

From A Right to Read to Access for All:

understanding the relationship
between adult literacy education and
education for people with learning
difficulties in England 1970–2010.

Judith Margaret Rose

UCL

Research Degree: Education, Practice and Society

Declaration page:

I, Judith Margaret Rose, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with general (non-specific) learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010. I use documentary sources, archival research and personal accounts to understand an unexamined history. The thesis evaluates events which shaped the relationship and investigates the changing thinking behind practice and policy. I base my analysis on a divide between 'rights'- and 'needs'-based philosophies. I conclude that a rights-based approach to adult literacy education offers all students (disabled or not) the freedom to take some control and to challenge preconceptions.

I utilise primary and secondary sources to confirm that people with learning difficulties were attending adult literacy education by the end of the 1970s. Conflicting approaches to the purpose of adult literacy education and the identity of students produced tensions throughout the period. For the people involved questions of 'rights' versus 'needs' were not well-defined, but the language used reveals contrasting narratives. A commitment to 'rights', empowerment and social justice motivated the campaign for adult literacy education in the 1970s. This spirit lived on in practice in a student-centred approach which was stressed by my interviewees. The agenda of empowerment matched the aspirations of disability activists. Self-advocacy through adult literacy education could empower students with learning difficulties.

The discourse of deficit, however, dominated public perception and government policy. It shifted the emphasis from social justice to individual deficit. The change in vocabulary from 'literacy' to 'basic skills' during the 1980s and 1990s was significant. Adult literacy education became an investment in up-skilling the workforce, funded through the vocational sector. A skills-based system focused on

employability disadvantaged people with learning difficulties. The advisory report *Freedom to Learn* (2000) recommended a comprehensive approach to adult literacy education in England, rejecting the vocational imperative to enable people with learning difficulties to access the new Skills-for-Life programme. Government funding, however, prioritised economic ends. People with learning difficulties were largely relegated to 'special' programmes based on perceived 'needs'.

Impact statement

This thesis is an historical investigation which explores a neglected aspect of adult education in England. It focuses on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, between 1970 and 2010. I use the term learning difficulties to mean the sort of congenital cognitive condition also known as ‘intellectual disabilities’ or ‘global developmental delay’. My study therefore foregrounds a community which does not usually feature in academic literature about adult education. I hope that more research into the area will follow. I contend that my work meets the criterion for ‘emancipatory research in the context of special educational needs’ which:

must seek to make a further contribution to our understanding and our ability to erode the various forces – economic, political and cultural – which continue to create and sustain disability at both the macro and micro levels (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007:15).

I identified a fundamental division between a ‘rights’- or a ‘needs’-based approach to adult literacy education, which was sharpened by considering the case of students with learning difficulties.

A narrative of empowerment based on rights was evident in the literature, and reinforced by my interviewees. It translated into student-centred practice such as a negotiated curriculum or language experience approach to adult literacy teaching. It gave students the dignity of choice and agency and it echoed the call for self-advocacy which motivated movements such as ‘People First’, run by people with learning difficulties, which appeared in England in 1984.

A ‘needs’-based approach reflected the discourse of deficit which dominated public perception and government policy in the field. It reinforced the ‘labelling’ of

students and depended on the assessment of 'needs' by professional staff. Disability rights activists emphasised how students internalise such labelling. Similarly, adult literacy students may learn 'appropriate' behaviour and conform to expected social 'norms'. It can be argued that the assessment of 'needs' and the use of pre-formatted 'individual learning plans' impose an agenda of 'social control' which 'labels' individuals and maintains conventional power relationships and established hierarchies.

The impact of my work challenges the assumption that a 'special' curriculum based on 'needs' is in the best interests of students with learning difficulties. I argue that student-centred adult literacy education based on a philosophy of empowerment can offer students with learning difficulties choice and agency and the potential to challenge prejudice and stereotypes about learning difficulties. I suggest that all adult literacy students benefit from a student-centred approach which acknowledges power relationships and gives students control of their learning. A binary 'special' versus 'mainstream' understanding of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties is at odds with the developing diversity of society.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Professor Sam Duncan and Professor Tom Woodin who have patiently supported and guided me throughout my work on this thesis. Sam bravely supported my application as a research student after many years outside the academic system and both have been endlessly helpful in clarifying my task and making sure that I got there in the end.

I am also grateful to all the participants whom I interviewed, anonymously or not. I would like to pay particular respect to Jane Mace and to Irene Schwab, both of whom passed away since I recorded their interviews, and both of whom I had known and admired professionally and personally for many years.

I would like to thank, too, the people who helped me to use the archives which I consulted, namely Barbara Sakarya at the Institute of Education, UCL, Ruth McLeod at London South Bank University and Liz Fawcett at Lancaster University. I very much appreciated the interest and support they offered.

Special thanks are due to my loving and supportive family. I would especially like to offer huge thanks to my daughter, Cecilia Rose, who read drafts and responded to my panicky phone calls with calm tact and practical suggestions. My husband Nicholas has lived with this study for a long time and been a constant and humorous listener to my thoughts, rants and musings along the way.

On being assessed

Not many people have written about the experience of being assessed, but poet Lemn Sissay wrote about how he felt after many years in the care system, facing yet another assessment: 'I knew that challenging them [the Authority] would incur their wrath ... The questions offended me so I answered them **my way** ...'

The psychologist called in by 'the Authority' after this reported that, 'The motivation for rejecting assessment is not intellectual but part of a growing (?) rejection of the 'care' concept (i.e. of other people making decisions for him).' (Lemn Sissay, 2019. *My Name is Why*, Canongate, Edinburgh, pp. 164–5)

From *A Right to Read* to *Access for All*: understanding the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970–2010.

Contents

Declaration page:	2
Abstract	3
Impact statement	5
Acknowledgements	7
On being assessed	8
Abbreviations	15
Introduction	17
Rationale and structure	17
Scope and Terminology	24
Chapter 1. Reviewing the Literature	35
Introduction	35
‘Rights’ versus ‘Needs’	39
The discourse of deficit	41
Questions of power, agency, identity and citizenship for people with learning difficulties in relation to adult literacy education policy and practice	47
Lifelong learning, vocational education and a ‘skills-based’ approach	55
Definitions of literacy, social practice versus functional skills	60
The social turn, social model of disability and social capital	63
Tensions for professional practitioners, inclusion versus ‘special’ education	69
Conclusions	81
Chapter 2. Methodology	83

Introduction	83
Overall approach.....	84
Stage One: Documentary research.....	89
Collecting the evidence.....	89
Analysing the data	91
Stage Two: Archive research.....	93
Collecting the evidence.....	93
Analysing the data	95
Stage Three: Interviews	96
Collecting the evidence.....	96
Analysis of the primary data	106
Stage Four: From data collection to presentation	107
Ethics	108
Chapter 3. The 1970s – Throwing out the ‘Ladybirds’	111
Introduction	111
The international and intellectual context.....	116
Legislation, government policy and official reports.....	120
The role of the agencies	127
The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice	152
Summary.....	164
Chapter 4. The 1980s – Working it out practically, politically and theoretically	169

Introduction	169
The international and intellectual context.....	175
Legislation, government policy and official reports.....	181
The role of the agencies	186
The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice	208
Training, professionalisation and questions of care versus education	208
Managing and developing provision	217
Summary.....	231
Chapter 5. The 1990s: a sort of merger	238
Introduction	238
The international and intellectual context.....	242
Legislation, government policy and official reports.....	246
The role of the agencies	266
The relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties in practice	277
Summary.....	290
Chapter 6. The 2000s: Whose literacy is it anyway?.....	295
Introduction	295
The international and intellectual context.....	299
Legislation, government policy and official reports.....	303
The role of the agencies	325

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice	338
Summary.....	345
Chapter 7. Final Conclusions	348
Introduction and explanation	348
Summary and analysis of findings	352
Implications	373
References.....	376
Appendix 1	401
Adult Literacy Education/Students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities Timeline	
1970–2009	401
Appendix 2	403
Pen portraits of individual interviewees, December 2017.	403
Appendix 3	407
Schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992	407
Appendix 4	408
Who Pays? Table of shared costs of adult education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, Educare, March 1994	408

Abbreviations

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ABSSU	Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit
AEI	Adult Education Institute
ALBSU	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
ALLN	Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy
ALRA	Adult Literacy Resource Agency
ALU	Adult Literacy Unit
ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
ATC	Adult Training Centre
BAS	British Association of Settlements
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
BSAI	Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative
BSQI	Basic Skills Quality Initiative
DES	Department of Education and Science (1964-1992)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (1995-2001)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-2007)
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007-2009)
DoH	Department of Health
ESN	Educationally Sub-Normal
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FEU	Further Education Unit
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
ILP	Individual Learning Plan

LEA	Local Education Authority
LLU	Language and Literacy Unit
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSRC	Learning and Skills Research Centre
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OCN	Open College Network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMLD	Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
RaPAL	Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (now Literacies)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties
SLDD	Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Introduction

Rationale and structure

This study explores the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010. The period covers important developments in both fields, and my investigation reveals a close but tense relationship which changed over time. There have been no studies of this subject, although it was a concern for the people involved throughout the period. My review of the relevant literature considers reasons for this silence. My investigation sets out the events which have shaped the relationship and analyses the thinking behind them.

At the beginning of the period adult literacy education was not an established part of the education system (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). Adult education for people with learning difficulties hardly existed (Sutcliffe, 1990). Forty years later Sam Duncan identified the continuing gaps in the research: 'If adult literacy teaching is an under-researched field, teaching literacy to adults with global learning difficulties is a **very** under-researched field [her emphasis] (Duncan, 2010: 331). My work responds in part to that challenge. I track how two evolving strains of adult education in England struggled to build legitimacy and identity, and to work out their relationship practically, theoretically and politically over four decades. One reason for my study is to foreground the significance of hidden cohorts of students. A focus on students with learning difficulties throws new light on the history of adult literacy education. Staff and students in this area have often been invisible. My research enables some of those involved to record their experiences of a neglected history and to consider the questions raised. I analyse the changes in the relationship. I argue that an initial emphasis on rights and empowerment in adult literacy education was undermined by

a growing commitment to basic skills in the context of vocational education and employability. As a result, I contend, a place where people with learning difficulties could challenge educational and social stereotypes and stigma disappeared. This argument runs through my thesis. By concentrating on how adult literacy education related to people with learning difficulties I highlight the distinction between a 'needs'-based and a 'rights'-based approach. My analysis of the factors involved in shaping the relationship shows how the 'vocationalisation' of adult literacy education created a two-tier system which relegated students with learning difficulties to 'special' programmes depending on identity and the assessment of 'needs', despite a rhetoric of inclusion. The evidence reflects an enduring tension in adult literacy education as the increasing emphasis on vocational aims and a more formal approach conflicted with the arguments for a curriculum which focused on citizenship, empowerment and choice for all students.

My review of the literature pertinent to the subject of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010 demonstrates that the factors involved in shaping the relationship were embedded in social attitudes and assumptions. Few authors concentrate on the area, but significant themes and discussions can be identified. The literature shows how language and prevalent discourses coloured the relationship. The discourse of deficit was a strong influence in the fields of disability (Oliver, 1990) and of adult literacy education (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011). I suggest that it is linked to the concept of stigma, which is a theme of this investigation. I understand stigma as a mark of shame or blame attached by society to individuals or to groups. A particular historical event which occurred in the middle of the period I examine illustrates my interpretation. In 1994, the Spastics Society renamed itself as

Scope. There was a growing awareness that the word 'spastic' had become a common playground insult, representing stigma. The word 'scope' re-formulated the mission of the charity by using an abstract term with positive associations. The charity rejected the discourse of deficit and replaced it with a bold suggestion that disability could be reimagined (Rye, 2001). Campaigners in the 1970s and 1980s were anxious to distinguish adult literacy education from contemporary 'remedial' or 'special' provision, partly because of the fear of stigma which might taint the public perception of adult literacy education. Writers commenting on special education draw attention to the impact of 'labelling' (Corbett, 1996). They describe how the process of assessment of needs disempowers students and how people can internalise stigma (Oliver, 2013). My investigation follows the twists and turns of questions of language, politics and social attitudes which characterised a relationship which had the potential to challenge stigma, but was subject to conflicting pressures.

The ideology and discourse of empowerment based on a concept of human rights was also a powerful factor in adult literacy education and in the education of people with learning difficulties. It reflected the approach to adult education articulated by UNESCO (1949). Most adult literacy education practitioners I interviewed emphasised their commitment to the empowerment and agency of students. These values underpinned a student-centred approach which could support access for students with learning difficulties to adult literacy education. Jeannie Sutcliffe (1990; 1994) argued that self-advocacy should be central to the purpose and practice of adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties. But this narrative conflicted with dominant public perceptions and policy built on notions of individual deficit. Successive governments stressed the economic benefits of adult literacy education. From this perspective individuals who were seen to be a

burden on the state and not contributing to economic wealth were relegated to second-class status (Coffield, 1999; Hamilton, 1998, 2005; Martin, 2003). The language of the government initiative Skills-for-Life (2001) emphasised the 'diagnosis' of 'needs' in adult literacy education. It echoed the discourse of deficit, constructing a rationale which put the responsibility on the individual to address their 'need' for improved 'basic skills'. The tension between an agenda of empowerment and a philosophy of individual 'needs' was a constant feature of the relationship. It involved questions of power and agency which were important to debates about the aims of adult literacy education and the identity of students. These are themes which are pursued in my investigation.

I use a chronological framework of relevant legislation and government initiatives to structure my research findings. An approximate ten-year pattern emerges from my analysis. The four decades 1970–2010 provide a useful mechanism for exploring the changing scene and looking at the implications of government thinking at the time. I divide my research into four chapters each covering about ten years. Chapter Three, *Throwing out the 'Ladybirds'*, covers the 1970s. I start with the 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act, which articulated a new ethos because it stated that all children were entitled to education regardless of their disability. The 1970s also showed how thinking in areas such as feminism and civil rights developed, raising questions about the marginalisation of groups and inclusion for all. The decade saw the successful campaign to establish a national adult literacy programme and the contemporaneous creation of the vocationally-oriented Manpower Services Commission (MSC). These opposing currents created enduring tensions which are evident in exploring the evolving relationship. Chapter Four, *Working it out*, examines the complex picture in the 1980s, as practitioners in

England worked out policy and practice. The innovative Special Educational Needs Act of 1981 marked a new era when it introduced integration and the language of 'special educational needs' into education policy and practice. Adult education was not a political priority in the 1980s but the 1988 Education Reform Act signalled the government's educational direction. The 1990s saw huge change initiated by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Chapter Five, *A sort of merger*, concentrates on the impact of the new regime. This legislation reinforced the vocational imperative and removed adult literacy education from Local Education Authority (LEA) control. It made the new Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) responsible for both adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. The relationship under discussion was explicitly addressed at policy level for the first time. Almost ten years later the Learning and Skills Act (2000) and launch of Skills-for-Life (2001) marked another new beginning in policy and practice in the field. Chapter Six, *Whose literacy is it anyway?* studies the Skills-for-Life decade, 2001-10. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was positively addressed by the advisory report *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000). But the narrative of 'basic skills' effectively dominated adult literacy education. After the Leitch report, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy* (2006), set the agenda for 'world class skills', policy and practice could not accommodate an inclusive approach to education for people with learning difficulties. By 2010 New Labour had been replaced and the incoming Coalition Government discontinued Skills-for-Life. In another indication of government priorities the DoH closed the Valuing Employment initiative for adults with learning difficulties in 2011, switching all resources to work

with younger people. 2010 provided a sensible end point for this study because it marked an end of the relationship in various ways.

