technical and discreet from any social or cultural context. The responsibility for the development of these skills is placed firmly with the individual with the ability to achieve an identified minimum level of LLN competence being associated with personal success or failure.

A series of Government interventions has been introduced since 1997 to ensure that adults who are identified as holding LLN skills below the defined minimum standard (Level 1) work towards developing them. These include a large-scale marketing campaign, the removal of financial barriers to accessing training opportunities and a suite of new

national tests to support the new curricula for adult literacy and numeracy, constructed alongside the new set of minimum standards, compiled by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

Having reviewed the literature surrounding the evolution of adult LLN provision and the notion of need, from the perspective of the individual adult and from Government policy initiatives, I now turn to the literature associated with the notion of choice for adults LLN learners and scrutinize the range of learning opportunities made available, and accessible, for adults. I survey the policy developments linked to the priority target groups identified in the *Skills for Life* strategy in relation to notions of choice. In exploring this literature I review the motivations of adults to attend *Skills for Life* training programmes, looking at how decisions are made about choosing and attending training programmes that best meet their needs: personally perceived or externally assessed and determined.

Choice

Choice is a term that suggests the selection of an item out of a number of options. In reality, however, there are often very few options available. In this section of the chapter I examine the literature that considers choices, and particularly in relation to the range of *Skills for Life* training programmes available to adult LLN learners; and consider

whether Government policies have been assembled in such a way that they detrimentally influence both choice and decision making for this group of adults. Implicit in this discussion is the perception that adults are in a position where they have 'freedom' to choose; and forms a focus for this examination of the literature.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that there is a wide range of literature on the subject of 'choice', that can be drawn from a range of disciplines, including economics, politics, law, philosophy and psychology, this literature review will necessarily focus on literature relating to opportunities of educational choice and models of economic choice associated with educational frameworks. However, it should be acknowledged that many of the discussions in the literature are associated with notions of choice within the 'compulsory' years of schooling for all stakeholders involved and that little direct literature relating to adult choice within the post-16 sector of education and training exists.

'Choice' is described by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) as a social and political battleground wherein tensions exist between the rights of individuals to make choices and define their own existence and the balance between the rights and obligations of individuals - and the rights and obligations of the communities and societies within which they live (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

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

Within England the education system comprises a period of compulsory education from approximately 'rising' five to aged 16. Education undertaken following this age is referred to as post-compulsory education. In reality, however, there are so few choices available to young people that, in reality, their choices are largely limited to different education and training pathways, such as vocational, apprenticeship or academic. Even though 'compulsion' is said not to exist within the post-compulsory sector, examples of recent Government policies can be found which draw on social expectations to ensure attendance at *Skills for Life* training programmes.

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

not about whether choice does or should exist, but about how far this choice should be constrained or unconstrained by external intervention. (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 3)

In unpicking these dichotomies this discussion considers what factors influence choice and how choices are understood, undertaken and made.

Theories of choice are predominantly constructed from models of economics (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001) with choice identified as a central process for an individual, requiring him or her to engage in decision-making processes that involve both the construction and consideration of a range of options and then subsequently choosing between them. Such decision-making processes can be described as 'dynamic and incremental' in character with choice preferences changing over time in response to external factors, such as media advertising and changing circumstances. This presented view of choice and decision-making is based on four key elements:

- 1 That individuals will seek to maximise the benefits they will gain from the choices they make; so-called, utility maximisation
- 2 That individuals will make choices that are entirely based on self interest
- 3 That choices will be made after a process of vigilant information collection
- 4 That the process of considering alternatives and making choices will be entirely rational

(Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 29)

In exploring the choices of potential adult LLN learners it is important to recognise, significantly, who makes the choices in this field and when, how and why these choices have been made; what influences the choice process and what impact that choice has on the individual, other participants and on outcomes of training programmes.

The model of choice and decision-making presented by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) is a very dynamic one in which individuals are perceived to hold all the knowledge and skills necessary to make considered choices. For many adult learners of LLN, however, such a dynamic approach to choice and decision-making is unrealistic and unreasonable. Many require support and detailed information, advice and guidance to navigate the dense materials to enable them to make informed decisions and subsequent choices.

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

appropriate because a problem has not been self-identified. Many adults, described as long-term unemployed, whilst they may, but by no means always, accept that they have limited LLN skills, do not necessarily consider such limitations as problematic (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994). The cultural and social environment in which they exist (their *field*) enables them to function satisfactorily. Additionally, their existence within this group (their social network) informs their values and beliefs regarding LLN skills, training programmes, decision-making and employment.

In understanding adults' choices to participate in *Skills for Life* training programmes, it will be necessary to design the methodology to capture this information effectively. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown argue strongly that 'the use of extended, in-depth, qualitative research methodologies are an essential requirement of researching a view of choice processes' (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 44) and this approach will be considered in the construction of the research design for this study.

The ability to choose a training programme is not only closely associated with an individual's capacity for decision-making but their motivation, or desire, to undertake such a programme.

Motivation is a term often associated with desire – a desire to learn, to engage, to participate, to commit, to progress and is defined by Curzon

as 'a person's aroused desire for participation in a learning process' (Curzon, 1990: 195). There are many authors writing on this subject, offering varying definitions associated with particular psychological schools of thought. For example, behaviourist psychologists link motivation with a stimulus-response mechanism inherent in humans, where behaviours are repeated if positively rewarded and not repeated if perceived to receive a negative reward. Popular writers in this school of thought include Skinner, Pavlov and Thorndike (discussed in chapter 1). Alternatively, a humanist psychological approach to motivation and learning emphasises the notion that adults have an inherent 'natural desire' to learn. This motivational approach was popularised by writers such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Malcolm Knowles and Paulo Freire (again these are discussed in chapter 1).

Despite the many definitions of motivation, there is general consensus that motivation is an internal state or condition that serves to activate or energise behaviour and gives it direction (Huitt, 2001); that it is a learned behaviour will not occur unless energised.

Motivation can broadly be categorised as either extrinsic (outside the person) or intrinsic (internal to the person). Extrinsic motivation relates to behaviours which occur as a reaction to some external incentive which has associated with it some sort of promise of reward, threat of punishment or need for competition or cooperation with others. Such motivation requires attached attainable goals in order for

it to be sustained. Intrinsic motivation, alternatively, is linked to an individual's inner drive, often being related to an individual's feelings of self-esteem and to a desire to satisfy personal curiosity. Such motivation provides self-reward for the individual. Gilbert, in his discussions on motivation, asserts that:

motivation is a very misunderstood process ... carrot and stick may work if you want a classroom full of donkeys, but real motivation comes from within. (Gilbert, 2002: 2).

The suggestion here is that unless an individual is intrinsically driven to undertake an activity or action, that achievement of the goal is unrealistic. This position will be explored in this study, especially with regard to adult LLN learners who are not intrinsically motivated to develop their skills through attendance at *Skills for Life* training provision; but who have been 'chosen' to attend by external forces or agencies, such as adults in receipt of welfare benefits and prisoner-learners.

Motivation is seen as a key factor in successful learning (Reece and Walker, 2000). Abraham Maslow produced '*A Theory of Human Motivation*' in 1943 (Maslow, 1943) based on a hierarchy, where he stated that fundamental needs must be satisfied in order to move onto

further developments.⁹ This motivational theory is widely known and drawn upon in educational settings but is also more widely used. Significantly for this study, this theory is used by the DWP in their research activities that underpin the development of their intervention strategies. For example ECOTEC, reporting in 2003 (ECOTEC, 2003) to the DWP on their two-stage, predominantly face-to-face longitudinal study of approximately 200 basic skills client's outcomes, state:

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

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

1. clients who are highly motivated to improve their current situation and participate in (or return to) the labour market
2. clients who are moderately motivated and willing to accept intervention, but who might not make the changes for themselves

⁹ Whilst Maslow's work on motivation is highly regarded, it is not without its critics. The most common criticism surrounding his work is methodological. In undertaking his empirical work Maslow hand-picked a small number of people whom he declared to have achieved self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is conceptually difficult and confusing to define – this is largely due to frustrations and variations in and of human behaviour, which in itself is problematic. Critics have commented that Maslow's theory of motivation is only really applicable amongst the middle classes of America and the UK, where the study was undertaken.

3. moderately unmotivated clients who are fairly accepting of their current situation, but could not be persuaded to change their views
4. Unmotivated clients who resist change and prefer their current state. These clients do not want to, or will not recognise that they have a problem(s) and that assistance is available to overcome it.

(ECOTEC, 2003: 6)

Their findings concluded that a range of factors affect the motivation of adults with low LLN skills who are in receipt of welfare benefits; these could be linked to both their past experiences and their perceived views of the future. This influenced how individuals responded to offers of training and other support to improve their situation. Motivation alone, they concluded, was too simplistic to explain such behaviours.

An index of motivational indicators (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002), provides four factors which can be related to motivation: choice of task, effort, persistence and achievement. Researchers (Lepper, Greene and Nisbett, 1973) found that the ability of an individual to select a task under free-choice conditions indicated a motivation to perform that task. Learners demonstrating effort, particularly high effort with difficult material, had a relation to motivation. This was also the case when learners demonstrated persistence over a longer time scale, especially if obstacles have been encountered and successfully

negotiated. The fourth factor of achievement is identified as the culmination of choice, effort and persistent to achieve the task.

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

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

a key difference between adult and child learners is that adults choose to participate in educational programmes, whilst children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and

cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper “work” of “childhood”. (Comings, et al., 1999: 1)

The research team interviewed 150 adult learners and identified four key areas that, they concluded, acted to support and establish persistence:

- (1) The management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence
- (2) Self-efficacy – a focus on a specific task and the associated feelings of being able to accomplish the task
- (3) The establishment of a goal **by the student**. The identified goal should then be the context on which learning is constructed
- (4) Reaching a goal. Progress towards achievement of the goal should be regularly reviewed, assessed and measured.

(Comings, et al., 1999)

The study concluded that policy makers should use an expanded definition of persistence:

adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow. (Comings, et al., 1999: 3)

The study also identified two aspects of educational experience associated with persistence: (a) adults who had been involved in previous training programmes were more likely to persist than those who had not and (b) adults who, when asked why they had entered a programme, mentioned a specific goal were also more likely to persist than those who did not mention a goal.

This view concords with prominent writers in the field of adult learning, termed andragogy, such as Knowles (1975) and Mezirow (1991) who popularised the view that adult education is usually a voluntary activity, undertaken for self-development and personal interest.

However, Illeris (2003) presents an opposing viewpoint to the key assumption underpinning Comings et al's research. Instead, he suggests that adults do not choose to participate in training programmes, but that:

Most adult learners approach education in very ambivalent ways. The majority of participants enter the programmes because they are more or less forced to do so, and not because of an inner drive or interest. In practice, they typically develop a variety of psychological defence strategies to avoid learning that challenges their identity and personal ways of thinking, reacting and behaving. In general, it seems to be basically characteristic of adult learning that: adults have very little inclination to really learn something they do not perceive as meaningful for their

own life goals; adults in their learning draw on the resources they have; and adults take as much responsibility for their learning as they want to take (if they are allowed to do so). (Illeris, 2003: 13)

Illeris clearly argues that the majority of adults attending training programmes at this time are largely doing so because they have to, they are forced to or they have been persuaded to attend, either by employers or authorities, or because the alternative to attendance may result in social and economic marginalization (Illeris, 2003). During his work on the 'Adult Education Research Project', he investigated three popular adult education systems in Denmark. Using a qualitative research design, by means of both observations and interviews, he focused on learners' accounts of their experiences and on evaluations of the educational situation and setting as well as the process that led to their participation. This approach to investigating experience aligns with Foskett and Hemsley-Brown's argument that:

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

(Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 44)

The findings of Ahrenkiel and Illeris's study (2002) suggest the presence of an ambivalent approach towards education by adults, with motivation being closely associated with employment and

employability. Some adults reported attending educational programmes because they wanted to learn something; others reported attending because they had to; with resulting evidence by some of passive resistance and perplexity. Motivations associated with attendance at education programmes appeared to be a mixture of social, personal and technical elements, focusing particularly on the concrete skills they were expected to gain.

Whilst Illeris, discussing the fundamental differences of learning in relation to age (Illeris, 2004), agrees that adults want to take personal responsibility to decide whether they do or do not want to learn (in line with Comings, et al., Knowles and Mezirow) he states that, in fact, most adults entering educational institutions have not freely chosen to do so. Illeris found, that for the unemployed, with little realistic possibility of obtaining employment, ambivalence tended to develop into resignation and despair.

The main concluding finding of the research Illeris identified was:

... the main result of our investigating adult education from the perspective of ordinary learners who are alien to such concepts as lifelong learning and lifelong education is that if it is given to or forced upon participants who have not mentally accepted and internalized a wish or need to acquire the knowledge, skills,

attitudes or qualities in question, it will tend to be a waste of human and financial resources. (Illeris, 2003: 22)

This study will consider how, for some adults attending *Skills for Life* training programmes, the notion of choice and, importantly, owning that choice and taking responsibility for that choice has been removed. This is particularly the case for individuals undertaking training in prisons or those dependent on the state for welfare assistance who have become passive participants within the welfare system. The welfare system uses 'conditionality' as part of receipt of benefits, routinely presented as 'carrot and stick' interventionist strategies. These issues are now explored in this review of literature.

Prison Learners

A report produced by the Basic Skills Agency (1994) identified a link between poor literacy and numeracy skills and crime, and argued that ensuring prisoners had access to improving these skills in prison was likely to make it easier for them to get employment or gain vocational qualifications upon release (Brooks, et al., 1999).

A prison's primary function is to 'keep in safe custody those committed by the courts' (Hanson, 2001: 1). However, the Prison Service claims to be committed to a Training and Education Policy with a core curriculum being introduced in 1995. It was felt that this would assist an offender to lead a 'good and useful life' on release and, in doing so,

enhance that offender's prospects and lead to a reduction in his or her likelihood of re-offending (Hughes, 2005).

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) work with learning providers to ensure that offenders' learning is relevant to the needs of the labour market, working to ensure that prisoner learners gain the skills and qualifications they will need to hold down a job within society. However, education, for many prisoners, only becomes an option when the other opportunities for 'work' within the prison are exhausted. Students are paid to attend education, although, as mentioned previously, this is generally below the level of that paid to those undertaking 'work'.

As a result of the introduction of the prison core curriculum in 1995 (Hughes, 2005) the range of courses made available within prisons has been restricted. Increasingly, since the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy, in which prisoners were identified as a 'target group', the curriculum offer has become increasingly limited, dominated by the provision of literacy and numeracy training programmes and a handful of vocational courses.

Paul Boateng, Minister of Prisons, speaking in 2000 at the prison education conference, made no apologies for this increasing focus, stating:

I make no apologies for the emphasis that we place as a Government on basic skills and the reason for that is really simple. It is that we recognise the very real deficits that exist out there in relation to basic numeracy and literacy and we are determined to address them. We know that there is a clear link between basic skills difficulty and crime. Research shows that offenders are less likely to re-offend if employed and that access to employment opportunity is widened if appropriate levels of basic skills are attained. (Prisoners' Education Trust and University of Central England, 2000)

It is difficult to ignore that a significant percentage of prisoners require such training; it has been estimated that at least half of prisoners in England and Wales have serious problems with literacy and numeracy skills (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

Even those these figures have been contested in the literature (Brooks, et al., 1999), detail consideration of the data does appear to confirm that there are a high proportion of people in prison with poor basic skills, when compared to the general population (See Table 8).

Table 8: Summary of Literacy Needs amongst Prisoner Populations
(Brooks, et al., 1999: 26)

Year	Sample Size	Literacy below Level 1 (%)
1994	416	52
1998	47,298	33
1999/2000	97,681	39
Rice (2000)	203	14(?)
Level in general population		15-19

Source: BSA (1994), Prison Service, (2000), Rice, (2000)

Some prisoners question such a focus on teaching basic literacy skills, suggesting that this only has the effect of ‘turning out burglars who can read and write’ (Hanson, 2001: 2). Hanson, a prisoner serving life, goes on to assert that education ‘becomes a vehicle to impress Parole Boards and prison managers’ (Hanson, 2001: 2) and that meaningful, vocational and education programmes should be constructed in order to support prisoner rehabilitation.

This reinforces the view, a century earlier, of Sir Edmund DuCane, the first Prisons’ Commissioner who stated that:

Experience has shown that literacy education has not had the reformatory influence which was once expected from it and that

moral and industrial instruction are the most potent of the education influences which can be employed with that object. (Hanson, 2001: 3)

The most considerable challenge presented to the prison service in adopting a strategy which focuses on increasing the education and training of offenders in order to reduce recidivism is, significantly, around the cultural practices of prisons and prisoners. Reporting in 2003, the Prison Reform Trust suggested that the national drive to provide learning opportunities in prisons was more often rhetoric than reality. At the same time, Braggins and Talbot (2003) published the findings of their study that considered prisoners' perceptions of education in prison. Using semi-structured group discussions with 153 prisoners across 10 prisons, with prisoners in learning and those not in formal learning, they identified a series of issues that either encouraged or discouraged participating in learning. These were predominantly process-type issues and included areas such as initial assessment and more general issues, such as ineffective application system for entry into education, poor rates of pay, timetabling clashes and unsupportive cellmates. They concluded that a significant cultural change was necessary across the whole prison system, in order to effectively engage prisoners in the formal education and training programmes.

Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, speaking in 2005 at the Prisoners' Education Trust re-stated the words of the Select Committee, that:

Prison education should be part of a wider approach to reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation of prisoners. [But it is] about more than just this. It is also important to deliver education in prisons because it is the right thing to do. Education as part of a broader approach to rehabilitation must consider the full range of needs of the prison and continue to support the prisoner on release. Prison education does not take place in isolation, and its purpose cannot be understood in isolation from these wider issues. (Anne Owers, 2005: 19)

It is clear that the *Skill for Life* strategy has a part to play in the educational strategy of the prison service but may work to compromise or limit the choices available to potential learners in prisons.

Jobcentre Plus Learners

Le Grand (2003) used a metaphor to explore the relationships between motivation and those individuals involved in both the construction of, and receipt of welfare. He describes motivation as 'an internal desire or preference that incites action and agency' (Le Grand, 2003: 2) and applies the differing motivations of actors to various chess pieces:

Knights:	Altruistic individuals and acts
Knaves:	Self interested individuals and acts
Pawns:	Passive recipients of acts and actions (least powerful members of society)
Queens:	Active agents of acts and actions (most powerful members of society)

He asserts that an individual's motivation impacts both on the production of policy and how such policies are lived; with the realities of human motivation and agency being crucial to the success or otherwise of public policy. He goes on to argue that policies which consciously, or unconsciously, treat people as pawns may lead to both de-motivated workers and disgruntled beneficiaries. Le Grand identifies three groups largely involved within a social democratic welfare state. Group one comprises actors including politicians/civil servants, managers who administer and delivery professionals - often seen as motivational and performing in a 'knightly' manner. Group two comprises tax-payers with some self-interested individuals and some partly 'knightly' individuals. Group three are the recipients of the welfare state and are described as the 'pawns' in the system, seen as essentially passive.

The welfare state is a system, according to Le Grand (2003), that has been designed to be operated by 'knights' for the benefits of 'pawns'. However, an ideological shift during the 1980's from knights to knaves has resulted in the exploitation of users of the system as pawns.

In considering how the state came to be involved in the development of individuals' knowledge and skills in order to positively affect employment, the next section reviews the literature on the evolution of the welfare state in England and examines how interventionist strategies came to be such a characteristic component of the system. Additionally, I explore whether a fundamental underpinning aim of using such strategies is to affect change in peoples' behaviour through the use of 'conditionality'.

The Welfare State

The United Kingdom (UK) introduced the first National Insurance Act in 1911. This Act aimed to provide a comprehensive programme of financial assistance to those people who found themselves unemployed. Prior to this Act unemployed workers historically sought support through the Poor Law system, adopted in 1834 (Wu, 2000).

This system of welfare relief was managed at a local level, making distinctions between the able-bodied poor and those unable to work. Those assessed as able-bodied were made 'less eligible' for relief and

subjected to workhouse tests. A Royal Commission, established in 1906, undertook a review of the Poor Laws that culminated, in 1909, with a series of reforms being recommended. These included a focus on vocationally-oriented education, a public labour exchange system and the promotion of employment in industry. A public assistance programme was recommended for those who were unemployed and unable to find work. The National Insurance Act of 1911 incorporated many of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission.

Various amendments to the 1911 Act followed, including the 1920s Amendments and the Unemployment Act of 1934, which introduced a new unemployment assistance system, specifically aimed at providing support for the unemployed who were unable to draw unemployment insurance, but were nevertheless still in need. In 1948, unemployment assistance was absorbed into a new national public assistance programme by the National Assistance Act of 1948, followed by a supplementary benefit system in 1966 with subsequent further restructuring in 1975 through the Social Security Act. Common to the system, throughout its evolution, is that it was designed to secure a basic living for people in financial need by providing income during periods of inability to earn (Wu, 2000).

The National Insurance Act (1911) provides the foreground for today's welfare system and it is noteworthy that what was the focus for

inclusion in the system in the early 1900s continues today. The original system provided a limited range of benefits; individuals were only eligible for assistance for a maximum of 15 weeks per year with criteria for qualification of benefits being a previous ten weeks of paid contributions. Interestingly, even in its original format, 'conditionality'¹⁰ was a component of this Act:

... disqualification from unemployment insurance benefits was imposed for six weeks if the worker lost a job because of labour disputes, misconduct, or refusal of suitable work, leaving work voluntarily without just cause. (Wu, 2000: 3)

So, conditionality has been a component of the benefits system since its inception and its primary purpose appears to be to influence the behaviour of claimants in order to achieve a broad range of policy aims. A recent report 'Sanctions and Sweeteners' (Stanley, et al., 2004) considers the extended use of conditionality as a means of effecting change in people's behaviour and identifies some limitations in its use as a policy tool to achieve certain outcomes. However, Mwenitete (2004) argues that the rationale behind conditionality, such as sanctions (the suspension or withdrawal of welfare support to an adult who does not undertake an action upon direction), as a concept appears sound when using such measures to drive positive client behaviour to increase job entry rates. Essentially, Mwenitete argues,

¹⁰ A series of identified requirements to be adhered to in order to receive welfare assistance

sanctions exist to enforce compliance with the conditions associated with the receipt of benefit and more directly influence behaviour:

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

(Mwenitete, 2004: 9)

The aim of the application of a sanction is seen as an attempt to reengage welfare recipients who do not comply with the system; acting as a tool to maintain the focus of responsibility on the individual. Sanctions act as a tool to ensure Jobseeker's Allowance (discussed in detail later in this chapter) is paid only to those who fulfil the requirements for its receipt and, as a regime, is expected to contribute towards the achievement of the wider welfare to work objectives.

Mwenitete (2004), however, goes on to suggest that the current sanctions regime might be considered contrary to the Government's wider social goals. The removal of financial assistance, she argues, potentially has a disproportional impact on the most disadvantaged, with the possibility of hindering job-search activities or re-engagement with programmes. This argument is supported by the Social Exclusion Unit who assert that the effects of compulsion and sanctions push

those who are already marginalised further from the reach of employment (SEU, 2004).

A major reform and overhaul of the system was undertaken in 1994 when the then Conservative Government introduced a new type of unemployment benefit: Jobseeker's Allowance. The aim of this benefit was to focus more closely on helping unemployed people into work:

All unemployed people would be required to enter a Jobseeker's Agreement, committing them to a plan of action to seek work.

(Wu, 2000: 6)

The Jobseeker's Agreement replaced the Back to Work Plan (an advisory and voluntary document), previously completed by new claimants for welfare assistance. Under the new system, claimants now sign this Agreement as a condition of benefit receipt. The Jobseeker's Agreement forms a personal agreement between the individual claimant and Government that details the steps the individual intends to take to find employment. Job-seeking activity became a condition of benefit receipt at this time and allowed staff to formally monitor job-seeking activities (Wu, 2000).

Jobseeker's Allowance, then, is a benefit for people needing financial support as a result of unemployment. However, individuals can be disqualified from the allowance; the major causes for disqualification

from eligibility including voluntary separation from work, discharge for misconduct, refusal of suitable work and labour disputes. Interestingly, this reflects the disqualification criteria of the 1911 National Insurance Act.

In discussing the requirements of future economic success, the Government is:

... investing heavily in education and training, aiming to improve productivity through tackling a range of skills shortages, along with introducing a crusade to improve adult basic skills in literacy and numeracy. (DWP, 2001: 25)

The Government go on to suggest that up to 40 per cent of working age people on benefits have literacy and numeracy problems and states that

... it is essential both for them and for the economy that they are encouraged and enabled to improve their skills.

(DWP, 2001: 27)

This reflects the seriousness with which the Government received the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) and their subsequent responses, including the presentation of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001).

Welfare to Work Programmes form part of the Government's strategy to diminish the problem of long-term unemployment (DfEE, 2001, Webb, 2003). Long term unemployed adults, in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, fall under the requirements, restrictions and regulations of the Jobseekers Act of 1995 and, as such, enter into an agreement with the Government in accordance with the Act.

Adults are defined as being 'long term unemployed' if they have been unemployed for a period of six months (26 weeks) or more. In aiming to alleviate the problem of long-term employment, the Government's employment strategy has three main elements: welfare-to-work policies, targeted measures to help areas of the country and groups of people facing the most significant barriers to work and policies to strengthen work incentives (Webb, 2003).

The publication, by Government, of the Employment Green Paper: *Towards full employment in a modern society* occurred in March 2001 (DWP, 2001), again during the same period as the presentation of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001), outlines the steps Government planned to take in responding to the identified challenges. Among these, the Government aimed to:

... broaden the scope of its Welfare to Work programmes to cover all people on benefits who are economically inactive as well as the long term unemployed. (Webb, 2003: 7)

The paper set out how Government aimed to provide more intensive support for the hardest to help, focussing particularly on raising levels of basic skills in order to prevent any potential for adverse impact on economic growth (Webb, 2003).

'Jobcentre Plus' is the name for the Working Age Agency responsible for the delivery of these policies; its role is to deliver work focused support for all those of working age on out-of-work benefits – both unemployed and economically inactive – and is at the centre of the Government's strategy for a 'work-first' service for all people of working age. It is envisaged by Government that the 'employment first' focus of Jobcentre Plus ensures that it offers 'high quality and demand-led services appropriate to the needs of employers' (Webb, 2003: 9). An important aim of Jobcentre Plus is to ensure that people on working age benefits fulfil the responsibilities of their Jobseekers Agreement.

Part of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) is to target long term unemployed adults. This section of the literature review now goes on to consider the 'choices' available to adults who are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance; particularly focussing on one element of their Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme: Basic Employability Training (BET). This programme was designed to help the long term unemployed back into work; aimed primarily at people

aged 25 or over who have been unemployed for six months or more and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance:

WBLA is a vehicle for tackling the basic skills and other barriers to employment faced by people with the most severe basic skills problems (e.g. those with a reading/numeracy assessment under the level of an average 7 year old). Provision up to 6 months in duration is available for this client group – but the key aim of the provision remains to move people into work.

(Webb, 2003: 12-13)

The key objectives of the WBLA programme are:

- to help adults without work and poor employability skills move into sustained employment;
- to help long-term unemployed people to gain the occupational skills needed to fill local skill shortage vacancies;
- to enable long-term unemployed people to make a success of self –employment;
- basic employability training for jobless people with severe literacy and numeracy problem to remove their barriers to employment (Webb, 2003).

There are four pathways available through WBLA:

- Short job-focused training,
- Longer occupational training,
- Basic employability training, and
- Self-employment support.

Interestingly, the first appearance of the terms 'basic skills training' and 'training in literacy and numeracy' within the training framework of Government's welfare support programme was in 1985 when a series of Wider Opportunities Training Programmes commenced. The introduction of Basic Employability Training (BET) is a descendant of this type of training programme and is of particular interest to this study as it is this programme that adults identified as holding LLN skills below Level 1 are referred, attendance at which is conditional upon receipt of welfare subsistence.

There are two key areas which are particularly interesting about this training programme: one is the notion that adults who are eligible to attend this programme have an element of choice over the decision to attend or not, and the other is that it is intended to act as a programme to increase the basic skills of this group when, in reality, its primary focus is quite clearly a work-focussed one.