The chronological framework allows me to consider the contemporary context. Each chapter covering a ten-year period is subdivided into sections. The sections reflect a multi-layered approach and provide some continuity, as the headings are the same for each time period. The structure pins the analysis down to historical time and enables the reader to discern growing trends, enduring tensions and new thinking over a longer period. A mosaic of documentary and first-hand evidence allows me to see connections and to build arguments which tie the thesis together. I am concerned throughout my investigation to discover the underlying factors which shape the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. I examine, for instance, how theoretical thinking on disability rights translated in the 1980s and 1990s into calls for integration, and then inclusion, in education. At the same time adult literacy education in England moved into the vocational sector, framed as part of employment training, and the trend made it more difficult to justify the cost of flexible provision which accommodated students with learning difficulties. In each chapter I look at the international background and contemporary intellectual developments, noting thinking about disability and about adult literacy. A second section concentrates on legislation, government initiatives and 'official' reports which were specific to England. I look then at the impact and activities of the national agencies tasked with promoting and administering adult literacy education in England. These bodies were particularly important when government policy was lacking. The final section concentrates on the practical effect of the relationship on adult literacy education at the time. Each chapter has a different character, depending on the contemporary scene, but each is analysed to

draw out the factors significant to shaping the continuing relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. The structure allows me to judge the comparative influence of the factors I discern. I evaluate the evidence to identify the forces of change, even if they were largely unrecognised and little discussed at the time. The thesis shows how the impetus shifted between non-government agencies, practitioners and government during the period. The moves led to constant tensions and uncertainty for those involved, as various influences came into play. My findings reveal how the development of a curriculum focused on employability during the period closed down the opportunities for empowerment and self-advocacy which adult literacy education could offer to people with learning difficulties. My approach is not 'present-oriented' in the sense that its main justification is in its application to the current situation, but it reflects the view that a crucial argument for historical research is to understand how 'the structure and taken-for-granted assumptions' of today developed historically (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000:5).

This investigation reveals how assumptions about the need for a 'special' adult literacy curriculum for people with learning difficulties took shape, although this was not necessarily a planned outcome. The chapter devoted to the 1970s explores dilemmas faced by pioneers of adult literacy education as they fought to distinguish the new field from literacy education for children and the existing remedial system. Their ethos was rights-based and focused on adult-oriented teaching and materials. The 1980s chapter studies the complexities of the relationship as adult literacy education moved into the established education system and struggled to maintain a student-centred focus which could support students with learning difficulties. The chapter looks closely at the work of the then national agency, the Adult Literacy and

Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU). The tensions in the shifting relationship are evident in the memories of practitioners and in contemporary documents. In the 1990s the government moved to take control, and my research centres on the impact of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) on the relationship. I argue that decisions taken for administrative reasons had real effects in narrowing opportunities and perspectives in policy and practice. The heavily monitored Further Education (FE) system was predicated on a vocational/school model which assumed that people with learning difficulties followed a 'special' route. In theory the 2000s offered new possibilities. My analysis of the *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000) report produced alongside the Skills-for-Life initiative shows that the paper was based on a call for universal access to adult literacy education, which sought to bring together ideas of 'rights' and 'needs' for students with learning difficulties. Actually, the government's growing commitment to a skills-based interpretation of adult literacy and outcome-related funding reinforced the discourse of deficit during the 2000s. Adult literacy education which embraced an ideology of empowerment for people with learning difficulties and challenged the 'status quo' was incompatible with the new agenda of 'functional skills'.

Scope and Terminology

These developments worked with a malleable set of concepts and terminology which shifted over time. This section outlines some of those shifts and sets out the scope of my investigation. It clarifies terminology and definitions as I have used them in this study. I examine questions of vocabulary and of location and provide a background to the research chapters below.

My investigation is focused on England. The scope of the study, however, includes international and intellectual trends. Adult literacy education had an important international dimension which affected thinking in England. UNESCO publications set parameters and established vocabulary in the field. People thinking and writing about disability and about adult literacy education were aware of developments abroad. RaPAL (then Research and Practice in Adult Literacy, now Research and Practice in Adult Literacies) was founded in England (1984) but drew upon international research and practice, which helped writers such as David Barton (2007/1994) to challenge English practice and policy. Meanwhile government policy after 1997 was influenced by the thinking of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which emphasised economic aims and objectives. My evidence includes references to research accomplished in Scotland (Riddell et al., 2001; Tett, 2010) partly because the Scottish government followed different principles in developing an adult literacy programme, and work with students with learning difficulties at this time had a higher profile than in England. UNESCO reports addressed questions around disability and learning difficulties too (*Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons*, 1971; *Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education*, 1994), but contemporary UK authors on disability (Barnes, 2005 Thomas, 2013) and my interviewees, looked more to the USA and the development of civil rights as a source of authority.

Language is a sensitive consideration. I use the term 'learning difficulties' rather than 'learning disabilities' because most educationalists employ it. The distinction is explored below. I refer generally to 'students' instead of 'learners' and use the term 'student-centred' throughout. Both 'adult literacy' and 'learning difficulties' are contested terms which can be interpreted in various ways. Their

meanings have shifted over time and vary according to the perspective of the group or individual who makes the interpretation. They are not neutral terms but carry complex associations. Issues around terminology can present a barrier to probing the history of the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties. One aspect is the anxiety people feel about getting the language 'wrong', as what is 'acceptable' changes, particularly in relation to disability. Simplified views which are current in media presentations also make it difficult to challenge the dominant discourse in the public perception of areas such as literacy. For example, one experienced literacy practitioner, having read the report of a parliamentary committee reviewing Skills-for-Life, warned me of the 'simplistic' view that MPs held of 'teaching English' (GH, 2017). At the same time examination of linguistic shifts and conventions reveals resonances which are important to the analysis. The discourse of deficit and the rise of the term 'skills' in place of 'literacy' are both significant factors in revealing underlying assumptions.

The term 'adult literacy education' is not uncomplicated. This section provides a brief introductory description of 'adult literacy education' in the period 1970–2010. In this study 'adult' means anybody over the age of 16, although historical changes should be noted. For most of the period 1970–2010, 16 was the end of compulsory schooling, although many pupils with learning difficulties stayed in school until 18, sometimes attending Further Education colleges for vocational training as part of their course. Adults attending classes in the 1970s and 1980s could have left school at 14 or 15 years of age. My study covers provision in community settings such as Adult Education Centres, as well as in FE colleges and special sites such as hospitals or day centres.

Learning to read was initially seen as the fundamental aim of adult literacy education, and this perception was still current when the MPs mentioned above reviewed the Skills-for-Life programme in the 2000s. My investigation concentrates on literacy as 'reading and writing' written text, which was the main focus of adult literacy education throughout the period. Structural arrangements varied according to political priorities and the funding available. Adults attending literacy provision were not usually full-time students. The pattern of provision at the university settlements, where the adult literacy campaign started in the 1970s, depended on volunteer tutors working one-to-one with individual students, for an hour or two per week. Local Authority (LEA) adult education moved to offer two- or three-hour sessions once or twice a week. LEAs gradually introduced group teaching, but one-to-one tuition and the use of volunteers persisted into the 1980s. Annual enrolment might be alongside fee-paying pottery or keep-fit courses but subsidy made literacy provision free to students. Practitioners remembered that each potential literacy student would be individually interviewed before starting their course. By the 1990s FE colleges might include literacy and numeracy within a full-time vocationally oriented course, targeting 16–19-year-old students. Literacy teaching was inserted into work-based courses developed during the period by private training agencies. The idea of 'literacy support' or 'embedded' literacy which could add a contextualised literacy element and additional certification to vocational training was also introduced during the 1990s. Another development was 'Learning Centres' providing generic support, often in computer form, which students could access at a time to suit themselves. Such support was not necessarily provided by literacy specialists. A range of volunteer and teacher training packages reflected the growth of adult literacy

education, but there was no standard qualification required for adult literacy teachers until the advent of Skills-for-Life in 2001.

I introduce here a brief explanation of the terminology of adult literacy education at the time because it affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. In England the vocabulary of adult literacy education shifted from 'adult literacy' to 'basic skills' and then to 'functional skills' in the period 1970–2010. I focus on the use of the word 'skills'. It is another term with complicated connotations. A skills-based approach works on the assumption that reading and writing skills can be learned as free-standing skills in a standardised system, independent of context or social hierarchies. A UNESCO report on *Understandings of Literacy* in 2006 clarified the common perception:

The most common understanding of literacy is that it is a set of tangible skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing – that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them (UNESCO, 2006:149).

The work of Brian Street and others, who developed the theory of literacy as social practice, argued that literacy was not a set of 'autonomous skills' which could be learned or taught free of context (Street,2006/1984). He contended that literacy was always 'ideologically' based, and subject to issues of power and social setting. This understanding was explored by academics and developed by writers and researchers in England under the auspices of the independent body, RaPAL, but was never fully adopted by the government or in the public perception. Governments increasingly embraced the language of 'skills' and consolidated an approach which put individual deficit and economic benefit at the centre of policy thinking. In 2001, Secretary of State David Blunkett launched the Skills-for-Life strategy saying:

'Tackling the basic skills problem is now one of the government's key priorities' (Blunkett, 2001:9). Adult literacy provision became part of an agenda dedicated to 'up-skilling' the work force to meet economic objectives.

I approached the vexed question of language and 'naming' in the field of learning difficulties with care. In the context of this investigation the crucial element of the definition of 'learning difficulties' is how the terminology related to an educational context. Stigma has coloured the views of students, practitioners and fundholders, and inhibited research. It is one reason why terminology shifts over time and distance. In England the 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act removed the concept of the 'ineducable child' from legislation. Attitudes did not change overnight but in retrospect the new approach can be seen as a major step in the development of education for people with learning difficulties. Sally Tomlinson listed special education categories in England 1913–2010. Her chart demonstrates that labels change but have mostly negative associations. The term 'idiot' used in 1913 has become 'severe learning difficulty' (SLD) or 'profound and multiple learning difficulty' (PMLD) in 2010, while 'mental defective' is now 'moderate learning difficulty' (MLD) (Tomlinson, 2014:59).

The term 'special educational needs', introduced by the Warnock Report (1978), represented an advance in thinking about the education of people with learning difficulties or disabilities. It was a revolutionary change in terminology and philosophy partly driven by a desire to address attitudes and stigma around disability. It also reformulated ideas about funding. The recommendations of the report, largely adopted in the 1981 (Special Educational Needs) Education Act, were intended to emphasise an educational focus. This approach changed attitudes over time and affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for

people with learning difficulties as adult students with learning difficulties looked for educational opportunities.

'Special educational needs' (SEN) was a concept mainly pertaining to school provision, and it covered a wide range including emotional issues as well as physical disabilities, which might affect a child's ability to learn. Funding for support often depended on assessment of needs by an educational psychologist. The outcome was that at any one time about 20 per cent of the school population were judged to have special educational needs which could entitle them to additional support. The 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act and the 2000 Learning and Skills Act adopted the same principle, and used the 1981 definition of 'learning difficulties' as when 'a person ... has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his [sic] age' (Section 4 (6–7) FHE Act, 1992). The definition is relative and clearly open to debate. In spelling out the procedures for additional support in FE and Adult and Community Education after the FHE Act, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) introduced the acronym SLDD, Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, which had a narrower application than the school SEN, making no provision for temporary emotional or behavioural problems which might affect learning. The FEFC approach was closely tied to systems for assessment and the provision of support.

Meanwhile the Department of Health (DoH) introduced a definition of 'learning disability' in 2001, which has become the accepted usage in all health and social care operations. They too use a relative definition, and also reflect social implications, stating that a 'learning disability' includes the presence of:

A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence) with reduced ability to cope

independently (impaired social functioning) which started before adulthood (DoH, 2001).

There is a distinction between educational terminology and that employed by health and social care agencies, particularly in respect of adults. In a 2010 paper *A Working Definition of Learning Disabilities*, produced by the DoH, the authors point out that, ‘Many people with learning disabilities prefer to use the term “learning difficulty”’ (Emerson & Heslop, 2010:1). This is one reason why I have used the epithet in this study. They go on to explain that the SEN codes of ‘moderate learning difficulty’, ‘severe learning difficulty’ and ‘profound multiple learning difficulty’ all refer to ‘generalised learning difficulty’ and can be considered ‘interchangeable with the adult health and social care term “learning disability”’ (ibid.). But they also clarify that it is only the UK which uses ‘learning disability’ in this way, and that many other countries (eg USA, Canada, Australia) use the term ‘intellectual disability’ (ibid.).

The 2015 ICD (International Classification of Diseases) finally dropped the term ‘mental retardation’ and replaced it with ‘intellectual disability’, defined as:

A condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind, which is especially characterised by impairment of skills manifested during the developmental period, which contribute to the overall level of intelligence, ie cognitive, language, motor and social abilities (quoted in *Formal Definitions of Learning Disability* n.d. The Challenging Behaviour Foundation.
www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk)

This updated definition stresses less absolute developmental issues. The language is still shifting, and I observe that the use of ‘learning disability’ has become more widespread in England (eg BBC usage) in place of ‘learning difficulty’ over the decade 2010–2020.

A particular confusion arises because ‘learning difficulty’ is also used in the UK to cover specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. My study is not concerned

with specific learning difficulties, although I recognise that people with a general learning difficulty might also have a specific learning difficulty. Dee and co-researchers in their LSRC (Learning and Skills Research Centre) report, *Being, Having and Doing* (Dee et al., 2006) similarly included in their review work on learners with particular developmental problems such as Down's Syndrome, but excluded studies focusing on specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (Dee et al., 2006:11). I adopt the same approach. Duncan in 2010 used the phrase 'global learning difficulties' to distinguish the students she was focusing on from adult learners with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (Duncan, 2010).