A formal process of screening for basic skills (language, literacy and numeracy) needs was introduced by DWP in April 2001 for those aged over 25 and reaching six months of unemployment. Those who potentially demonstrated skills needs were referred to a basic skills Initial Assessment screening. Personal Advisors were asked to identify 'potential' skills needs through reactions to interview questions, often having little or no training to assist them in making such significant decisions through, for example, avoidance by claimants to complete forms or claiming to have lost/forgotten spectacles. If the screening confirmed the individual as holding LLN skills below Level 1 subsequent training in order to develop these skills in the form of BET training was recommended.

To explore the most effective means of identifying and engaging potential learners in both the Initial Assessment process and subsequent training programmes (including through the use of financial incentives and the imposition of sanctions) Government established pilot schemes in six districts of England. The pilot studies examined whether a requirement to acquire LLN skills, with the risk of losing benefit for those who fail to address their needs and with the prospect of rewards for those who do, impacted on the number of unemployed people taking up and attending training programmes.

Following the introduction of these pilot schemes, evaluative studies were undertaken to examine the effects of these interventions. The evaluations were undertaken in two waves, using a qualitative approach. During the first wave of the study, undertaken during May and August 2002, 1525 interviews were undertaken; during wave two, undertaken between December 2002 and February 2003, 927 follow up interviews were completed. Subsequent evaluations of these pilot programmes have confirmed that the use of interventions, such as financial reward and sanctions, positively impact on the attendance rate of unemployed adults both at Initial Assessment appointments and subsequent training programmes (Peters, et al., 2003). Furthermore, Peters, et al., found that incentives rather than sanctions increased attendance at training programmes. The study identified that five per cent of respondents achieved a qualification. Whilst 48 percent of respondents involved in the study felt that the training programme may improve their employment prospects, the researchers acknowledged the many factors could contribute to obtaining employment. Although there was a general view, by respondents, that the training programme may have improved their LLN skills and they were more likely to be doing everyday tasks involving literacy and numeracy, there was no evidence, from the study, that attendance at the training programme was likely to increase the use of these skills in the work environment (Peters, et al., 2003).

What this evaluation does not state, however, is whether such programmes positively affected the employability of the unemployed adults in terms of knowledge or skills development; so whilst attendance increased, did this positively effect LLN skill development – were learners attending the training programmes but not engaging with the programme?

Beder and colleagues (2006) undertook a study in the USA exploring learners' engagement in adult literacy programmes. This study considered how, or whether, learning context shapes engagement; defining engagement as 'mental effort focussed on learning and is a precondition to learning progress' (Beder, et al., 2006: 1). The research team studied six classes: three basic level classes, a General Education Diploma (GED) class and two adult high school reading and writing classes. Using qualitative research methods including video, ethnographic observation and interviews, classes were observed between five and seven times. The study found that students' high levels of engagement were supported by their motivation, the encouragement they received from their teachers and, significantly for this study, the voluntary nature of participation in adult literacy education (Beder, et al., 2006).

Following the initial piloting of sanction and incentive interventions, and the subsequent evaluation by Peters, et al., 2003, an extended 12-

month mandatory training pilot scheme was launched in April 2004 (Joyce, et al., 2005). A qualitative evaluation of this further pilot was carried out between May 2004 and June 2005. This evaluation considered the delivery process of the scheme, a reflection of the views and perceptions of the scheme in the mandatory pilot areas and a study of the impact of sanctions. This study was supported by a quantitative analysis of the impact of the mandatory pilot.

Joyce, et al., found that BET comprised a range of activities, including basic skills training, job search, work placements and assessment. The training programme was 'sold' to unemployed adults using a range of strategies (Joyce, et al., 2005), very often presented as a training programme to develop LLN skills. Often, attendance at training was as a consequence of its mandatory nature with unemployed adults having:

... a general awareness and understanding that in order to claim benefits they would be expected, under the rules of Jobcentre Plus, to engage in certain activities, such as training. (Joyce, et al., 2005: 3)

Sanctions had been imposed on adults who did not attend training although, following the imposition of a sanction, it was clear that unemployed adults tended to comply more readily with the conditions of their Jobseeker's Agreement.

The outcome measures for this type of Government training programme include either qualification outcome or job outcome: both economic indicators. Interestingly, however, Joyce, et al., found that:

... the development of soft skills was seen as being of particular importance [by the client group] as it was felt this had a knock on effect on a range of other outcomes, such as increased employability. (Joyce, et al., 2005: 4)

These 'social capital' indicators of success are not collected, recorded or measured in any way by Jobcentre Plus.

Also noteworthy is the 'churning' effect associated with such training programmes. This is evidenced by repeat attendance at training programmes by unemployed adults. Joyce, et al., noted that Jobcentre Plus staff indicated concern regarding the lack of improvement to individuals' 'basic skills' levels, as on return to the Jobcentre and under reassessment, the client group continued to exhibit similar needs levels. It was felt that the apparent inability for individuals to progress was likely, in the long term, to undermine the success of the programme (Joyce, et al., 2005). This element of repetitious attendance at training programmes will be explored in this study, particularly its influence on individuals' experiences of *Skills for Life* training programmes.

Through a review of Government policies surrounding unemployed adults, it is clear that the receipt of financial assistance for this group has always been, and continues to be, associated with conditionality. This is designed to discourage individuals from continuing to receive subsistence for an indefinite period of time and to actively influence a change in social behaviour. Throughout the evolution of the policies, disqualification from receipt of benefit has been a persistent component of the system, with the aim of affecting change in an individual's behaviour.

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

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) is a two-pronged strategy, aimed at achieving economic success and social cohesion. However, all the targets that have been put in place to assess the development and

success of the strategy appear to be based on economic indicators, rather than social indicators. It is this literature, concerning social capital and, necessarily, human capital that is now reviewed.

Capital: Social, Human and Identity

Social capital, as a concept, provides a way to explore the usefulness to learners of attending LLN provision, from a perspective other than economic. Field (2005) suggests that social capital (a social measure) should be considered alongside human capital (an economic measure) to identify how they can support each other to achieve their respective aims. The literature associated with these concepts and their value to adult LLN learners will now be discussed.

Social capital theory's central thesis can be summed up in two words: 'relationships matter' (Field, 2003: 1). Social capital, as a concept, was structured and critically examined in the 1980's by Bourdieu (1986) and also, separately, by Coleman (1988) and Putman (1993). These authors appear to agree that this concept broadly refers to the access people have to varying stocks of an asset not resting in their pockets (Bynner, 2005). However, there are distinct differences between the authors about whether the concept can be regarded as altruistic or as an alternative form of social control.

Bourdieu uses social capital as one of four identified capitals (economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital) to explore how *fields* (structured system of social positions) are inhabited (Bourdieu, 1990). He suggests that relationships between people are constructed by domination, subordination or equivalency and that these relationships are connected through goods or resources: capital. He discusses social capital in terms of different types of relations which are valued by others who are significant and important (Bourdieu, 1990). For Bourdieu, social capital is a tool for social control.

Alternatively, Coleman, sees social capital much more as having a functional role:

It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of actors. (Coleman, 1988: S98)

In his construction of social capital, Coleman outlines three aspects of social capital: obligations and expectations; information flow capability and norms accompanied by sanctions. Sanctions form part of the framework of 'conditionality' imposed on individuals in receipt of benefits from the governing state (Stanley, et al., 2004). Such sanctions form part of the 'normal' intervention strategies of the DWP

who hold responsibility for the management and delivery of the welfare benefit system of the UK, as discussed previously.

Putman (1993) further developed the concept of social capital during the 1990's, suggesting that social capital is present in:

... features of social organisations such as networks, norms and trusts that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. (Putman, 1993: 1)

This formulation of social capital is embraced by Schuller (2000) who argues that social capital requires attention to be paid to the relationships that shape the realisation of human capital's potential, including relationships between different groups as well as within groups.

Whilst there is no substantive definition of the concept, all constructs and discussions of social capital consider the elements that constitute the construction of relationships between and within groups.

Bourdieu's explanation of social capital as a form of social control is particularly interesting to this study. Within the *Skills for Life* strategy, some targeted categories of adults (outlined previously) attend *Skills for Life* training programmes at part of the 'conditionality' attached to obtaining welfare support. A 'network' of social controls are

consequently placed on members of society who may, on the one hand be seen as the most vulnerable and needy and, on the other as unwilling to participate in employment and being a drain on the resources of the state. The 'value relations' between those tasked with delivering the strategy and its associated targets, and those who form the identified people the strategy seeks to support are likely to influence the ways in which *Skills for Life* training programmes are experienced.

Exploring the *Skills for Life* strategy, using the lens of human capital theory, provides a different interpretation of the strategy, aimed squarely at developing a human capital 'stock' of adults who can effectively participate in employment to fulfil the Government's desire to achieve high economic activity.

The formation of human capital, according to Becker (1975), is the process by which such capital is deliberately developed in order to achieve economic return. Becker (1975) was pivotal in bringing to the foreground the notion of human capital in relation to education, and providing a framework for human capital theory based on the premise that greater economic return will result from educational investment; describing conventional outcomes of education in terms of knowledge and skills which enhance employability.

This argument was supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1987 when it stated that:

... the development of contemporary economies depends crucially on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of their workers.

(OECD, 1987: 69)

And again in 1998 when it defined human capital as

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

(OCED, 1998: 9)

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

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

(1) there is a causal effect of human capital on economic productivity, and,

(2) the differences in workers' earnings are due entirely to differences in their human capital investments. (Baptiste, 2001: 189-190)

Broadly, it appears that human capital theory considers the knowledge, skills and qualifications that individuals acquire as a consequence of organised learning and their relationships with economic activity. The underlying implication of a human capital perspective is that investment in knowledge and skills brings economic returns, individually and therefore collectively.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) reflects this perspective in that the Government are investing heavily (1.6 billion pounds in the first three years of the life of the strategy) to work towards developing the knowledge and skills of the adult population in order that they, as individuals, and the country as a whole, are strongly positioned when competing in the global market economy. Measures of outcome and target setting are also closely aligned with human capital theory by associating success and achievement with outcomes, such as qualification achievements and employment.

Schuller (2000) presents a summary comparative framework of social capital and human capital perspectives (see Table 9), which identifies the differing focus of each theory:

Table 9: Comparison of Human Capital and Social Capital

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

(Schuller, 2000: 5)

Social capital and human capital theories, Schuller argues, represent a framework of complementary activities that can support the developments to which they aspire, suggesting it is unhelpful to discuss them as opposing or conflicting theories. However, this is a difficult position to accept when there is ongoing debate regarding the fundamental components, purposes and values of each of the theories, with some authors seeing social capital as one that works to positively

support social cohesion and others, such as Bourdieu, arguing that social capital is a tool for social control.

This is also the case for human capital with authors such as Becker, arguing that developing economic activity for an increased return through growth should be underpinned by the development and acquisition of knowledge and skills. This view, however, is challenged by Baptiste (2001) who summarises the contemporary version of human capital theory as incorporating technology: a factor that mediates the relationship between human capital and productivity. Unlike Becker, he argues that human capital theory works towards an exacerbation of social discontent and difficulties rather than their alleviation. He goes on to suggest that using such a theory in the development of educational policy detracts from more civically responsible practices.

This approach is of particular interest to this study. The *Skills for Life* strategy, at its launch, had a core aim to support adults develop their LLN skills in order not only so that they may be able to contribute to the economy more effectively but also, crucially, to enhance social cohesion and social justice. Measures of success for the strategy requires evidence of an adult's increased LLN skills; gathered through the collection of data from learners undertaking the newly introduced National Test (previously discussed). The first target identified by

Government was to see 750,000 adults achieve a National Test Level 1 by 2004. Whilst this target was achieved, it has since become evident that the majority of people who achieved these outcomes were largely 16-18 year olds undertaking re-sit examinations, rather than the priority target groups identified in the strategy.

It is clear that all measures put in place to assess the success of this strategy focus on economic influences, rather than societal and social developments. It will be difficult to determine, for instance, from the collected data on the *Skills for Life* strategy, whether there has been a reduction in crime, an increase in local community activities or political activity: social capital indicators.

It is also noteworthy that Becker asserts that a human capital approach that has an educational focus can, in fact, negatively influence or exacerbate social difficulties. Wolf, (2002) also supports this view, suggesting that training should not be the only activity to be focussed on when considering the economic wellbeing and the development of a country and its population. Whilst she recognises that those without good levels of basic academic skills are more disadvantaged, she goes on to suggest that education is not the only answer to all social problems. Using special training programmes as a 'cure-all' approach for individuals who are unemployed or considered disadvantaged have, historically, proved both expensive and inefficient, argues Wolf. She

questions the current Government's preoccupation and focus on education as 'the engine of economic growth' (Wolf, 2002: x), as does this study.

A review of the literature on social capital theory, and its relation to the *Skills for Life* strategy led to a review of the literature associated with human capital theory. Both of these theories provide a differing framework, or lens through which the strategy can be interpreted and analysed. However, this study aims to explore the influence of the strategy on the learning experiences of adult LLN learners and it is clear that the social network, or culture, which is inhabited by the learner – their *habitus* – contributes significantly to their experiences of learning, including their experiences of learning whilst attending a *Skills for Life* training programmes. It therefore became important to consider identity; a review of this literature is provided below.

Identity Capital

A traditional view of the construction of an individual's identity believes that one's identity is formulated during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). However, others have argued that 'identity' is more closely associated with a social formation, rather than a personal one and is significantly dependent on social relations and constructs (Gergen, 1994). Alternative observers, such as Giddens (1991) and Edwards and Usher

(2000), argue that a stable identity is inconvenient and impossible in a world that is constantly moving, developing and changing. Illeris (2003) develops such arguments, suggesting that identity:

... tends to be seen as something much more changeable and unstable: a person may take on different identities in different situations, or there is only a limited stable core identity and in extension of that, a zone of more fluid layers. (Illeris, 2003: 16)

Cote (1996) explains identity capital as representing 'what individuals "invest" in "who they are"' (Cote, 1996: 425) and provides a description of the components he argues creates the links between culture and identity:

- (1) social structure, which can include political and economic systems;
 - (2) interaction, comprising patterns of behaviour that characterise day-to-day contacts among people in socialising institutions like the family and schools; and
 - (3) personality, which encompasses terms like character, self and psyche, including subcomponents like ego identity.
- (Cote, 1996: 417)

Using these descriptors, Cote suggests that, as a minimum, individuals require key social and occupational networks, and need to be in

possession of a portfolio of assets that should include two elements. First, tangible assets, such as educational credentials which act as a 'passport' allowing membership of groups or acting as a 'gatekeeper' ensuring non-entry into a group and, secondly, intangible assets, such as psychological factors and characteristics which provide one's capacity to understand and negotiate opportunities and obstacles encountered through life.

Cote (1996) sees the construction of one's identity to comprise of these elements. Whilst some of these elements appear to be pre-determined, others, Cote argues, are controlled by the social structure of society, or culture and one's experiences within that society. These elements are similarly described by Bourdieu as *doxa*, *habitus* and *field* and these concepts will be explored in more detail in the next section of this review.

An alternative view of identity construction is provided by Wenger (1998). In his work on learning through 'communities of practice' he advocates that one's identity involves five elements: a negotiated experience of self, community membership, learning trajectory, connections of multi-memberships and relationships between local activities and global activities.

The views of Cote and Wenger identify the interconnectedness of one's identity construction between various elements. However, Blumer (1969) argues that one's 'identity' is based on 'symbolic interactionism' where individuals act according to the meanings that they attribute to their experiences. Such meanings, Blumer suggests, are generated through processes of social interaction that are continually reinterpreted and modified through continual social interaction. It is through such processes of social interaction that actions are constructed 'by actors out of what they take into account' (Blumer, 1969: 74) and through which identity continually evolves. Identity, for Blumer, is the product of interaction between identification and self-identification.

Given the determination of the *Skills for Life* strategy to target socially constructed groups, such as 'long term unemployed adults' and 'illiterate adults', and to actively work to influence, manage and, in some instances, coerce a change in an individual's behaviour, it is important to consider the relationships, and the focus, between the targeting of 'groups' and the placement of responsibility for individual successes, and by default, failures, squarely with the individual. It appears that the strategy's reliance on social networks, or groups, to access individuals may contribute to undermine or devalue the role of social networks within the social justice element of the strategy, creating a form of 'social fragility'.

The term 'social network' was first introduced and used in 1954 by James Barnes, using it to refer to:

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

His social network theory views social relationships in terms of *nodes* and *ties*: 'nodes' referring to the individual actors within the networks, and 'ties' referring to the relationships between the actors. In its simplest form, Barnes suggests, a social network can be described as a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes being studied. Additionally, a social network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors.

As previously noted, social capital is a term used by Bourdieu (1990) to describe types of valued relations with significant others; with 'family' and school identified as the main arenas for the accumulation and transmission of this form of capital.

Networks of relationships, Bourdieu argues, are a product of investment strategies, aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable, either in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1997). The relationships between agents, groups of agents and differing *fields* are the core identifiers for social capital, allowing for

clear visibility of the development of social organisation, social interaction and, particularly, social advantage. Using Bourdieu's perspective, social capital can be employed as one method of constructing and maintaining social control, reproducing a society within a framework for domination by a dominant group.

The focus of the *Skills for Life* strategy on literacy and numeracy as skills precludes the opportunity to consider them as either social or cultural practices that present in multiples forms as part of our day to day lives (Papen, 2005). Central to this viewpoint, as noted early, is that LLN practices are embedded within social and cultural context and, necessarily, always involve people in some way (Barton, 1994; 2000; Papen, 2005): a social network.

This study explored the learning experiences of adults highlighted within the *Skills for Life* strategy as target groups, described and discussed previously. Using the concepts provided by Bourdieu's analysis of how society and culture are reproduced through education, and particularly the use of symbolic violence, consideration was given to how the strategy was operationalised, through adult learner's learning experiences.

I now turn to an examination of the theoretical framework that informs the data collection and analysis in this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the learning experiences of socially constructed groups, identified as 'long-term unemployed' and 'illiterate adults', who had low levels of LLN, and who are referenced in the discourses of manipulative power and symbolic violence, evident in the growing literature and policies since 1997 (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006; Barton and Tusting, 2005; O'Grady and Atkin, 2006; Papen, 2005; Atkin, et al., 2005; DfES, 2003; Webb, 2003; Illeris, 2002; DfES, 2002; DfEE, 2001; DfEE, 1999; DWP, 2001).

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of symbolic violence and its use in (re)producing societies (constructions of cultural norms and particularly the dominant positioning of positions), along with his concepts of *habitus* and *field*, were operationalised throughout this study to provide a lens through which the research data could be analysed.

This section of the review of literature surveys Bourdieu's collection of concepts in some detail and provides evidence of their usefulness in constructing a framework for this study. In undertaking this exploration, I focussed particularly on the concept of symbolic violence and its incorporation of misrecognition and legitimacy. However, it is unrealistic to discuss Bourdieu without understanding his sociology of

habitus and *field* and its links with capital, and therefore these are also explored.

The concepts are discussed using the three overarching themes of the thesis: adult language, literacy and numeracy, choice and capital.

Bourdieu's thesis of social and cultural reproduction

Bourdieu's work on education and social reproduction has had considerable impact within the sociology of education (Lingard, et al., 2005). Bourdieu's sociology is useful in educational research as it helps to provide explanations, and ways of understanding how positions of people in a society are constructed and continuously maintained by the dominant few upon the dominated majority, through influences of family, of community and of school. All, arguably, instruments of the state, consider the foundations of social differences to accessing *fields* and the relationships between the systems of production.

At the centre of his sociology is the notion that much of the social world occurs in a misrecognised form (Grenfield, 2004). Differential access to, and expressions of, what is 'thinkable' form the basis of *misrecognition*. For Bourdieu, the relationship between the individual

(*habitus*) and the context (*field*) form the core of his theory of knowledge (Grenfield, 2004) and have application for this study.

An individual, argues Bourdieu, is shaped by the position they occupy within a social *field* and this is intricately linked to capital, described by Bourdieu in three forms: cultural, social and economic (Bourdieu, 1997), thereby providing a framework within which judgements can be formed and conclusions drawn.

The Development of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy

Adults undertaking *Skills for Life* training programmes are largely doing so because either they have decided, or external agencies have decided for them, that their current level of LLN skills is compromising their existence in some way, either socially or economically. These external agencies include global organisations, such as the World Bank and the OECD, which link literacy and numeracy skills with the abilities of both individuals and countries, particularly developing countries, to be able to function effectively in both local and global economies as well as within one's society (OECD, 1997). An adult's ability to develop these skills, I argue, is informed and affected by their *habitus* and *field*, and also through capital in its various forms; concepts used by Bourdieu to try to understand, explore and explain the practices of society.

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

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

More simply, *habitus* is a system of dispositions, a term used to describe (a) the result of an organising action (b) a way of being and (c) a pre-disposition, referring to a tendency, a propensity or inclination (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu states that *habitus* is embodied in the individual in three meaningful ways:

- (1) *habitus* only exists 'inside the heads' of actors
- (2) *habitus* only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors, their interactions with each other and their environment
- (3) practical taxonomies are rooted in the body (Bourdieu, 1977).

Habitus is, according to Bourdieu, the means by which the 'social game' is inscribed in individuals, preparing them to meet various situations and creating consistency in behavioural response patterns and choices:

doxa (discussed below). The models of behaviour, or dispositions, produced by *habitus*, are passed on through generations, inculcated from an early age and socially reinforced through education and culture, rather than by explicit teaching. Interestingly, *habitus* is also creating those choices and acts to reinforce the initial drivers; indeed each works to reinforce the other.

A product of history, *habitus* results in producing individual and collective practices and attitudes in accordance with the schemes generated by history (Bourdieu, 1977); a 'taken for grantedness' of actions and activities with a social field. Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to provide a link to go beyond the 'opposition between subjectivism and objectivism' (Jenkins, 2002: 74).

Bourdieu argues that:

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

In this sense *habitus* can be considered a subjective, rather than an individual system of internalised structures, perceptions, conceptions and actions common to all members of a group and thereby constituting the precondition for all objectification. This relational

'homology' allows space for an individual's *habitus* to become united as a group *habitus* with evidence of a 'structural variant' from other groups (Bourdieu, 1977). Interestingly, adults who have been identified as possessing poor LLN skills can be considered to be united as a group, in the same way as ethnic groups have come to be classified, because of a 'structural variant'.

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

In understanding the construction of one's *habitus*, one must consider this in relation to *fields*; the second of Bourdieu's concepts to be examined. Bourdieu outlined social arrangements as consisting of various social *fields*. Social *fields* have their own *logics of practice* (discussed below) with varying degrees of autonomy from other *fields*, sitting in a hierarchy within the overall arrangement and also with

internal *field* relations of hierarchy between positions and agents (individuals) who occupy them and who possess varying amounts of differing capitals (Lingard, et al., 2005). Within each *field*, argues Bourdieu, exists a competitive market place in which positions are constantly being played out and reinforced by actions of encounters between actors within the *field* and between actors in differing *fields*.

Bourdieu observed a *field* as a social arena within which struggles take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them:

Fields present themselves synchronically as structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of the occupants. (Bourdieu, 1993: 72)

Three distinct operations of *field* are presented: first, the *field* of power, identified by Bourdieu as the most dominant *field* of a society and the one which overarches and structures all other *fields*. Bourdieu defines this *field* as:

The space of play within which the holders of capital (of different species) struggle *in particular* for power over the state, that is, over the statist capital granting power over the different species of capital and over their reproduction (particularly through the school system). (Bourdieu, 1998: 42, italics in original)

Secondly, within a *field* a 'social typology' is constructed which maps relationships of individuals within a *field* in an effort to identify the *field's* specific form of capital. Thirdly, the *habitus* of the individuals within the *field* are analysed, considering particularly the interaction between *habitus* and the constraints and opportunities determined by the structure of the *field* (Bourdieu, 1993).

It must be accepted that *fields* do not exist autonomously but are structured systems of social positions; to think in terms of *field* involves recognising the centrality of social relations to social analysis:

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

Fields, then are not only the shapers of *habitus* but also the products and producers of *habitus*. The structure of the *field* is a state of the power relations among the actors or institutions engaged in the struggle (Bourdieu, 1993). The struggle that takes place concerns the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority), characteristic

of that particular *field* (Bourdieu, 1993). This struggle is seldom linked to a majority but to the dominant cultural position.

Field is a relational concept that presents a society consisting of quasi-autonomous *fields* with their own logics of practice and required *habitus*; this appears particularly applicable to considerations of the policy cycles in education (Lingard, et al., 2005: 664).

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

The third concept presented in this anthology is *doxa*. *Doxa* is used by Bourdieu to refer to the mutual agreement and unspoken awareness of suitable behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977). Many human activities are governed by such *doxa* where there is no requirement to make

expectations explicit. However, difficulties arise with such governance when individuals become holders of positions that enable them to determine the 'norm', 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours or responses to activities.

The concept of *doxa* provides a way of understanding spontaneous beliefs and opinions which shape people's views of the world, on the basis of relationships between the ideas and attitudes of individuals and the structures within which they operate:

The coincidence of the objective structures and the internalised structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility.
(Bourdieu, 1990: 60)

Applying the concept of *doxa* within this study, an adult's experiences of learning can be linked to the way in which their *doxa* has been constructed. It may be that for some learners their ideas and attitudes towards learning are related to the structure in which that learning is structured. It may be, for example, that adult LLN learners will respond differently to their training programme, dependent on where and how that training programme is being provided – at a further education college, through a private training provider or in a prison. Alternatively, it could be part of an individual's *doxa* to accept their

position within the positions of power structures and relationships of power in which their position exists; their *habitus*, created through their experiences of *fields*.

The concepts of *habitus*, *doxa* and *field* and the unconscious relations between these are fundamental to the understanding of the actors involved in this study. For many learner research participants involved in this study their *habitus* has been shaped by the network of *fields* which they have influenced or been influenced by; particularly their family, their community as well as their educational experiences; the dominant *fields* of their formative experiences. Additional *fields* that have shaped their *habitus* are other institutions of the state, including care services, judicial services, prison services and welfare benefit agencies. These *fields* hold culturally and socially dominant positions, particularly the *field* of power. The social typology, or *doxa*, constructed by and for these individuals enables them to inhabit a position within a *field* and enables them to present behaviours and practices associated with their position in that *field*.

The *Skills for Life* strategy has been developed as a response strategy by the dominant culture of this society to a report (OECD, 1997) stating that global economic effectiveness could be compromised if all members of society cannot readily engage in useful employment within a knowledge economy. In order to do this, arguably, all adults must hold a minimum level of LLN skills. Those charged with constructing

and disseminating the *Skills for Life* strategy appear to have misrecognised as legitimate, and reasonable, the expectation that all adults can achieve this level of LLN, constructing a strategy which gives individuals an obligation of expectation and responsibility for the acquisition of such skills, and by implication, those who do not, as failures.

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

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

(Bourdieu, 1993: 88)

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

Bourdieu's Concept of Practice

In considering the construction of social practices, Bourdieu is a keen observer of individuals' activities, or *practices*, in their daily lives, arguing that social interactions are a mixture of freedoms and contraction and that knowledge of the social world is integral to the (re)production of the world. *Practices*, Bourdieu argues, are located in space and time, with time providing both a constraint and a resource for social interaction (Bourdieu, 1977). *Practices* cannot be understood outside of space and time; whilst they are not always wholly consciously undertaken they are more likely to be associated with *practical sense* or *practical logic* (Jenkins, 2002). Bourdieu explains the notion of *practice* using the metaphor of 'a feel for the game':

The practical mastery of the logic or of the imminent necessity of a game – a mastery acquired by experience of the game, and

one which works outside conscious control and discourse (in the way that, for instance, techniques of the body do).

(Bourdieu, 1990: 61 in Jenkins, 2002: 70)

Bourdieu suggests there are two sides to *practical sense*: the 'necessity imminent in the social world' (Wacquant, 1989: 42), suggesting that individuals are an integral part of the circumstances in which they exist and which contribute to their social identity; their *doxa* and 'the 'art' of the *necessary improvisation*' (Bourdieu, 1977: 8), meaning that social life is not accomplished on the basis of rules but that improvisation is the exploitation or manipulation of time.

Practice is the product of processes which are neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious, rooted in an ongoing process of learning which begins in childhood and through which actors know – without knowing – the right thing to do (Bourdieu, 1990: 62-63 in Jenkins, 2002: 72).