Another complication is the vocabulary used to categorise different levels of learning difficulty. The distinctions and gradations which label people with learning difficulties have become more defined over the forty years covered in this investigation. The process has been driven mainly by the need to target funding, as far as education is concerned. Practitioners remembering the 1970s confirmed that there were students in adult literacy education who had a 'cognitive' difficulty, but no diagnosis. In the 1980s, Alan Wells, Director of ALBSU, wanted to ensure that the public recognised that adult literacy education was not intended to focus on people with special educational needs or learning difficulties. At the same time provision for adults with learning difficulties was beginning to be provided through FE and adult- and community-based classes, so both areas sought to demarcate and identify different markets, and to earmark separate funding. In 1984 the Further Education Unit (FEU), illustrating the questions surrounding terminology, produced *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty eds. 1984), stating that it was 'a collection of papers concerned with post-school provision in the education sector for mentally handicapped young people and adults, ie those with severe learning difficulties'

(Mansell, 1984: introductory letter). The publication used school categories which related to the impact of the 1981 Education Act and the introduction of the codes for 'special educational needs'. The terminology related to funding streams. Using the phrase 'severe learning difficulties' established the basis for specific targeted provision in post-school education. In schools and in colleges the distinction between 'severe' and 'moderate' learning difficulties was often observed, although the FEFC inspections and funding system did not distinguish in this way. Commentators agree that the term 'moderate learning difficulties' was impossible to define accurately. Dee et al. point out that in FE the definition of learning difficulties depended on self-identification (Dee et al., 2006:8) and Brahm Norwich quotes 2003 guidance to schools providing a mixed range of criteria for 'moderate learning difficulties' (MLD), including greater difficulty in literacy and numeracy acquisition, possible speech and language delay, low self-esteem, poor social skills and lack of concentration (Norwich, 2004:6). The advice included the instruction to teachers not to record pupils as MLD if they were not receiving extra support. The issue of resources was as much a defining factor as other possible barriers to learning.

The radical paper *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000) represented an effort to marry the principles of 'rights' and 'needs' in discussing the access of people with learning difficulties to adult literacy education. It also sought to separate the basic skills agenda from the vocational imperative. The report was unequivocal in extending the remit of adult literacy education to all potential students. It advocated a position nearer to 'inclusion' than to 'integration' as articulated by the Warnock Report (1978). The recommendations included:

Developing and extending the basic skills curriculum to meet the needs of those adults who communicate in non-standard ways and for whom the

proposed standards are too high (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Working Group, 2000:4).

At the same time the authors of the advisory document suggested that students should be assessed individually to ensure that support was tailored to need. In theory addressing the individual needs of students may not be controversial, but in practice the evidence of my reading and of my witnesses suggests that assessment confirms the isolation and powerlessness of students, and limits their agency and control.

The questions of terminology in the relationship between adult literacy education and the education for people with learning difficulties are complicated and dynamic. This helps to explain why the issues raised by this study have not been fully explored before. It also exposes some of the common factors which have faced people working in the field of adult literacy education and in adult education for people with learning difficulties. I suggest too that the issues of terminology are located more in social attitudes, political priorities and public understanding than in educational debate.

Chapter 1. Reviewing the Literature

Introduction

In this review of the relevant literature I map the field for my exploration of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010. I identify themes, formulate questions and set up 'signposts' for my research. The headings of sections I use in the review below indicate themes which inform my thesis and my understanding. No specific body of literature, however, focuses on the subject. My investigation reads between the lines to track down connections and establish a meaningful context and direction for my research. My reading clarifies the issues and reflects the wider implications.

Looking back to the 1970s from the 2000s, in the introduction to their 'critical history' of adult literacy, language and numeracy education in England, Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier suggest that readers might take away:

A sense that many of the issues we grapple with in the field are not temporary or inexplicable peculiarities of a misguided policy process, or the fault of individual personalities or of one organisation. They are more enduring tensions that have to be managed (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:xiii).

I use the concept of 'enduring tensions' to structure this review of the literature relevant to my study of the shifting relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970–2010. The tensions were not always explicit, but they had real effects. They were multi-layered and difficult to unpick, as Hamilton and Hillier imply. In this review I explore debates about the 'rights' versus the 'needs' of students in the context of adult literacy education, the purpose of adult education in terms of prioritising 'citizenship' or

employment-related 'skills', and discussion of a 'special' curriculum as opposed to an 'inclusive' approach in adult literacy work. The implications of the 'discourse of deficit' and different definitions of literacy are also discussed. I consider initially the 'silence' in the literature and explore the reasons behind it.

The lack of studies into work with adults with learning difficulties in the literature of adult literacy education is striking because it was an issue of concern for practitioners at all levels in adult literacy education throughout the period under investigation. The subject may be not only neglected but positively avoided in writing related to adult literacy education. Hamilton and Hillier hint at a reason for the lack of discussion when they review the adult literacy education scene in the 1980s. 'Students with disabilities and learning difficulties were sidelined in the effort to show ALLN (adult literacy language and numeracy) learners as "normal" people,' they say (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:46).

Stigma is an issue affecting both the people involved and research into learning difficulties. Neither the people nor work devoted to them have high status. Jan Walmsley, a specialist in the study of work with people with learning difficulties, underlines this position. She wrote: 'The study of mental handicap has historically been segregated, like people with learning difficulties themselves,' (Walmsley, 1991: 220). Walmsley suggests that the social stigma attached to people with learning difficulties creates a barrier which prevents research in the field reaching a wider public. My findings confirm that adult literacy practitioners did not read research on 'learning difficulties' (other than specific conditions such as dyslexia) during the period I review. I conclude that the fear that adult literacy education might be confused with 'remedial' or 'special' provision voiced by 1970s campaigners

continued to be a concern, and that adult literacy teachers were anxious not to slip into the 'special' category.

Specific writing on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for students with learning difficulties is almost entirely couched in terms of practical guidance for teachers. It is construed as a classroom issue and not a subject for academic research. The work of Jeannie Sutcliffe is an example. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) published Sutcliffe's *Adults with Learning Difficulties: Education for Choice and Empowerment* in 1990 and *Teaching Basic Skills to Adults with Learning Difficulties* in 1994. She is a pioneer and important thinker in the field. Her writings are informed by a strong commitment to a philosophy of student self-advocacy, but they are designed and presented as surveys of good practice for teachers to learn from, not as analytical or critical studies. In terms of adult literacy education the area is almost invisible as a research topic. *A Review of Research on Adult Basic Skills*, commissioned at the launch of the major Skills-for-Life strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy education in England, reported that, 'Very little is known about adults with special educational needs in basic skills provision' (Brooks et al., 2001:4). It highlighted the area as a 'gap in the existing knowledge':

Adults with special educational needs and poor basic skills may well be the hardest to reach and the most difficult to serve. But they are also the group about whom least is publicly known, in terms of their presence both in the population as a whole and in current provision, and of how teaching and assessment are adapted for them (Brooks et al., 2001:152).

The lack of literature is matched by an absence of policy. There was no government direction steering the relationship until legislation established first the FEFC in 1992 and then the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Skills-for-Life apparatus in 2001,

so it was left to the central agencies, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) 1979–1995 and Basic Skills Agency (BSA) 1995–2007, to speak ‘officially’ for adult literacy education in England (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). The situation changed in the 2000s, when adult literacy and numeracy education for adults became a policy field. The government wanted data and results. The National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), comprising a group of adult education agencies and universities across England, was created as part of the Skills-for-Life initiative, and for about ten years from 2003 produced many researched reports, as well as practitioner guides and a journal. NRDC research incorporated work with students with learning difficulties as a part of basic skills provision both specifically (eg Jones, 2007) and generically (eg Kelly et al., 2004). Meanwhile from 1984 RaPAL and the development of international New Literacy Studies (NLS), provided a platform for independent research and publication in adult literacy studies, sometimes specifically including work with students with learning difficulties (Herrington & Kendall, eds., 2005).

I draw also from the literature of the disability rights movement and writing relating to education and inclusion for people with learning difficulties. Material concentrating on adult education in this area is scarce; learning difficulties are largely considered as a school issue, with writings targeting teachers or parents and carers. Because of the lack of research into adult education in the area, I refer to school-age studies which consider subjects such as assessment of need, where the principle applies to people with disabilities of all ages (eg Oliver, 1996; Withers & Lee, 1988; Barton, 2003).

The sociologist Sally Tomlinson (1985, 2005, 2014) is unusual in giving attention to 'special education' at all stages, including further and adult education. Tomlinson is a notable authority and commentator as she is one of a few authors who studied and wrote about issues relevant to the topic over several years (eg *The Expansion of Special Education*, 1985; *The Politics of Race, Class and Special Education*, 2014). Others are Mary Hamilton, offering a penetrating overview and analysis of adult literacy education history in England (e.g. *The Changing Face of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy*, 2006, and many other titles, often with co-authors), Jane Mace, practitioner, writer and researcher in adult literacy from the 1970s to the 2000s (eg *Talking About Literacy*, 1992; *Playing with Time*, 2003) and Mike Oliver, sociologist and disability activist (eg *Social Policy and Disability*, 1986; *The Social Model of Disability 30 Years On*, 2013). Their writings contribute long-term perspectives. The long-lasting discourses of deficit and of functionality and the opposing agenda of empowerment and self-advocacy which emerge as dominant themes in my reading are analysed in their work.

'Rights' versus 'Needs'

Throughout the period 1970–2010 the question of whether the 'rights' or 'needs' of students of adult literacy were paramount was contentious, although not necessarily openly discussed. The issue appears in various guises, and it is particularly relevant to the position of adult students with learning difficulties. I contend that the controversy is located in social history as much as within education. My view draws upon the observations of the cultural and social historian Raymond Williams. He reflects that whereas the meaning of being 'literate' had developed from how an individual related to 'letters' or 'literature', now 'literacy and illiteracy have become

key social concepts', (Williams, 1983:188). The concept of illiteracy carried a stigma which was exploited by the campaign for adult literacy education in the title of their launch conference in November 1973, *Status Illiterate: Prospects Zero*. The 1974 manifesto of the campaign was, however, entitled *A Right to Read* (British Association of Settlements, 1974). It was presented as a rallying cry, suggesting that government should fund adult literacy education as a 'right' and matter of social justice.

The Right to Read campaign was not just concerned with education but also with power and participation. An ambivalence was inherent in the thinking of the adult literacy campaign. It set out to champion the rights of people who would benefit from adult literacy education but it actually voiced the ideas of the campaign leaders who took it upon themselves to represent those people and what they might 'need'. *A Right to Read* expressly excluded people with learning difficulties, 'the educationally sub-normal' and 'mentally defective', from their demand for adult literacy education (British Association of Settlements, 1974:11). In retrospect we perceive the contradiction and prejudice demonstrated in the document. The 'needs-meeting' philosophy behind the manifesto was explored by contemporary commentators. In 1982 Paul F. Armstrong published an article analysing the 'rationality and ideological nature of the idea of "meeting needs" within the liberal adult education tradition' (Armstrong, 1982:293). He asserted that 'it is what the adult educator considers important and necessary that provides the basis for the ascription of "need" (Armstrong, 1982:296), and he refers to the contemporary growth in 'basic education courses for adults' as an example of the phenomenon. He does not mention the barriers for people with learning difficulties but points out that there is often a class element involved, with the middle-class educator taking a view

on the 'needs' of the working-class student. The revolutionary theories of Ivan Illich contributed to Armstrong's analysis, in particular *Disabling Professions* (Illich, 1977), where Illich argues that it is in the interest of professionals in careers such as 'health' and 'care' to demonstrate and define the 'needs' of their clients.

Writing as a practitioner and researcher in adult literacy education, Mace agreed with Armstrong's conclusions about the conflicted nature of the 1970s adult literacy campaign, but suggested that by the 1980s 'we can confidently shed all talk of "needs"' (Mace, 1992:53). This did not happen. The 2001 government document launching the Skills-for-Life 'national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills' spoke of 'the 7 million adults in England with literacy and numeracy needs' (DfEE, 2001:11). The 'discourse of deficit' demonstrated here runs through the narrative behind adult literacy education in England, and that of education for people with learning difficulties.

The discourse of deficit

I define the 'discourse of deficit' as the use and normalisation of language which belittles and 'others' individuals or communities. The discourse of deficit makes a powerful link between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties because it underlies beliefs, decisions and actions in the field, as well as in the public perception. It was challenged by some adult literacy education practitioners, but it was present in the idea that volunteer tutors could 'help' students to address their literacy 'needs' (Mace, 1992). It had a strong hold. Considering the power of discourses to control thought in the context of social and educational policy Stephen J. Ball suggests that:

Policies exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' as discourses. Discourses embody meaning ... Thus, certain possibilities of

thought are constructed ... We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us (Ball, 2006:48).

Ball's analysis clarifies how discourse exerts influence by setting the patterns and parameters of thinking. His explanation shows how the discourse of deficit exemplified in the *Skills-for-Life* and other public documents legitimised the dominant narrative of 'literacy needs'. It also highlights the importance of language, vocabulary and terminology. Using the detailed technique of discourse analysis Mary Hamilton and Kathy Pitt compared the 1970s adult literacy manifesto *A Right to Read* to the government's Skills-for-Life 2001 strategy document and found a 'pervasive deficit discourse' running through both texts (Hamilton & Pitt, 2011). Their findings show that the idea of 'individual deficit' was articulated by the campaign for a Right to Read despite the rhetoric of 'rights'. Hamilton and Pitt's use of the word 'individual' is significant. The discourse of deficit dismisses the idea that such disadvantage might be systemic and puts the focus on the individual.

A feature of my study is the parallels that appear between developments in thinking in the fields of adult literacy and of disability rights, and of the dynamic between them. Mike Oliver wrote as a disability activist and an academic. In 1983 he published *Social Work with Disabled People* in which he challenged the conventional thinking of professionals involved in working with people with disabilities (Oliver, 1983). He identified the dominant approach as a model based on 'individual deficit', and proposed an alternative 'social model' (ibid.). His idea was based on the premise that it was the barriers erected by society which disabled people, not the intrinsic 'impairment' of disability.

Oliver was writing in a new context in terms of education for people with disabilities, including learning difficulties. The Warnock Report introduced the term

'special educational needs' (SEN) into the official language of the UK (Warnock, 1978). The phrase was written into law in the Education Act of 1981. The Warnock Report, commissioned by the government, recognised the rights of children and young people with disabilities to education and reflected shifting social attitudes in recommending integration into mainstream schooling as the default route for most children. The intention behind the new wording and fresh approach was to focus on the educational support needs of children and young people and to end the categorisation and segregation of pupils by their disability or 'handicap'. Reviewing the situation in 2018 Rob Webster stated that the Warnock committee's findings 'provided the first major challenge to the medical model of disability, where impairments and differences are portrayed as intrinsic to the individual and the cause of disadvantage and lower quality of life' (Webster, 2018:38). Jenny Corbett, working in the field and writing critically about the changes, accepted the positive point that the new vocabulary and approach signalled 'a welcome change' from the 'within-child deficit' model and 'removed the old divisions between categories of handicap' (Corbett, 1996:14). Corbett, however, was not alone in damning the language and practice of 'special educational needs' in the years following the new legislation, and the impact of the SEN system in schools. She wrote that the language of 'special educational needs' was 'the language of the status quo – the voice of the confident and complacent establishment' (ibid.:7), and argued that it fitted into the 'dominant discourse ... for education is inextricably linked to the wider community, to pop culture and the politics of difference' (ibid.:5). Like Williams commenting on the social implications of the terms 'literacy' and 'illiteracy', Corbett drew attention to the popular understanding of 'special needs' as part of the discourse of deficit. It is a

term now embedded in law and in public perception, and is a label routinely used to describe people with learning difficulties.

David Barton articulates the parallel line of thinking in adult literacy education. In exploring the language and imagery commonly used in discussing literacy, and their implications, he highlights the vocabulary of disease and professional treatment. In a section based on the work of Kenneth Levine, Barton tabulates metaphors used for 'illiteracy' and the 'appropriate' response. (Barton, 2007:13). The first two terms listed are 'sickness' and 'handicap'. The suggested responses are 'treatment' through 'clinical intervention' leading to 'remission', and secondly 'rehabilitation' using 'compensatory aids' with the outcome of 'alleviation'. The rationale behind such figures of speech centres on a concept of 'individual deficit', and the response envisages a therapeutic or compensatory intervention. Indeed, the *Right to Read* manifesto spoke of individuals 'suffering from their inability to read' (BAS, 1974:11). The pseudo-medical analogy is continued into adult literacy education policy and practice made mandatory under Skills-for-Life, in the terms 'initial screening' and then 'diagnosis' leading to an 'individual' learning (or treatment?) plan.

An alternative narrative was available which focused on literacy education as a universal 'right'. UNESCO recognised 'literacy as a right' as part of its commitment to post-war development and international action. The commitment was restated through the International Year of Literacy in 1990 and the subsequent UN Literacy Decade 2003–2012. In the mid-point review of the Literacy Decade, concentrating on youth and adult literacy, the agency affirmed that 'literacy is part of the right to education, and it facilitates the achievement of other rights' (UNESCO, 2008). There

is an echo of this aspect of adult literacy education in the 'social inclusion' agenda which was part of Skills-for-Life.

A more radical understanding of the role of adult literacy education was worked out by Paulo Freire. Freire presented adult literacy education as not only a human right, but as a potential tool of revolution. His ideas were based on work with landless peasants in Latin America and he powerfully argued that adult literacy education should actively change people's relationship with their world:

Learning to read and write ought to be an opportunity for men to know what **speaking the word** really means: a human act implying reflection and action. As such it is a primordial human right and not the privilege of the few (Freire, 1994:256) [author's emphasis].

The fundamental concept that students of adult literacy were equal in ability and in capability to their teachers was embraced by many practitioners involved in the development of adult literacy education. The notion that 'authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects' (Freire, 1994:257) was central to adult literacy education provided a philosophy which fitted the search for an 'adult' approach to adult literacy education. Among practitioners interviewed by Hamilton and Hillier while researching the history of adult literacy in the 2000s Freire's name was the most quoted influence (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:116). The thoughts of Freire and of Illich gave adult literacy workers new perspectives, beyond school-based ideas of literacy and educational practice. Being different to school was important in opening adult literacy education to students with learning difficulties.

In the 2000s a different dimension to the idea of 'rights' was proposed by Amartya Sen. Sen is a Nobel prize-winning economist whose work relates to international development. He developed his theories in a new political and intellectual climate of neo-liberal thinking. Instead of 'rights' he talks of 'freedoms'.

His nuanced view has particular relevance to people with disabilities or learning difficulties. In *Development as Freedom* (1999) Sen argued that ‘the expansion of freedom’ should be viewed ‘as the primary end and as the principal measure of development’ (Sen, 1999:xii). He went further into the concept of ‘freedoms’ and ‘deprivation’ to identify the need for ‘capability’ in order to make choices and to use opportunities. Speaking of the ‘importance of basic education’ he suggests that:

When people are illiterate their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited, and ... this tends to be a persistent problem for people at the bottom of the ladder, whose rights are often effectively alienated because of their inability to read and see what they are entitled to demand and how (Sen, 2003: no page no.).

The ‘inability to read and see what they are entitled to demand and how’ is a crucial factor in depriving people with learning difficulties of their rights. This is not so much because they cannot read but because their educational and social position does not give them the capability to ‘see what they are entitled to demand and how’ to make that demand. The importance of ‘how’ people can demand their rights is vital. Sen mentions the barriers of poverty and of cultural and religious conventions which deprive women of their capability (Sen, 2003). I suggest that disability, social stigma and the discourse of deficit are similarly significant factors. A specific example arose when the UK was fighting the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21. Vaccine availability was limited and so the government in England prioritised groups judged as vulnerable. People with learning difficulties living in residential care homes were not on the priority list, although they were clearly a vulnerable group with a range of health issues and subject to the risks associated with shared accommodation. They were ‘people at the bottom of the ladder’. They had ‘rights’ but no ‘capability’ in the situation. It was only when high-profile BBC disk jockey Jo Whiley revealed that her

sister had contracted Covid in a care home, and publicised the issue, that the government reversed its policy and confirmed that '150,000 people on the GPs' learning disability register would be prioritised' (Saner, Guardian: 17.06.21:6). The story shows the continuing lack of power and status of people with learning difficulties.

Questions of power, agency, identity and citizenship for people with learning difficulties in relation to adult literacy education policy and practice

Questions about the purpose of adult education are fundamental to discussing the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It is an area where tensions as well as parallels are evident. Power and agency are important considerations. The 'empowerment' agenda is a strong link between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties. The authors of *A Right to Read* saw adult literacy education as part of their campaign to 'overcome various forms of powerlessness' (BAS, 1974:2). They believed that literacy would give people more control over their lives and more ability to participate in 'social action'. In the same vein Jeannie Sutcliffe chose the subtitle: *Education for Choice and Empowerment* for her 1990 book, *Adults with Learning Difficulties*. In her view self-advocacy was the central purpose of adult education. Her approach is based on a rights-based philosophy of education for people with learning difficulties. She stated that 'self-advocacy should be a key component of learning, underpinning the development of a curriculum built on student choice, decision-making and empowerment' (Sutcliffe, 1990:19).

Sutcliffe believed that there was a common commitment to empowerment shared by adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, writing that 'adult and continuing education has played an important role in the

development of self-advocacy' (Sutcliffe, 1994:11). Sutcliffe was writing a 'handbook of good practice' for practitioners. It was meeting a need. During the 1980s, and particularly after the 1983 Mental Health Act in England and Wales came into force, more adults with more severe learning difficulties were living in the community and seeking educational opportunities in local provision. In this context Sutcliffe went on to write *Teaching Basic Skills to Adults with Learning Difficulties* (1994). She stated in the book, jointly published by ALBSU and NIACE, that 'basic skills' education 'is about developing confidence, developing competence and fostering independence' (ibid., 1994:63). As a principle Sutcliffe insisted on 'learning opportunities which are based on a student-centred approach' (Sutcliffe, 1990:5). Her vision of what adult literacy education should achieve went well beyond the technical skills of reading and writing. To the list of objectives in teaching literacy to adults with learning difficulties she added 'developing a voice for students' and the advice that provision 'must support other areas of people's lives' (Sutcliffe, 1994:63). Her concept was 'student-centred' adult literacy education 'for choice and empowerment', an approach which focused on agency in terms of the process and of the objective. The theme of a 'student-centred' approach is central to this study. Sutcliffe recognised that it was not an easy option:

It can be challenging to construct meaningful contexts to learn reading and writing which draw successfully on the past experience of students ... It is much easier to sit with a group of students in the classroom practising writing (or pre-writing) skills or playing bingo with numbers than to plan imaginative alternatives **with** students [her emphasis] (ibid., 1994:14).

In a later publication Lesley Dee and fellow researchers also proposed a 'person-centred ... way of conceptualising the purposes of learning' for adults with learning difficulties' (Dee et al., 2006: 1). Dee et al wanted to challenge the 'assumptions and

limitations of current theories' by revisiting 'the underlying purposes of provision for adults with learning difficulties' (ibid., 2006:1). Their review of *Theories of Learning and Adults with Learning Difficulties: Being, Having and Doing*, referenced the 'Four Pillars of Learning' defined as 'Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Be and Learning to Live Together' in the Delors Report, published by UNESCO (Delors, 1996). This located their work in the context of rights and of contemporary debate about lifelong learning rather than in the literature of special education. Unlike Sutcliffe, Dee et al. were explicitly addressing the theoretical thinking and assumptions behind education for adults with learning difficulties, as well as providing guidance for practitioners. More than fifteen years after Sutcliffe's first book, Dee was aware that little had changed. Social conventions and stereotypes still dominated attitudes affecting content and practice of education for adult students with learning difficulties:

Beliefs about learners with difficulties in learning are more likely to influence decisions about how to teach, and what approaches to adopt, than new knowledge and insights (Dee et al, 2006:1).

Dee's research team found that 'new knowledge and insights' in education or theories of learning were not as powerful as deep-seated preconceptions about people with learning difficulties, in relation to the purposes and methods of educational provision. Their findings confirm the view that social attitudes proved a barrier to education which might offer 'choice and empowerment' to people with learning difficulties. The recommendations of their report related to the concepts of the Delors Report (1996). They emphasised agency and purpose in a holistic approach to education for adults with learning difficulties:

Learning should be purposive. A focus on purpose, rather than outcome, shifts attention away from a reductive, functional and pragmatic notion of

learning to a more complex redefinition of learning and one that reflects the emotional and psychological aspects of learning, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as active participation (ibid., 2006:2).

Dee's review also suggests how her team's research can be put into practice in the classroom. These sections resonate with Sutcliffe's ideas and guidance. For instance, in discussing teaching practice, Dee et al. refer to Freire's theory of shared learning where 'the participants are the experts, and learning occurs through the process of working together towards a common goal', citing as an example the process of performance which 'creates the means through which dialogue and communication can occur both individually and collectively, thereby providing a context for self-advocacy' (Dee et al, 2006:56). Creative writing, performance and poetry as part of adult literacy education can, as Sutcliffe points out, give students 'a voice'. Mace, writing about adult literacy education in general, emphasises the importance of writing as a purpose. In her view 'literacy education ... means a journey towards confident, critical and active authorship' (Mace, 1992:xvii), arguing that 'in order for any of us to believe ourselves literate ... we need to recognise ourselves as writers – as authors of our own words' (ibid., 1992:83). Mace is addressing questions about identity too, pointing out the significance of becoming an 'author'.

The approach to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties articulated by Dee et al. represents the opposite perspective to the idea of 'individual deficit'. They recognise the collective benefits of adult education for people with learning difficulties, and the social implications. They emphasise how becoming active students can challenge the discourse of deficit:

The process of learning can become the means through which people with learning difficulties themselves challenge the negative and stereotyped views

that are held by many in society about who they are and who they can become (Dee et al., 2006:3).

It is a strong statement of the benefits of student-centred adult education in the specific context of education for people with learning difficulties. Mace makes the same point differently, talking of students 'joining the community of authors' (Mace, 1992:95). Dee et al (2006) and Mace (1992) contend that education which focuses solely on individual achievement and outcomes cannot provide the same experience or effects for the students involved. They are arguing for adult literacy education which confronts both literacy and social orthodoxy.

The argument advanced by Dee et al. introduces the question of student identity. 'Identity' is tied into debates about the purpose of adult literacy education and is important to this thesis. *A Right to Read* (BAS, 1974) did not recognise a person with learning difficulties as a legitimate adult literacy student. Over the period 1970–2010 this view changed, but it was not a straightforward process. Questions about student identity are integral to ideas about the purpose of adult literacy education in the context of adults with learning difficulties. One area where the debate was played out was in relation to education for citizenship.

Citizenship was a potent ideal, and one which reflected the Right to Read vision of 'participation' and 'social action' as part of the purpose of adult literacy education. Citizenship as an aim is one of the links between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. Walmsley addressed the concept of citizenship for people with learning difficulties in 1991. Despite the barriers of convention she proposed a positive view. Her paper, *Talking to Top People*, located her argument in the self-advocacy project where she worked (Walmsley, 1991). Walmsley argued that 'contemporary rhetoric surrounding citizenship demonstrates

the need to comprehend all under its banner', and that 'recent developments in the learning difficulty field suggest that citizenship for people with learning difficulties is not an empty dream' (ibid., 1991:220). She compares the situation of people with learning difficulties to the place of many women in society, limited by their 'economic dependency':

They too are often confined to the private world of the family. They too are excluded from full participation in the community partly through the lack of means by which to exercise 'citizenship' rights (ibid., 1991:226).

Walmsley stressed the active role which people with learning difficulties could play as volunteers and partners in training health and care professionals, declaring that 'For people with learning difficulties, like women, a lot of the work they do is invisible, taken for granted, and somehow does not count as work' (ibid., 1991:228). Issues of dignity, adulthood and public perception are implied in her analysis, and she argued that self-advocacy was a way for people with learning difficulties to learn how to claim their rights and talk to 'top people'. Walmsley saw education for citizenship as part of self-advocacy and a promising and worthy purpose for adult education.

Catherine Jamieson, a teacher of adult literacy working in Edinburgh, echoed her arguments in a 1999 article (Jamieson, 2005:491–496). Jamieson described a situation where people with learning difficulties were able to represent the views of service users by taking part in planning meetings with the professionals involved in providing specialised services in the city. With the support of Adult Basic Education (ABE) staff her group produced a tape and transcript which could be discussed with users and taken to meetings. They could be active citizens.

Citizenship was part of the school curriculum from 2002 in England but it was subject to criticism related to the position of people with learning difficulties. Ian Martin believed that current government education policy on citizenship was based

on 'neo-liberal welfare reform'. In *Adult Education, Lifelong Learning and Citizenship: Some 'ifs' and 'buts'* Martin wrote:

In effect we learn to become a different kind of citizen within a reconfigured 'post-welfare' landscape in which 'learning to do without welfare' is what lifelong learning is really about (Martin, 2003:576).

Such an agenda has negative implications for the recognition of people with learning difficulties as full citizens, or indeed as legitimate students of adult literacy. Martin calls for 'pertinent questions' about the nature of citizenship to be asked by 'the disabled people's movement' as well as feminist and minority ethnic/cultural groups (ibid., 2003:573). He makes the case that lifelong learning as delivered in England prepares people for the wrong sort of citizenship, a version which creates 'second-class' citizens.

As part of a major *Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* sponsored by NIACE (Schuller & Watson eds. 2009), Bob Fryer also investigated *Lifelong Learning, Citizenship and Belonging* (Fryer, 2009: 37). Fryer explores the linked themes of 'identity and belonging' and considers the role of adult education (or lifelong learning) in citizenship. For people with learning difficulties, struggling to be recognised as adult members of the community, these are concepts with great significance (Dee et al, 2006). He was not focusing on the position of people with learning difficulties, but his reflections and conclusions express how adult education could contribute in developing 'citizenship and belonging'. In discussing how far people were free to choose their own identity he writes:

Not all options are open to the simple exercise of free choice ... Individuals or groups may be deliberately or coincidentally excluded from belonging to a particular group, organisation, community or to the special category of 'citizen' (Fryer, 2009: 41).

People with learning difficulties were certainly not free to always make their own choices, even in the matter of attending adult education, or choosing a course for themselves (Sutcliffe, 1990). Once 'labelled' they were mostly subject to the decisions of those in authority over them. Fryer points out that, 'a key, not to say occasionally overwhelmingly powerful, element of those processes, are the decisions about one's identity made by authorities' (Fryer, 2009:41).

More subtly, Fryer states that 'it is in the realm of collective actions, reciprocity and social interaction that more **substantive** notions of shared identity and belonging are forged [his emphasis]' (ibid., 2009:40). Echoing the thoughts of Dee et al. (2006) on how the process of becoming students enables people to challenge stereotypes of learning difficulty, he suggests that:

Citizenship and lifelong learning can clearly make positive contributions, building people's involvement through dialogue, shared deliberation, common access to shared culture, joint action and working through issues together towards agreed outcomes and common goals (ibid., 2009:40).