The *practices* associated with 'being unemployed', 'being a prisoner' or 'being an adult with low level LLN skills', were explored in this study to develop an understanding of the identities of the actors involved. Of interest to the study was whether these terms were useful in referring to individuals as groups with similar *doxa* and *habitus* or whether, these people, whilst they have experienced *fields* in similar ways, their

habitus has been shaped by the network of *fields* to arrive at the circumstances in which they exist. Have peoples' identities; their *habitus*, been shaped by the institutions of the state, the *fields*, and can adults with poor LLN skills be homogenised as a group as part of their social identity?

Choice

The notion of choice: freedom to choose or inability to choose formed an integral part of this study. In considering the choices available to adults with low levels of LLN in relation to either training or employment, it is apparent that influences of power play a pivotal role in determining choices. It is for this reason, that the concept of *symbolic violence*: a system of power relations and relations between groups or classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) have been most influential.

The concept of *symbolic violence* considers how the reproduction of structures of domination in society are, at least in part, dependent on the impositions of cultural values, presented as universal but whose content and context are politically and historically determined and therefore arbitrary.

Bourdieu's foundations of a theory of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) consider the relationship between education and social reproduction. Bourdieu attempts to demonstrate that through the system of education, processes of social order and restraint are continually (re)produced through indirect cultural mechanisms. He characterises *symbolic violence* as the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (alternatively, described as 'culture') upon groups in such a way that they are likely to be experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Such 'legitimacy', he argues, obscures the power relations that permit such impositions to be successful.

Bourdieu and Passeron present a foundation for a theory of *symbolic violence* which starts from the premise that:

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

Bourdieu explored how power relations within and of societies are maintained by means other than repression:

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

'Culture' reinforces such power relations enabling systematic reproduction. This is achieved through a process of *misrecognition*:

the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: xxii)

The primary socially constructed mechanism for the operationalisation of *symbolic violence* is, Bourdieu asserts, undertaken through 'pedagogic action': an activity which enables the imposition of a 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Pedagogic action reproduces power relations: the social reproduction function of cultural reproduction. In turn the interests of the dominant groups or classes in society prevail and are reproduced. Pedagogic action is articulated in three forms: *diffuse education* (interaction with members of a social formation), *family education* (undertaken through interaction with family members) and *institutionalised education* (undertaken through schooling or training) (Jenkins, 2002). Pedagogic actions acts to

reproduce the power relations that underwrite its own operation, reflecting the interests of dominant groups and reproducing uneven distribution of 'cultural capital' between those inhabiting the 'social space':

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

(Jenkins, 2002: 105)

The work of pedagogic action is achieved through 'pedagogic work'

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

The whole conceptual framework of *symbolic violence* provides a strong theoretical position from which to consider the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001); in particular the notion of *misrecognition as legitimate*. Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* was fundamental to the

process of data collection, discussion and analysis of findings in this study.

The research focus of this project was to consider the influence of the *Skills for Life* strategy, which was constructed specifically to target adults with low levels of LLN, on their learning experiences. For long term unemployed adults, as identified recurrently through this thesis, 'conditionality' has always been an associated requirement for the receipt of welfare benefits. This study considered how such 'conditionality' is now so 'culturally' embedded that such activity is *misrecognised* as a *legitimate* activity. Particularly, the study considered whether the conditionality of attending training was useful, as attendance does not necessarily equate to participation.

Additionally, the study explored the *habitus* of the practitioner research participants to ascertain whether their pedagogy works to reproduce the social controls to which Bourdieu refers.

Capital

In attempting to further understand the structures and mechanisms that underpin societal constructs, Bourdieu drew on the concept of capital. The term 'capital' is used throughout Bourdieu's writings to refer to accumulated labour or, different types of power (Bourdieu,

1997). The structure and distribution of the different types and sub-types of capital at a given moment in time represents the imminent structure of the social world, e.g.:

The set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the changes of success for practices. (Bourdieu, 1997: 46)

Three distinct forms of capital are seen by Bourdieu to influence the (re)production of a society. These are: *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money; *cultural capital*, which is convertible on certain conditions into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications (symbolic capital); and *social capital*, which is made up of social obligations or 'connections', which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the forms of a title of nobility, to explore how *fields* (structured system of social positions) are inhabited (Bourdieu, 1990, 1997).

Bourdieu suggests that relationships between people are constructed by domination, subordination or equivalency and that these relationships are connected through goods or resources: capital, the accrual of which he terms 'symbolic capital'.

In order to understand the interplay between each form of capital, I will firstly briefly outline their composition and then consider the conversions of capital between themselves and the influence of *habitus* and *field*.

Bourdieu explains *cultural capital* in three distinct forms: the *embodied* state (dispositions of the mind and body), the *objectified* state (in the form of cultural goods) and the *institutionalised* state (a form of objectification) (Bourdieu, 1997).

This term was introduced to Bourdieu's work when he was considering the unequal academic achievements of individuals in the education system and how the distribution of 'cultural capital' was invested with the resultant effects on academic success, measured through qualification outcome. This, in turn, informed his work in considering how social groups attribute value to learning and its consequential influence upon social reproduction. Because of the apparent unequal distribution of cultural capital, it becomes a marker of distinction and social privilege (Webb, et al., 2002).

Cultural capital can be acquired to a varying extent, depending on the period of time, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. For example, language; the use of language and the range of vocabulary acquired by

an individual through the construction of their *habitus* and exposure to certain *fields* will provide different cultural capital to those in different positions. Because of the social conditions of the transmission of cultural capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, e.g. to be unrecognised as capital and recognised as legitimate competence: an authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition (Bourdieu, 1997).

Cultural capital in its various guises is utilised 'as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which goes on in the field of cultural production' (Bourdieu, 1997: 50).

Secondly, social capital, as discussed previously, is a term used to describe types of valued relations with significant others (Bourdieu, 1990) asserting that 'family' is the main arena for the accumulation and transmission of this form of capital. Whilst this is the main arena, it is recognised that other areas exist in which this form of capital can be accumulated, namely the family and the community. Interestingly, these different *fields* can be identified independently or act collectively, for example someone accessing a residential public school is likely to experience these three separate elements as a collective: the school acting as a community, as a family group and as the school for education.

Bourdieu defines social capital as:

... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition ... (Bourdieu, 1997: 50)

Networks of relationships are described by Bourdieu as products of investment strategies, aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable, either in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1997). Because of its connection to predetermined networks, social capital can never be completely independent of either economic or cultural capital influences and is the 'product of an endless effort at institution' (Bourdieu, 1997: 51).

The relationships between agents, groups of agents and differing *fields* is the core identifier for social capital for Bourdieu, allowing clearer visibility of the development, both of social organisation, interaction and, particularly, social advantage.

The operationalisation of social capital as a 'weapon' or 'tool' of social control informed the data analysis for this study, considering how, or if, adult LLN learners accumulate and transmit social capital within the experiences of learning, through the construction of self, their *habitus*, and through the interaction of *fields* of experiences.

As previously discussed, the *Skills for Life* strategy employs a range of measurements as 'markers' of success and achievement, linked predominantly to economic activity. However, in considering social capital, the work of Bynner (2001) and colleagues at the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning, have identified a wide range of benefits which can be associated with attending training, including the development of friendship groups and increases in personal health and self-esteem (social capital indicators). Particularly interesting to this study was whether such outcomes were valued by the dominant groups initiating the training programmes or whether such outcomes acted to perpetuate a social classification; thereby contributing as a mechanism of and for social control.

Thirdly, economic capital is identified by Bourdieu as the most powerful form of capital that acts to overarch and influence all aspects of social reproduction, and particularly cultural and social capital.

Bourdieu describes economic capital to be:

... at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root ... (Bourdieu, 1997: 53).

Bourdieu proposes an understanding of society based on the movement of 'capital' through social spaces as it is accumulated or lost by individuals and demonstrates how capitals may be accumulated, lost, invested, distributed and traded within and between social fields.

Because, for Bourdieu, social capital is potentially a tool for social control, it is to this end that the ways in which capital conversions occur were most likely to affect the research participants in this study.

To summarise this section, Bourdieu's work on the production and reproduction of society has been the focus of his study. His work has produced an anthology of concepts that are 'good to think with' (Jenkins, 2002: 176).

Bourdieu has moved thinking forward from notions of predisposition to notions of fluidity and movement; of societies that adopt a cultural arbitrary through which it constructs societal norms, rules and regulations. Individuals acquire *habitus* through their interactions with and between *fields* and the associated *doxa* and *logics of practice* of that *field*. Capitals that are viewed through three interactive lenses influencing the *field* in which an individual's *habitus* is acquired: cultural, social and economic. The resultant interaction and conversions of these capitals can be reframed into *symbolic capital*. However, it must be acknowledge that economic capital is the overarching and the most influential of the capital frameworks as it

ultimately dominates all aspects of social (re)production in the form of power, and particularly political power. *Symbolic violence*, then, can be viewed as the mechanism of control used by dominant groups of society to ensure that society is continuously (re)produced in line with the determinants of the dominant groups.

According to Bourdieu, each *field* within society is structured according to what is at stake within it (educational, cultural, economic and political). Once various forms of capital and their associated representative credentials are widely accepted and acknowledged within a society as relations of power, domination no longer exist directly between individuals (Bourdieu, 1998) but become mechanisms which reproduce relations of domination without the need for direct intervention by the dominant group in society.

Summary

In summary, this review of literature has considered the development of adult LLN training programmes, tracing its development from an activity which initially focussed on supporting the LLN skills of the developing world, to a more introspective consideration of adult LLN skills in the Western world, supported by a largely voluntary workforce and seen as very much a 'Cinderella' training activity to one which sits now as 'centre-stage' and is seen as a fundamental underpinning

economic policy initiative. The literature maps the movement of adult LLN training programmes from one which held a liberal approach to the subject, aimed at supporting adults to develop their literacy and numeracy capacity in line with their personal aspirations and goals, to one which is now firmly routed in the development of LLN as knowledge and skills which can enhance employability and, in turn, economic productivity: functionality. The stigma which has historically been associated with holding minimal LLN skills has been considered, the move from a deficit model of failure, inadequacy and incompetence has been shelved and replaced by one which is seen as embracing and supportive. However, the success of this transitional approach is questionable and the move to individual accountability continues to ensure that any failure to achieve identified skills levels is seen as unacceptable and is levied squarely at the individual.

Following the consideration of adult LLN skills and associated ideologies and philosophies, the review considered how the notion of 'choice' could be instrumental in the experiences of adult LLN learners who had been identified as target groups by the strategy. In this section of the review, choice was assessed in its relational affect to social and cultural factors. Using Bourdieu's models of cultural construction and individual *habitus*, the literature associated with choice practices was explored. Of particular interest in this section of the review was the relationship between the minority dominant group of society which dominates the

majority and how intermediaries often misinterpret and misrecognise the imposition of policies as legitimate, such that activities become wholly legitimised and accepted as legitimate by the whole dominated group of society, even those who are the receptors of the act. This becomes particularly clear when one identified target group of the *Skills for Life* strategy: unemployed adults, are considered.

The review maps the evolution of the welfare state within England, and considers how 'conditionality' has been a fundamental component of the system since its emergence in 1911. The use of conditionality is an important element of the system when considering this target group and their ability, under the welfare system and through the centralisation of the *Skills for Life* strategy, to choose a training programme through which to develop their LLN skills and, indeed, their freedom to choose at all.

The relationship between motivation and learning plays a significant part in the consideration of LLN skills development, as do measures of success in terms of increasing attendance rates or measures of success in terms of engagement and skills development. The misrepresentation of a policy that has as its focus a work-first directive is considered alongside the 'selling' of training programmes that seek to develop LLN skills.

Thirdly, in considering both the evolution of adult LLN as an area for study and the simultaneous development of policy, the review has considered the two original goals of the strategy: economic enrichment and social cohesion. Using 'capital' as a concept, the strategy has been explored from a social capital perspective and a human capital perspective, with associated identity capital.

Illuminated from the review is the fact that 'the individual', whilst being the focus of the strategy and being thoroughly discussed through the strategy, the reality is there is little evidence of them in the strategy. It is clear that the dominant group of society requires a more knowledgeable 'human capital' stock in order to continue to be economically successful and competitive and there is a feeling that increased LLN skills and increased employability will inevitably lead to more social cohesion. However, the strategy is not clear how this will be achieved.

Historically, unemployed adults, prisoners and, to a lesser extent, adults with LLN needs have been objectified by the dominant group as people who need to be 'managed' and 'controlled', rather than people who need help, support and encouragement.

Social capital, using Bourdieu's perspective, is constructing and maintaining social control. Targeted categories of adults (outlined

previously) often attend *Skills for Life* training programmes at part of a requirement to obtain welfare support. A network of social controls are placed on members of society who may, on the one hand be seen as the most vulnerable and needy and, on the other as unwilling to participate in employment and a drain on the resources of the state.

This study examined the learning experiences of adults attending LLN training programmes from three perspectives: the discourse of adults with LLN needs and the *doxa*, *habitus* and *fields* which result in this discourse; the notion of choice and the social constructs which determine decision-making and finally, capital and how this concept is being widely misrecognised as the mechanism by which adult LLN learners will be able to develop their capital(s) but which is working to reproduce society within a framework for the dominant group. These themes were used to support the collection of data and subsequent analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data.

The following chapter will present the research methodological approach for the study. Using a predominantly qualitative approach, the research adopted a case study approach to draw out the data necessary to respond to the research questions identified on page 59 of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach used in the study to address the research question and sub-questions outlined in chapter one (see page 59). The research design has been informed by the literature review and theoretical framework constructed through the use of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual anthology. The research design is presented and includes the ethical framework adopted for the study; access and sampling decisions and issues of validity and reliability. Methods of data collection and data analysis are also described. The chapter then concludes with a summary.

Methodological Approach

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

The study focused on the learning experiences of adults attending LLN training programmes, having been assessed as possessing LLN skills below Level 1 (see page 55, Chapter 1, Table 1 for a detailed explanation of levels). The study considered particularly whether

individuals had chosen, or had been chosen, to participate in the training programme and whether this subsequently influenced their experience of, and participation in, the programme (see research questions on page 59).

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

'In the study of human experience, it is essential to know how people define their situations' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 40) and therefore methods that are sensitive to individual experiences are needed. However, it is not necessarily appropriate to consider qualitative and quantitative methods in opposition to each other but, rather that each can complement the other and have useful contributions to make in the construction of a rich data-set from which analysis can be undertaken.

All social research, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), takes the form of participant observation:

[I]t involves participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation. Irrespective of the method employed, it is not fundamentally different from other forms of practical everyday activity, though of course it is closer in character to some than to others. As participants in the social world we are still able, at least in

anticipation or retrospect, to observe our activities 'from outside' as objects in the world (1983: 16-17; 2004)

Qualitative research can mean different things at different times and in different contexts (Ozga, 2000) but it is primarily an inductive form of inquiry (Anderson, et al., 1998). This study utilised the definition offered by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) in their consideration of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter ... [and] involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2).

What unites qualitative research, suggest Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) is the view that human behaviours are not governed by general, universal laws that are characterised by underlying regularities. In qualitative research, 'the researcher is the principal data collection instrument' (Anderson, et al., 1998: 123) and, as such, tries to understand phenomena and interpret the social reality.

The construct of social reality was significant in this study – the research participants had individual, heterogeneous, social realities, based on their *fields* of experience that formed and informed their *habitus*. However, routinely, such individuals become homogenised through common elements, such as unemployment, imprisonment or holding low levels of LLN skills. There is a dichotomy in place within the *Skills for Life* strategy that is presented to be applied to ‘target groups’ but which makes each ‘individual’ accountable for their successes and failures.

Qualitative researchers agree ‘that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001: 19). Beck (1979) reinforces the underpinning principles of a qualitative approach to research:

[T]he purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man’s definitions of reality and the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification

and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself. (Beck, 1979: 20)

Being able to collect information regarding the social world of the identified participants involved in this study would be best achieved through a process of interviewing, allowing the generation of 'data which gives an authentic insight into people's experiences' (Silverman, 1993: 91) and provide access to the meanings people attributed to their experiences and their social world. A qualitative research approach therefore offers the opportunity for such an exploration of the views of the research participants (Silverman, 1997).

As this study sought insights and understanding of individuals' perceptions of the world, a predominantly qualitative research design was constructed through the development of research tools that were sensitive to individual experiences, identifying the primary source of data collection having a focus on words (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). However, some quantitative data was collected from research participants that provided useful background data for the study. As is indicated throughout this thesis, many studies seeking to understand individual experiences have similarly adopted such an approach: Atkin, et al., 2005; Porter, et al., 2005; Joyce, et al., 2005; Ward and Edwards, 2002; Ahrenkeil, et al., 2002.

In constructing a research design which fundamentally aimed to understand and interpret the experiences of the actors involved in *Skills for Life* training programmes, both from their perspectives and their realities of the world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001) a case study area was constructed to enable this goal to be achieved.

A case study is said by Anderson to be 'an investigation, defined by an interest in a specific phenomenon, within its real-life context' (Anderson, et al., 1998: 121) is concerned principally with the interaction of factors and events (Bell, 1997). In using a case study approach 'a three-dimensional picture illustrating relationships, micro-political issues and patterns of influences in particular context' (Bell, 1999: 12) could be drawn out.

The *Skills for Life* strategy has brought the focus of adult LLN skills to the 'centre stage'. The phenomenon of adults possessing significantly low levels of LLN skills is, arguably, remarkable in a Western, developed country which has had compulsory education in existence for more than a century.

Using a case study as a framework to analyse adults learning experiences enabled the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984).

This holistic research method, using multiple sources of evidence to analyse this phenomenon (Anderson, et al., 1998) allowed the learning experiences of adults with low LLN skills to be brought to life through the collection of a strong chain of evidence, enhancing and illuminating the field of study.

Triangulation

In order to consider such experiences, to limit bias and develop a robust picture, it was important that the research design considered how data could be triangulated.

Particularly, triangulation was sought through the use of varying research participants (learners, practitioners and coordinators) and varying institutions (prison, further education college and private training provider). Additionally, data was collected through classroom observations and informal discussions with a wide group of learners. As well as gathering data from a range of sources, additional documents were also drawn from each training provider site.

Throughout the study, triangulation was further sought by sharing the findings of the study with others in the field through conference presentations and peer-referenced publications. A full list of publications can be found in Appendix F.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) identify, triangulation is more to do with a way of life than a tacit activity. The conscious decision to include the checking and validating of data throughout the study by the researcher as an integral part of the data collection process created a strong procedure for ensuring triangulation.

Conceptual Framework

Bourdieu's conceptual discussions of *symbolic violence* and its use in reproducing societies, and the associated concepts of *habitus* and *field* (outlined and discussed in Chapter 2), were operationalised throughout this study and informed the perspective through which the research data was considered.

Bourdieu's explanation of *symbolic violence* as an attempt to specify the processes in which order and social restraint are produced by and in society, through indirect, cultural mechanisms, rather than by direct, coercive social control (Bourdieu, 1993) maps interestingly onto the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Symbolic violence is articulated by Bourdieu as the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (e.g. culture) upon groups or

classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate, through a process of misrecognition:

the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder' (Jenkins, 2002: 104)

This provided the framework for the collection and analysis of the data.

The concept of *symbolic violence* can 'apply to any social formation understood as a system of power relations and relations between groups or classes' (Jenkins, 2002: 104). Pedagogic work, Bourdieu asserts, in working with pedagogic action, acts as the process of inculcation in the production of dispositions, generating 'correct' responses and becoming the substitute for physical constraint and coercion, legitimising its product by producing legitimate consumers of the product (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As a result, the interests of the dominant group in society are most likely to prevail and be reproduced.

As the primary format in which *symbolic violence* is operationalised, according to Bourdieu, is through 'pedagogic action' (a long term function of such action being to reproduce power relations which form the social reproduction function of cultural reproduction), the

practitioners engaged in the delivery of such programmes provided a further perspective on the learners' experiences of such programmes.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001), the policy focus of this study, I argue, provides an excellent example of what Bourdieu terms *symbolic violence*, operating through a process of misrecognition and legitimisation, both by the implementers of the policy and the recipient actors of the policy.

Through the use of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, it emerges that a range of actors contribute to a resultant experience; consequently, it is important that this study reflected a range of actor perspectives in order that a strong picture of experience could materialise; such actors included policy makers, implementers of the policy including Personal Advisors, practitioners as well as recipient actors of the strategy; most importantly, the learners.

Justification of Research Instruments

Research Interview

Interviews are culturally and historically specific phenomena (Wengraf, 2001). The research interview is based on conversations of daily life, being defined by Kvale as one:

... whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena. (Kvale, 1996: 5-6):

The research interview is further defined as:

a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purposes of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.

(Cannell and Kahn, 1968: 527)

The use of interviews in research marks a move towards regarding knowledge being generated between humans through conversations (Kvale, 1996). An interview is a professional conversation with structure and purpose; defined, guided and controlled by the researcher (Kvale, 1996).

It is clear that the research interview, specifically, involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals; being an interpersonal situation - a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest; a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue.

Interviews are particularly suited for studying people's perceptions and understanding of the meanings of their world (Kvale, 1996), allowing them the space to describe their experiences by providing an account of self-understanding; clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world.

Interviewing is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for obtaining and capturing knowledge about peoples' experiences and behaviours (Kvale, 1996) and, particularly, the lived meanings of their every day world. Using such an approach in this study allowed for a window of opportunity to open up so that a full understanding of an individual's experience could be developed (Atkinson, 1998).

Research interviewing is alternatively described by Wengraf (2001) as a 'type of conversation' which has been specifically designed and constructed to extract knowledge in order to develop an understanding of a reality for the research participants at that time (Wengraf, 2001). As such, the length of interviews undertaken in this study varied considerably between research participants, with durations lasting from 10-15 minutes to in excess of 45 minutes. Some participants readily engaged in an elaborate account of their experiences whereas others told their story within the limitations they had constructed for themselves (Atkinson, 1998).

The research participants are acknowledged as key informants in the collection of data to support this study, as they have particular experience and knowledge about the subject being discussed (Anderson, 1998). Similarly to Porter, et al., 2005 and Ward and Edwards, 2002, the interviews undertaken in this research project were all carried out with the research participants on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis. Using such an interview approach enabled participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and, not only did it allow for the collection of data about the research participants lived experience but also constructed and formulated their experiences in ways they may not have undertaken previously.

Whilst it is clear that an interview incorporates a transaction of information between the research participant and the researcher, a number of interview approaches can be employed, including:

- formal interview where set questions are asked and answers recorded on a standardised schedule;
- less formal interviews where the interviewer modifies the sequence of questions, changes the wording of questions, explain them or add to them;
- a completely informal interview where the interviewer has a number of key issues which are raised in a conversational style;
- the non-directive interview in which the interviewer takes on a subordinate role to the interview participant.

In this study, a semi-structured design was broadly adopted. An interview schedule was prepared with key questions and broad themes to be covered, allowing movement between less formal and completely informal forms of interviewing, as appropriate.

In using interviews, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations and difficulties associated with using this methodology as a mechanism for data collection. Some problems identified by Cicourel (1964) include:

- there are many factors which inevitably differ from one interview to another, such as mutual trust, social distance and the interviewer's control;
- the respondent may well feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep;
- both interviewer and respondent are bound to hold back part of what it is in their power to state;
- many of the meanings which are clear to one will be relatively opaque to the other, even when the intention is genuine communication;
- it is impossible, just as in everyday life, to bring every aspect of the encounter within rational control. (Cicourel, 1964)

In undertaking the interviews for this study, it is recognised that the experiences and understanding of reality that are the researcher's may

vary significantly from those of the research participants and that these experiences are brought to the interview interaction.

Observations and Informal Discussions

Observations provide researchers with the opportunity to 'gather 'live' data from 'live' situations' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 305).

Through undertaking classroom observations I was, as observer-as-participant (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), able to engage in classroom activity and gain access to learners in a more informal environment. Whilst it is recognised that my presence may have altered the dynamic of the group, such opportunities provided for a deeper contextual understanding of the nature of the experiences of learners attending the training programme.

Informal discussions, or informal conversational interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) provided the opportunity to ask questions of learners that emerged from the immediate context and that arose from the natural course of conversation. By undertaking such informal discussions, the relevance of questions within the more formal one-to-one interview setting could be recognised and triangulation could be achieved.

The use of classroom observations and informal discussion techniques within this study provided a model of robustness for the study, allowing for cross-referencing of collected data. More significantly, however, it provided a framework through which those who may not have felt comfortable engaging in more formal activity to be represented in the study.

Through reviewing the literature, considering the research question for the study and drawing on the experiences of others, such as Porter, et al., 2005, Joyce, et al., 2005; Hughes, 2005; Mwenitete, 2004; Ward and Edwards, 2002; Young, et al., 1994; a predominantly qualitative approach, particularly using research interviews within a case study area, was similarly selected as the most appropriate approach to use in constructing a research design to answer the study's research question and to enable participants to tell their narrative of learning experiences: their choices and motivations.

Importantly, the interviews that make up this study reflect the form, shape and style most comfortable to the person telling the narrative, bringing order and meaning to the experience for both the teller and the listener (Atkinson, 1998). The data collected in the study focussed particularly on one theme: learning experiences through the life-time, with a particular focus on current learning experiences whilst attending *Skills for Life* training. The use of classroom observations and informal

discussions to support the data collected through one-to-one interviews, not only provided a robust mechanism for triangulation but also added richness and depth to the experiences being described in more formal interview settings.

Limitations of using interview as a research method

An important component of the research study design was the acknowledgement of the potential for bias by the researcher. Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that everyone sees the world through frames of reference that are developed as a result of their possessing particular attributes, or being situated in particular social, historical, geographical, political, religious, context, consequently leading to differing experiences; what Bourdieu would term their *habitus* constructed through associations with varying *fields* during their lifetime. Bias is always, and should be, a concern for those engaged in qualitative research. Goodson and Sikes (2001) go on to suggest that one could, in fact, argue that all human knowledge and experience, as expressed through verbal accounts is, in essence, biased.

In acknowledging that such bias may exist, this study has sought, throughout, to recognise and acknowledge its existence and to view the data through the lens of the research participants.

Whilst using face-to-face, one-to-one interview, demonstrates the importance the study places on the participation of the research participants and allows for in-depth analysis of responses, it was accepted that the personal nature of this approach may lead people to respond to questions in a way that they feel was required or most pleasing, rather than 'truthfully'. By highlighting this weakness, the research design applied triangulation and reliability and validity techniques to counter, where possible, such potential limitations. This was done through the use of additional layers of research participants: practitioners and co-ordinators, and learners undertaking similar training programmes across a range of institutions. Additionally, engagement with the field, through sharing the ongoing findings of the study through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications added a further layer of triangulation to the study. Ultimately, however, it is accepted in the research design that the 'story' told at the time of the interview is the truth available to the participant at that time, and in that context.

Access to Research Sites and Participants

This study obtained access to an appropriate sample of research participants (learners, practitioners and coordinators) through three different institutions offering *Skills for Life* training programmes. As described in chapter one, the institutions were based within the

Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire areas of England. The institutions included a large remand prison, a large college of further education and a large private training provider. These institutions were chosen specifically because of their potential for difference.

Identified institutions were invited to participate in the study. Meetings were arranged with key actors to discuss the study in more detail; particularly the anticipated amount of time that might be required to take part in the study. On receipt of written approval from the participating institutions to proceed, fieldwork began.

Access was eventually granted without any constraint. Within the prison institution, access was granted to interview learners and practitioners/coordinators willing to participate. Within the further education institution, the *Skills for Life* manager identified targeted classes and practitioners who could be accessed to seek participants. From these groups, participants who were happy to become research participants were identified. Within the private training provider, access was granted to all learners and practitioners working on *Skills for Life* type training programmes at all of their training sites.

All institutions participating in the study were informed that the identity of their institutions would remain confidential to the study.

Fieldwork was planned in two waves: phase one was undertaken during June/July of 2004 and phase two during February/March of 2005.

Gaining access to the institutions did not come without its difficulties. The institutions that proved least problematic were the remand prison involved in the study and the private training provider. The Governor and the Training Manager of the prison were very supportive of the project and allowed access to the Education Department, its staff and learners without any constraints. Permission to use a dictation machine to support the collection of data through one-to-one interviews was also given. It was accepted by the institution that all data collected was confidential to the research participant and the researcher. Also, the private training provider was extremely eager to participate in the study. Phase one of the study undertook fieldwork in two of the training provider's site. During phase two of the project the remaining two sites were visited and a site visited during phase one was revisited.