Student-centred adult literacy education could offer just such opportunities in open classes, co-operative productions or through activities such as writing weekends. Fryer's perception that adult education can enable students to review their identity is confirmed by research on adult literacy work in Scotland. Using case studies, Jim Crowther, Kathy Maclachlan and Lynn Tett found that adult literacy students, including those with learning difficulties, 'envisaged and were using their learning as a means of enabling them to negotiate their transitions and assume a different identity' (Crowther et al., 2010:657).

NIACE's *Adult Learning, Citizenship and Community Voices* (Coare & Johnston, eds., 2003) underlined the part that adult education could play in promoting active citizenship. The book considered various international contexts

including asylum seekers, 'excluded' young people and people with disabilities. The authors recount how a range of community-based local education projects enabled students to gain competence, confidence and critical understanding and to become active citizens, not just 'good citizens'. These writers continued to articulate the commitment to student-centred adult education with empowerment as an explicit purpose.

Lifelong learning, vocational education and a 'skills-based' approach

During the 1980s and 1990s international changes in politics, funding mechanisms, socio-economics and intellectual perspectives profoundly affected views about the purpose of adult education and the identity of students in England and elsewhere. Here I explore the changes in thinking and terminology, and their impact on the relationship under scrutiny. The idea of 'lifelong learning' replaced the term 'adult education' (Coffield, 1999; Field, 2001; Martin 2003). John Bynner, a long-term researcher in the field, later identified the shift as 'the move towards a narrowing of curricula based on work-related skills enhancement as opposed to the broader "life-wide" capabilities approach' (Bynner, 2016:61).

An instrumental view of adult education, focused on employability and construed as an investment in 'human capital', had major significance for adult literacy education and for the role it could play in relation to education for people with learning difficulties. The idea of lifelong learning as an investment was central to the vision promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which published *Lifelong Learning for All* in 1996. Policy analyst, Gert Biesta, explains that this influential report spelled out the principle 'that lifelong learning is first and foremost about the development of human capital so as to

secure competitiveness and economic growth' (Biesta, 2013:7). He points out that the OECD approach to lifelong learning does not recognise the conflict between the promotion of economic development as the purpose of adult education and the simultaneous encouragement of 'democracy and social cohesion', which he believes is an inherent contradiction (ibid., 2013:7). Biesta argues that the term 'lifelong learning' is an 'individualistic concept', suggesting that under the new 'paradigm' of lifelong learning 'individuals have ended up with a duty to learn throughout life', whereas people previously had the right to education, while the state was responsible for providing resources and opportunities (ibid., 2013:8). Biesta's analysis shows how this interpretation of 'lifelong learning' could damage adult literacy education which prioritised the rights and empowerment of students.

Reviewing the evolution of the term 'lifelong learning', John Field argues that the change is not a big alteration in direction (Field, 2001). Field concedes, however, that the new thinking has particular issues for marginalised or 'excluded' groups. He recognises that it reinforces the discourse of deficit which singles out the individual as responsible for his or her 'needs' or 'problems':

By individualising the characteristics which 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 (ibid., 2001, p.13).

As early as 1999 Frank Coffield criticised 'the powerful consensus in the UK and beyond that lifelong learning is a wonder drug' (Coffield, 1999:479). Basing his argument on the findings of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Learning Society Programme projects, Coffield infers that the core tenets of the UK version of lifelong learning were built on flawed assumptions. He argues that the policy and practice ignored social context and 'has created a new moral economy

where some people are treated as more desirable than others' (ibid., 1999:481). He specifically identifies the impact he saw on people with learning difficulties:

If people are to be treated first and foremost in relation to their potential contribution to the economy, then a market value is attached to each individual according to that contribution. So people with learning difficulties may come to be seen as a poor investment (ibid., 1999:481).

The OECD doctrine linking adult literacy education to economic competitiveness and social cohesion was largely embraced by the New Labour government of the UK, elected in 1997. The connection was written into the Skills-for-Life programme in England (2001), but the emphasis on economic aims was evident from the 1980s. It resulted in a move into the vocational sector. In a chapter on developing policy in adult literacy education Mary Hamilton, Catherine Macrae and Lyn Tett reflected that:

The arguments used to justify the need for ABE [Adult Basic Education] were framed in terms of global economic competitiveness: creating a skilled workforce rather than an informed citizenry (Crowther, Hamilton & Tett, eds., 2001:25).

Skills-for-Life marked new investment in adult literacy education, but also stricter monitoring. Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001) noted a new emphasis on standardisation, accountability and a closer relationship with school education (ibid.:25). Hamilton and Tett reviewed the scene in 2012. They recorded that the rationale and policies described in 2001 were reinforced by the 'impact of the globalisation of the world economy' and the influence of 'international bodies such as OECD' (Hamilton et al., 2012:50). They concluded that ideals of citizenship and social justice had been sacrificed to a skills-based idea of adult literacy:

Despite a rhetorical commitment to social inclusion and citizen participation, this system is driven by a market ideology and a vision of the needs of global

competitiveness. The imperative is to create a skilled workforce and an active consumer, rather than a critically informed citizen (Hamilton & Tett, 2012:50).

The expansion of special education was the flip side of a government drive to implement reform in vocational education. Tomlinson observed in 1985 that the growth of special education was designed to provide a route for those students who could not find employment, rather than to meet the 'needs' of students (Tomlinson, 1985:157). She described the growth of new courses called 'social and life skills' or 'independent living' in special schools, and correctly predicted that adult education would soon be drawn into the cycle of special education for 'self-sufficiency and controlled social behaviour' (ibid.:163). The idea of 'social control' of a potentially troublesome element is another recurring theme and represents the opposite perspective to the argument for adult education as a means to self-advocacy and active citizenship. In 2005 the second edition of Tomlinson's *Education in a Post-Welfare Society* recounted 34 Education Acts 'with hundreds of accompanying circulars, regulations and statutory instruments' issued between 1980 and 2005 giving 'unprecedented centralised control of all post-16 learning to develop a "skills strategy"' (Tomlinson, 2005:141–142). Tomlinson highlighted a centrally driven campaign which prioritised the perceived needs of the economy over the rights of students, and adult education for citizenship and empowerment.

In the context of English educational policy and institutions the fact that adult literacy education was part of the vocational system made the dilemma particularly stark in relation to students with learning difficulties. Hamilton identified a critical point as the passing of the 1992 FHE Act (Hamilton, 2005). Moving adult literacy provision into vocational education secured funding but, she noted, 'particularly discriminates against older adults ... and poses problems in resourcing courses for

adults with serious disabilities or learning difficulties' (ibid., 2005:102). The Act's distinction between vocational and non-vocational education consolidated a definition of literacy education which was narrowly employment focused and acted against content such as creative or interest-based writing or performance (Clyne & Payne, 2006).

The Skills-for-Life initiative marked a change in the 'official' language of adult literacy education. Whereas Moser's report, *A Fresh Start*, was subtitled *Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (Moser, 1999), the government's response was presented as *Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* (DfEE, 2001). The switch in vocabulary was significant. It demonstrated that the government policy on adult literacy education now prioritised 'up-skilling' the workforce. The unequivocal use of the word 'skills' showed that adult literacy education was now embedded in the vocational education system based in the FE colleges. The idea of 'vocationalism' is a significant element in dissecting the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in this study. The conflict between a student-centred approach which allowed teachers to concentrate on the interests and experience of their students, and the demands of a vocational system which measured achievement in standard tests and timebound stages focused on employability, was a growing source of tension (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015; Papen, 2005). Steps towards uniformity and standard certification worked against the possibility of offering students with learning difficulties the opportunity to benefit from student-centred open-ended adult literacy education. Altering definitions of literacy mattered to the relationship.

Definitions of literacy, social practice versus functional skills

At the same time as the skills agenda captured the policy arguments, the concept of literacy as 'social practice' brought a new understanding of the role of adult literacy education. The theory of literacy as 'social practice' was initially articulated by Brian Street in the seminal work *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984). Street argued that all literacy was essentially culturally and socially contextualised. Social practice theory concentrated on what people actually did with literacy. Street therefore challenged the belief that adult literacy could be taught as 'autonomous skills' regardless of context.

After 1984, the international New Literacy Studies (NLS) group pioneered by Hamilton, Barton and others developed the ideas of literacy as social practice. Members of RaPAL shared ideas around social practice and were critical of national policy direction in England which they perceived as adopting a vocational imperative and an understanding of literacy as 'autonomous skills' (McCaffery, 1985). They published research such as *Local Literacies* (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) which demonstrated and analysed literacy as social practice in Lancaster, England, and *Situated Literacies* (Barton et al, eds., 2000) on 'reading and writing in context'. The work of authors such as Jane Mace and Roz Ivanic also reflected on literacies and the agency of students in various contexts (Mace, 1998: *Playing with Time: Mothers and the meaning of literacy*; and Ivanic, 1998: *Writing and Identity: A discursive construction of identity in academic writing*). In the absence of academic or professional training for adult literacy practitioners these writings were not widely known until they appeared on reading lists after the introduction of standard training from 2001. Most teachers, managers and fundholders would not have been aware of the debate around a social practice approach to adult literacy education. It remained

a mainly intellectual discussion and was not aired by the adult literacy lead bodies ALBSU (1980–1995) and Basic Skills Agency (1995–2007).

Introducing *Powerful Literacies* (2001), editors Jim Crowther, Mary Hamilton and Lyn Tett claim that debate about the goals and processes of literacy education was shut down and should be re-opened:

The opportunity for thinking about what literacy means and the issues it involves for developing alternative practices has been squeezed out by the demands of government and global corporations preoccupied with narrowly conceived ideas of human resource development ... The policy discourse, both within the UK and the wider world is premised on a basic skills model that prioritises the surface features of literacy and language (Crowther et al., 2001:1–4).

The current 'basic skills model' which Crowther et al. refer to was promoted by the BSA in England. Their definition of literacy was 'the ability to read, write and speak in English ... at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general' (Moser, 1999:2). It was derived from the definition drawn up by UNESCO in 1956 which was designed to challenge an absolute interpretation which judged people as literate or illiterate:

A person is literate when he [sic] has acquired the essential knowledge and skills to 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 those skills towards his and the community's development (Gray, 1956).

The UNESCO formulation recognises the importance of context and relativity, but reflects the discourse of deficit in the suggestion that the 'problem' and the 'solution' rest with the individual. The BSA definition is nearer to 'communication skills' as required in employment-related training, what Crowther et al. call 'the surface

features of literacy and language'. It introduces 'speaking' but inserts 'work' and refers to the concept of 'levels' which hints at school literacy and standard tests. It has dropped 'community' and the idea of literacy contributing to its 'development' and replaced it with the more ambivalent notion of functioning 'in society in general'. The 1990s definition of literacy has lost the active and purposeful nature of the UNESCO original.

The idea of 'functionality' was part of the original *Right to Read* manifesto (1974), which referred to potential students of adult literacy education as 'functionally illiterate' (BAS, 1974:4). UNESCO provided the concept of 'functional' literacy which was adopted by the UK campaign for adult literacy education in the 1970s and has been a constant factor ever since. Charnley and Jones, writing in 1979, defined the contemporary UK version of 'functional literacy' as:

A vision of the student functioning, with the aid of his reading and writing, in a world whose reality is determined by his own needs and purposes (Charnley & Jones, 1979:13).

This positive analysis of the term demonstrates how it could be inclusive and encompass students with learning difficulties. It includes the concept of student 'purposes', although individual 'needs' are foregrounded.

A 2011 discussion paper by Amy Burgess and Mary Hamilton looks at the re-emergence of the 'concept of functional literacy' in the policy discourse of adult literacy education in the 2000s. They discover a much narrower interpretation. They base their analysis on the work of Kenneth Levine (1982), who studied the use of the phrase 'functional literacy' in adult basic education in various countries. He argued that it was characterised 'by a systematic and insidious ambiguity that permits incongruent interpretations while simultaneously promoting a comfortable illusory consensus' (Burgess & Hamilton, 2011:2). Burgess and Hamilton conclude that the

ambiguity identified by Levine has allowed ‘more recent developments where “functional” is interpreted in terms of the measurement of competencies and vocational skills or employability’ (ibid., 2011:6). They find that ‘the tensions and contradictions that have historically surrounded the term “functional literacy” were also a feature of Skills-for-Life’ (ibid., 2011:7). They go on to scrutinise a later document, *Skills-for-Life, Changing Lives* (DIUS, 2009) issued by the government to update the Skills-for-Life initiative. This guidance, they suggest, is key to the new functional skills policy, and they note that adult literacy education is now essentially defined as ‘skills for employment’:

Within this approach learners are represented as deficient and lacking the authority or agency to define their own needs and ambitions for learning. Furthermore, there is evidence of a neo-liberal discourse which locates the causes of, and solutions to, social problems within individuals whilst downplaying the importance of wider structural issues which limit people’s lives and opportunities. The over-riding concern with economic issues means that literacy education becomes narrowly defined as skills-for-employment (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011:11).

Burgess and Hamilton perceive an attack on student agency, a narrow interpretation of adult literacy and a reflection of the discourse of deficit. Their analysis underlines hardening attitudes in adult literacy education policy and confirms the lack of opportunity for discussion of complex issues such as access for students with learning difficulties. New Literacy Studies (NLS) writing reflected a wider view.

[The social turn, social model of disability and social capital](#)

In this section I draw together aspects of the literature relating to literacy and to disability, which are linked by the idea of a ‘social turn’. Writing in the context of the New Literacy Studies US author, James Paul Gee articulated the theory that NLS

was part of a 'social turn' which affected thinking in a range of disciplines at the end of the twentieth century (Gee, 2000). He described it as a move 'away from a focus on individual behaviour' to 'a focus on social and cultural interaction' (ibid.:180). In this light the idea of a 'social practice' approach to adult literacy education fits into a wider picture. I suggest that the concept of a 'social model' in thinking about disability policy and practice reflects the same shift in perspective. Gee writes about literacy, 'The NLS is based around the idea that reading, writing and meaning are always **situated** within specific social practices within specific discourses [his emphasis] (Gee, 2000:189).

Oliver was concerned about the discourse around disability. He proposed an alternative 'social model' to enable student social workers to understand disability differently. His ideas were based on the principles of the UPIAS (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation) 'which argued that we were not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we faced in society' (Oliver, 2013:1024). He defined the 'social model' to combat what he labelled the 'individual model' which divided people with disabilities. Oliver saw how the dominant discourse of individual deficit translated into the idea that people with disabilities were a 'burden' on society:

Because disability in all parts of the world is an isolating experience most disabled people experience their disabilities in individual terms. They may come to see themselves as a burden and feel that their problems are their own fault (Oliver, 1996:122).

His ideas informed the emerging academic discipline of Disability Studies and the rationale behind calls for disability rights (Barton, 2003; Barnes, 2007; Oliver, 2013):

While politicians, policy-makers and professionals have rediscovered the notion of citizenship, disabled people have begun to redefine disability not as

personal tragedy requiring therapy but as collective oppression requiring political action (Oliver, 1996:44).