Access to the further education college, however, was more problematic. The manager in charge of the *Skills for Life* training programmes was extremely busy and under a significant amount of work pressure. For this reason, it was necessary to re-negotiate access to learners and practitioners on a number of occasions. However, once

access had been sourced, there were no restraints on fieldwork, including both interviews and informal classroom observations.

Research Sample

The aim of this study was to 'reveal shared patterns of experience or interpretation within a group of people who have some characteristics, attributes or experiences in common' (Goodson and Sikes, 2000: 23). Therefore, sample selection was not random, but necessarily focused on a specific social situation, requiring informants to have appropriate knowledge and experience (Goodson and Sikes, 2000).

In order to be able to offer any response to the research question, it was necessary to speak to (a) adults who had been assessed as having language, literacy or numeracy skills below Level 1 but within the range Entry 1 to Entry 3, and who were attending some form of *Skills for Life* training programme and (b) practitioners and/or coordinators who were involved in delivering or managing *Skills for Life* training provision.

Sample selection was therefore purposive (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), as learner participants were required to have the appropriate knowledge and experience that met the previously identified criteria. Similarly, practitioner or coordinator participants

were required to be either actively engaged in delivering *Skills for Life* training to this target group of learners or managing such provision.

A sample was selected with the support of the practitioners responsible for the learner cohorts. Initial introductions to the groups allowed learners who fell into the sample criteria to decide whether they wished to participate in the study, through a process of self-selection. Each learner who expressed an interest in participating was invited to have a one-to-one informal discussion with myself to decide whether they wished to contribute further by undertaking a one-to-one interview that would be tape-recorded and later transcribed to form the basis of the study.

All research participants were informed that they could, at any time, elect to withdraw from the study. Learners who agreed to participate in the study were invited to complete a consent form (see Appendix A) confirming their right to anonymity and confidentiality of information. To avoid the potential for embarrassment to research participants involved in the study, consent forms were read aloud. This allowed the research participant to ask any further questions or clarify any concerns. Following this process, consent forms were signed and dated by both the research participant and the researcher.

A similar process was undertaken with practitioner/coordinator participants; those who agreed to participate in the study were, like the learner research participants, informed of the role their involvement would play in the construction of the study and the commitment of the study to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity was respected. Once again, research participants were advised of their right to withdraw at any stage of the study and then invited to complete a consent form.

The sample size was not pre-defined for this study. Fieldwork ceased when a point of saturation was arrived at; that is to say it became clear that I was able to predict the likely response to questions posed, or that the story being told by the research participant became repetitious of previous stories and confirmed preceding stories. Moorese (1994) suggest that a sample is adequate when:

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

In order to overcome the risk of pre-determining a saturation point interviews were undertaken with a range of actors in each area: learners, practitioners and coordinators, reinforcing the achievement of saturation being achieved.

Throughout the fieldwork activity I was overtly aware of the risks that exist around ‘shaping’ what is being said into a framework which matches previously heard accounts. In considering this risk, I ensured that multiple ‘stories’ were collected over and above the point at which saturation was considered to have been reached, therefore developing a strong body of evidence through the collection of multiple experiences from research participants who were existing in similar sets of socially-structured relations (Bertaux, 1981).

Similarly to the study of Ahrenkiel and Illeris (2002), throughout the three institutions chosen for the study, 56 interviews were conducted with 47 learners and nine practitioners/coordinators, as shown below:

Table 10: Research Participants involved in the Study

Sample by Institution		HMP	TP	FE	Total	Total
Phase 1	Learner	6	9	4	19	
	Practitioner/Coordinator	2	2	1	5	(24)
Phase 2	Learner	9	13	6	28	
	Practitioner/Coordinator	1	2	1	4	(32)
Total Sample	Learner	15	22	10	47	
	Practitioner/Coordinator	3	4	2	9	(56)

As described previously, research participants in the study were required to fulfil a pre-determined set of criteria.

Whilst conducting the fieldwork it became clear that learner research participants were both willing and keen to participate in the study. This was extremely interesting as such learners are often categorised through Government policies as 'vulnerable adults' (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2003). The study, in fact, found quite the opposite. Following initial clarification of the status of the researcher (e.g. not working for any Government agencies) the learner research participants fully engaged in, at times, quite detailed discussions about their learning experiences.

Interestingly, the practitioners/coordinators were more reserved about participating in the study. It was necessary to spend some considerable time building up a rapport with the practitioners and coordinators, engaging in detailed discussions about the study and the implications that participation in the study might have for them before they were prepared to contribute through a 'formal' interview.

Ethics

In constructing the framework for this study a considerable amount of attention was given to the ethical component, acknowledging that ethical decisions are likely to arise throughout the entire research

process (Kvale, 1996). The ethical guidelines of the School of Education, University of Nottingham and the British Education Research Association were used to support the development of an ethical framework for the study.

It was important, for the success of the study, that all research participants were regarded as equal in the research process. The participation and contributions of the research participants was vital to the compilation and completion of the study.

It became clear during the study that all research participants required a significant level of assurance that the study was being undertaken independently of any Government agencies or institutions. It was necessary to spend some time with each participant confirming my motivations, as the researcher, for undertaking such a study. The reasons for this are, of course, open to conjecture but it appeared, particularly for learners attending training provision as an element of welfare benefits, and for practitioners or coordinators involved in further education training, to be a genuine concern about who owned the information that was being disclosed, how it was being disclosed and whether it could be used to implicate them in some way. For the learners, there was a genuine concern that if they disclosed 'how they really felt' about the training this may affect their welfare payments; for practitioners the concern was regarding the dilemma they faced

about discussing the value of the training for the learner against their performance to manage or deliver the training programmes for which they were responsible. It is interesting to note at this point that predominantly, all learners engaged in further education training programmes found practitioners to be instrumentally valuable within the framework of the ability to persist with the training programme. For learners attending welfare training programmes, Government agencies appeared to predominantly focus on attendance at the training programme or progression into job activities, rather than educational/learning progression outcomes, such as qualification outcome.

Reflecting on the 'potential human issues in qualitative research' (Anderson, 1998: 127) draws attention to the necessity to ensure that research participants feel at ease with the research process in order to participate. Whilst it was recognised that there was likely to be an unbalance in power relationship in the interview process, particularly with the learner research participants, the study tried to overcome potential barriers at interview prior to the event. Some time was spent considering appropriate dress code when undertaking interviews, endeavouring to ensure a 'dress code match' where possible.

Additionally, the environment in which the research interviews were conducted was given some consideration. Where possible barriers,

such as tables, were removed from the environment or put to one side. This ideal did not happen in all cases and was particularly difficult in the prison environment where it was a requirement of the institution that doors should be left ajar.

As noted previously, all research participants were invited to sign a consent form that described the nature and purpose of the study. In addition, all research participants were advised that their identity would remain confidential to the study.

All opportunities to identify the research participants have been removed from the study. This includes identification by gender or ethnic origin, although this data has been gathered and is presented numerically, rather than qualitatively. There are, of course, advantages and disadvantage to signing up to such a clause as the diversity of views cannot be considered from the perspective of gender or ethnicity. However, the study is not compromised by adherence to this request that was made, initially by the practitioner/coordinator research participants, who were fewer in number. This group particularly felt they might be more readily identifiable by the use of a pseudonym name that reflected their gender and/or ethnicity.

The research instruments developed and used in this research study applied a semi-structured interview approach informed by the research

question and the theoretical framework of the study. The study, in using such instruments, accepts that the data collected from research participants involved in the project represents a construction of reality and truth for the participant during the conversation that occurred at that time (Wengraf, 2001).

Three research instruments, including two semi-structured interview schedules (Appendices B and C) and a background data collection form (Appendix D) are presented at the end of the thesis. Of the two semi-structured interview schedules: one was constructed for the learner research participants and the other for the practitioner/coordinator research participants. The instruments were designed to allow the research participants to develop the initially prepared questions in an improvised way (Wengraf, 2001) and to enable their 'story' to be told about the pre-identified aspect of their life experience: learning.

The research instruments were built to reflect a timeline, starting with the identification of key events connected with the study. In this case, the emphasis is on the respondents' learning experiences. The research instruments were used during phase one of the study, using a time-line within the interview setting from three different starting points: starting from future aspirations, starting from childhood experiences and starting from current experiences. Following phase one, the instruments were further developed and a time-line starting

from childhood and mapping experiences up to present day adopted. This was a result of the trialling of different starting points during phase one as it soon became clear that research participants gravitated towards telling their story starting from their earliest experiences that affected and impacted on the subsequent experiences.

Using this type of instrument allowed me as the researcher to gain a detailed knowledge of research participants' experiences relating to and associated with learning, including the associated complexities which surround the focus of the research question (Wengraf, 2001). The interview schedules provided a tool that was used to prompt and guide the research interview.

The constructed background data collection form was used at the start of the research interview for two reasons:

- (1) Because it allowed data to be captured about the research participant, such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment history, relationship status and language spoken at home. This information allowed the development of a richer picture of the research participant. Additionally, it allowed the researcher to capture data that had been lost through the non-use of pseudonyms, reflecting gender and ethnicity.

- (2) Because it allowed an effortless way into the research interview. This form was completed with the research participant prior to the commencement of the interview. The tape-recorder, used to capture the interview conversation, had not been activated and the researcher could start to develop a rapport with the research participant. Such a rapport was considered vital when conducting conversation with the research participants about potentially sensitive areas of their life experiences.

The interviews conducted with research participants were all tape-recorded, and subsequently transcribed. The researcher considered the transcriptions to act only as processed data which has been used to aid the analysis process, rather than the raw data of the interview which allowed a multi-dimensional view of the interview interaction, including body language and tonality of voice which cannot satisfactorily be captured using a tape-recorder. Equally, it was felt inappropriate by the researcher to bring into the interview interaction any additional technological aids, such as video recorders as this may have acted to further compromise the interview interaction.

A further important consideration during the development of the research design for this study was the need to be able to present the findings as a confident picture of the learning experiences of adults LLN

learners. Therefore, time and attention was given to ensuring the design incorporated into its framework a degree of reliability and validity. Of particular concern for this study was its ability to provide evidence of respondent validity. This was concern for the researcher because of (a) the very real possibility that the learner research participant would be unable to read a transcript of the interview interaction in order to verify that it was an accurate representation of the interview encounter and (b) because of the fluid nature of both the training provision and the learners, it was unlikely within the time constraints of the project, that the researcher would be able to return to the site at which the interview was undertaken in order to be able to read the transcript to the learner research participant or to discuss the transcript. For this reason, a paraphrasing interview strategy was adopted:

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

Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken following the construction of the research design. Fundamentally, this was to ensure that the design enabled the

necessary data to inform the research question to be collected; thereby testing the research instruments developed and to consider reliability, validity and triangulation. The pilot study allowed the research design to be refined in light of the findings resulting from the pilot study.

One site from the private training provider was selected as the pilot test site. Potential research participants were invited to engage in the project and were briefed using supporting documentation: the 'Information for Participants in Research Project' (Appendix E) and by conducting individual one-to-one briefings with each potential participant so that any questions could be addressed. Of those who participated in these discussions, not all went on to participate in the pilot study.

Those who agreed to take part more fully in the study were then invited to complete a consent form to participate. This allowed the participant to choose a pseudonym by which they would be referred during the analysis and discussion of findings.

The pilot study involved three interviews with learner research participants. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected: research participants were asked to provide a range of background information about themselves which was gathered through question and answer activity, rather than giving the form to the learner to

complete independently. This was a very positive introduction to the main qualitative interview because it allowed both the researcher and research participant to develop a rapport. Additionally, this provided a further opportunity for research participants to clarify any outstanding questions they may have. Furthermore, research participants were able to discuss the reasons for the tape recorder (used to record interviews for subsequent transcription) and allowed an opportunity for them to overcome any initial discomfort about the presence of the tape recorder. Once the research participants realised they were not expected to read any material, they were able to relax and discuss their experience of the training programme more comfortably and confidently. All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, were recorded and transcribed.

To test the research instruments for bias and reliability, the learner schedule was used in a variety of ways. This allowed the researcher to consider whether the order in which the research participants were given different questions or themes to discuss influenced or bias the responses they gave. Therefore, some learners were asked initially about their future aspirations following their current learning experiences, followed by their current learning experiences and finally about their experiences of learning prior to this current training programme. Other research participants were asked to firstly describe their initial experiences of learning, followed by their current learning

experiences and then their future aspirations. Other participants were invited to choose which they wanted to discuss first. However, the order in which the research participants discussed their experiences did not seem to bias the discussion either positively or negative. It is interesting to note, however, that research respondents appeared to feel more comfortable discussing their learning experiences “from the beginning” and generally lapsed into that format for discussion.

Following completion and analysis of the pilot study, the research focus was refined. The pilot study led to a redrafting of the interview schedule. Significantly, it was felt by some research participants that even by choosing a pseudonym by which they could be referred to in the study, there was concern that they could be identified and traced. This was of particular concern to those participating in Jobcentre Plus training programmes and coordinator/practitioner research participants. It was therefore decided to implement a joint numeric and alphabetical system of referencing for identification of different participants.

The pilot study further highlighted the limitations of the study and enabled the research focus of the ongoing study to be refined. This study, therefore, did not consider the following:

(a) It is recognised that influences external to training programmes and their learning environment should be considered when determining how, or if, an increase in one's LLN skills has been arrived at. This study cannot present a comprehensive response to this question and therefore it was not considered during this study.

(b) This study did not seek to establish evidence of progression of LLN skills through the means of any form of measurement or assessment tools. Due to the nature and transience of the learner research participants involved in this study it was not possible, within its timeframe, to be able to track multiple learners, undertake a range of assessments and map assessment results. However, this study did consider progression in relation to the interpretation of the research participants about what progression means for them and how, or if, they identified any meaningful progression which they attributed to their experiences during the training programme.

The focus of the study, therefore, was to consider the learning experiences of adults with low levels of LLN skills, attending a *Skills for Life* training programme in a range of institutional settings.

The study explored adults' reasons for attending training programmes at this time of their life (critical incidents and motivations) and how useful or relevant they felt the learning experience had been for them;

considering social, human and identity capital. The study also explored the notion of choice in relation to attendance at training programmes and its potential to influence their learning and/or career trajectory.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three central issues underpinned the quality of data generated by using interviews as the primary source of data collection: representativeness, reliability and validity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). These provide an ongoing focus for consideration throughout both the collection and analyse of data; taking into account particularly the possibility of sources of bias within the study by all participants, including the researcher, as well as making regular validity checks throughout the study process. Validity, in this study, was identified through the ability of the narrative being told to be representative of the research participants' subjective reality, being interpreted to mean the development of a strong understanding of the accounts, or narratives, being provided by research participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Internal validity checks that 'seek to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provided can actually be sustained by the data' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 107) were achieved through the use of a range of data collection methods.

Reliability of the data was built into the research design through the phasing of fieldwork activity; providing the opportunity to demonstrate consistency and reliability over time and with similar groups of respondents (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000).

Data was supported through the use of alternative sources, including fieldwork notes, observation notes and artefacts of the institution (such as marketing literature, programme outlines, schemes of work and initial assessment documents).

At the start of the interview process, the following discussion took place with each research participant:

- (a) Concerns regarding confidentiality and anonymity
- (b) Information on how data would be collected (use of tape recorder)
- (c) The ownership of transcript material
- (d) Dissemination of information
- (e) Contact details
- (f) Freedom to withdraw from the research process at any time
- (g) The interview process – types of questions, length of interview.

Following this discussion, background data was collected from each participant. This was undertaken for two reasons:

- (1) it enabled the interviewee and interviewer to start to construct a relationship prior to the introduction of the questions regarding learning experiences, and
- (2) it allowed for a rich picture of research participants to be achieved.

In deciding the best method to analyse the collected data in this study, the following questions were considered:

- (1) What needs to be done with the data when it has been collected – how will it be processed and analysed? and
- (2) How will the result of the analysis be verified, cross-checked and validated? (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001)

Analysis in any study involves a series of steps, usefully presented by Jorgensen:

Analysis is a breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable pieces, the researcher sorts and sifts them, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion. (Jorgensen, 1989: 107)

Whilst the term 'analysis' is closely aligned with the quantitative paradigm of research, the purpose of analysis in this study was to make sense of the learning experiences of the research participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). A qualitative approach to analysis involved a process of 'noticing, collecting and thinking' (Seidel, 1998). Noticing included observation, recording and coding which facilitated and informed further investigation; collecting the coded information into groups and finally thinking and examining what had been collected. This approach to data analysis, Seidel asserts, enables the researcher to make sense of each sub-group and of the whole data; to identify patterns and relationships both within a sub-group and across sub-groups in order to inform and make discoveries about the researched phenomena. Using this process, he argues, enables a comparing and contrasting of data, identification of similarities and differences, and any sequences and patterns.

Morse (1994) provides an alternative framework for all qualitative analysis, regardless of the specific approach, which includes *comprehending* the phenomenon under study, *synthesising* a portrait of the phenomenon that accounts for relations and linkages within its aspects, *theorising* about how and why these relations appear as they do, and finally *recontextualising* by putting the new knowledge about the phenomena and relations back into the context of how others have articulated the evolving knowledge. This set of steps, according to

Morse, provides a series of intellectual processes through which the data can be considered, examined and reformulated into a research product.

Various methods of analysis were considered, including narrative analysis, which distinguishes the extent to which stories told provide insights about lived experiences, involving personal dimensions that are shaped from an individual's perspectives and transformed through linguistic representation. The speech, in itself, does not represent the experience but is a socially and culturally constructed device for creating shared understandings. This method of analysis was discounted as the research participants in this study were being asked to discuss literacy and numeracy needs within a training programme and had the potential to have a limited linguistic range from which to select. Whilst this in itself may have provided interesting insights into the range of language competence, this was not the focus of this study.

Discourse analysis of data was also considered. This analytical approach considers how versions of the world, society and events are produced in the use of language and discourse (Morse, 1994). Discourse analysis identifies speech not as a direct representation of human experience, but as an explicit linguistic tool constructed and shaped by numerous social or ideological influences. Researchers, using this analytical approach, 'explore the organisation of ordinary talk

and every day explanations and the social actions performed in them' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 298). Again, this form of analysis of the data may have provided interesting findings but was not useful within the research focus.

A further alternative approach to the interpretation of the collected data was conversation analysis. This form of examination aims to provide a rational analysis of the structures, procedures and strategies that people use when they are making sense out of their own everyday world and their actions and interactions within it. This appeared to be a possible approach to the analysis and interpretation of the data. However, on further investigation it became evident that such analysis centres on a process of identifying elements of structure in naturally occurring conversation. As the research design had been constructed for predominantly planned semi-structured interviews with research participants, naturally occurring conversation was not systemically captured in the study and therefore, this method of analysis was disregarded.

Using the conceptual framework provided by Bourdieu, the data was analysed using the model offered by Seidel (1998) considering research participants *habitus*, *fields* of experience and how or whether *misrecognition* and *legitimation* (within the framework of symbolic violence) of actions played any part in the learning experiences of

those involved in *Skills for Life* training programmes. Data was scrutinised to identify similarities and differences of experience, both between learners undertaking training in the same institutional settings as well as exploring experiences of learners in training programmes across the different institutional environments, and their *habitus* generally.

The research study, as noted previously, was conducted in two phases. This was a purposeful decision, based on several factors. Pragmatically, it allowed time for the researcher to undertake some fieldwork, collect data and analysis it in line with the Seidel model of 'noticing, coding and thinking', allowing time to transcribe and consider the data in line with the research focus and research question. Subsequently, this enabled, during phase two, the researcher to revisit institutions and undertake the same study with different research participants, providing a further degree of reliability to the data collection process. By using research participants accessing training programmes over a period of time the researcher was able to identify how the learning experiences of people over time remained similar for each provider group or changed over time.

During phase one of the study the research instruments were used in various formats, allowing the researcher to continually explore whether the starting point of the story for the research participants affected the

narrative. The initial background data form constructed for phase one of the study was enhanced for phase two allowing for more effective capture of the data being offered by research participants. Examples of amendments include the 'grouping' of age ranges and 'tick boxes' and the inclusion of ethnic groupings. During phase two of the fieldwork, interviews were undertaken with all groups of research participants and built on the reflections of the interviews already undertaken. Therefore, the research could be said to have been evolving and refining in line with a qualitative paradigm (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000).

Summary

This chapter outlines the research design for this study, drawing on studies from the field to support the selected methodology. Additionally the construction of the research tools has been presented. The pilot study, undertaken to assess the research design and supporting research tools; findings from the study and implications for the refinement of the research design are presented. Methods of data collection and data analysis have been described. In the next chapter the study findings are presented and discussed.

Chapter Four: Research Findings and Analysis

The previous chapters discussed the theoretical framework, research design and methodology that have shaped this study. The research produced a rich data-set of information, detailing the learning experiences of adults attending *Skills for Life* training programmes.

As identified earlier, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary research instrument for the collection of data, with informal discussions and classroom observations supporting the data collection process. Additionally, quantitative data on individual research participants and general artefacts from training providers acted to support data and add robustness to the study. General questions were asked of a range of actors involved in the implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy in some way, including LLN learners, LLN practitioners/coordinators and policy makers. The involvement of these actors in the study, the range of institutional settings in which the study was undertaken and the different methods of gathering data have enabled triangulation of the findings and strengthened confidence in the study outcomes.

In this chapter the emergent themes from the data-set, using the voice of the research participants where possible, are presented. The findings and analysis are presented using the three broad themes

which have framed this thesis: adult language, literacy and numeracy; choice and capital (economic, social and identity). These themes continue to provide a framework in which a response to the research question that this study addresses:

What are the experiences of learners attending *Skills for Life* training programmes who have chosen, or have been chosen, to attend training?

The study sought to answer this question through the construction of further supporting sub-questions:

Adult Education

- (1) How do adult *Skills for Life* learners understand their language, literacy and numeracy skills?

Choice

- (2) What types of training programmes are available to adult *Skills for Life* learners?
- (3) Do *Skills for Life* training programmes positively influence an individual's economic and/or social capital?

Policy

- (4) How do learners choose *Skills for Life* training programmes?

As noted in the previous chapter, primary data was collected from research participants through one-to-one interviews, using a semi-structured interview schedule, supported by further informal discussions and classroom observations. An interview schedule was constructed to support the collection of interview data (see Appendix B).

General themed prompts were also constructed to support the collection of data through more informal discussion, which were identified through the literature review and through the formation of the interview schedule (see above):

1. Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills
2. Experiences of Education
3. Learning Opportunities
4. Motivations
5. Measures of Progression
6. Employability
7. Future Aspirations

Overview of Research Participants

A total sample of 56 research participants were involved in the study, across the three institutions. Table 11 gives a comprehensive breakdown of all learners and practitioners interviewed for the study.

However, these figures do not include learners and practitioners who were involved in the study on an informal basis through classroom observations and informal discussions.

Table 11: Learners and Practitioners Interviewed

Sample by Institution	HMP	TP	FE	Total
Learner	15	22	10	47
Practitioner	3	4	2	9
Total	18	26	12	56

Looking at the learner research participant sample in a little more detail (see Table 12) it is interesting to note that there is a significantly higher proportion of males involved in training programmes in private training provider training programmes than females in both phase one and phase two of the study. Clearly, the total gender population of the prison sample was male as the prison involved in the study was a large male remand prison. However, for learners accessing training programmes through the further education institution the higher proportion of participants was female. This is an interesting finding and could, anecdotally, be accounted for in a number of ways:

- (a) males are more likely to be claiming welfare benefits and therefore more likely to be referred to attend targeted training programmes as a necessary as part of a conditionality of receipt of their welfare benefits.
- (b) females are less likely to be claiming welfare benefits if they are in a relationship where the male is employed or is claiming benefits on behalf of both partners in the relationship; therefore they are less likely to be present in training programmes contracted by Jobcentre Plus.
- (c) females prefer to access training programmes through a more traditional further education institution.

It cannot be claimed, from the collected data, that any of these reasons can be confirmed. However, they are representative of the views of some of the participants in the study.

Table 12: Learner Research Participants by Gender

	HMP (male)	TP	FE	Total
Learner sample by gender (Male:Female by number)	15	19:3	3:7	
Total Sample	(15)	(22)	(10)	47

A review of the range of learner research participants involved in the study revealed that the highest number of people involved in the study were between the ages of 20-29 (see Table 13 below). This is particularly noteworthy as some of this group of learners had undertaken the majority of their compulsory schooling during the period when the Government made significant changes to the education system, particularly the introduction of a mandatory national literacy hour in primary education in 1988 (DfEE, 1997). However, these learners, on assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills, had achieved between Entry 1 and Entry 3 levels. It is also interesting to see that there were significantly fewer learners between the ages of 30-39 involved in the study. Again, this could be accounted for in a number of ways, for example:

- (a) people could be in employment
- (b) people may be involved in other activities, such as child-rearing
- (c) people may not readily associate themselves with attending formal training programmes

Table 13: Learner Research Participants by Age

	Learner sample by Age	HMP	TP	FE	Total
Sample	20-29	11	6	2	19
	30-39	1	4	3	8
	40-49	3	8	3	14
	50-59	0	4	2	6
Total		(15)	(22)	(10)	47

Interestingly, a significant number of learner research participants in the study described themselves as single or divorced/separated (see Table 14 below) and this could contribute to their reasons for attending training. The majority of learners involved in further education training programmes particularly, described themselves as single or divorced/separated. Many of this group of learners described attending training programmes as a result of a ‘critical incident’ or change in social network that now left their poor literacy and numeracy skills exposed. Examples of such events included children moving into formal compulsory education; children leaving home; divorce; separation or death of a partner. This issue is discussed in more detail further in this chapter. For those who described themselves as married

and undertaking training through the private training provider route, they were largely male and responsible for the financial income of the household through the welfare benefit system.

Table 14: Learner Research Participants by Marital Status

Learner sample by relationship	HMP	TP	FE	Total
Single	8	12	7	27
Married/Partner	5	8	1	14
Divorced/Separated	2	2	2	6
Total	(15)	(22)	(10)	(47)

All learner research participants involved in the study had undertaken some form of assessment of their LLN skills. As part of the collection of background information on all learners, each learner was asked if they could let me know the results of this assessment. The range of responses is provided in Table 15, below. Significantly, the majority of learners stated that they did not know the result of the assessment; only one respondent was able to state the outcome of the assessment in terms of the level they were attributed with a further two respondents stated they assumed they had failed because they had been sent to this course (private training provider learners undertaking the programme through Jobcentre Plus); one learner stated they had

passed the assessment and two respondents stated they had done well or had an excellent outcome. This brings in to question the usefulness of assessment and the purposes of assessment.

The *Skills for Life* strategy is fundamentally based on assessment of skills, assignment of levels and activities targeted at improving skills to a level, measurable through tangible, measurable, qualification outcomes. Such activities appear to hold little value to those actually undertaking the training and to be of significantly more importance to those responsible for the construction and delivery of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Table 15: Learner Research Sample by Understanding of Skills

Assessment				
Learner sample by	HMP	TP	FE	Total
BSA assessment				
Unsure/Don't know	14	18	9	41
Passed		1		1
Failed		2		2
Good/Excellent	1		1	2
E2/3		1		1
Total	(15)	(22)	(10)	(47)

Having collected this background information, this information was used to support, inform and develop the one-to-one interviews. This information, once collected and transcribed, was analysed and is now presented and discussed below.

Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy

The conceptual understanding of language, literacy and numeracy skills, their contribution and effect on day-to-day activities as well as their association with employment opportunities were raised with all learner research participants. Learners were asked to describe their LLN skills and to consider how they made use of these and whether they identified a relationship between their LLN skills and their employability.

This is a particularly important aspect of the current Government focus on raising adult LLN skills to ensure continued economic prosperity, evidenced in the recent Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch, 2006), which, commissioned by the Treasury, highlights the relationship between LLN skills and employment and the persistent drive to ensure all adults are in a position where they can usefully participate in, and contribute to, the prosperity of the country both economically and socially, thereby creating increased life chances. In his report, Leitch states that 'skill levels have an important impact on employment and social welfare'

(Leitch, 2006: 6) and he concludes that 'tackling low skills, through upskilling an additional 3.5 million adults from the lower end of the skills spectrum, could deliver an average annual net benefit – on top of current ambitions – of 0.3 percent of GDP' (Leitch, 2006: 11).

Additionally, Bynner (2006) provides further significant evidence that members of the population who have LLN skills at Entry 2 or below are significantly disadvantaged and further marginalised when attempting to access the employment market and that a 'lack of basic skills – especially reading – is the key ingredient of a poor educational career leading to lack of qualifications' (Bynner, 2006: 5). Analysing basic skills data drawn from two of Britain's birth cohort studies in which 10% of the sample had their functional literacy and numeracy assessed (Ekinsmyth and Bynner 1994), Bynner asserts:

literacy and numeracy are not only the key building blocks of educational progress and qualifications, but of entry into and progression in the labour market as well ... consequently, the upgrading of skills in all areas of the labour market is essential to keep a foothold in it. (Bynner, 2006: 14-15)

Grinyer (2005), analysing literacy and numeracy and the labour market, drawing on the 2003 *Skills for Life* survey, found a clear association between literacy and numeracy levels and labour market outcomes, stating that women with Level 1 literacy skills being 7 per

cent more likely to be employed than women with Entry level 3 skills; men holding Entry level 1 and 2 literacy skills were found to be twelve per cent more likely to be outside the labour market.

This focus is framed by a much larger global focus on LLN skills with UNESCO describing literacy as:

An indispensable means for effective social and economic participation, contributing to human development and poverty reduction.

(UNESCO, Education Literacy Portal; accessed 17.02.07)

Whilst learners were asked to talk about their LLN skills (see below), it is significant that they predominantly referred to reading skills. Although this is not necessarily surprising, the majority of learners had been undertaking a range of LLN activities. Even with such a limited view of literacy, learners found it extremely difficult to describe how effective they thought their skills were and did not appear to have previously considered their LLN competence. This was especially interesting, given that they were all attending LLN training programmes, which had commenced with a formal interview and assessment of LLN skills before entry on to the training programmes and they were all attending *Skills for Life* programmes which focused on the development of these skills, and following a national curriculum which describes literacy from four perspectives – reading, writing,

speaking and listening and numeracy in terms of number, measure, shape and space, and handling data.

Below are examples of recurrent responses given by learners when describing their LLN skills:

73 A What's your reading, writing and spelling like?

74 B My spelling's not too good. I can spell certain things.

75 A Right.

76 B And my reading's not bad and my writing's not bad.

(TP 1)

180D I like reading. Even if I couldn't read when I were younger, I can now but I'm not the best at reading. I still get stuck on a couple of words with reading.

(TP 4)

Numeracy was a subject that learners discussed less often and appeared, by learners, to be a subsidiary subject to literacy. Once again, it was a subject discussed very broadly, although learners were able to highlight particular numerical activity that they found more difficult to understand. Because learners seemed to find numeracy more difficult to engage with than literacy, it appeared to be avoided more regularly by learners and, interestingly, practitioners as well.

178B I don't know really. It's just all these big numbers and what do you call it, you know these like divisions, I didn't know how to do them. (TP 1)

66S Umm. I am rubbish at maths, I can't do any maths

67A How do you get on managing money or bank accounts?

68S Well, I can add up and take away but like, percentages and stuff like that I'm rubbish at. (FE 2)

Given the limited amount of time learners were able to spend on training programmes, both in the private training provision and the prison, practitioners appeared to focus on one subject, usually literacy, to try and facilitate an increase in one set of skills which could lead towards a target outcome – qualification. This provided ongoing motivation for learners to engage in learning if they felt they were working towards a qualification they may be able to succeed in and also led towards the achievement of national targets for the training providers, set by Government.

Some learners were instantly dismissive of any LLN competence whilst others considered their skills to be average or above.

- 8J I just can't pick it up (TP 8)
- 56N I just think maths and English seems impossible,
feels impossible (FE 10)
- 19J I wasn't very good at learning. (HMP 3)
4. D Alright. Not bad
5. A Right. What do you mean by that – tell me what
you mean by that.
6. D Well, above average.
7. A Ok. So they're above average. So, when you are doing
maths, what sorts of things can you do?
8. D I can more or less do them all.
9. A Can you? So times ...
- 10.D I have a little bit of trouble with dividing, all the rest I can
do.
- 11.A Right – adding and taking away...
- 12.D Yeah, subtracting and times.
- 13.A What about your English? Tell me about your English.
- 14.D My English is average. Probably, might be above average.
I don't think my English is that good.
- 15.A Ok. So, what's your writing like.
- 16.D Not bad.

17.A Ok – you get by.

18.D I get through, yeah.

(TP 13)

The discussion around 'averageness' is a recurring discussion amongst research participants, both learners and practitioners. 'Averageness' was clearly measured in relation to their *habitus* and within the *field* in which they existed. Learners 'positioned' their literacy skills within their social network, practitioners 'positioned' the learners skills within the framework of national standards, put in place by the *Skills for Life* strategy, whereas policy makers 'positioned' skills within the framework of national standards and associated labour market demands, nationally and internationally. 'Averageness' for learner research participants was closely associated with what they needed to do to exist within their social situation – their *field*. Their *habitus* was drawn from their experiences of *fields* – of home, education, employment, or through experiences of other state institutions, such as the welfare system, child care system or prison system. Many participants described their abilities as being in line, and in some instances, exceeding, the requirements of their day-to-day lives, having constructed their lives in such a way that their LLN competence was seen as perfectly reasonable and satisfactory for them; none of the learners made an association between their LLN skills and their employability. This is a significant finding for both practitioners and policy makers. If learners consider that their LLN skills enable them to

participate in society effectively, it is difficult to see why they would wish to enter a training programme to develop these skills. Despite the efforts of Government, through the *Skills for Life* strategy, to provide a national standardised understanding of LLN skills, these are seen largely by learner research participants to be associated with the requirements of their daily lives, rather than linked to an employability agenda.

However, with a little probing, learners described abilities that they initially dismissed or disregarded. A good example of this is found in a response from a learner researcher participant (TP2 – a male undertaking training with a private training provider) who initially states that he is only able to read headlines but a little later recognises that he would perhaps be able to read most of a newspaper article:

109An Er, some words I can read and some words I get mixed.

110A Get confused?

11An Confused with, like long words.

110A So, could you read a book, or could you read a road map?

111An No, I don't think I could read a road map.

112A No. What about a newspaper?

113An Newspaper, yeah. Probably, main headlines and things like that, but ..

114A ... not the actual story....

115An ... story. I could read most of it probably. I might get tongue-tied, twisted and things like that.

(TP 2)

It seems that, for the majority of respondents in this study, LLN referred predominantly to reading skills with participants discussing other components, such as writing, speaking and listening less often and giving much less focus to numeracy. When learners did refer to writing, it was usually task-related, for example writing letters to family members (prison learners), completing worksheets or completing forms (private training provider learners) or, occasionally, writing shopping lists (further education learners). Very rarely was writing considered an elective activity; only learners in prison training discussed writing as an activity to be freely undertaken when talking about writing home to family and friends.

The exceptions here are the learners undertaking training as part of a Jobcentre Plus programme who often referred to their writing in terms of completing worksheets¹¹ For these learners writing was rarely an activity undertaken anywhere other than during training programmes. If forms needed to be completed, they often deferred this activity to their wider social network for assistance.

¹¹ see Atkin, Rose and O'Grady (2007) who observed that learners repeatedly referred to writing activities undertaken in the formal learning environment as predominantly worksheet oriented.

None of the learners described in any way their literacy skills in terms of speaking and listening language. However, learners did participate in detailed interviews as part of this study and evidenced a range of spoken vocabulary that exceeded their written literacy competence. Oracy is not assessed in the current *Skills for Life* assessment tools; neither does speaking and listening currently form part of the *Skills for Life* national test for literacy.

All learners participating in the study had undertaken some form of literacy and numeracy assessment and each learner had been assigned a literacy and numeracy skills level following completion of the assessment. It is unclear whether learners understood the purpose of the assessment and for some learners it appears to be something they undertook passively; the assessment appeared to be 'done to them' and held little value for them. There is no evidence of engagement in, or understanding of, the assessment process; significantly there was no association made between the assessment outcome and individual LLN skills or how the outcome of the assessment could be used to inform further decision-making.

70. B Well, dole suggested I needed a bit of help. They did a test when I went to sign on once. They timed me with it and they said that I needed a bit of help with my maths and that, which I did, yeah, because I was no good at maths at all. (TP 1)

The aims of the assessment, in line with the *Skills for Life* strategy, are to identify the 'functionality' of an individual's literacy and numeracy. Functionality, as discussed earlier, is identified in two forms and relates to the most common definition of LLN; that is the ability to be able to function independently in society, with all the demands that a literate society requires and to hold the LLN skills necessary to participate in the country's economy through employment. As noted previously, a skill level of Level 1 is the minimum, identified through the *Skills for Life* strategy, that individuals are required to hold in order to achieve 'functionality'. All learners engaged in this study had been ascribed a skills level of between Entry 1 and Entry 3.

It is perhaps remarkable then, given this detailed level of diagnostic assessment, that none of the learners in this study used this result level as an indicator of their LLN competence or associated their LLN competence with employability but rather referred to their skills in relation to the demands of their day-to-day activities; a socially constructed understanding of literacy skills linked to their *field* of life

experience and their position within that field. Movement within this *field* is largely affected by individual understanding of LLN skill requirements associated with the *doxa* of informed experience. For some of the learner research participants in this study, passive participation in activities reflects their position within their cultural existence and is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Interestingly, even though the *Skills for Life* strategy links LLN functionality to employability (see page 47 for a detailed discussion on employability), for some learners employment had not been a feature of their lived experience, although an equal number had been engaged in some form of employment in their past, as shown below:

Table 16: Learner Research Participants by Occupation

Learner sample by Occupation		HMP	TP	FE	Total
Phase 1	No work history	6	4	1	11
	Factory worker		2		2
	Machine operator		2		2
	Cleaner		1	1	2
	Care Assistant			1	1
	Hairdresser			1	1
					(19)
Phase 2	No work history	2	5	3	10
	Factory worker	1	3	1	5
	Landscape gardener	1			1
	Mechanic	1			1
	Labourer/groundwork	2	4	1	7
	Farmer	1			1
	Painter	1			1
	Youthworker			1	1
	Joinery		1		1
Total Sample					(28)
		(15)	(22)	(10)	47

As Table 16 shows, whilst 21 of the learners reported no paid work history, 26 learners had undertaken employment of some kind. It is clear, however, that the types of employment undertaken were largely low skilled and could be undertaken with a minimum of literacy and numeracy skill. Interestingly, the lack of work history was spread across the three participating institutions and was not unique to any particular learner setting.

This indicates that 'functionality' from a policy perspective has a very different interpretation on an individual basis. Learners engaged in this study did not associate their literacy and numeracy skills with their ability to function effectively.

Learners had much less to say about how they felt about their numeracy skills or how they used these skills, either in their day-to-day activities or as part of their employability skills-set, unless prompted specifically with contextualised examples from day-to-day life. Learners largely felt that that whilst their literacy skills were either satisfactory or developing, they had limited or negligible competence regarding their numeracy skills.

Overall, learner participants described their LLN skills in a negative fashion. Learners presented frustrations at not being able to develop these skills, often describing them as 'rubbish'. The majority of

learners were more negative about their numeracy skills than their literacy skills, describing a range of mathematical operations that they could not work with confidently. It is noteworthy that learners more readily discussed their numeracy skills negatively and this could be for a variety of reasons; the apparent endorsement within our society that it is more culturally acceptable to struggle with mathematical concepts or that limited numeracy competence is more easily hidden.

The following extracts are reflective of comments made routinely by learner research participants about their numeracy skills particularly:

8. J I just can't pick it up.

(TP 8)

2. E Erm, math's rubbish, English - OK.

3. A What does that mean?

4. E Well, I can add up, take away, and times; I'm rubbish at division and fractions, so I'm doing fractions like next week.

5. A OK, and what about your English?

6. E Er, yeah, me English is OK; just want to improve like my spelling and grammar and that, and whatever, sorry - grammar and punctuation.

(FE 7)

As learners discussed their LLN skills it became clear there were contradictions in how learners conceptualised their skills. Some learners described holding LLN skills which were 'above average' whilst other learners described their skills as 'rubbish'. Some learners used these terms interchangeable to describe their skills. As previously noted, all learners in the study had been assessed as holding LLN skills below Entry 3 and many had skills assessed at Entry 1 or Entry 2 based on national assessment instruments, linked to nationally ascribed standards. It may be, as a society, we are culturally conditioned to naturally understate our abilities and competencies or, adversely, over-represent our abilities.

The ability of learners to position their skills appears to link to a notion of 'average' within their social network, or *field* (social arena) (Bourdieu, 1993). The term 'average' is a culturally and socially constructed term, having different associated meanings linked to ones *habitus* (mechanism of structured social practice) (Bourdieu, 1993). For many learners being able to read, write or undertake even some simple mathematical tasks was above average, or more than could be undertaken by a majority of other members of their social field – their social network.

Examples of this mismatch between the learners' conceptualised notion of skills and their assessment levels are provided below:

- 2. D I think my English¹² is fine.
- 3. A You think your English is fine.
- 4. D Yeah.
- 5. A Ok. What about your reading and writing?
- 6. D I can read a bit. I'm not really good, like. But, I can't write. I find it really hard writing sentences and stuff like that.

(TP 10)

[and]:

- 19.D Alright. Not bad
- 20.A Right. What do you mean by that? Tell me what you mean by that.
- 21.D Well, above average.
- 22.A Ok. So they're above average. So, when you are doing math's, what sorts of things can you do?
- 23.D I can more or less do them all.
- 24.A Can you? So times tables ...

¹² English and maths were terms often used during interviews with learners to explore learners understanding and assessments of their literacy and numeracy skills. These terms were more familiar to the learners and they were able to draw more meaning from these terms. Equally, when probing a little more into the area of discussion, English as a subject was broken down into different topics, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening.

- 25.D I have a little bit of trouble with dividing, all the rest I can do.
- 26.A Right – adding and taking away...
- 27.D Yeah, subtracting and times.
- 28.A What about your English? Tell me about your English.
- 29.D My English is average. Probably, might be above average.
I don't think my English is that good.

(TP 13)

For many of the learner research participants, assistance from family and friends; their social network, defined by Barnes, as 'a system of ties between pairs of persons who regard each other as approximate social equals' (Barnes, 1954: 44) was important in the management of their day-to-day lives. This is noteworthy as some participants felt they had more LLN skills than their social network and yet relied on it heavily to cope with various administrative tasks, such as understanding their postal correspondence.

Most of the learners attending training provision were over the age of 25 and had developed a considerable number of strategies that they drew upon in order to overcome LLN obstacles. Atkin, et al., (2005) similarly found that:

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

(Atkin, et al., 2005: 96)

The following series of extracts provide some examples of how learners across the different training pathways managed their lives in line with their levels of LLN, their reliance on their wider social network and some of the strategies they had developed to manage their limited LLN skills:

160. J But I mean, my ex-wife knows, and my daughter and my son knows and me, my son was only young – he couldn't help me but my daughter helped me a few times.
161. A Did she? What about a bank account, or anything like that?
162. J Oh, I've got a bank account.
163. A Can you write cheques?
164. J Yeah, because me sister's wrote like, £10, to £100.
165. A So you can copy all your letters – you can write all your letters.
166. J Yeah. Yeah.
167. A And you can read some of the words?

168. J Er, sometimes, when I've got patience. I haven't got the patience to do it.

(TP 8)

24.C Ah, I had a son that used to do that for me [laughter]

25.A Right.

26.C If I could write it myself, if the words wasn't too difficult, Then I'd write it myself but if they were going to put something in different from what I usually use, then my son was helping me to do with the spelling.

(FE 1)

35.S Just like, if you've got to write something, you sort of like take little bits off everything that, you like see and put it on a piece of paper and keep it so if I needed to say, like school or something for the kids, I'd have like little pieces that I could just write down.

36.A Right. So you would copy-write it.

37.S Yeah, copy-write it and I have like a template like so if I ever needed it, it was there.

38.A How did you get on with things like shopping or banking?

39.S Oh, I was brilliant at shopping but the bank, oh that was a nightmare, because to write a cheque, I couldn't spell, even to write a cheque, I couldn't.

(FE 4)

It is clear that these adults relied heavily on their families for LLN support and would find their daily activities acutely compromised if they were required to exist independently of it. The focus of the *Skills for Life* strategy on literacy and numeracy as skills associated with individual accountability and associated employability precludes the opportunity to consider them as social and cultural practices presenting in multiple forms as part of day to day lives (Papen, 2005). Central to the reframing of literacy and numeracy as social practices is the notion that these come in many forms and become distinct in their differing uses for differing purposes and in differing contexts; they are always embedded in social and cultural contexts and always involve people in some way (Papen, 2005; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Barton, 1994). Such reframing arguably brings into question whether it is appropriate to expect all to reach the literacy and numeracy expectations set out in the *Skills for Life* strategy. There are few other areas of personal or professional life where we expect everyone to have a baseline competence.

Experiences of Education

When discussing literacy and numeracy skills, learners linked the development of their LLN skills with their experiences of education during their formative years (ages 5-16 in England). Learner research participants described a range of experiences that, for the majority,

were regarded as less than positive. Some individuals described feeling so unable to cope with the literacy or numeracy expectations of them during school lessons that they often elected to stay away from school, using terminology such as 'wagging it' or 'skiving'. Others described feeling rejected by 'the system' or individuals, such as teachers or support workers. For them, they felt they were in a system that did not reflect a capacity to provide additional support in order to develop their LLN skills whilst still in compulsory education. The inability of the compulsory education system to provide people with levels of literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to meet the criteria identified through the *Skills for Life* strategy; its primary function, is significant. Providing literacy and numeracy training programmes for adults is, at best, a second chance for adults to acquire such skills and is hindered and compromised because of the largely negative experiences of learning participants may have been exposed to during compulsory schooling.

Learners attending LLN provision through either the prison or the private training provider recounted significant periods of time out of mainstream school. Anecdotally, learners described intermittent attendance at school from the age of 11 dwindling to very little attendance by the age of 14 and complete non-attendance by the age of 16. Interestingly, however, for a significant number of these learners, their experience of school had often taken place outside

mainstream schooling, in what they termed 'special schools' or 'backward schools'; very negative terms. This type of school traditionally worked with learners considered to have learning difficulties or disabilities. For some learners they appear to feel cheated by this type of school environment, suggesting that the development of their LLN skills was not targeted and the attitude towards learning was less than satisfactory, as described below:

46.J Yeah. I left school when I was 16 but it was like a backward school. I went there when I were five and left when I was 16.

(TP 8)

150.M Well, I went to a special school.

151.A Did you?

152.M For my reading and that. They weren't bothered about us.

153.A Even at the secondary school they weren't bothered about you?

154.M Oh no. We sat down, doing nothing all day or playing games.

(TP 11)

Learners attending *Skills for Life* training programmes through the further education strand predominantly described being schooled

through the mainstream system and attending until the compulsory leaving age. However, they regularly reported missing lessons when they felt unable to contribute to the session or to meet the expectations of the teachers, as described below:

8.M Yeah, a normal ordinary comprehensive, yeah. And, I felt a teacher used to single me out, particularly in English, like; used make me stand up and read my work out and read out of books and that and I'm not very good at spelling.

9. A So how did that make you feel?

10.M [pause] I think the right word is rebellious. Yeah, I rebelled against the system and I was extremely disruptive there. I got expelled at the end of my first year.

(HMP 2)

8.C Yeah, I went to school but I was mainly more playing truant instead of studying.

(FE 1)

Learners who were attending education programmes through the prison system, however, describe a different picture of compulsory education. They describe feeling unable to manage in the

comprehensive system – they spoke about the large class sizes, the lack of attention from the teacher, feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment at not being able to undertake tasks requested of them. Their reactions to the system were often negative and learners detailed actions that they termed ‘rebellion’ through demonstrations of anger and aggression, including behaving disruptively, attacking teachers and pupils and throwing classroom furniture. Many of these learners detailed recurrent expulsions from school. Also, these learners described a breakdown of relationships between themselves and a particular teacher. However, there were more fundamental barriers to learners engaging in any formal learning, such as drinking alcohol to excess.

The following quotes exemplify how learners currently attending prison training provision frame their experiences of compulsory education:

68.C Umm. And then I got expelled from school, went to another school, got expelled from that school, went to another school, got expelled from that one, went to another school, and then in the end they just gave up and said no, no we’re not, we’re not taking him.

(HMP 4)

64.T Yeah, I had periods of time where I went to school. I had periods of time where I didn't go to school. I was going in for certain lessons.

[and]

107. T I got expelled in the end.

(HMP 5)

In the following extracts, learners describe how their opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy were hindered by additional barriers to learning:

130C Well, if I hadn't of gone into Care. If, like, the problems with my mum and dad hadn't started up, then, fair enough, I most probably would have been at home, yeah, with a stable, like, I don't know, a stable place to go like kind of thing and get on with my parents and that.

(HMP 4)

2.J I didn't go to school.

3.A You didn't go to school?

4.J No, I was drinking.

(HMP 6)

To summarise this section, all learners in this study participated in an in-depth one-to-one interview. Without exception none of the learners

discussed their speaking and listening skills in relation to their literacy skills, although it is clearly evident from their interviews that many participants held a wide and varied vocabulary. This is an interesting omission. Learners did not value their ability to be able to undertake detailed conversations and analysis. Many stated they often preferred face-to-face encounters and reported feeling nervous and anxious about using the telephone, for example. Again, this provides an interesting insight into the conceptualisation and contextualisation of LLN, associated to one's *habitus*. Many learners held mobile telephones and used them routinely as a communication tool between their social network; making use of both voice calls and text messaging. The fear they associated with using the telephone was often about having to make telephone calls beyond their social network and interacting with people who they positioned in a hierarchy of power.

Many learners involved in this study struggled to position their LLN skills, feeling on the one hand that their skills were adequate for their day-to-day activities, whilst at the same time recognising their limitations, and acknowledging their need to rely on other members of their social network to support them with some literacy tasks, in particular.

Learners had two main ways of dealing with literacy and numeracy issues: one was to avoid any activities that may cause them any difficulty or embarrassment, such as not reading newspapers, not having a bank account. The other main strategy that learners developed was to draw on the people around them, either family members or people in what might be considered a position of power or authority with whom they regularly come into contact, such as staff members of Jobcentre Plus or teachers. These strategies were used simultaneously and interchangeably, with learners drawing on those they felt most appropriately positioned to undertake the necessary tasks. Drawing on a social network of support was not only necessary for their existence but, for many, preferable to undertaking training programmes to acquire these skills independently. They had positioned themselves in such a way, that their passive participation in training programmes provided them with a mechanism through which they could draw on the necessary people to undertake literacy and numeracy tasks for and with them.

By developing these strategies learners were able to assess their skills as satisfactory and even as average or above, even though the diagnostic assessment which they had undertaken identified them as having significantly poor skills if framed within the expectations of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Some learners recognised that their limited LLN skills had played some role in their inability to acquire sustainable employment, primarily because of the need to undertake a significant amount of paperwork during the recruitment process. For some learners employment had not been a part of their lives whereas others had experienced periods of employment, some quite significant periods of employment in excess of 15 years but, because of either redundancy or time out of the employment market because of child-care responsibilities, found that re-entry to the employment market required a different set of skills from those necessary at their initial point of entry into employment.

The changing face of the labour market within the case study area, moving from a predominantly industrialised employment market to a service industry reflects the changing needs and demands of the labour market. This, added to the widespread development and use of technology within the workplace, reinforces and supports the need for individuals to be able to develop their LLN skills in order to be able to obtain and retain employment. This is recognised by some learners electing to attend training programmes to develop these skills but, significantly, not by those who have been mandated to attend training programmes. Such individuals do not feel they can either (a) develop their LLN skills to a level necessary to obtain sustainable employment or (b) do not feel their LLN skills have been a contributing factor to their inability to obtain sustainable employment.

Choice

During interviews with learner research participants, the types of training and learning opportunities available to them were discussed. The resulting discussion can be divided into three threads:

- (i) the limitations of training programmes and choices;
- (ii) the perceived value and usefulness of the various training programmes; and
- (iii) the repetition of experience.

Limitations of training programmes from which to choose was a recurring discussion with many learners attending training programmes through the prison system or Jobcentre Plus system describing being assigned a training programme and having minimal, if any, involvement in the decision-making process. Only learners attending provision through the further education system described a wide range of programmes available from which they could select courses and topics that were of interest to them. All programmes, however, were underpinned with a focus on the development of learners' LLN skills.

The perceived value and usefulness of the *Skills for Life* training programmes being undertaken was largely associated with the learners' personal assessment of their LLN skills and their involvement in the decision to attend the particular training programme. For some

learners, there was evidence of a strong association with need and value; those who had self-assessed their LLN needs had a greater tendency to attribute value and meaning to the training programme than those who did not feel their LLN skills were negatively influencing their life and had not elected to attend a training programme to develop these skills.

The repetition of training programmes became a significant feature of the discussion around the range and choice of training programmes. Once again, those learners who were prescribed training programmes, recounted stories of attending the same training programme time and again; this was particularly the case within the prison system and the Jobcentre Plus system. Many learners in the prison system told of undertaking LLN skills assessments multiple times – on entry to the prison, on transfer to another institution, on exit and into probation and again as a returning prisoner. For learners attending training through the Jobcentre Plus system, once again they recounted attending the same training programme two or three times. For some, attending training along the same or similar theme had been a pattern of their existence since leaving the compulsory system of education. For learners attending training programmes through the further education system, whilst there was some repetitiveness, the learners' discussions described progression over time with learners undertaking assessment to move 'up through the levels', learners described undertaking many

photography classes or art classes or history classes but linked progressively, rather than repetitively, providing consolidation.

The notion of a choice of training provision from an identified suite of programmes seemed to be a concept which few of the learner research participants could associate with. There appears to be a culturally constructed legitimacy around who has 'choice'; this confirms the discussion in chapter two of Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) who identify choice as a 'social and political battlefield' within tensions existing in and between different *fields* of society. For many learner participants in this study, choice was closely associated with other activities and consequences; if unemployed adults choose not to attend training programmes, the consequences were likely to be removal of welfare benefits; if prison learners did not attend training programmes, they did not 'earn' any money. There is clear association between compliance and choice limitations that are so socially ingrained within one's *habitus*, that limited or no choice without, very often, negative consequence has become culturally legitimate. Pragmatically, for many unemployed learners, their *fields* of experience have also created this cultural legitimacy and 'choice' has become a redundant concept, replaced by passive acceptance of choices 'being done to them.'

For adults with poor language, literacy and numeracy skills the ability to choose a training programme appears to be significantly

compromised and can be linked to a number of reasons, such as the need to complete course work or undertake written assignments as part of a course or the possibility of having to undertake summative assessments as part of the programme. Additionally, information regarding programmes is largely provided in either a written format, which is generally inaccessible for low-level learners, or through other communication pathways, such as the internet. For many adults with low-level LLN skills, this is a technology that they may feel is beyond them. Learners, once again, reported relying on either friends or those in privileged positions to advise and direct them to appropriate training programmes.

For some learners, the notion of choice to attend and participate in training programmes was definitely considered to be unavailable. Many learners described attending programmes only when it was associated with a particular identity: being a prisoner or being unemployed. For some prisoner learners, they described linking training programmes only with the identity of being in prison and never considered undertaking training programmes outside that institutional framework. Many prisoners routinely undertook 'education' whilst in prison but did not associate their identity as a non-prisoner with attending training programmes. Their reasons for attending training programmes whilst a prisoner were closely associated with maintaining a link with their social network outside the institution; often partners

and children with whom they wanted to retain open lines of communication. When the learners explored their reasons for non-attendance at training programmes outside of the prison environment, learners described an identity that could not be associated with attendance at training programmes.

This extract is characteristic of the explanations given by prison learners of their reasons for attending training programmes:

87. T It's alright because I'm learning how to spell and that lot,
so I can write letters to my family and my son.

(HMP 1)

For Jobcentre Plus trainees, those who are long term unemployed, they largely described attending training on the instruction or direction of Jobcentre Plus and undertaking the training programmes they were directed to. As a unemployed individual, they took on the role and identity of a passive participant in this process, describing having no control over the decision making that was being undertaken and 'being done to them'. They felt they had no choice but to attend a training programme because not attending was likely to have an adverse effect on their welfare benefits. For these learners, given the choice, they described being more inclined to choose not to attend training provision at all, even though some recognised that their limited LLN skills were

likely to be detrimentally affecting their ability to obtain employment. Attending training programmes for these learners was associated with the identity of being a long-term unemployed adult. Learning, for these participants, was in some part associated with 'punishment'; that is because they were unable to obtain employment they had to undertake activities – training programmes – as a result. The ability to choose not to undertake an activity, or to opt out was often associated with the risk of a financial 'punishment' through the loss of welfare benefits. Living with the threat or risk of removal of benefit was, in fact, more of a coercive activity than the actual reality – which was far less often carried out.