It is important for my thesis to note that the UPIAS included people with learning difficulties in their definition of disabled people because they understood that dividing the community of people with disabilities played into the discourse of deficit and the idea that people could be categorised by 'need'. In 2013 Oliver noted that:

Cuts in benefits are being justified on the grounds that the intention is to give more to those who are severely impaired (and hence deserving) and not to those who are not (and hence undeserving). Our differences are being used to slash our services (Oliver, 2013:1026).

Like Martin (2003) and Tomlinson (2005), Oliver believed that part of the government's motivation was to cut spending on welfare and to influence the public discourse accordingly (Oliver, 1996:80). He called for political awareness and action amongst people with disabilities. His arguments underline the importance attached by Sutcliffe (1994), Walmsley (1991), Jamieson (2005) and others to self-advocacy as an essential element in adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties. They needed to be able to 'talk to top people', as Walmsley expressed it (Walmsley, 1991). Meanwhile Fryer's insights remind us that 'it is in the realm of collective actions, reciprocity and social interaction' that people find their identity substantiated (Fryer, 2009:40). Literacy education is one sort of social interaction. Barton is clear that the practice of literacy is essentially related to power and power relationships. In relation to adult literacy education he points out that 'much literacy is learned in relationships of unequal power' and clarifies how people can be limited by their own perception of their social position: 'People's literacy practices are situated in broader social relations ... They are to do with what people feel is or is not appropriate' (Barton, 2007:41). In effect, being an adult literacy student with learning

difficulties could require subtle social negotiation to conform to prevailing social conditions.

In another aspect of the 'social turn' these observations can be related to the concept of 'social capital'. The theory of different 'forms of capital' was developed by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1980s (Bourdieu, 1986). It is especially pertinent in this context as adult education, including adult literacy, came to be seen as an element of human capital in the 1990s and 2000s (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Hughes & Schwab, eds., 2010; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). Bourdieu argued that the different forms of capital were transferable and worked together to reinforce existing hierarchies. The idea of social capital was used to evaluate the educational experience of adults with learning difficulties in a study done in Scotland, *The Learning Society and People with Learning Difficulties* (Riddell et al., 2001). It is a rarely focused piece of research conducted as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's project, *The Learning Society: Knowledge and Skills for Employment 1995–2000*. There is no reason to suppose that the findings would have produced more comfortable results in England, particularly since the Scottish government adopted a policy which recognised the importance of social justice within adult literacy education (Crowther et al., 2001; Tett et al., 2006; Hamilton et al., 2012). Sheila Riddell and fellow researchers investigated the education, training and employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties, using case studies and surveys. They reported that:

In many ways, people with learning difficulties are positioned at the social margins, educated separately from their peers, often excluded from employment and lacking many of the social and family networks which are essential to psychological and material survival (Riddell et al., 2001:12).

Their findings were analysed in terms of 'social capital'. Riddell and team accepted Bourdieu's premise and referred to the work of Robert Putnam, who elaborated 'social capital' as 'social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness' among individuals (Putnam, 2000). They found that people with learning difficulties had very limited social capital because of the marginalisation they experienced:

The particular 'dis-benefit' from which the people with learning difficulties who constituted our case studies suffered was the limiting of their lives to narrow and 'special' circuits, whether residential, occupational or social (Riddell et al., 2001:141).

Where lifelong learning, and the promises of the 'learning society' might have been seen as advantages, the researchers found that the education and training opportunities offered to people with learning difficulties:

Rather than facilitating access to employment, establishing inclusive relationships or acting as a source of personal enrichment ... may simply serve as a time-filler, keeping people with learning difficulties in a state of social quiescence (ibid., 2001:21).

In 1996 Oliver claimed that special school education produced 'educationally and socially disabled adults' (Oliver, 1996:64). Riddell and fellow researchers found that the disadvantages cited by Oliver and others (e.g. Corbett, 1996) were reproduced in further and adult education. Their work demonstrated that adult literacy education can contribute to creating people who are limited by the label of 'learning difficulties', despite an avowed agenda of empowerment. Oliver, anticipating the conclusions of Field (2001) and Biesta (2013), interpreted SEN policy generally as an effort to remove responsibility from the state and put it on to the individual. He perceived, like Tomlinson (2005), that there was a special curriculum focused on 'life skills' for people who were seen as economically unproductive. 'Current curriculum concerns

about life skills are underpinned by earlier ideas about reducing the burden on the state' (Oliver, 1988:18).

I find this a telling reflection on the notion of a 'special' curriculum, which can be seen as a wedge driven into the idea of student-centred adult literacy education that accommodates adults with learning difficulties. After 1992, in FEFC-supported provision, the trend in England towards two separate curricula was unmistakable. FEFC methodology divided funding streams in 'basic education' on the basis of the category of students, creating a split in the idea of adult literacy education. The identity of students became crucial. A 'special' curriculum undermined the idea that adult literacy education offered an inclusive student-centred provision which could challenge stereotypes of people with learning difficulties, as envisaged by Sutcliffe and Dee. In 1993 Barton and Corbett voiced concerns about 'special needs in further education':

The challenge of inclusive education is to maintain the required impetus against the prevailing ideology which is turning education into a competitive and ruthless business economy (Barton & Corbett, 1993:21)

Dee took the argument further in *FE and Lifelong Learning* (Green & Lucas, eds., 1999). Considering inclusive learning, she challenged the FEFC model 'The philosophical basis of the funding mechanism needs to change from one which is market- and outcomes-led to a learner- and curriculum-led model' (Dee, 1999:157). She advocates 'the quality of life approach' which supports 'individuals in defining their own value base and determining the course of their own lives' (ibid., 1999:146). Their demands illustrate the difficulties facing practitioners who were caught between pressure to achieve targets and pre-determined outcomes and their inclination to implement a student-centred approach.

Tensions for professional practitioners, inclusion versus 'special' education

The political, theoretical and ideological tensions in the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties naturally affected students and workers in the field. The issues are evident in the commentaries and analyses of practitioners and researchers (eg Sutcliffe, 1990; Oliver, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Barton, 2003; Lavender, 2004). In this section I unpick what the literature tells us of the experience of students and tutors negotiating the relationship and how they managed the tensions. This leads to a focus on discussions about 'inclusion' and 'special' education which were live debates at the time, and important factors in the emerging relationship.

The professional status of practitioners in the fields of adult literacy education and of work with people with learning difficulties was not fully recognised during the period 1970–2010. I contend that the issue was a source of tension which affected the relationship. Carol Dennis published an article which illustrates some of the dilemmas. In her title she posed the questions: *Is the Professionalisation of Adult Basic Skills Practice Possible, Desirable or Inevitable?* (Dennis, 2010). Dennis suggests that a student-centred approach is antithetical to professionalisation of the role. She argues that 'to be a literacy tutor is to adopt an anti-professional stance compelled by a desire to make connections with the learners and their particular contexts' (ibid., 2010:31).

Her interpretation shows that it was an unresolved and uncomfortable situation. She equated the 'professional' with someone responsible for the implementation of government policy (ibid., 2010:26). This is not a universally recognised position, but it signals anxiety about the issue. In the 1980s, Peter Jarvis proposed that adult education was in the process of professionalisation because

amongst other indications, it was devising sector-specific training and qualifications (Jarvis, 1988). Harold Perkin published a historical analysis, *The Rise of Professional Society* in 1989. He argued that over time the possibility of more professional roles, status and money had increased within the public sector, and was causing competition and friction:

More and more people can aspire to professionalism subject to 'specialised training' and expertise, and 'all professionals are laymen to the other professions' (Perkin, 2002:3).

His analysis connects to the radical thinking of Illich (1977) who claimed that the 'professionals' in health and care needed to keep their power through defining and insisting on the continual 'needs' of their clients. Perkin suggested that the currency which gave workers such as care staff status was not money or status, but the perception of 'indispensability' (Perkin, 2002:6). It was a precarious situation and practitioners in adult literacy education were in a similar position. Dennis writes that Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) quoted a figure of 20,000 workers in Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy (ALLN) of whom an estimated 50 per cent were part-time (Dennis, 2010:28). They were not a solid body, but a 'casualised' workforce operating across a range of institutions. Dennis mentions 'teachers, lecturers, tutors, assessors, section leaders or advanced practitioners' as some of the possible roles, and that does not include the instructors, support workers or carers who might be employed to teach adults with learning difficulties.

After 1992, when the main funding for teaching adult literacy education was channelled through the FE system the situation was complicated by the fractured nature of FE personnel. Jocelyn Robson wrote of the FE teaching body as '*A Profession in Crisis*' in 1998, citing long-term under-funding as an issue which led to compartmentalised staff groups (Robson, 1998). In 2008 Coffield headed a research

team which reported on FE under the post-2000 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regime. They found a contested field where:

The two worlds of policy and practice overlap, and at times collide, when institutional leaders and course managers have to turn national funding regimes, targets and initiatives into viable programmes and procedures, which at the same time must protect the interests of their institutions as well as the interests of their learners. The outcome is a series of competing tensions, pressures and dilemmas (Coffield et al., 2008:37).

Adult literacy teachers had to find their way in this difficult environment. The literature presents a picture of staff who worked under pressure and without coherent direction or support.

In these evolving circumstances it is not surprising to find stigma and prejudice playing a part in dividing staff and students. In 1994 research by Sue Bergin and Andy Johnson uncovered the practice of diverting people with learning difficulties away from 'open access' adult literacy or Adult Basic Education (ABE) provision. They found that 64 per cent of the Open Learning Centres and 70 per cent of 'established ABE providers' surveyed routinely referred students with learning difficulties to 'special' provision such as 'life-skills courses, self-advocacy groups, disability and learning support courses, special needs provision within local FE colleges, pre-ABE or vocationally based provision, local Adult Training Centres' (Bergin & Johnson, 1994). Bergin and Johnson called their paper '*The Power of Labelling in ABE*' and they concluded that:

Referral seems to indicate that some kind of definition is being used by ABE practitioners resulting in adults with learning difficulties being defined as 'other' than basic skills students and being referred elsewhere within the locality (ibid., 1994:3).

They claim that:

It is clear that policy statements, professional staff and institutional arrangements seem to be operating in conjunction to construct the 'normal' ABE student and the 'other' student with learning difficulties (ibid.:7).

Bergin and Johnson point out that the effect of this 'labelling' has wider implications. Both staff and students can be negatively categorised. On the one hand it suggests that only 'special' staff can work with adults with learning difficulties, and on the other hand the students are identified as different and deficient:

Once labelled it then becomes acceptable for any parts of their whole self to be scrutinised ... decisions may cease to be educationally based (ibid.:7).

As they further comment:

Adult students with learning difficulties are rarely given positive categorising labels such as 'self-motivated', 'independent' or 'committed' (ibid.:7).

The conclusions of Bergin and Johnson reveal how little-remarked local decisions can illuminate the bigger picture. Managers and organisers responded to pressures from institutions and funders to meet quantitative targets, demonstrating how 'outcome-related funding can reinforce divisions and split students' (ibid., 1994:10). Their findings show the pressures on staff working at local level which created a two-tier system and facilitated an unacknowledged argument for 'special' provision.

Writers on special education have much to say about the disadvantages of the system and the basic philosophy of inequality which underpins the policy and practice in schools. In *The Sociology of Special Education* initially published in 1982 and reissued in 2012, Tomlinson writes:

To be categorised out of 'normal' education represents the ultimate in non-achievement in terms of ordinary educational goals. The result of exclusion is that the majority of children are destined for a 'special' career and life-style in terms of employability and self-sufficiency (Tomlinson, 2014:16).

Oliver wrote in 1996:

By producing educationally and socially disabled adults in this way, the special education system perpetuates the misguided assumption that disabled people are somehow inadequate and thus legitimates discrimination in all other areas of their lives (Oliver, 1996:64).

Both these writers and others refer to the growing industry of 'special needs' and to increasing numbers of 'special' staff (Tomlinson, 2014:43; Slee, 2018:82). Tomlinson explains these factors as the result of 'parental need and professional vested interests' (Tomlinson, 2014:68). Oliver claims in 2013 that 'the hegemony of special education has barely been challenged' (Oliver, 2013:1025). Roger Slee argues that 'special' education has not been dismantled, but absorbed into the mainstream under the guise of 'inclusion' (Slee, 2018).

Two areas of the fierce discussions about special education are particularly pertinent to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010. The subject of the assessment of needs is a pivotal issue. I also examine the undercurrent of meaning associated with the idea of functionality, which is significant in considering the arguments around inclusive versus 'special' education. Both produce tensions for the staff involved.

The individual assessment of need is crucial to the policy and practice of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in England. It was built into the system after the 1981 Act (Special Educational Needs) and reinforced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SEND) 2001. In principle the process is intended to define the educational support needs of pupils in order to support their integration into mainstream schooling. It has become equally embedded into the practice of adult literacy education. In both cases it is clearly based on an individual deficit model and has become linked with funding (Rose, 1995; Dee, 1999). Oliver is quite

sure about the issue of assessment: 'Above all else assessment of need is an exercise in power' (Oliver, 1996:70). In a collection of essays devoted to investigating the '*Politics of Special Educational Needs*' in the SEN system there is a chorus of criticism of the process of assessment (Barton, ed., 1988). The contributors claim that it is a system that reinforces individual deficit and puts all the power in the hands of the professionals involved. Tony Booth, an educational psychologist and researcher, emphasises the fallible nature of judgements made by professionals such as educational psychologists (Booth, 1988:115). Andrea Freeman, a parent and teacher, looks at the concept of 'social competence' and the 'batteries of tests' allowing assessors to make judgements 'about normality', which, she claims, are ultimately based 'within their own sub-culture'. Her conclusion is that 'social competence' in the case of school tests equals 'conformity and acceptance' (Freeman, 1988:126). Rob Withers and John Lee stress the pseudo-medical language and approach, and suggest that, 'Assessments for the purposes of special education are able to take on the mystique of diagnosis, the protection of the expert professional and the secrecy and power of the clinician,' leaving the pupil, the parent and the teacher powerless to challenge the results (Withers and Lee, 1988:182). A TES report quoted Mary (now Baroness) Warnock herself as saying that assessment 'has ceased to be about what the child needs and has just become a battle for resources' (Shaw, TES, 19.9.2003: 22). The issue raises questions of power and agency.

Assessment is also addressed by Sutcliffe in the context of teaching basic skills to adults with learning difficulties. She uses less harsh language, but is equally clear that the process can be damaging (Sutcliffe, 1994). Advising teachers of adult literacy (and numeracy) she writes, 'Too often tutors spend so long assessing adults

with learning difficulties that they never get to teaching anything' (ibid., 1994:25). She criticises 'the detailed quasi-scientific checklists and diagrams' which offer 'no real involvement', and act to 'highlight deficits' and include features which 'may have little reference to real life' (ibid., 1994:23). The exercise, she implies, is the opposite to a student-centred empowerment-oriented approach.