Punishment is closely associated with discipline. Peters (1966) defines 'discipline' as the submission to rules, with 'punishment' being explained as the consequence of breaking the rules. There is a clear representation here between Peters' interpretation and the format used by DWP for long term unemployed adults to achieve compliance with requests.

Hart (1970) describes punishment as the deliberate infliction of pain or unpleasantness, by some in authority, upon an offender, for an offence. Again, the threat of sanctions against unemployed individuals can be seen as the potential to deliberately inflict unpleasantness, through the removal of financial assistance by a more powerful

authority: Government policy. Alternatively, it could be seen to reflect 'school detention', a commonly used system of punishment in the compulsory school system. The aim of associating punishment of some form with discipline seems to be that if society understands the 'rules of the game' and the penalties attached to 'breaking the rules', compliance becomes the best, and arguably, the only option in order to avoid punishment. It is clear to see how *symbolic violence* through the *misrecognition* of activities as *legitimate* can be linked to individuals' *habitus*, creating a mechanism for and of social control by the dominant group.

When learners explored the notion of choice in relation to attendance at training programmes, it became noticeable that having options or choices as a course of action within their lives was unfamiliar in relation to their *habitus*. These learners often commented 'you simply do as you're told' and appeared to passively undertake activities asked of them by actors or agencies who were regarded to, and indeed did, hold power over them. All these actors, both learners and 'agents of the state' work to maintain the social order or control of these adults and, I argue, misrecognise these actions as legitimate. Such activities are now so ingrained in our nation's activities that it is seen as legitimate, both by the learner recipients and the 'agents of the state', that unemployed adults be directed to undertake activities deemed by the

state as reasonable, without question, negotiation or discussion, on the basis of 'conditionality' of receipt of welfare benefits.

Those who were most readily able to describe a choice of provision, generally described attendance at provision associated with a change in their life; a critical incident, as previously noted by Atkin, et al., 2005. For these learners, however, choice was associated with their decision to attend provision, rather than choosing a particular training programme.

For all learners, whilst choice meant different things: choice to attend or not attend training or choice associated with identity, in all cases they relied on others to advise them about which course to undertake or, in fact, whether there was a choice, either of programme or institution.

The following extract represents how learners described the choices available to them:

33.A Did you consider any other courses before you chose this one?

34.L No, because there weren't any other course opportunities put to me.

(TP 12)

It is evident, from this extract, that the learner has no real role in the process of choosing the training programme he was attending and that the course was being 'given' to him; a reflection of the compulsory schooling system. To say the course was 'put to me' highlights the balance of control, with the state 'controlling' the actions and activities of its actors, deciding what those in receipt of welfare benefits should be doing.

Learners were encouraged to describe their feelings about their current training programme: how useful or valuable had they found the programme. Learners described a range of experiences, both positive and negative. The value of the training programme was closely aligned with learners' initial motivations for attending the training programmes. Those who had taken the decision to attend training as a result of a critical incident predominantly recounted very positive and constructive learning experiences, as demonstrated in the following extract:

44.C I was very nervous because to me it's just like coming to school but instead of being kids, it's like adults but they've been so brilliant, they've been brilliant. It's not like you've got to be forced to sit down and do something. They give you something to do and it's in your time. There's no like rush, or somebody coming over to your shoulder and this,

that and the other. And if you've got difficulties with spellings and things like that then, you know, just tell them and they'll come round and sort you out. It's been brilliant.

(FE 1)

It is undoubtedly true to say that the majority of adult learners hold their teachers in high regard and rarely describe a difficult relationship between themselves as learners and their teacher(s). Learner persistence at training programme is most often associated with a positive environment, built out of positive teacher-learner relationships, rather than as a result of the subject being studied itself.

However, learners attending a training programme as a 'conditionality' of receipt of their welfare benefits were much more likely to recount negative experiences of the training programme and correlate their experiences of the training programme with their experiences of school education. Learners in this category saw limited, if any, benefit to attending the training programme, feeling that they had been unable to achieve comprehensive levels of LLN whilst at school and that their experiences of the training programme had only worked to reinforce this view.

The following extracts act to highlight how many participants felt about their training programme in terms of its value and usefulness:

103. A So over the last 26 weeks while you've been here, what have you been doing while you've been here?

104. J Just sit down, doing nothing all day.

105. A Sitting down doing nothing all day! That can't be true?

106. J Well, I've been doing some work an all but I still can't pick it up.

(TP 8)

114. P You can't teach an old dog new tricks, can you?

115. A You don't think so.

116. P Well, I didn't like it at school.

(TP 9)

22. D No. Just like do all these like worksheets what they give me.

(TP 10)

10. M That's because I'm not going to get anywhere - at the end of the day, I'm not going to learn.

(TP 11)

For many of these learners reliance on welfare benefits is long-term, ranging from six months to more than 20 years. Consequently, learners have evolved into compliant, passive actors in the process of attending variously prescribed training programmes in order to continue to receive benefits; arguably, the responsibility of any reasonable member of society (Atkin, 2002). Learners have taken on an identity that they associate with being long-term unemployed. These elements, taken collectively, could be associated with being institutionalised. Even though there are no tangible structures, such as walls, there are many similarities between learners attending this training programme that could be seen as representative of groups living within an institution, in that they take on similar behaviour patterns and habits, such as self-limiting beliefs, compliance and a passive quality. The following quotes offer a representative view of this concept:

153.An No, I think it was mainly coming here, because last time I came, you get friendly with a group of lads out there and you want to come back and see them and things like that.

(TP 2)

78. D And I started looking at Jobcentre for jobs and that like, and ever since I've been going on these schemes and that, you know.

(TP 4)

54. M The only jobs I have had is when the benefit office here send me like on placements and that but they've never ended up in jobs.

(TP 6)

Whilst the majority of the learners in this study attending training programmes delivered on behalf of Jobcentre Plus were largely ambivalent towards the programme, there was an interesting discussion that is noteworthy around the positive response of many of these learners to the work-placement component of their training programme. This is in direct contrast to the interpretation presented by practitioners, when interviewed.

Many learners stated that whilst they recognised that the work-placement component of the training programme was generally understood not to lead to any employment opportunities and that the work undertaken was very often basic, menial and unskilled, they still preferred this element of the training programme (see quote below). They appeared to feel less pressure in the work environment to work on tasks that they felt to be insurmountable, such as literacy or numeracy tasks. Again, learners correlated the classroom-based component of the training programme to their experiences of compulsory schooling.

197. M I'd prefer to be up at [work placement] rather than here.
198. A You'd rather be on your work placement than here?
199. M Yeah.
200. A Why is that?
201. M Because it's too boring in here. Sat in all day.
202. A So you don't like sitting in all day.
203. M No. At least when you're up there [work placement] you're out in the fresh air.
204. A So you don't like the classroom environment at all.
205. M No, don't.

(TP 11)

However, when practitioners were asked to present an overview of these learners and their interests and motivations to attend the training programme, all practitioners reported that whilst learners attending this programme were largely uninterested in all aspects of the programme, they felt that learners particularly disliked the work-placement element as it was seen as 'working for free'.

This finding could be associated with the desire of learners to give the appearance to their social network of being engaged in an activity which could be seen as a more credible activity than attending a literacy and numeracy training programme; such as employment. The legitimisation of activity by an individual is considered by Bourdieu to

be associated with knowledge; the knowledge of one's *habitus*, resulting from experiences of *fields*; creating localised legitimacy. The markedly different framing of the experience of work placement from the perspective of the learners and that of the practitioners could be accounted for by this legitimisation of the work place experience or activity by learners and equally by the legitimisation of the classroom-based activity by the practitioners. The framing of these different experiences is closely linked to the different *habitus* and *doxa* of the learners and practitioners that they bring to the *field* of training.

A further component associated with the choice of training programme discussed with learner research participants was their motivations and reasons for attending *Skills for Life* training programmes. This produced interesting discussions, bringing about a large range of responses from participants, both learners and practitioners, regarding both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Motivation to attend training programmes for learners appeared to fall into two broad categories: voluntary attendance: those who had taken the decision to commence a training programme and non-voluntary attendance; those who had no ownership or, at best, a diminished ownership over their decision to attend training.

The following extracts provide a startling reaction from learners about their attendance at the training programme. For learners attending

private training provider training programmes, there is little evidence of any intrinsic motivation to engage in the training programme. The learners represent a group of people who are literally 'doing as they are told'; being directed and managed with no apparent self-interest in attending the programme:

96. F I were just on dole for a long time and then they sent me to this place.

(TP 5)

72.M What happens is that they give you like a sheet of maths to see if you know the answers and see how quick you are. If you're not quick enough they send you here, same as reading and writing, that's the same way and that's how you get sent to these places.

(TP 6)

40.J No, I didn't want to come. I wanted to stop at home. It were dole what sent me up here.

41.A Right. So, why did you come if you didn't want to come?

41.J Er, I couldn't tell you. I don't know why they sent me up here. I tried to tell the dole I couldn't read and write. They said 'oh, give it a try'. I give it a try and after 26 weeks I still couldn't pick now't up.

(TP 8)

- 58.P You get sent, don't you, from the dole.
- 59.A You got sent from the dole?
- 60.P They ask you like, you put it off. You keep putting it off
but in the end, you've got to go somewhere, haven't you.
- 61.A Why have you got to go somewhere?
- 62.P Well, they'll stop your money.

(TP 9)

- 45.A So why did you start this training then?
- 46.M Dole made me, sent me to learn – to pick up on me
reading and writing.
- 47.A Ok. And how did you feel about that?
- 48.M Well, I didn't like the idea but, at end of day you've got to
go or no benefits, so ...

(TP 11)

These extracts demonstrate quite clearly how the learners situate themselves outside the activities being undertaken and do not show any responsibility or accountability for the actions or activities. The requirements, to either undertake assessments or training programmes, are clearly activities which are being 'done' to them by other more powerful actors; instruments of the state, and the state itself. Such symbolic violence allows the continuation of social control by a dominant group. Even though all learners attending training programmes through Jobcentre Plus received additional financial incentives to attend these programmes (between £10 and £15 per

week plus reimbursement of any travel costs incurred), learners at no time discussed these benefits and chose instead to intensely focus on the potential implications of non-attendance: sanctioning and the potential threat of loss of welfare benefits.

For all of these learners, then, their motivation to attend training was wholly extrinsic. They regard themselves simply as passive players or what Foucault would term 'docile beings' (Foucault, 1980). They do not attribute any value to the programme, either in terms of its ability to enhance their LLN skills or to support their employability development. Many of the attendees were clearly unhappy to attend the programme but did so in order to comply with the conditions of receipt of their welfare benefits. However, they were less likely to actively engage in the training. This is a significant difference between these learners and learners who are attending *Skills for Life* training programmes through other pathways.

Many of these learners had recurrent experiences of training programmes through the welfare system that had not led to either the development of their LLN skills or to employment. This could be for several reasons:

(a) Training is work-focussed

The training programme learners were attending was contracted by Jobcentre Plus under the umbrella of a suite of training programmes called Work Based Learning for Adults. These programmes are structured to have a work-first approach (Webb, 2003). The fundamental goal of the programme is to enable participants to obtain employment of any kind, whether temporary or low-skilled.

(b) Training is time-bound

Training programmes are only accessible for fixed time periods. Participants must be able to evidence unemployment for a period of 26 weeks before becoming eligible for a training programme. Once eligible, participants must attend for a fixed period of 26 weeks. They are only able to leave if they obtain employment. Once they have completed 26 weeks of training they are obliged to leave and cannot re-enter a training programme for a further 26 weeks (Webb, 2003). There is no clear research that supports the construction of these time periods as 'optimum' for the achievement of the identified outcomes. Indeed, it is clear, from the anecdotal evidence supplied by the learners involved in

this study that this 'constructed' time period is groundless. The fact that many learners have repeatedly attended the same or similar programmes multiple times further suggests that outcomes cannot be achieved by a majority of participants within this timeframe. In fact, the work of Commings, et al., (1999) argues that what is necessary to see any real increase in skill levels is a flexible programme which allows individuals to persistently attend over time, acknowledging and working with the chaos of adults' lives.

Consequently, learners dip in and out of training programmes and are unlikely to make significant developments in either their LLN skills or their employability skills. Learners are unable to obtain significant gains in their LLN skills in this time and the need to end training at 26 weeks means that any developments are unlikely to be sustained over a significant period of time as learners are not motivated to develop these skills independently of the training environment or to seek out training programmes elsewhere. There is evidence that learners are required to undertake a minimum of 120 hours of training to increase their literacy or numeracy skills by one level (Reder, 2005; Brooks, et al., 2007).

Because of the many compulsory elements of the training programme, it is highly unlikely that participants will receive this amount of literacy or numeracy training.

(c) Training is mis-sold

Prior to being referred to a training programme, potential participants are required to undertake a diagnostic assessment of their LLN skills. If the results show their LLN skills to be below Level 1, learners are required to attend this training programme, being advised that this will help them to develop the skills they need. However, the training programme is a work-first focussed one in which the primary objective of the programme is for learners to obtain employment. The development of LLN is a secondary objective.

(d) Training is not wanted

Learners are not interested in developing the LLN skills they need to achieve employment because (i) they are not interested in working and do not want to get a job or (ii) they do not believe they have poor LLN skills.

For learners engaged in *Skills for Life* training through a further education pathway, their reasons for attending appear largely intrinsic.

In the following example, a learner discusses how her formative schooling was compromised due to ill health and how she struggled to develop her LLN skills:

10.S Yeah and I just, erm, lost a lot of work and like, whatever, I just couldn't get back into it so they like got me a tutor about twice a week so I've just come to improve my English and my math's and like.

(FE 2)

In the next extract, the learner describes how she had come to depend on her son particularly to support her with her literacy needs. When he left school, he became less available and she found herself struggling when her granddaughter asked her for help. This was the 'critical incident' (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006; Atkin, et al., 2005) that led her to seek support outside of the family network:

55-57 S I think it was when my granddaughter -she asked me to spell something and I couldn't and my son wasn't in. And like if he's in, he used to spell for her and I said, this is ridiculous and, you know, so I just built up the courage and came.

(FE 4)

Similarly, these learners have recognised that their poor LLN skills are becoming problematic for them in managing both their day-to-day life and in obtaining employment. These factors together have led the learners to seek support to develop their skills.

23.E Er, why did I come to college – just to improve myself, like my math's and my English.

(FE 7)

44.D 'Cos I had problems with my English; I've had problems spelling, I'm having problems reading and I'm having problems with my math's. I decided to come to college.

(FE 9)

Learners in the prison attending training programmes on a non-voluntary basis were likely to be doing so for some extrinsic reason. The prison that participated in this study was a large male remand prison and, therefore, whilst inmates lose their liberty, they cannot be mandated to undertake any activities. As a result, these learners only undertake activities should they wish to. However, some of the reasons given for participating in education would suggest they are extrinsically motivated to attend training provision and can be defined in reality as a non-voluntary learner. Some of the reasons learners gave for attending education included gaining extra socialisation time

with other inmates, to avoid long periods of 'bang-up' or because attending education was likely to affect their sentencing positively. The following extracts highlight some of the prisoners' motivations for attending educational programmes:

78.M Why I am here now? To give myself a start. To give myself opportunities for when I'm released.

(HMP 2)

96.C Because I've been thinking to myself as in like, I've missed out on my education, yeah, 'cos I've been getting expelled from schools and stuff and I thought to myself, well, this time I want to get out of jail, I want to go straight, yeah, I want to get a job, so I might as well do my education, get my math's done and then I can get a good job when I leave.

(HMP 4)

268A And what made you make that decision?

269T Erm, it was two things – one it got me out of the cell, 'cos it's a lot of bang-up in this prison. The second one, I decided that it's about time I learnt and why I can do it without missing out on my children's growth, growing up and as I'm missing out on that in here I might as well do

my education, even if it's only for a few years until my appeal comes up, it's something to do, keep me occupied all the time.

(HMP 5)

There is a duality to the learner's attendance at the training provision; one is to do with the social construct of a training programme and the desire to integrate with others; the other is to construct a self that provides self-worth.

To summarise this section, the reasons why learners are attending *Skills for Life* training programmes significantly influences their experience of the training programme. Learners who are motivated to attend as a result of a 'critical incident' show a very positive experience, embracing the learning opportunities made available to them and working constructively towards achieving their goals. However, those who are attending programmes because of extrinsic factors, for example under the direction of Jobcentre Plus portray a very different picture; attending reluctantly and without any demonstration of desire to develop their LLN skills. Whilst all learners are attending training programmes, then, the significant difference between the learners appears to be actual engagement in the training programme that can be linked to the learners' original motivation for joining the programme.

In addition, for all learners, the notion of choice in selecting and deciding which, if any training programmes, to attend is limited and at best is linked to a network of individuals who can provide appropriate information, advice and guidance about various training programmes. At worst learners are directed without consideration of individual needs and with little or no idea about the programmes content and their reasons for being there.

During the study, learner research participants provided a diverse picture of their LLN skills, ranging from extremely poor to above average; concepts which are socially and culturally constructed. Additionally, learners discussed the choices of training programmes for them and how the notion of choice is one that is not largely considered by many. The next section of this chapter considers how learners attending training programmes conceptualised and measured progression and success and how this aligned with the *Skills for Life* strategy indicators.

Capital

During the interviews, and also during informal observations, learners were asked about their aspirations and plans for the future.

Learners reported a wide range of benefits associated with attending training programmes. These included not only the traditional economically-focussed goals of gaining appropriate knowledge and skills to achieve measurable goals and outcomes (such as qualifications) which could lead to employment opportunities but also less tangible outcomes, associated with social and personal development (such as the importance of camaraderie and friendship groups, the development of self-efficacy and confidence as well as a feeling of 'belonging'). This is particularly interesting as it links closely to the previous discussion on social networks and *habitus*. All learner research participants valued the shared experience of 'belonging'. Particularly, learners described the importance of sharing the training experience with people who had similar learning needs and similar social backgrounds; again this is linked with discussions around 'institutionalisation' and 'homogeneity' of 'prison learners' and 'unemployed learners' but was much less evident with learners undertaking training programmes through the further education route, the focus of which was much more individual, heterogeneous and linked to qualification outcomes with employment aspirations.

Whilst it is not unreasonable to expect learners to have this first set of aspirations the other more abstract outcomes of the training programme appear to be more valued and hold more significance for many of the learners participating in this study.

Interestingly, even though the majority of learners attending private training provision had little positive to say about the classroom experience in relation to the development of their LLN skills or their employability skills, many recounted two positive experiences: one was related to work-experiences and the other was the connection with the development of social capital (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006; Coleman, 1998; Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990; Putman, 1993).

Many of the learners appeared to enjoy the routine of 'having somewhere to go', enjoying the company of their colleagues and the development of their confidence to interact with other people. Again, this could be seen as institutionalisation of behaviours to align with an identity of unemployment and their unemployability; the notion of belonging to a group or 'tribe' (Bourdieu, 1997) was considered a valued aspect of the training programme; the training programme held little regard in relation to the construction of a 'place' for people of similar *doxa* to congregate.

The following quotes provide examples of how learners felt the training programme had added to what can be termed *social capital* (the development of self confidence and construction of social networks).

218.B Yeah, well I never used to go to libraries but now I do.
(TP 1)

183.An Yeah. It's made me a lot more confident, I think I've got,
 like I say, I was shy, I'm a shy person and things like that.
(TP 2)

120 J I'm not as nervous with people and that.
(TP 3)

208.D It's been worth coming, yeah.
209.A Yeah? What was the most useful thing about coming
 here?
210.D Erm, er, [sigh], meeting different people; meeting
 different friends.
(TP 4)

142.D Well I think it at least gets me out of the house anyway,
 through the week.
(TP 10)

This is also the case for learners accessing training provision through the further education pathway; again they commented on the development of their self-efficacy through, for example feeling confident enough to try new skills, such as using a computer. In addition, however, these learners described the equal importance of gaining a tangible outcome to their training, such as qualifications.

100.S I've made, like new friends and like whatever. I've learnt how to use a computer because I was really rubbish.
(FE 2)

77.S Oh God, I've got a lot more courage. It's really, like, I'll try and spell now. Even if I'm wrong, I'll try, so, yeah, it's good. A lot more confidence.
(FE 4)

81.E Yeah, just getting out and meeting new friends and that; and getting some qualifications.
(FE 7)

For learners involved in prison education, again they described both the value and development of capital in terms of obtaining both future employability skills, including the develop of their LLN skills as well as the development of self-efficacy, as noted in the following responses:

147.J Because it gets me out the cell, more than anything.

(HMP 3)

150.C Well, confidence, I've got a bit more of. Self esteem.

(HMP 4)

The most significant benefit which individuals valued and associated with the training programme, regardless of the institution in which they were studying or the reasons why they were attending, appears to be the development of what Bourdieu terms *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1990); that is the development of self confidence and the construction and, indeed for some, the continuation of a social network, rather than the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

However, the obligations and expectations in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy skills appears to be a socially constructed and imposed requirement, constructed as a legitimate activity by the dominant few and misrecognised by those dominated as an individual social responsibility contributing to the social and economic wellbeing of the cultural arbitrary. The Government, in constructing *Skills for Life* training programmes, are controlling the actions of society and the construction of social capital is acting as a mechanism for social control, ensuring that all members of society are

located or 'positioned' within a hierarchical structure of positions from which there is little movement.

The discussion led onto how learners measured progression: in relation to either their LLN skills and also in relation to the previously identified wider apparent benefits to attending the training programme. Learners were asked whether they felt they had made any progress with their LLN skills during their attendance at the training provision. In spite of the differing stories presented by the learners undertaking *Skills for Life* training programmes using different pathways, the majority of learners self-reported small improvements in their LLN skills. Learners, however, generally did not associate progress with any formal measures, such as qualifications but more often with increased confidence in their ability to deal with day-to-day activities and tasks:

107.An Spelling's coming on a lot better than it did first time. Er,
 my reading's average.

(TP 2)

94 J Er, I think I've improved on it.

95 A Do you?

96 J I'm more better now with figures and that.

(TP 3)

138.F My reading's getting very good but my spelling, that's; it's

a bit better but not a lot better.

139.A So when you say your reading's getting very good, what sorts of things can you read now that you were struggling to read before.

140.F Er, I couldn't read big writing, big words but I'm pretty OK with them now.

(TP 5)

116.L It's given me the skills that I already knew but it's like refreshed me. They've learnt me how to recognise things like words that we sometimes may use but not know the meaning of it.

(TP 12)

Learners in the study attending training programmes through the private training provider repeatedly recounted their dislike of the training programme, of its classroom environment and the learning tasks they were being asked to undertake. It was somewhat surprising, then, towards the end of the interviews to hear learners describing the progressions they felt they had made in their LLN skills during their time at the programme. This could be for several reasons: because they were being required to use their LLN skills on a more regular basis there is likely to be an improvement in skills associated with increase usage over time (Bynner and Parsons, 1998); that

actually they did enjoy the training programme but were reluctant to voice this view or that actually they had made no progress and did not want to share this information with the researcher. These skills developments have not been measured in a formal manner but are personal reflections of developments by the learners.

Whilst undertaking the fieldwork phase of this study, learners involved in this training pathway were the most unlikely to reveal a desire to obtain qualifications, often suggesting that qualifications were for 'clever' people. Learners associated qualifications with school-based qualifications that had been unattainable for them in the past. The association between qualification and 'cleverness' is interesting; learners described the hierarchical acquisition of academic qualifications, leading to professional career pathways. For these learners, the construction of their *habitus*, formed through the experiences of the social networks and *fields* which they were exposed to did not include a familiarity or association with people obtaining qualifications; more often learners described associations with people who had similar backgrounds in terms of skills level and employment histories.

Progression, for these learners was not associated with qualification outcomes but with the development of skills which allowed them to develop more confidence in managing their day-to-day activities.

For learners engaged in prison training, what was clearly important for them in terms of progression was the achievement of independence; independence from the institutional structures of society which have played significant roles in defining and determining their lived experiences to date. Typically, these may have included care homes, social workers, probation services, judicial systems, the police service and penal establishments. Education, for these learners, is seen as a significantly factor in achieving this independence. In the following extract, the learner describes how important it is that he is able to write by himself; progression is associated with the construction of skills that enables independence.

139M Yeah, it think it'll make my life, not a hell of a lot easier because I'm going to have a hard struggle when I'm released but like, filling out forms, I'm gonna feel confident in like filling out job applications. I'm gonna feel confident about writing my own cv and I'm gonna feel confident about writing letters and things like that.

(HMP 2)

However, for the following learner, also engaged in prison training, the development of his skills is causing him some apparent concern.

273. T Erm, my English is improving a hell of a lot. My maths
 has even, it's improved too much for my liking.

(HMP 5)

Attending training whilst in prison has enabled him to develop his LLN skills to such an extent that they are making him feel uncomfortable. His *habitus* is being challenged. Field, (2000) through his research into the educational experiences of people in Northern Ireland, found that education, whilst being seen as the key to economic prosperity and individual success can act as a divisive apparatus and potentially brings about social fragility amongst the social network of a community. The work reported that whilst the community were able to demonstrate excellent qualification outcomes for students, the use of these qualifications to precipitate further study or develop professional employment pathways did not reflect the initial potential identified through qualification success. A reason for this was given as the *doxa* of the socially constructed community and is reflected in the findings of this study.

For many learners in this study, progression was measured in relation to the skills that enable them to manage their day-to-day activities with more confidence. However, the recognition by some learners that 'qualifications are for clever people' and the concern by some that they may develop their skills so much that they make them feel

uncomfortable, may tell us something about the imposed limitations of social capital and the overwhelming feeling that social capital may be being used as a new form of social control by bureaucratic authorities, constructing localised legitimacy of expectations. Bourdieu describes how a set of cultural positions are established, managed and controlled by those in a position of power through the use of pedagogic action and legitimised through misrecognition, a concept he describes as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1997).

Through the introduction of *Skills for Life* curricula, *Skills for Life* national test qualifications and *Skills for Life* teacher training programmes, the Government are presenting a prescribed training package that works to ensure that learners can be labelled and compartmentalised, both socially and economically.

However, it is important to recognise that for some learners, mostly those undertaking training programmes via further educational or prison pathways, tangible evidence of programme outcomes and progression, through qualification achievements was a key aspirational goal and one which they wished to achieve in their drive to obtain employment and economic activity.

In seeking to strengthen the data provided by learner research participants, the views of practitioners/coordinators were also sought.

When speaking to practitioners about the progression of learners in their LLN skills, practitioners stated that many learners were able to increase either their literacy or numeracy skills by one level. Learners who entered the training programme at Entry 1 in their literacy skills were often able to achieve an Entry 1 qualification, consolidating their level and occasionally obtained an Entry 2 qualification. Practitioners were much more likely to describe and discuss their learners' skills in relation to national pre-set levels and measurable outcomes linked to future employability, rather than a social practice approach. This can be linked to the implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy and the management of pedagogic action in the form of national frameworks for the teaching, learning and assessment of adult LLN skills, highlighting the association of LLN skills with employability. This is in direct contrast to the historical LLN curriculum based on constructing adult LLN teaching and learning relating in an individual's identified request, such as letter writing or report writing.

Practitioners working with learners attending private training provider training programmes tended to focus on one of the learners' LLN skills during the training programme, due to limitations of time. Some of the reasons given for this were related to (a) practitioner competence – practitioners were generally more confident working with learners on either literacy or numeracy and tended to focus on learner activities based on their preferred subject rather than the needs of the learner,

(b) learner achievement – because of the timescale available to practitioners to work with learners, they were often keen to ensure the learner could evidence progression through a measurable, tangible outcome such as a qualification. In order to move up one level a learner would regularly require intensive support and often practitioners felt it was more important for learners to focus on one subject and achieve a one level increase in competence over the period of the training programme, rather than working with the learner on both areas and potentially not obtaining any tangible outcome, (c) pressures from employers and contractors require practitioners to ensure learners obtain a qualification outcome.