Meanwhile, the policy and practice of individual assessment of need was extended to include all adult literacy students, as providers and funders required evidence of progress through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) based on initial assessment. Hamilton introduces her critique of the use of ILPs:

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), originally a formative assessment tool, are currently part of a system of performance measurement based on quantifiable indicators of teaching and learning. These are used for administrative purposes, for example, for quality assurance and for allocating funding (Hamilton, 2009:221).

Hamilton describes the conflicted position of the adult literacy teacher:

Tutors take up an enforced position as broker or mediator between student aspirations and demands, and system requirements (ibid., 2009:225).

And goes on to suggest that:

In this process, student and tutor identities, the meanings and boundaries of adult literacy, language and numeracy are being reorganised (ibid., 2009:226).

In summarising her findings Hamilton shows how the use of ILPs mirrors school practice and is used to 'evidence a particular version of "good practice"' (ibid., 2009:239). She claims that 'learners' identities are shaped through the categories into which their experience is translated' and 'tutors are ... incorporated, or enrolled, into the system's goals as active mediators' (ibid., 2009:239). It is a long way from the student-centred ideals of the early adult literacy campaign. Hamilton locates the

ILP system within 'social policy', drawing attention to the influence of the Skills-for-Life guidance, the government-funded training and the judgements of inspectors. These are all ways of ensuring that the ILP mechanism complies with the 'system goals' of the social policy behind it, although this is not explicit. Biesta, commenting on the social dimension of lifelong learning, makes a similar point when he concludes that 'lifelong learning is being mobilised to facilitate integration and cohesion through processes of adaptation and adjustment' (Biesta, 2013:8). These critics recognise that the system requires adult students to be passive learners, who will not challenge existing conventions.

The agenda of implicit compliance to an undeclared social policy is identified in the analysis of 'functional literacy' produced by Burgess and Hamilton noted above (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). Burgess and Hamilton argue that the term 'functional literacy' carries within it the 'idea of literacy skills as helping people to fit in, to be normal'. They reference the sociological theory of functionalism, which values the 'equilibrium of society' achieved when each individual plays 'their part by fitting into the status quo rather than changing or disrupting it' (ibid., 2011:8). This can be translated into a doctrine which states that people with learning difficulties should follow a 'special' curriculum and not expect to be 'real' students following an adult literacy curriculum centred on agency, self-advocacy and empowerment. It is the 'second-class citizen' approach described by Martin (2003) and the 'ultimate non-achievement' highlighted by Tomlinson (2005). Speaking from a variety of backgrounds the recognition of what a 'special' curriculum means has been put in various ways. Freeman (1988) talks of 'conformity and acceptance' as the ideal behind 'assessments' while Withers and Lee more chillingly compare the assessment regime in special schooling to 'surveillance' (Withers & Lee, 1988:182).

Riddell and co-researchers suggest that 'social quiescence' is the purpose of the post-school offer for adults with learning difficulties (Riddell et al, 2001:21). Corbett wrote of the SEN system in 1996 that:

'Integration' has come to mean: adapt to what exists; do not ask for extra resources; become like the majority, conceal your differences; learn to fit in (Corbett, 1996:22).

Corbett refers to the pressure on people with disabilities to be 'invisible, mute and passive' (ibid., 1996:83). She states that:

Niceness keeps people harmless and passive. Professionals and carers have a significant investment in keeping 'special' as a concept of 'niceness' (ibid.:50).

The stress on 'niceness' is a reminder of David Barton's insight on 'appropriateness' in literacy practice (2006). Hillier underlines how a 'functional literacies' approach to adult literacy education 'is used to enable people to **manage** their lives, often with an emphasis on being able to cope in the workplace or with families' [her emphasis], whereas a social practice approach recognises and challenges inequalities (Hillier, 2006:175). Learning to conform is subtle and the evidence is hard to pin down in the case of staff and of students, but it is significant to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

Writers explain that 'inclusive' education is a wholly different approach. A critical view of policy and practice articulates powerful arguments for inclusive education and the theory behind the changes proposed by its advocates. The thinking behind their proposals is complex. It is both iconoclastic and positive and can be mined for relevance to my subject. The philosophy of inclusion, they say, seeks to overturn the existing values, processes, structures and hierarchies of education. Len Barton, in a professorial lecture on *Inclusive Education and Teacher*

Education called for a complete ‘transformation’, arguing that ‘it involves a political critique of social values, priorities and the structures and institutions which they support’ (Barton, 2003: no page number). Gary Thomas starts his ‘review of thinking and research about inclusive education policy’ by insisting that ‘the term “inclusive education” now refers to the education of **all** children’ [his emphasis] (Thomas, 2013: 473). Like Barton, his thesis rests partly on the perception that thinking about inclusion has sprung from the history of special and segregated schooling, and needs to be disassociated. He suggests reconceptualising the idea of ‘learning difficulty’ by going behind barriers such as ‘race, disability and gender’ to work out how these factors operate on learning:

Difficulty is constructed out of disruptions in learning caused by discomfort, alienation, anomie, fear, hostility and mistrust and that schools may themselves offer a seedbed for such phenomena to do their worst (ibid., 2013:478).

Thomas is writing about schools, but the ‘socio-cultural’ and institutional factors he identifies reflect those which authors such as Mace (1992), Corbett (1996), Barton (2007) and Hamilton (2009) adduce in considering the experience of adult students. Thomas concludes that the assessment regime of schools is constructed on a system of ‘comparison’ and that ‘the alienation and exclusion experienced by students’ is largely based on comparison between students ‘and the institutional endorsement of such comparison’. We can recognise here the ideas put forward by Fryer about the ‘decisions made about one’s identity by the authorities’ (Fryer, 2009:41) and the importance to identity and belonging of ‘collective actions, reciprocity and social action’ (ibid.:40). Thomas’s analysis also suggests a radical rethink in institutional thinking, away from ‘identify-assess-diagnose-help’ to

concentrate on participation and self-worth 'embedded in understandings about community and communality' (Thomas, 2013:485).

This radical view of disability and inclusive learning relates equally to adult literacy education and to education for people with learning difficulties, and demonstrates how a single approach can encompass both areas. It includes the concept of 'social capital' in the suggestion of 'social worth' as an aim of education. Notions of 'community' and 'participation' echo the early ideals of the adult literacy campaign in England (BAS, 1974) and the thoughts of Freire (1972) on the power of co-operative adult literacy education. The ideas also reflect the suggestions of Fryer (2009) and others on the part adult education can play in developing a sense of 'belonging and identity'. The concept of 'communality' meanwhile resonates with the work of Dee et al. (2006) and Crowther et al. (2010) which suggests that becoming an adult education student can enable people with learning difficulties to challenge the 'label'. The call to reject the 'identify-assess-diagnose-help' model confronts the issue of 'individual deficit' and resonates with the writings of Barton (2007) and other NLS authors calling for a recognition of the power relationships built into educational experiences. People promoting inclusive learning clearly wanted to disrupt the status quo and fundamentally change the values and structures of the educational system. They were not thinking in the main about adult literacy education, but their concept of inclusive learning shares the ethos of student-centred and rights-based adult education. Dee suggested that the ideals of inclusion were based on 'the principles of social justice' whereas the 'FE curriculum and funding methodology spring from market-individualism, emphasising consumerism, performance and efficiency' (Dee, 1999:157). The outcome of the clash of ideologies was the consolidation of 'special' education within FE. The model, I contend, was the SEN system developed in

schools, dependent on individual assessment and castigated by the proponents of inclusive education.

The student point of view can be found in the literature. In 2006, Yola Jacobsen and Viv Berkeley summarised the demands of adults with learning difficulties in terms of education. Jacobsen reported that the three main issues raised by people with learning difficulties who had worked with her as co-presenters in regional seminars were as follows:

They wanted learning to help them move on in life, particularly into work;

They wanted to be able to choose from the whole offer and not just provision specifically for people with learning difficulties;

There was a sense that very often all that was on offer in discrete provision was 'reading, writing and numbers' (Jacobsen & Berkeley, 2006:19).

As Jacobsen comments, these are 'all pretty basic demands' (ibid.:19). I suggest, however, that they are essentially based on a conception of 'rights'. The students quoted are asking for what is available, in their perception, to everybody else. They wanted 'purposeful' education and they wished to be able to choose their own courses, as opposed to being assessed for 'needs' and then being directed into 'special' or 'discrete' provision selected by others. It is hard not to conclude that the literature reveals that the system of assessment and 'special' education is constructed to maintain the status quo. Hamilton suggests that students of adult literacy were also strictly controlled in their aspirations and routes through the educational system by the use of ILPs. The social policy underlying this agenda naturally creates a tension for practitioners trying to put the students at the centre of the programme (Dennis, 2010). It is apparently a system which uses the concept of 'needs' to preserve the existing hierarchies in society.

Conclusions

In this section I draw on the literature review to identify the issues which inform my investigation and to formulate my research questions. My reading of relevant literature uncovers significant themes in the historical relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970–2020. The idea of ‘enduring tensions’ clarifies concepts which are at the heart of my study. My research builds on this foundation by examining the interaction between all the factors which shape the relationship I am investigating.

My study of the literature shows how theories of rights and empowerment linked adult literacy education with the contemporary development of disability activism. It allows me to compare the analysis of social historians such as Tomlinson (1985 etc.) with the thinking of educational writers such as Martin (2003) and Coffield (1999) to understand how a ‘special’ curriculum for people with learning difficulties was almost accidentally developed in adult literacy education. I explore the impact of a ‘social turn’ in disability theory articulated by Mike Oliver (1983 etc.) and see it also in the work of adult literacy specialists like David Barton (2007 etc.). People writing from inside educational practice like Jane Mace (1992) and Jenny Corbett (1996) illuminate how the ‘discourse of deficit’ lies within the language of ‘special needs’. Research by Mary Hamilton (2011), Lesley Dee (2006) and others takes this analysis further by uncovering the social agenda which limits opportunities for people with learning difficulties, and adult literacy students in general, to challenge stigma and stereotypes. Issues of identity, power, stigma, agency, inclusion and ‘functionality’ are all raised by combing the literature. These concerns inform my

further research into the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010.

The research questions which I use to investigate and understand the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970–2010 are open-ended. They are designed to enable the primary evidence to speak for itself and at the same time to deepen understanding of the themes identified by the literature review and to introduce a historical perspective.

The questions I seek to address are:

How did this relationship change over time?

What were the significant factors in shaping the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970–2010?

What are the enduring themes characterising this relationship?

How did this relationship affect adult literacy education in practice?

Chapter 2. Methodology

Introduction

This is an historical investigation. My thesis presents an understanding of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010. It analyses the shifting relationship between the forces and factors involved at the time. My methodology is co-ordinated and strengthened by the theory of emancipatory research. In the context of education Colin Barnes and Alison Sheldon state that emancipatory research:

Must seek to make further contribution to our understanding and our ability to erode the various forces – economic, political and cultural – which continue to create and sustain disability at both the macro and micro levels (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007:15).

A focus on understanding the forces which reinforce or challenge disability in the context of adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties demands methods which respect the experience of students and clarify the roles of the various agencies involved by considering their attitudes and actions in relation to students with learning difficulties. In this thesis I set out to explore and hold up to scrutiny the ways in which adult literacy education can reinforce or erode disability in the context of education for people with learning difficulties. This section explains my research methods and journey travelled. The methodology of the study is designed to provide a reliable account and analysis of the evidence. I do not claim that it is the only possible interpretation of the evidence. The project is an example of what Gary McCulloch and William Richardson, considering current educational historiography, call an 'interdisciplinary study' which deploys 'different kinds of research methodology and evidence in complementary fashion to investigate a particular historical problem' (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000:128). I have used qualitative

research as described by Uwe Flick ‘to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena’ by:

Analysing the experiences of individuals or groups, analysing the interactions and communications in the making, analysing the documents ... or similar traces of experiences or interactions. Common to such approaches is that they seek to unpick how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insights (Flick, 2007).

As a researcher in adult literacy education I have noted the principles proposed by RaPAL, observing particularly the need to hear the student voice, recognising the power relationship in educational practice and locating my research in a historical and geographical context.

I chart the parallels and overlaps in a dynamic relationship. A timeline of the main events and some key publications appears at Appendix 1. It was a starting point for my research.

Overall approach

In this section I detail how my focus has driven the research methodology and choices. My purpose was to understand the developing relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, an unexplored area of educational history. The study combines a range of research methods in a qualitative framework underpinned by the values of emancipatory research. As the research progressed, I triangulated documentary research with interviews and archival research and added a second raft of interviews with ‘key people’. Drafting and redrafting was an integral exercise. The design and execution of the research evolved through an ongoing, co-operative iterative and generative process.

An essential reason for historical research in education is to show the 'historically mediated nature of modern educational ideas and practices' (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000: 5). This thesis illuminates the historical context and background assumptions which have shaped the continuing relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England. I included contemporary writings as primary source material in this study because they provided evidence both in recounting events and in expressing current thinking. For instance, the work of Charnley and Jones on *The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy* represents both a contemporary account and an academic analysis (Charnley & Jones, 1979).

The investigation uses literature review, documentary and archival research and data from interviews to chart a historical narrative and to examine the social, intellectual and political background to the educational history. Exploring social attitudes is crucial to my analysis. The subject crosses disciplines and occupies a relational space. McCulloch and Richardson define a distinction between 'the emphasis given by historians to sources which record sets of events in chronology that can be reconstructed' and 'the emphasis given by social researchers to procedures from which theories of social action and structure, fixed often uncertainly in time, may be refined or freshly constructed' (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000:121). Both approaches are important to this study.

An element of oral history is part of my multi-faceted approach. I had experience of interviewing practitioners, and was aware of the fine details which they might contribute to research. A mix of interviews with practitioners, combined with documentary research can help to 'shed interesting light on change in education over the longer term' (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000:119). Oral history is

appropriate to the topic and to a social practice and emancipatory approach because it validates the views and agency of the people involved. Thompson suggests that oral history 'provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account', giving ordinary people 'a central place' (Thompson, 2000:7) 'Oral history is history built round people,' (ibid:23). Portelli points out that 'tone, volume and intonation' are features of oral accounts, and these traits played a part in my analysis (Portelli, 2016). Most of my interviewees were people with some authority, either as teachers and managers or in key positions in their field. I also talked to students whose contribution helped me to reflect on the wider implications of my subject. The topic covered in this investigation is a neglected area, so these are voices not often heard.