Practitioners were asked to consider the sustainability of learners' LLN developments following the end of the training programme; particularly focusing on learners who had experienced repeat attendance at the training programme. It is clear that the ability of learners to maintain their LLN development independently of the Jobcentre Plus training programme (26 weeks) was unlikely. Progression in this context is seen more as maintenance rather than lateral development. There is a clear link here with the work of Bynner and Parsons (1998) 'Use it or Lose It' when they found that those engaged in employment and regularly using literacy and numeracy skills were more likely to be able to maintain these skills, whereas those who were unemployed and did not regularly draw on literacy and numeracy skills within their day-to-

day activities were more likely to lose these skills. The need for groups of learners to leave a formal learning environment for significant periods of time presents a similar difficulty. Again, drawing on the work of Comings, et al., (1999), there is good evidence to suggest that flexible training programmes that enable learners to persist in training programmes over long periods of times provides a framework in which participants can evidence measurable progression in their literacy and numeracy skills.

However, practitioners did state that if they had a repeat learner who had, for example, achieved an Entry 2 qualification in literacy during their previous attendance, they would only offer them activities which would develop their skills to that required of an Entry 3 qualification. Alternatively, should a learner have needs in numeracy as well, they could choose to focus on that skill instead.

Once a learner achieves an Entry 3 qualification whilst on the programme, they (a) receive a £100.00 award from the DWP and (b) no longer become eligible for the training programme.

The DWP reward progression through qualification outcome achieved at Entry Level 3. For many of the participants on the programme this is an unachievable target and, once again, they can perceive themselves to have failed. There is a clear identity association, linking current

learning experiences with previous experiences of compulsory education. This works to reinforce an individual's place within the socially constructed positioning between the dominating and the dominated. Even if a learner does achieve a qualification, at any of the levels, it is clear that such skills need to be used on a regular basis in order for them to be sustained (Parsons and Bynner, 1998). If a learner is not encouraged to take responsibility for the development of their skills, has no desire to develop their skills, or is not shown how these skills can be employed in their day to day activity, then it is very likely that their skills level will revert to the level it was prior to attendance on the training programme.

All learner research participants were asked to think about their future aspirations. The purpose of this question was to ascertain to what extent learners linked future aspirations, future employability and employment with their current training programme and the development of their LLN skills.

Most learners expressed a desire to be part of the labour market; to gain and sustain employment. For some this was a well thought through plan with an ultimate goal, starting with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, particularly LLN skills, and the acquisition of qualifications that could lead to further training opportunities and ultimately employment. For many others it was a desire to get

employment to avoid the need to re-enter what had been for many a recurring and valueless training experience from which they believed they gained little, either in relation to employability skills or the development of their LLN skills in any significant or sustainable measure.

Future Aspirations

The following quotes allow the research participants to explain their hopes for the future, based on their most recent experiences of *Skills for Life* training programmes.

For learners attending private training provider training programmes, there is a resigned feeling about their conversations; a sense of apathy and defeat – they accept their situation as the ‘natural order’. Learners reflect that the most likely outcome for them following this training programme is yet a further period of unemployment that may be followed, once again, by re-entry to an identical training programme:

129.A So what happens now? You leave today – what happens now?

130.J I’ll have to go back on – go to the dole on Monday – get forms.

(TP 8)

114.A What would you like to happen at the end of the course, though?

115.D Er, well if I don't get a job, I'll be signing back on.

116.A How do you feel about that?

117.D I think, if I sign back on – I think I'll probably end up having to come back anyway, if I don't pass any of this work.

(TP 10)

54.T Yeah. Well, like I said, I mean, I just hope I get a job.
I'd love a job.

55.A You'd love a job.

56.T I definitely like to get a job

(TP 14)

Whilst there is a resigned feeling to the conversations at this point, it is clear that for some, there is a need to 'tell the expected story' – that is they accept that they need to, as Bourdieu would describe 'play the game'. Having been part of 'the game' of unemployment, in some cases, for considerable periods of time, players of the game need to ensure that they recount the expected responses to certain questions, for example demonstrating an eagerness to obtain employment. However, from the perspective of the researcher, it became important to accept the account of the learner research participant as being the

true account for them at the time of the interaction and it is apparent that the narrative changes with participants with some being resigned to a future involving long periods of unemployment and prescribed training programmes and for others an aspiration to find employment and to provide an end to 'the game of unemployment'.

For learners engaged in training programmes in the other two pathways, however, there is a greater sense of hope and determination to achieve the goals they have, significantly, laid down for themselves and played a crucial role in constructing, which include both the acquisition of qualifications and the aim to achieve employment:

72.S Hopefully, when I've got like qualifications and like whatever, get a job.

73.A What sort of job are you hoping to get?

74.S Er, to work with animals.

(FE 2)

95.S I want to bring me education up to what standard it should have been.

(FE 4)

34.T I want to try and build the qualifications; to try and get a more upper grade or something, like up the ladder

(FE 6)

In the following extract one learner outlines how she plans to re-enter employment following a period out of a labour market which has undergone major changes and how this is impacting on her re-entry:

1. A Brilliant. What sorts of jobs are you looking to get?

2. F Well, something completely different, 'cos like I said, I've done like machining for a good 15 years.

3. A That's a long time to be in one job, isn't it.

4. F So, it's like - I know how to do baby clothes, knickers, bras you know what I mean and then all that industry is going out the window now because it's all import, so it's like looking at life from a different side and thinking what is there. It's more like secretary work and I think, I could get there one day but in myself, confidence is not there like with my reading and my spellings and I thought at the moment I don't know what I want to go into, at least I'm doing something, you know what I mean. I'm not just panting around the house and watching tele.

(FE 1)

Some learners following prison training pathways found themselves at the start of a long period of imprisonment and wanted to ensure they used the time effectively to achieve the education which had previously passed them by. They were able to discuss in some detail the ways in which they wanted to use the education system to ensure they had the skills they felt they would need in order to gain employment on re-entry into society and so avoid further periods of imprisonment.

In the following extracts learners describe clear ideas about their learning aims and employment goals:

- 5.A So what sorts of aims have you got while your doing education?
- 6.T To get some qualifications round me before I get out.
- 7.A What sorts of qualifications are you looking to get?
- 8.T NVQs, anything like that, because I've got nothing at the moment.
- 9.A Right. Ok. And what are you going to use those qualifications for when you get out do you think? What sorts of things would you like to see yourself doing?
- 10.T I'd like to own my own pub again.

(HMP 1)

- 85.A Have you thought about the jobs you would like to do?
- 86.M Yeah, I have. I've thought long and hard about what I would like to do when I get out, but it's if I'll be able to achieve them really. If I, if I've got the qualifications to do it when I leave custody I'd like myself to be either a drug counsellor or somebody that goes round and talks to kids in schools and share my experience with them.

(HMP 2)

- 146.C Because I want, I want to do like something like positive with my life instead of just being negative all the time, you know what I mean.

(HMP 4)

285. T Erm, catering because I would love to get qualified at catering, especially 'cos of the work I'm looking at getting into when I get out, it's catering, maths, a bit of reading.

(HMP 5)

In concluding this section, it is apparent that learners involved in *Skills for Life* training programmes place considerable value on the wider benefits of attending a training programme, describing the development of confidence and courage to carry out daily tasks; the

development of identity capital. However, learners attending training programmes through private training providers demonstrate a very depressed view of the future, apparently resigned to repeated periods of unemployment and training programme attendance, in compliance of the conditionality component of their welfare benefits. This could be seen as part of their *habitus*, drawn from their *fields* of experiences and based on the social networks; arguably this is a 'comfort zone' of existence that is familiar and uncomplicated. Whilst many learners give disgruntled accounts of their experiences of *Skills for Life* training programmes through the Jobcentre Plus pathway, along with the sense of apathy and helplessness, there is also a state of contentment with the situation. This is in stark contrast to the learners undertaking training programme through the other pathways who demonstrate an enthusiasm for a future which involves the development of their LLN skills and the potential to gain qualifications and engagement in the employment market.

Summary

To summarise this chapter, the emergent key themes from the data have been identified and presented through a detailed discussion and analysis, using extracts from the data where possible to provide 'real life' examples of how learners experienced their *Skills for Life* training programmes.

The following chapter of this thesis draws together the themes presented and considers, in light of the data, the conclusions that can be drawn.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

In this chapter, summaries of the conclusions are presented. The research questions are utilised as a framework to present the findings.

Highlights

Whilst learners participating in the study described their LLN skills in a range of ways, from negative interpretations such as 'rubbish' to very positive expressions, such as 'above average', they did not relate their LLN skills either to the outcome level they had been prescribed following the completion of diagnostic assessment activities, undertaken at the start of their training programme, or to traditional outcome measures, such as qualifications.

Learners most frequently explained their LLN skills in relation to what Bourdieu terms *habitus*, that is the social network and community that they inhabit. Bourdieu asserts that an individual's *habitus* is constructed through one's experiences, particularly of family and school, and through teaching; one's history is the foundation of one's *habitus*. It can be agreed that one's experiences during life significantly affects who and what one is; including family experiences, experiences of schooling, peer-group relations and interactions with one's community. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that one's

ability to become involved in decision-making and choice processes are also influenced by ones *habitus*. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is not a tangible structure but one which exists through, and because of, the practices of both the individual, interactions with others and the various social *fields* of experience; the durable yet transportable positioning of positions.

All learner participants in this study associated their LLN skills development with their experience of 'compulsory' education. Their previous experiences of education were the foundations on which the current experience was considered. For some LLN learners, they had been able to develop their educational experiences positively through a process of growth of their *habitus* (subjectivity) and their current reality (objectivity). For other learners, particularly the Jobcentre Plus learners, this process was more limited and strained. The ability of this group to move their experiences forward were restricted because of the cultural influences of their *field* of experiences.

Again, using Bourdieu's notion of the objective-subjective dualism (Bourdieu, 1997), accepting that cultures are constructed arbitrarily, research participants accepted the social realities of their situation, with activities being regarded and agreed by those constructing the reality as been either acceptable (passively undertaking the activities required of them – i.e skills assessment, training programme) or

unacceptable (rejecting training through non-participation in the training programme). A system of symbolism and meaning is put in place (*Skills for Life* policy, directions and sanctions through DWP activity) and legitimised by the dominant few, often being misrecognised by the dominated as legitimate. Through the social construction of a network, hierarchical social relations are formed with systems of power relations between groups informing the process in which the social reality is maintained; cultural mechanisms are subsequently developed to ensure the continued existence of this reality. As such, the culture is experienced as legitimate and works to reinforce the power relations that exist systematically through the use, for example of training programmes. The use of this mechanism enables the social reproduction of the culture that has been implemented, through the direction of pedagogic actions and activities, through the implementation of frameworks, such as adult national curricula for LLN and, linked to them, the development of national tests for literacy and numeracy. The use of such structures allows for positive inculcation, through the direction of the knowledge and skills that are to be taught, acquired, developed and assessed.

For many learners with low LLN skills, the *habitus* that they have constructed is one of non-learning, and being non-skilled. The move for many of these learners from a subjective experience of learning to an objective, positive reality is beyond their cultural reality. Many LLN

learners have developed a social identity that is associated with the acquisition of a cultural notion or 'rule' which determines what that can or cannot do or what they can or cannot achieve. This social identity can act to provide the individual with the freedom with live within that social constructed reality or *habitus*, or can equally act to provide constraints and limitations on what is considered reasonable for the individual to achieve or to aspire to achieve. Bourdieu argues that this process of social practice is not one that is conscious or unconscious for the individual but is ongoing through a process of learning in time and space; this can be reflected in the learning experiences of the adults engaged in this study.

For all learners, the notion of choice of training programmes was limited, with participants relying on other 'significant' figures with different *fields* of experience for advice and direction towards an appropriate training programme. For those who had chosen to develop their LLN skills, this was usually as a result of a significant life-changing event: a critical incident that had required them to reconsider and evaluate their future in relation to employment and employability.

Learners' motivations for attending training were complex. Whilst the majority of learners were able to describe some benefits as a result of attending the training programme, these were not predominantly linked to significant developments in LLN skills and very often related

to wider benefits attributable to attending a training programme, such as the development of self-efficacy: a more social capital development, rather than a human capital development.

The importance or weighting of social capital and human capital outcomes that learners applied to their training programme were interesting and appear to be linked to the initial motivation of the learner to attend the training programme. For learners attending training programmes voluntarily, their outcome focus was both social and economic. They recognised the value and development of self-efficacy during the training programme but, significantly, recognised its value in terms of its ability to enable them to become more employable and, often to seek more interesting employment than they had previously sought. Additionally, they aspired to achieve qualifications that recognised their LLN competence because, again, they valued the currency of qualifications when applying for future positions.

However, for those learners who were attending training programmes on a non-voluntary basis their focus was only related to social capital gains. This is particularly interesting because it is this group of learners who have been mandated to attend programmes specifically to develop their human capital capacity.

The construction of Government strategies which seek to implement interventions upon unemployed adults, such as attendance at training programmes, is *misrecognised*; a process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eye of the beholder (Bourdieu, 1997) as a *legitimate* activity, both by the constructors of the strategy and by those charged with the implementation of the strategy. This process is explained by Bourdieu as *symbolic violence*: the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are presented and experienced as legitimate. The apparent legitimacy of the activity obscures the power relations that permit the imposition of such interventions to be regarded as reasonable and successful. The construction of the cultural or social reality further supports the systematic reproduction of such activities that ultimately attempts to construct a process where order and social restraint are produced as an indirect covert cultural mechanism, rather than a more overt, direct action of social control.

The use by Jobcentre Plus of *Skills for Life* training programmes as part of their intervention strategy to upskill the unemployed adult population appeared to be ineffective. Analysis of the data collected for this research study suggests that the interventions in place for those attending training under the umbrella of Work-Based Learning for Adults are being engaged through processes of order and social

control. The policy culture used in Work-based Learning for Adults policy is a deficit model which embraces failure. Disciplinary actions are written into any contracts which the DWP award. However, direct coercive social control is also playing a part in legitimising the actions that are being played out by the various actors involved in the Government's *Skills for Life* strategy.

The Government is endeavouring to ensure that all adults of working age reach a minimum standard of LLN competency. This incorporates an implicit assumption that this is a universally realistic and attainable target. The Government appear to view this intervention as legitimate as the client-group are in receipt of welfare benefits and may be considered to be avoiding sustained employment by not taking any action to redress their skills need. The production of an intervention that mandates adults to attend appropriate training programmes is, therefore, misrecognised as legitimate by those responsible for constructing the *Skills for Life* strategy.

As Government considers such interventions as legitimate, they become recognised as legitimate by the enforcers of the policy, such as Jobcentre Plus employees and coordinators and practitioners who are delivering *Skills for Life* training programmes; the power relations which are at play are concealed. In effect, the intervention is misrecognised as legitimate and reasonable and the policy is

successfully imposed upon the client group. The client group dominated by those imposing the policy has little or no redress.

As a society, or culture, adults of working age who have long periods of unemployment and receive welfare benefits from the Government are expected to be able to evidence that they are working towards achieving employment in any format. The adoption of this cultural attitude adds its force to the power relations within society and allows for the systematic reproduction of such activity.

A network of social controls have been placed on members of society who may be, on the one hand be seen as the most vulnerable and needy and, on the other as unwilling to participate in employment. The training programme does not seem to add significantly to either their employment prospects or their [the Government's] desire to develop their LLN skills beyond the lifetime of the training programme.

It appears that the role of the practitioner, delivering a *Skills for Life* training programme, contracted by Jobcentre Plus, is to reinforce the message that employment and engagement in the employment market is the priority and all activities should be seen to be working towards that goal. For the practitioner, then, they can be seen as the vessel through which they are legitimately reproducing the existing model of culture, either positively or negatively.

Bourdieu's work on legitimacy and misrecognition provides a useful mechanism through which to explore the *Skills for Life* strategy; implemented to address the needs of adults with poor LLN skills. The cultural arbitrary developed by this society maintains that people of working age should be able to live independently, both socially and economically. To that end it is seen as legitimate that all adults should be able to find sustainable, long-term employment. However, what is less well recognised by our culturally structured society is that the changing nature of employment globally has led to a change in the demands and requirements from employers upon employees. In this global knowledge society, it is acknowledged that adults do require a minimum level of LLN skills to participate fully, both economically and socially. However, what is not recognised is that this may be an unreasonable and unattainable goal for the **whole** of the adult population.

Some learners participating in the study had been assessed as having learning difficulties early in their childhood. They had then spent the remainder of their 'compulsory' school years in 'special schools'. For these learners, their curriculum did not focus on the development of their LLN skills but on the development of wider life skills.

Many people who find themselves with low LLN skills do acknowledge that they struggle to exist in this society which has grown and changed

rapidly over recent decade, now depending more and more on LLN skills for everyday needs, as well as employment needs. Living independently is unrealistic for many of these adults and they have developed sophisticated 'coping' strategies to enable them to get by; usually based on the development of a social network of support.

The Government's current interventionist approach to long-term unemployed adults with low LLN skills fails to recognise the needs of these people individually. The policy sees these adults as a homogenous group. This is surprising given that the current Government trend is to make individuals responsible, and accountable, both for their successes and their failures. The Jobcentre Plus training framework is rigid, prescriptive and bureaucratic. Ironically, it is filled with paperwork for completion; ensuring learners are accountable by evidence for their movements and activities.

In presenting further conclusions of the thesis, the research questions that framed the study are also presented.

How do adult *Skills for Life* learners understand their language, literacy and numeracy skills?

The concerns surrounding adult LLN have been discussed and debated in some detail throughout this study. Following detailed analysis of the data, it is clear that there are several fundamental difficulties associated with the conceptualisation and understanding of adult LLN for learners, practitioners and policy-makers in the field, with different actors providing differing accounts of what counts as adult LLN skills, which can be summarised as follows:

- (a) the definitions of LLN;
- (b) the linking of LLN skills with levels, measured by tests;
- (c) the identification of what constitutes a 'poor' skills-set and by whom, through assessment.

It is unmistakable that policy-makers in England and Wales have adopted a functionalist definition of LLN in their approach to resolving the 'burden' of adults with poor LLN skills, using the definition:

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

The adoption of this approach, following the seminal publications from the OECD (1997) and Moser (DfEE, 1999) has significantly affected the

development of training provision for adults with poor LLN skills. In particular, it restricts those responsible for the development of such programmes to an economic application of training provision, with the possible associated benefits of LLN skills development in relation to social cohesion taking on a subsidiary role.

The reality of the *Skills for Life* strategy is a continuation of a deficit model of training provision - long associated with adult LLN. This functional definition of LLN suggests that an individual only becomes functional and useful within society if they can contribute to society through economic activity and can evidence a minimum level of LLN competence through a measured assessment activity.

Whilst a functional approach to LLN has been repeatedly challenged over several decades; for example, by the critical literacy approach (Freire, 1996; Street, 1994) and the constructivist liberal approach of the new literacy studies (Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Barton, 1994), a functionalist approach continues to dominate adult LLN training provision.

The *Skills for Life* strategy has adopted this functionalist approach, putting in place a series of national standards of LLN levels (see chapter 1). Subsequently, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) aligned these graded LLN levels with National Qualification

Framework for England (NQF). A set of assessment activities have been developed to enable adults LLN levels to be measured and an LLN level 'prescribed'. The outcomes of these assessments can, and are, then used to ensure adults are accessing the correct level of training programme. In addition, a series of 'end-tests' (known as National Tests) have been created so that learners can evidence achievement and competence at a level; the threshold level for Government being the achievement of Level 1. This model very much reflects a medical model of: assessment (initial assessment), diagnosis (level ascribed), care-plan (training programme), ongoing monitoring (national tests), and cure (achievement of minimum LLN level).

Without exception, learners participating in this study struggled to give meaning to the processes of assessment and testing. Learners undertaking initial assessments were unable to report the level that they achieved on outcome. The majority of non-voluntary learners simply stated that they must have failed in order to be on this course (a re-emphasis of a deficit, failure regime which had so often formed a significant part of their learning experience during compulsory school). For voluntary learners, they saw the experience as part of a process of information gathering but, nevertheless, were still unable to describe their LLN skills in terms of 'levels'.

This has significant implications for policy makers going forward. It will be important for assessment to be made meaningful and useful for both learners and employers. Assessment of LLN skills can only be useful if it is used to inform learning plans and personal development plans which are constructed through a process of negotiated understanding between the learner and the provider of the programme of supported development, whether in a training environment or workplace.

Linking LLN skills with levels has provided little value for adults with poor LLN skills, other than to reinforce an already negative association with assessment and testing. Levels of LLN skills only had meaning for non-voluntary unemployed learners who understood that on achievement of Entry 3 qualifications, a threshold for the BET programme, they would no longer be expected to attend the programme. Unfortunately, for many of these learners attending this programme, who generally presented with LLN skills assessed at Entry 1 and 2, this was all too often felt to be an unachievable goal within the timescale of 26 weeks allocated for the programme, alongside the additional requirements they were expected to undertake whilst on programme. This finding demonstrates for policy-makers the value of flexible training programmes (see the work of Comings, et al., 1999). Voluntary learners demonstrated more interest in actually developing

confidence in their own LLN skills, rather than the achievement and evidencing of a particular level.

The identification of what constitutes a 'poor' LLN skills set created interesting discussion amongst the research participants. Learners did not link their LLN skills to either economic or social factors. Many learners applied a 'broad sweep' approach to defining their skills – either 'rubbish', 'average' or 'above average'. Many learners related their LLN skills to other people in their social network. For some learners, as discussed in the previous chapter, average for some was average within the context of the LLN group they were now a participant of: the learner cohort. For other learners, they expressed concern that their skills were developing to such an extent they would go beyond the range of the social network in which they regularly engaged.

Whilst some learners accepted that their LLN skills were prohibiting them from accessing employment; the majority of learners associated their LLN skills with day-to-day activities, such as reading a newspaper; dealing with household bills and budgeting, and writing and reading letters. This conceptual understanding of LLN is much more closely aligned with a social practice approach to literacy (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). This should be an interesting finding for policy-makers as they create training programmes. It would be beneficial for

them to consider the relevance of LLN training programmes that are so far decontextualised and removed from participants' day-to-day existence that they struggle to make meaning of the training programme they are attending.

I have argued, throughout this thesis, that the use of the terms 'literacy' and 'numeracy' have created confusion, for learners, practitioners and policy-makers alike. The adoption of a functionalist approach in the development of LLN training provision has created an overwhelming focus of training provision on economic factors associated with LLN development, particularly employability. The *Skills for Life* strategy, in its standardising and formalising of adult LLN provision, through the introduction of assessments, differentiated levels, core curricula and National Tests, has led to decreased consideration of the wider benefits associated with LLN skills development and a decontextualisation of LLN skills from learners' social realities. However, the work of Casey and Mallows (2006) clearly demonstrates that the concept of 'embedding' LLN learning in some form of meaningful reality for learners, either linked to a vocational employment pathway or an individual's life experience, significantly influences the positive development of LLN skills for learners. Success, through the *Skills for Life* strategy, is linked solely with achievement of tangible outcome measures. Again, this work provides further evidence to policymakers, and practitioners, that LLN skills can

not be seen as a set of skills that sit outside the framework of ones lived experience; their *fields*. It is necessary to expand the focus of LLN from a functionalist approach to a wider social and constructive approach in considering how to support adults in the development of their LLN skills.

What the *Skills for Life* strategy has been unable to recognise, or at least accommodate, is the diversity associated with LLN skills. The strategy has been successful in raising awareness of LLN differences amongst adults but has, on the one hand treated them as an homogenous group of adults with poor LLN skills and, on the other as individuals who must taken responsibility for their failure to achieve a minimum standards of LLN which would enable them to become a contributing member of society. The interventionist nature of the strategy rejects the possibility that some adults may be unable to achieve these identified minimum levels and consequently feel devalued by society as 'defunct' or 'unfunctional' in relation to the strategy.

Whilst most learners provided a very pragmatic account of their LLN skills in relation to their *habitus* and *fields* – 'a positioning of positions', practitioners provided a very restricted view of the ability of learners to develop their skills significantly more than one level. However, the *Skills for Life* strategy aims to ensure that everybody has the

opportunity to raise their skills to Level 2. This mismatch of aspirations between learners, practitioners and policy-makers is a further point for future research in this field. Policy-makers, in aiming to develop adult LLN skills through the provision of training programmes, need to ensure they provide a framework in which all participants can engage. Currently, policy-makers have identified an area in which economic activity and success could be compromised. In working to 'fill this gap', they have created the *Skills for Life* strategy; practitioners have become 'agents of the state' in the delivery of this agenda. They are now directed and informed what teaching and learning should be undertaken via the introduction of an adult core curricula framework; linked to national standards, assessments and tests. Learners are directed into such training with limited, if any choice, and are having LLN skills 'done to them' prescriptively. It is not surprising, then, that a tension has arisen between those who are 'doing the strategy' and 'those who are receiving' the strategy. A more holistic approach, that acknowledges and embraces the needs and demands of the learner, may, ultimately, provide a more successful outcome in the longer term.

What types of training programmes are available to adult *Skills for Life* learners? How do learners choose *Skills for Life* training programmes?

The findings of the study suggest that there are some shared characteristics amongst adults with poor LLN skills, such as prior educational and employment histories. What separates these adults, however, are their reasons for attending training programmes to develop these skills. I have argued that the rigidity of Jobcentre Plus training programmes and the limited range of training programmes is a major contributing factor to the continuing resistance of this group to engage in learning to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

It appears that there is a wide range of *Skills for Life* training programmes for those who wish to seek them out. However, for those adults who are unemployed and claiming benefits the available choice of programmes becomes more limited. What is available is prescriptive, inflexible and general. Training programmes are for a fixed period of weeks and number of hours with a fixed pattern of delivery, allowing little or no opportunity to ensure that training is designed to meet the individual needs of the learner. As Atkin et al., (2005) point out, for effective delivery the needs and motivations of adult LLN learners need to be fully understood, and accounted for in the development of *Skills for Life* training programmes. Devising

flexible training programmes that enable learners to persist with their training has been found by Comings, et al., (1999) to be a more effective route to encouraging learners to become engaged, lifelong learners.

Adults who find themselves unemployed for long periods of time do not appear to take an active role in making choices and decisions about the pathway of their lives. When asked to discuss their employment aspirations and what types of work experiences or training experiences they might like to have, they show little or no imagination about what they might like to do or achieve. They appear to be resigned to a constant cycle of being told what training course to attend next, for how long, etc. This type of apathy towards the training programme can lead to a lack of understanding of the value that a training programme could have in terms of supporting the learner to develop their LLN skills.

Interestingly, learners attending BET programmes reported enjoying work-placements more than periods of time within a classroom setting, even if those placements appeared to be of little benefit in terms of achieving sustainable employment. It may prove beneficial for policy makers to consider how training programmes for the unemployed could be structured in such a way to allow learners to decide their place of work and training support needs.

The deficit model currently in place actively reinforces the notion of failure (failed to obtain employment, failed to achieve minimum standards of literacy, language or numeracy on assessment, failed to secure employment during the training programme, failed to evidence tangible increase in LLN skills through the acquisition of qualifications, etc). When this is associated with compulsion to attend training programmes through the use of directions and sanctions, it is perhaps not surprising that the result is largely a reluctance to participate. Like *Skills for Life* practitioners, Jobcentre Plus staff act as 'instruments of the state', undertaking actions which have become so embedded, and accepted as reasonable, within our culture or society by all actors that they are misrecognised as legitimate.

In this thesis I have argued that making attendance at training provision a 'conditionality' of receipt of welfare benefits is unlikely to result in active participation and engagement in *Skills for Life* training programmes. A recent study by Brooks, et al., (2006) trialled the use of financial incentives for attendance at literacy programmes and found that, in fact, the use of the incentives actually increased drop-out from training programmes, rather than the reverse. This is a worrying finding for the Government as its policies rely heavily on such interventionist strategies to coerce adults to attend training provision. Policy makers would benefit from exploring a range of alternative to such strategies. Such alternatives could include a focus on rewards for

success, both soft outcomes as well as harder qualification outcomes; perhaps position the training over a longer period of time, allowing for periods of time when attendance at training is difficult because of legitimate reasons, ie caring responsibilities, illness or loss of transport. A closer alliance between learners' employment aspirations and employers is likely to benefit many learners; it was clear from this study that many participants did not have work experience or the confidence to seek work, although they expressed a preference for work placement over tradition 'classroom' like learning environments. Joining learners, training and employment into one location may be more effective in providing an opportunity for learners to acquire work skills and LLN skills simultaneously, supporting the work of Bynner and Parsons (1998) who showed that those who were in employment were more likely to use and develop their LLN skills, whilst those not in employment were more likely to 'lose' these skills.

Taking the views of learners involved in this study as a starting point would lead policy makers to reflect on current practices associated with training provision for adults with poor LLN skills and consider how provision can be developed to support adults to participate and engaged in LLN training programmes.

The Government justifies its large investment in skills programmes because unemployed adults and benefit claimants are likely to lack the

skills required by employers (Field, 2002) to achieve greater national and personal economic success, yet such programmes provide a good example of the lack of flexibility and adaptability required to support such adults to achieve these objectives. Additionally, whilst there exists an ongoing unemployment rate, the country is increasingly seeing the use of migrant workers by employers, who are often highly skilled, to undertake traditionally low level, low skilled work seen in agriculture and production employment because they cannot attract local adults into these forms of employment.

Participation in adult learning is identified as an important driver in affecting change and educational participation has a range of benefits that are non-economic, including health and social outcomes (Feinstein, et al., 2003). Recognition of this is visible through Government funding of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning which undertakes research that 'looks to inform policy, to deepen understanding of the complex ways in which learning provides benefits in the lives of individuals, and to provide robust evidence about the scale of these effects and the returns they represent' (WBL, 2005: website). The wider benefits associated with learning are as important, if not more important, than the acquisition of LLN skills for many adult LLN learners (Ward and Edwards, 2002).

A more flexible approach to supporting adults to develop their LLN skills which embraces the idea of learner persistence (Porter, et al., 2005) without continuous attendance may allow for adults to become independent lifelong learners who embrace learning, rather than just 'going through the motions' of attendance without really engaging with the programme. Porter, et al., (2005) have demonstrated that, by recognising the chaos of an individual's life, one can plan accordingly. They found that a learner who does not attend class for a couple of weeks because of illness or care requirements but is welcomed back to class without question is more likely to continue to persist in their learning journey.

By considering the needs of adult learners LLN skills, in association with their vocational aspirations and life chaos, without the restrictive framework of time and sanctions, those who have experienced long-term unemployment appear to be more able and more willing to re-enter both training and employment.

Reviewing the *Skills for Life* policy it can be argued that, given the process nature of the policy it is heavily weighted in favour of economic outcome, justified through the desire for tangible qualification outcomes and the aspiration to improve adults knowledge and skills which will (within the rationale of the policy) give them greater potentiality to become employed and contribute to society

economically. Whilst many would argue (e.g. Hodgson and Spours, 1999) that this is a perfectly legitimate course of action, it does not take account of the importance of social networks in the construction of a cohesive society. Instead, focussing responsibility on the individual for both their successes and failures can lead to a situation of social fragility with little evidence of a socially constructed community or network working together.

The whole concept of the *Skills for Life* strategy relies on measuring an individual's successes and failures as personal markers of accountability; indeed the policy is presented as the duty of any 'reasonable citizen' (Atkin, 2000)! *Skills for life* training programmes are so restrained by funding streams they are forced to focus on tangible human capital outcomes for learners, such as accredited qualification success linked to a likelihood of increased employability. In its desire to ensure the continued economic competitiveness of England, the Government is in danger of undermining traditional social networks through the introduction of a policy paradigm that claims universal personal responsibility and accountability for the acquisition of language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet the demands of the global economy.

By supporting adults to increase their LLN skills it was envisaged they would be able to participate more substantially within the economy and

in society more generally (DfEE, 2001). The strategy has similar potential for success from a social perspective in terms of the development of social cohesion factors, such as improved confidence, self-esteem, social networks and relationships, as it does for economic factors. However, the focus on qualification targets has overshadowed the social component of the strategy almost entirely; it is not recognised within the framework of the policy as it currently stands. In fact, the rigidity of the strategy framework could work to disrupt elements of social cohesion through the devaluing of established social ties.

The race to compete in the global economy has overshadowed the potential benefits of social networks in realising the goals of the *Skills for Life* strategy; particularly the development of literacy and numeracy competence amongst adults of working age in England. A re-focus of the strategy which highlights a social practice approach to the development of literacy and numeracy skills and which values the existence of social networks in its drive to work towards the successful improvement of these skills may actually result in more sustainable outcomes, and more choice – for both practitioners and learners in terms of the types and range of training opportunities available and enabling training programmes to be built based on the needs and interests of the learners, rather than the demands of Government.

Capital

Analysis of the data collected during this study suggests that the interventions in place for those identified priority target groups in the *Skills for Life* strategy are engaging some learners through a process of order and social restraint. However, coercive social control is also playing a part in legitimising the actions that are being played out by the agents involved in the Government's *Skills for Life* strategy.

Whilst the Government is endeavouring to ensure that all adults of working age reach a minimum standard of knowledge competency (human capital), there is an underlying assumption within the *Skills for Life* strategy that this is a wholly realistic and attainable target for all adults of England. The Government legitimises the intervention by stating it is in line with advice and guidance from the OECD on Government support to assist adults of working age to achieve a minimum standard of basic skills (OECD, 1997).

In our society, adults of working age who have long periods of unemployment and receive welfare benefits from the Government are expected to be able to evidence, as a minimum, that they are working towards obtaining employment (in any form) and are not relying on the Government to provide them with financial subsistence indefinitely. The adoption of this cultural attitude adds its force to the power

relations within society and allows for the systematic reproduction of such activity. Indeed 'unemployment numbers' are announced regularly and seen as an indicator of policy.

The welfare state was designed, since its inception in 1911 (National Insurance Act, 1911), as one that provides welfare benefits as a form of financial support, acting as a 'cushion' whilst individuals seek new employment, not as an alternative to employment.

It is clear that adults with low level LLN skills are more likely to encounter periods of unemployment or low skilled employment (Parsons and Bynner, 1999). Unemployed adults may be considered to be avoiding sustained employment by not taking any action to remedy their skills need and, therefore, the use of interventions such as 'directions' and 'sanctions' can be seen as legitimate. Indeed, there are signs of a general trend towards the use of such actions within recent Government policy initiatives; see, for example, the recent debates surrounding incapacity benefit and disability living allowance that include the introduction of such interventionist techniques (House of Commons, 2006a).

Because such interventions are seen as legitimate, they are recognised as legitimate by the enforcers of the policy: the power relations that are at play are concealed. In effect, the intervention is presented, and

potentially misrecognised, as legitimate and reasonable both by the enforcer (Jobcentre Plus staff) and the target group (unemployed adults with poor LLN). Those acting on behalf of the Government then successfully enforce the policy upon the target group. The target group have little or no redress and are therefore dominated by those imposing the policy. Similarly, those acting as enforcers of the policy have become instruments of control.

Adults in this study who found themselves unemployed for long periods of time, whilst they may resent the actions enforced upon them, felt they were passive participants in the processes being actioned on their behalf, largely because, ultimately, they are dependent on the welfare state for financial support in lieu of employment.

The policy culture associated with Work Based Learning for Adults is a deficit one which appears to embrace failure; indeed without failure it has no substance. Disciplinary actions form part of the contractual obligations associated with welfare benefits. Learners who do not act in accordance with the requirements of their Jobseekers Agreement are disciplined via a series of verbal and written warnings, eventually leading to directions and, ultimately, sanctions.

Many learners attending Jobcentre Plus training provision were unable to see how they could improve their skills by any significant level. For

some, the Jobcentre Plus training programmes seemed like a 'return to school' with classroom-based activities that were dominated by paper exercises. Additionally, many of the participants considered their LLN skills to be adequate (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994 in Brooks, et al., 2001), although Atkin, et al., (2005) found that learners were often aware of their lack of LLN skills but thought they either could not learn or had other priorities and instead developed coping strategies. Atkin, et al., (2005) found that adults were only likely to seek help with their LLN skills when they identified a need to do so; often occurring following a change in circumstances, either personal or professional.

Reviewing the *Skills for Life* policy in the light of both social and human capital theory, I have argued that, given the process nature of the strategy, it is heavily weighted in favour of economic outcome and human capital, justified through the desire for tangible qualification outcomes and the desire to improve adults LLN skills which will (within the rational of the policy) give them greater potentiality to become employed and contribute to society economically. Whilst it may be argued that this is a perfectly legitimate course of action, it does not take account of the importance of social networks in the construction of a society that demonstrates cohesion. Instead, I have argued that the focussing of responsibility on the individual for both successes and failures can lead to a situation of social fragility where there is little evidence of communities working together.

The social strand of the strategy is not recognised within its framework. Learners attending *Skills for Life* training are more likely to achieve, and need to achieve, some of the wider benefits associated with training (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2006: *passim*) before being able to advance to towards working on more easily measured outcomes, such as qualifications. However, this does not form part of the *Skills for Life* framework and there are currently no attempts to either capture this data or to implement any mechanisms by which achievements in these areas can be measured, or financial reward for its development and progression. This is in sharp contrast to the financial benefits for achieving a *Skills for Life* qualification.

There is a substantial amount of evidence (Illeris, 2003; Foster, 2005) that confirms that the Government continues to invest heavily in education that embodies the development of knowledge and skills in order to enable the continuing provision of employable adults (an approach underpinned by a human capital perspective). Indeed, the Labour Government state that 'education is our number one priority' (Labour Party Manifesto 2005).

Wolf (2002) argues that 'the philosophy driving modern British education policy is one of education for growth' (Wolf, 2002: 161). Education policy, she claims, pays little attention to either the lowest achieving youth or to the long term unemployed, suggesting that

education is big because it is seen as the engine of economic development with Governments increasingly developing interventionist strategies to ensure education continues to be able to fuel economic growth. Faced with competition from low wage economies such as China and India it is clearly tempting for Governments to clutch at strategies driven by notions of 'value-added' and innovation.

It is clear, however, that for some non-voluntary *Skills for Life* learners, attendance at training programmes is undertaken passively, without interest or engagement in the subject. Following analysis of the data, there is evidence from the learners that in fact an environment which replicates a 'working' environment in some way would be a more useful way of spending time and accruing more usefully appropriate skills for employment. Interestingly, Wolf (2002) also suggests that:

evidence from large-scale national surveys such as the British Household Panel Survey is that almost everyone who holds them [temporary contracts and short terms jobs] moves on to other employment, very often permanent and only a small proportion head straight back into unemployment. (Wolf, 2002: 253)

I have argued that the social capital benefit potential within the *Skills for Life* policy is currently limited, being overshadowed by the need to construct a human capital stock and, in fact, social capital has been used as one more form of social control. Despite its best efforts, rather

than having the synthesising effect suggested by the Government when launching the *Skills for Life* strategy, the opposite appears to have happened, with an ever-growing divide between the social and economic components of the strategy. As resources are limited, the economic link with human capital is unmistakably in ascendance. The direct relationship between LLN and the economy is clear in policy; what is not clear however is specifically what jobs requiring Level 1 LLN skills will open up.

What are the experiences of learners following *Skills for Life* training programmes who have chosen to attend training or have been chosen to attend training?

This study was undertaken in order to answer the above question. The data collected provides a detailed picture of the learning experiences of adults identified with low LLN skills. The data presents a dichotomous picture of learners. The first group are those participating in LLN training programmes, often as a result of a critical incident in their lives, which has affected their social network in such a way that they now seek out training programmes to enable them to develop their skills; I have termed these learners voluntary learners. These are largely to be found undertaking training through the further education pathway; a traditional training route but were also found undertaking training through the prison pathway. Many of the prison learners

described undertaking training in prison because they associated it with the identity of being a prisoner but also because it provided them with a route to maintain contact with their social network outside the prison.

The other group are those who are attending training programmes passively and with little or no interest in either being at the training programme or engaging with the learning opportunities. The majority of these learners did not report being involved in a decision-making process around participating in a training programme, nor had they identified personal needs or goals for training; more often they were passive recipients of the training programme which presented a picture of training 'being done to them'. These passive learners I have termed non-voluntary learners and were most often found undertaking training through private training providers who had been subcontracted by Jobcentre Plus to deliver training for unemployed adults.

Learner participants' experiences of *Skills for Life* training programmes are clearly associated with whether they have chosen to undertake the training programme voluntarily or have 'been chosen' to undertake the training and are therefore non-voluntary attendants at the training programme.

The *Skills for Life* strategy, at its inception, was seen as a policy which could provide a win-win outcome for both individuals with low level

language, literacy and numeracy skills, for employers and for Government. By supporting adults to increase their LLN skills it was envisaged adults would be able to participate more substantially within the economy and in society more generally (DfEE, 2001). The strategy had similar potential for success from a social perspective, in terms of the development of social cohesion factors of improved confidence, self-esteem, social networks and relationships, as it did for economic factors.

However, the Government's focus on qualification targets has overshadowed the social component of the strategy almost entirely; they are not recognised within the framework of the strategy as it currently stands. In fact, the rigidity of the strategy framework could work to disrupt pockets of social cohesion (e.g. long-term unemployed adults who complete their BET training programme are prohibited from re-entering WBLA training until they have been unemployed for a further six months). There is little in the way of supported progression through institutions and for some education is an identity associated only with certain social conditions e.g. prison or unemployment. It is not something undertaken voluntarily or electively.

It seems clear that the Government, and by default society, would benefit from developing a more flexible approach to the delivery of the *Skills for Life* training programmes (Atkin and Merchant, 2004; Atkin,

et al., 2005). This idea embraces the concept of learner persistence presented in the work by Porter, et al., (2005) who, drawing on findings from Young, et al., (1994) found that students often did not participate in programmes long enough to reap substantial learning gains.

Porter, et al., (2005) established that students faced a variety of difficulties that hampered their efforts to participate steadily and intensively in literacy learning and that programmes which provided a range of pathways to learners with less emphasis on group learning and more emphasis on one-to-one learning allowed students to dip in and out of provision as their ability to participate fluctuated (Porter, 2005). Such an approach to *Skills for Life* training provision may allow for adults to become independent lifelong learners who embrace learning, rather than just 'going through the motions' of attendance without really engaging with the programme. Of course there are problems associated with measuring consistently and effectively, elements of social capital and their development but this is important facet of any education policy that sets out to strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly economically and educationally stratified population.

Furthermore, this study supports the arguments of Stanley, et al., (2004) that the use of 'sanctions and sweeteners' as a tool to increase attendance at *Skills for Life* training programmes does not, in fact,

result in learners engaging in those training programmes (O'Grady and Atkin, 2005) but that actually the reverse is the case, with learners becoming increasingly resistant and frustrated by the training experience. This thesis has questioned whether it is reasonable for Government to use the welfare system as a tool towards attempting to change the behaviours of its recipients.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that adults who are coerced to attend training programmes aimed at upskilling their LLN skills are less likely to engage constructively in the training provision than adults who are electing to attend training programmes. The collected data supports the argument presented by Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) amongst others, that many adults do not identify themselves as having a 'skills need' as they continue to successfully manage and negotiate their life within the boundaries of their current skills competence and often resist or oppose attempts to coerce them into attending such training programmes.

Drawing on the conceptual discussions of Pierre Bourdieu regarding habitus, field and, particularly, symbolic violence, and associated discussions of social and human capital theory, I have argued that the *Skills for Life* strategy is being 'misrecognised' as legitimate by those charged with achieving the targets associated with this policy. I suggest that the *Skills for Life* strategy has been marketed as a tool to

develop both the social cohesion and economic competence of adults but, in fact, the desire to raise human capital has meant social capital development has been squeezed out of praxis almost entirely (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006).

The findings of this study support these arguments and I conclude that if the *Skills for Life* strategy is to achieve its full potential then it must seek to value social capital in similar terms to human capital development through, for example, the equal weighting of accreditation in recognition of 'positive transformations in health and well being' (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006: vi) and other associated 'wider benefits of learning', as is given to more traditional accreditation of progression in areas such as literacy and numeracy (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006).

The final chapter draws the key findings of the thesis together, identifying the implications for policymakers and practitioners. Additional, areas for further research are identified.

Chapter 6: Key Findings and Future Research

This chapter draws together the research, highlighting the key findings, together with recommendations for further research that would support the field.

Key Findings and Contribution to knowledge

This research highlights the learning experiences of targeted groups of adults accessing *Skills for Life* training programmes. The data supports the argument that compelling an adult in receipt of welfare benefits to attend a training programme through the use of directions and sanctions does not, for a significant number of attendees, mean active participation in, or with, the programme.

Active participation, in this study, means the willingness of an adult to embrace and engage with learning opportunities to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills. In fact, resistance to cooperative participation in such training programmes is heightened by the structural constraints imposed. It is unsurprising that learners questioned the value of such training programmes when they rarely lead to better life conditions, in the form of employment or economic and social stability.

In reality, adults accessing training programmes as a conditionality of welfare benefits, are much more likely to be asked to attend a repeat Jobcentre Plus training programme, following a further period of unemployment, than actually to re-engage with the labour market, take up mainstream further education opportunities or, indeed, feel that they have developed their LLN skills markedly. It is clear that they only valued the camaraderie they associated with attending the training programmes.

The *Skills for Life* strategy provides an excellent example of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), operating through a process of misrecognition and legitimisation, both by the implementers of the policy and the recipient actors of the policy. This research reconfirms more than a century of learning theory that demonstrates learning is more effective and successful when the individual has a vested interest in the subject being taught.

A mounting body of research, developed through the work of the NRDC and others, promotes a social practice approach to teaching and learning LLN in order to develop individuals' capabilities. This is demonstrated, for example, through the work of Casey, et al., (2005) that showed quite clearly an embedded approach to teaching LLN, linked to vocational areas of learning, developed an increase in

learners' participation in such programmes and an increase in success rates.¹³

Despite this growing knowledge and understanding, activity continues to focus around a functionalist, de-contextualised delivery model, requiring tangible outcomes in the form of qualifications.

What has become an increasingly interesting feature for observation since the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy is how it is being represented at the interface of teaching and learning – what choices are learners faced with and how notions of choice have influenced models of delivery? The *Skills for Life* strategy has impacted on the choices available for adult LLN learners, resulting in limited choice and in some instances, negating choice.

The ability to choose a training programme is not only closely associated with an individual's capacity for decision-making but their motivation, or desire, to undertake such a programme and the programmes' perceived legitimacy - the programme can demonstrate value to the potential participant by being able to satisfy their needs and demands. This often lies outside the framework identified by policy makers organising LLN provision. It is clear that notions of

¹³ Success in this instance is seen as either a job outcome or qualification outcome. It does not acknowledge less tangible 'success' indicators, such as increased confidence or engagement in community or voluntary activities.

choice and decision-making are shrouded in the assumption that the individual has all the necessary knowledge and skills to make an independent and free choice, or the capability of collecting such knowledge externally through a framework of information, advice and guidance.

I have highlighted how the ideological view of adult learning, within a philosophical framework of free choice, has been challenged by the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001). An adult who has poor LLN skills will be directed, or coerced, to attend training provision that has a pre-determined curriculum, syllabus and assessment.

Choice is limited to developing skills directly linked to employability. The andragogic concept that there are learners who are self-directed, self-motivated and attending training through informed decision-making processes is no longer in evidence within the framework of the *Skills for Life* strategy; a point exemplified in the work of Illeris (2003) and Atkin and O'Grady, 2006a, and 2006b).

I recommend that choice should be provided within an organised framework of information, advice and guidance. There should be transparency in a system that enables adults to consider engagement in such an activity, linked to value and meaning within their social

networks, allowing for an innovative range of delivery models and pedagogic activities.

Policy Implications

The *Skills for Life* strategy has dramatically transformed the landscape of adult LLN teaching and learning in England. This is set to continue as a result of recent publications, such as the Leitch Review (2006) which calls for more employer demand-led training, focussing on upskilling adults LLN skills for employability and Government's response: *World Class Skills* (DIUS, 2007).

A range of findings, for both policy-makers and practitioners are highlighted throughout this study. For policy makers, a focus on a wider range of learning provision, which has a flexible component to allow long-term engagement and retention, is recommended. For practitioners, a need to ensure learners are able to develop their learning opportunities through the use of resources they have been involved in selecting.

In the development of *Skills for Life* training provision, flexible training programmes that are linked to personal interests, whether social or vocational, will provide an improved framework for achievement – for

both policy makers and learners – allowing the aspirations set out in the *Skills for Life* strategy to be met.

The adoption, by government of flexible training programmes, based on the social realities of the participants, that work to re-establish social networks and the construction of support communities and are not built on a deficit model is recommended.

It is also clear that the initial assessment activity undertaken by learners holds little meaning. This is a significant finding for both policy makers and programme providers. These groups should now work together to identify mechanisms of support for learners based on a meaningful and useful assessment of their LLN capability, premised on a social practice model, rather than a deficit model of 'skills gaps'.

Models of teaching and learning were often linked to employment and employability. However, for a significant number of learners, this was not part of their experience. Therefore, a model, based on individual experience as a starting point would provide greater opportunities for engagement.

The link between Jobcentre Plus training programmes and employment is not made. There is verification of 'churn' where learners are routinely moving between periods of unemployment and attendance on

training programmes, without any transition into employment. Reasons for this are presented anecdotally within the findings – perhaps being linked to the time-bound nature of the training, the work-focussed approach of the organisation, the mis-selling of the training or the unwanted nature of the training. These now warrants further exploration in order to establish a greater understanding of the needs and demands of these adults and to provide a more useful and comprehensive package of support.

Limitations of the thesis

This thesis does not extend to all strands of adult learning provision, for very pragmatic reasons. Therefore, adult and community learning services and voluntary organisations did not form part of the research sample. Further research that explores the learning experience of adults attending provision with such providers would enhance the findings.

Evidence has been presented to show that there is a gender difference in the take up of provision through different provider pathways. However, this was a focus for this study and further work to explore reasons of attendance at learning provision from a gender perspective would enable policy-makers and training providers to develop strategies to support wider engagement in LLN programmes.

Further evidence is provided to demonstrate age variation in attendance at training programmes. Again, age was not a primary focus of this study but exploration into age at time of attendance could provide interesting insights for policy makers and programme providers in planning training programmes.

Agenda for further research

I have, throughout this thesis, made recommendations for further research in this field which would assist policy makers in the development of LLN training programmes, which could be appropriately contextualised and provide greater relevance to adult's day-to-day lives.

The link between LLN skills and economic development has been explored. I have argued that such a narrow focus has contributed to the breakdown of social networks on which this society has historically been constructed, leading to a new level of social fragility.

Further research should explore the role of LLN in the development of sustainable communities, based on community cohesion and social networks. Building on the methodological approach constructed for this thesis, comparison between communities could be explored.

A broader study focussing on the learning agenda for adults engaged in LLN learning and its role in the development of a cohesive society would add to the field.

Such studies would provide policy-makers and programme providers with invaluable information regarding models of programme delivery that effectively support the development of LLN skills.

Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that the *Skills for Life* strategy has been hugely instrumental in changing the field of adult LLN. The strategy has brought adult LLN out of the shadows and made it a central government cross-departmental agenda item.

Our society is changing and evolving; the demands and needs of our society also need to adapt to meet these demands.

What this thesis has shown is that adults need to be supported and motivated to develop their LLN skills to a level that will enable them live their lives more confidently and with more independence. This can be achieved by providing a choice of meaningful, useful and flexible training programmes that are not prefaced on a model of coercion.

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Appendix A

Agreement to Participate in Research Project

I confirm that I have read, or have had read to me, and understand, the information outlining the details of the research project being carried out by Anne O’Grady as part of a doctoral programme at the School of Education, University of Nottingham.

I confirm that I agree to participate in the research project through an interview to be conducted by Anne O’Grady and understand that my comments will be recorded, transcribed and interpreted to form the basis of her research project. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time should I wish to.

I understand that my identity will remain confidential to Anne O’Grady and I will not be identified by my own name in her report; instead I will be referred to by a code number that does not identify me in any way.

PARTICIPANT

NAME (Print)

SIGNATURE

DATE

Code Number.....

READER/WITNESS

NAME (Print)

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix B

Learner Interview Schedule

What do you think about your maths and English?

Please give me some examples of how you use your maths and English on a day-to-day basis?

Why did you start this training?

What other courses did you consider before choosing this one?

How long have you been attending training?

How often do you come?

What's it like to be here?

What sorts of activities do you undertake here?

What would you like to achieve by the end of the training?

What do you understand by the term "basic skills"?

What sorts of training have you done in the past?

What sorts of training/work would you like to do in the future?

Has doing this course made a difference to your life? How?

Prompts

Importance of qualifications

Employability

Range of learning opportunities

Measures of progression

Financial implications

Wider benefits/experiences

Work experiences

Motivations

Appendix C

Practitioner/Coordinator Interview Schedule

How do you define 'basic skills'?

How did you get involved in adult basic skills teaching?

What training have you had to undertake to be a basic skills teacher?

Who decides who attends your training programmes?

Are learners attending your courses voluntarily or non voluntarily?
How do you feel about this?

What's it like to be here?

What, specifically, do you teach?

How do you assess learners' levels of basic skills?

What do you consider to be the key factors for success?

What do you think are the main barriers, faced by learners, to achieving success? How might these be overcome?

What would you like to see learners achieve by the end of the training?

Where do learners go from here?

What effect have Government policies/strategies since 1997 had on your current role?

Prompts

Importance of qualifications

Employability

Range of learning opportunities

Measures of progression

Financial/funding implications

Wider benefits/experiences

Work experiences

Motivations

Continuous Professional Development

Appendix D

Background Data Collection Form

Age

20-29☐30-39☐40-49☐50-59☐60+☐

Gender

Male ☐Female☐

Ethnicity

White ☐Mixed ☐Indian ☐
Pakistani/Bangladeshi☐Black Caribbean☐Black African
☐Chinese☐

Institution

.....

Training
Programme

.....

Length of
Training Programme

.....

Length of time
On Programme

.....

Attendance
(hours/sessions
per week)

.....

Last training
Course attended

.....

Study Aim
(reason for attending)

.....

Occupation

.....

Employment
Status

Employed☐Unemployed ☐Self Employed☐
Unwaged ☐Retired☐

Relationship
Status

Single☐Separated/Divorce☐Married/Partner☐

No of Children

012345678910

Language
Spoken at

Home
Work
Learning

Basic Skills
Assessment

Instrument Used
Date Undertaken
Results

Appendix E

Information for Participants in Research Project

Reasons why I am undertaking the project

I am undertaking a research project that aims to collect information about the experiences of learners who are currently participating in Skills for Life training on a voluntary or non-voluntary basis.

I would like to find out about the reasons why learners participate in Skills for Life training and also how useful that training has been for them.

Why you have been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part in an interview for one of the following reasons.

- (a)** Because you are currently undertaking Skills for Life training.
- (b)** Because you are currently teaching/managing Skills for Life training.

What will happen to the information you share?

If you agree to participate in the project, you will be asked to give an interview (one-to-one) which will be tape-recorded. The tape will then be transcribed (typed-up). I will then use that information in writing my research project. It may be necessary for me (Anne O'Grady) to contact you again following the interview to clarify or confirm information discussed. The project, when completed, will be available to read. The project will form a doctoral thesis at the School of Education, University of Nottingham.

You will be asked to complete an "Agreement to Participate" form, which will ensure that your identity will remain confidential. You will be anonymous in the report.

You are free to leave the project at any time, if you decide you no longer wish to participate in the project.

Appendix F

Research Publications

Atkin, C., and O'Grady, A., (eds.) (2007) *Adult learning in Lincolnshire and Rutland: voices from practice*, The University of Nottingham: UNESCO Centre for Comparative Education Research

Atkin, C., O'Grady, A., and Rose, A., (2007) *Evaluation of the Skills for Life Materials for Embedded Learning*, London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Atkin, C. and O'Grady, A., (2006) 'Devaluing social networks in the race to compete' *The International Journal of Learning*, Vol. 13, No 6: 165-171

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O'Grady, A. and Atkin, C., (2006) 'Choosing to learn or chosen to learn: the experience of Skills for Life learners' *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol. 11, No. 3: 277 -287

O'Grady, A. and Atkin, C., (2005) 'Forced to learn or choosing to learn: Challenges and concerns for non-voluntary adult basic skills learners' *RaPAL Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Journal*, Vol. 58: 38-43

Appendix G

List of Acronyms used in this Thesis

BSA	Basic Skills Agency
BET	Basic Employability Training
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ICT	and Communication Technologies
LLN	Language, Literacy and Numeracy
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WBLA	Work Based Learning for Adults