Three contextual considerations are built into my methodological choices. One is the lack of literature specific to the subject, a second is my own history and viewpoint, and a third is my understanding of social practice theory. The review of the relevant literature revealed that no previous academic studies have directly addressed the history of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. I was, however, able to identify themes and factors which were important in shaping the relationship. The readings included literature relating to adult education in general as well as to adult literacy education and to disability issues. I was particularly interested in discovering overarching themes. As stated above identity, purpose, stigma, agency, inclusion and 'functionality' emerged as strong linking themes identified in my literature review

My own age, status, relationships and networks are elements in the investigation. I was originally prompted to take up this research by Hillier's challenge 'to force ourselves to move into the spaces where we feel uncomfortable, where we

do not have the answers, and we even have to question the ideas we hold dear' (Hillier, 2006:183). Reflexivity is an important factor in my approach and the context of this study. I first volunteered to work for an adult literacy scheme at Blackfriars Settlement in London in the 1970s. As a teacher in adult literacy education and then a manager in the 'Special Needs' section of an Adult Education Institute (AEI), before joining a Further Education (FE) college in 1994, I found it difficult to navigate varying boundaries between adult literacy and provision for adults with learning difficulties. I was caught up in the enthusiasm of the 1970s campaign for adult literacy education and then frustrated by the reinterpretation of adult literacy as pre-employment training. I was excited by the possibilities offered by an empowering approach to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties and then confused by the proposal that adult literacy teachers should be able to monitor cognitive developments in basic communications. I learned a lot about education, and about my own prejudices, from working with adults with learning difficulties, and from the other professionals involved. I was forced to think about the purpose of adult literacy education. I am now retired, but I recognise my subjectivity as an ex-practitioner. Like other writers in this field (e.g. Mace, 1992; Baynham, 1995; Duncan, 2010) I am both 'insider' and 'outsider'. My identity as a 'professional' in adult education makes me 'other' than the students and part of the practitioner community. It is a position explored by Heather Elliott when she writes:

An over-emphasis on my own story risks imposing what I think I know on others' stories. Yet so can an under-emphasis. What a researcher brings to fieldwork and data analysis affects what she can know, whether it is acknowledged or not (Elliott, 2011:4).

Like Elliott I consider that 'my own story' is a legitimate element in this research, and one which I cannot escape. At the same time I acknowledge my subjectivity and

have planned a methodology to reflect many perspectives. I used group interviews with the students interviewed for this project, partly to avoid an obvious student–teacher relationship. The knowledge I produce will be, inevitably, a construct of the time, place and culture it springs from. The time-span 1970-2010 reflects broadly the period of my active involvement in the field.

I have been influenced in my research by the work of RaPAL and my understanding of social practice in the context of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. My work is thus located in the context of New Literacy Studies (NLS). A social practice philosophy is embedded in the principles of RaPAL and in their approach to research and practice in adult literacy education. The principle of agency is central to the social practice view of adult literacy, which understands literacy in terms of how people use it. The question of who has agency is a strong theme identified in reviewing the literature. It is a characteristic aspect of education for empowerment, and writers such as Sutcliffe (1990, 1994) and Dee et al (2006) appreciated that adult literacy education could offer real agency to students with learning difficulties. I also note that researchers such as sociologist Jennifer Mason (Mason, 2004) and socio-anthropologists Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave (Holland & Lave, 2009) have considered how people actively construct their own identities as ‘historical persons’. The importance of agency is part of my research methodology. I conducted my interviews in line with Kvale’s definition of ‘life-world’ interviews, allowing ‘subjects to convey to others their situation from their own perspective and in their own words’ (Kvale, 2007:11).

Stage One: Documentary research

In this section I detail the documentary sources which I used and record my analysis of the data collected.

Collecting the evidence

I went from the timeline to the official documents. I consulted key documents published by international agencies. In both educational and disability thinking at the time international bodies were significant. UNESCO made a commitment to adult literacy education from its inception. The organisation set the parameters for discussing the field from the 1950s. It published weighty documents which facilitated debate about adult education and provided the vocabulary in the Fauré (1972) and Delors (1996) Reports. The UN message is 'rights' oriented. It also published statements which promoted disability rights including a Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (1971) and the Salamanca Statement on Inclusion (1994). In addition my research included OECD reports, which influenced government thinking in England, particularly in the Skills-for-Life initiative of 2001. OECD approached literacy as an economic development issue, promoting a 'human capital' perspective.

UK legislation and government reports were essential to my research. The 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act has specific significance because it established the right of all children to education. The 1973 Russell Report offers insights into contemporary opinions in adult education. Documents such as the Warnock Report (1978) and the subsequent 1981 Education Act followed. They are important to this study because they address education, attitudes and practice in teaching people with disabilities, including learning difficulties. It is interesting to note

the lack of 'official' documents in the field during the 1980s. This absence is itself significant. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act changed post-school education in England in the same way that the 1988 Education Act fundamentally altered school education. The introduction of a new central funding body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), and a policy of competition and accountability had a big impact on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. The FEFC produced many relevant papers and reports between 1993 and 2000. Their 1996 Tomlinson Report *Inclusive Learning* was a landmark publication in addressing post-school policy and practice in terms of people with disabilities. In 2001 the Learning and Skills Act confirmed the location of adult literacy education firmly within vocational skills-based education and training. The 2009 Little Report meanwhile demonstrated that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) would only fund further education for people with learning difficulties in the framework of employment training.

Documents relating particularly to adult literacy education included the Moser Report, *A Fresh Start* (1999) and the Skills-for-Life strategy papers (DfEE, 2001) which followed. Both have huge significance for the relationship which is the focus of this study. *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000) was published as a supplement to the Moser Report and represents the single major effort to formulate a policy which combined the latest thinking on adult literacy education and the commitment of campaigners to the inclusion of students with learning difficulties. In the field of learning difficulties the legislation around Community Care affected the relationship in the 1980s and 1990s and the White Paper *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001) introduced 'person-centred' planning and consultation into services for people with learning difficulties.

I also studied reports by the various agencies which fronted adult literacy education in England within the category of 'official' documents. The Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) 1975–6, the Adult Literacy Unit (ALU) 1976–8, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) 1979–95 and the BSA (Basic Skills Agency) 1995–2007 all produced guidance, reports and other publications, mostly not specifically targeting my subject, but often with implications for this investigation. I interpreted 'official' in this case to cover other papers and reports published by independent bodies such as NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), the FEU (Further Education Unit) and charities such as Skill, as they were often at least partly government-funded and because they were pitched at a level to influence national policy. The net for 'official' documents was widely thrown because no single body had responsibility for the relationship.

Analysing the data

I analysed the 'official' documents for relevance, meaning and content, bearing in mind the outcomes of the literature review, and the questions which I had formulated. I found that the publications of international bodies were significant to the relationship under scrutiny. In the case of the research report commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), *Being, Having and Doing* (Dee et al, 2006) the reference to the UNESCO report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors, 1996), was explicit and intentional. More often it was implicit as in the launch paper for Skills-for-Life when David Blunkett, Secretary of State, wrote in his foreword, 'The growth of the knowledge economy and the spread of information technology are ... changing what jobs we do and how we do them ... The prosperity of the nation and every one of us depends on how we meet these challenges and

opportunities,' (Blunkett, 2001: foreword). His message is derived from OECD thinking on human capital as expressed in *The Well-being of Nations*:

Changing economic and social conditions have given knowledge and skills – human capital – an increasingly central role in the economic success of nations and individuals. Information and communications technology, globalisation of economic activity and the trend towards greater personal responsibility and autonomy have all changed the demand for learning (OECD, 2001:17).

This thinking at government level had a profound impact on the relationship which is my focus because it drove funding decisions, as well as official discourse. We can see in the publications of ALBSU during the 1980s and 1990s how the language of the Unit was modified to fit government priorities, most obviously in the use of the term 'skills' to replace 'adult literacy and numeracy'.

Ideas about education for people with disabilities, including learning difficulties, were also influenced by international initiatives such as the UN-led International Year of Disabled Persons (1981). A line can be tracked in the official documents from the 1970 legislation on the rights of children with disabilities to access education, through the Special Educational Needs Act (1981) to the 1996 FEFC report, *Inclusive Learning* (Tomlinson, 1996), which targeted Further Education, and the training material *Access for All* (2002) which was specific to adult literacy and numeracy. It is harder to pinpoint how attitudes to learning difficulties were changed by official documents. We know that ALBSU in the 1980s and 1990s accepted that students with learning difficulties had a right to attend adult literacy education. The Unit published *Developing Communication Skills* which was designed to support teachers working specifically with students with learning difficulties (ALBSU, 1983a). Meanwhile Alan Wells, as Director of ALBSU, continued to

articulate an argument which distinguished between 'basic education' and 'special needs provision' (Wells, 1985:4). The divide was effectively built into the FEFC funding system introduced in 1992 by the Further and Higher Education Act.

Although the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was not a conscious part of the 'official' documents, close analysis of the assumptions and implications of such policy documents and developments enabled me to tease out the changing nature of the relationship. I conclude that although it is not the focus of international thinking, nor of government action, the relationship I am studying is affected by political, social and intellectual developments.

Stage Two: Archive research

Collecting the evidence

Using archive sources allowed me to take my documentary research beyond the official reports and publications. This section explains how I addressed and analysed data drawn from three specific archive collections. I found evidence related to my topic in the Basic Skills collection at the Institute of Education, UCL, the *Changing Faces* archive at Lancaster University and the papers of the Language and Literacy Unit (LLU) kept at London South Bank University (LSBU). This research enabled me to uncover the implications of government decisions and international trends nearer to the classroom and at a local level. None of the archives which I used had a catalogued 'special needs' or 'learning difficulties' section; I therefore looked at a wide range of documents to pick out relevant material. The first collection which I searched was the Basic Skills archive housed at the Institute of Education, London. The collection holds the papers of the national literacy agencies listed above. It

includes annual reports, newsletters, guidance for teachers, publicity material and research reports. It was a rich resource, partly because it was possible to see the changes in funding, language and attitudes over the years through the publications.

The *Changing Faces* archive dedicated to adult literacy, language and numeracy education was one of the original inspirations to pursue my subject. The collection represents a wealth of material brought together during the research for Hamilton and Hillier's book, *The Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy: A critical history* (2006). Here I found notes of meetings of the BAS (British Association of Settlements, 1973) group which planned the *Right to Read* campaign. The minutes recorded how the members decided that it was not desirable to include people with learning difficulties in their figures, and that they should be careful to 'bear in mind popular prejudice' (BAS Adult Literacy Campaign Group, 1973). It was a significant find for me and for my research.

The archive contains examples of 'grey' materials such as teaching resources, special project reports and local initiatives, submitted in answer to a call to practitioners. I was particularly interested in the material predating the 1990s standardisation and vocationalisation of adult literacy education because it reflected the creativity and commitment of teachers and managers. I found more eloquent testimony than I had expected to the importance attached to work with people with learning difficulties. The collection included conference records which highlighted work with people with learning difficulties, reports of partnership projects, teaching packs and student writing which noted the contribution of students with learning difficulties. There was also evidence of the distress caused to teachers by pressure to assess students in inappropriate ways, by the need to conform to inflexible achievement measures and by the feeling that work in this area was not valued by

their own institutions or by other agencies involved with the students. I hope that this study will mark the conscientious work done by students, teachers and managers in the field.

In addition, I searched the archive of the Language and Literacy Unit (LLU) at LSBU. In an example of 'snowballing' it was suggested by one of my interviewees that the papers would be useful. I also interviewed Madeline Held (director of LLU 1988–2008). The LLU papers and the interview revealed that the agency (latterly known as LLU+) played a major part in delivering staff training and acting as a 'sounding board' for the development of Skills-for-Life in the 2000s.

Analysing the data

The material in the various archives enabled me to explore the impact of the official documents by looking for the story between the lines. Unlike the official documents some of the archive sources directly addressed questions of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. I was able to understand the way that wider tensions identified in the literature review played out in practice.

Reports of ALBSU Special Projects, for instance, outlined the difficulty of measuring progress on a programme designed to help students with learning difficulties to produce their own materials, and of the complicated negotiations involved in sharing responsibilities through partnership work. A report of a national RaPAL conference highlighted the sensitive discussions around staff attitudes to students with learning difficulties (Stanbury, 1986). A student commented on how the practice in adult literacy education did not live up to the 'student-centred' rhetoric of the providers (Merry, 1985:1). Adult literacy teachers working with students with learning difficulties explained how they felt marginalised (Taylor, ed., 1987).

At the same time the archive material demonstrated that the idea of adult literacy education as a way to challenge the status quo and to enable students to 'take control of their own learning' was kept alive. Local schemes published their own teaching materials. Students with learning difficulties could take part in student writing projects such as the Gatehouse publication *A Writing Resource Pack Written by Students in Basic Education* (Frost & Hoy, eds., 1985). The unhappy practitioners who recorded their frustrations as adult literacy teachers working with students with learning difficulties at a Lancashire ABE conference, also declared that they saw 'education as a vehicle' for their students 'to exercise their right to make their own decisions and choices' (Taylor, ed., 1987:13).

Stage Three: Interviews

Collecting the evidence

Interviews were a major part of this investigation. I wanted to include first-hand accounts which would ground the analysis in remembered detail through the 'inside' story of the changing relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties as it was experienced by the people involved. The primary evidence complemented and corrected the documentary research. I ultimately conducted three different types of interview, which are detailed below. My strategy for sampling for the interviews/primary data was a 'judgement' or 'purposeful' technique 'based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself' (Marshall, 1996: 523). A 'convenience' (ibid: 523) approach allowed me to access a range of sources. I adopted the principles of BERA (British Educational Research Association) to establish an ethically sound research-oriented process. I was aware

that the process must be capable of being independently verified (Kvale, 2007:30) and I developed paperwork which underpinned the principles which informed my research.

I first interviewed individual practitioners who had been active as teachers, managers, support workers, inspectors and trainers during the period. They were promised anonymity as I believed that confidentiality would help people to be candid. I also led two group interviews with students or ex-students. They were supported by a facilitator with whom they were familiar, and I subsequently anonymised their contributions. I finally added a round of individual interviews with 'key' people who agreed to be interviewed 'on the record'. These could be described as rich 'key informant' interviews (Marshall, 1996:524).

I originally planned to interview 8–10 'expert witnesses' who had been actively involved in the field and could provide a 'long-term' view. I wanted to present a perspective which could oversee the period and allow for comparisons. I actually interviewed eleven people in a first round of interviews. My aim was to recruit a sample which represented a cross-section of active participants. I used a judgement sample framework which included the variables of gender, age and career experience and work location. It was important for credibility that the sample covered urban and rural localities and included people who worked in a range of settings (community, FE and private). I was interested in any common themes which emerged and in any contrasts. The subjects reflected different contexts and backgrounds, as well as ages, levels of experience and career trajectories. I chose to interview some individuals who were specialists in learning difficulties, and some who had broad experience of adult literacy education and some who had worked in both areas. Men and women were included but the subjects did not include anyone

from BAME communities. The individuals were white and middle class, and most had degree-level qualifications. This was a realistic picture of the staff group involved in the work that I was investigating.

Each potential subject received a summary of the research project planned, and a consent form on university-headed paper which broke down the elements involved. It was made clear that subjects would have the opportunity to see the notes of the interview and make corrections or alterations if they chose, that they might withdraw from the project at any time, knowing that their input would not then be used without their agreement, and that they could contact me at any time. The consent form also specified that any quotations would be used anonymously and that there was a possibility that the material could be published in an academic form. Each participant signed and returned a consent form. The forms were modified as detailed below, when I approached the 'key' people for interviews.

I conducted all the interviews myself, one-to-one and face-to-face, using a digital audio recorder. I had envisaged semi-structured interviews such as I had used in a local research project funded by the LSC. In the event people found it easier to tell me the story of their involvement as a personal history, and I would occasionally ask questions which helped to keep my investigation topic central to the conversation. I wrote up the interviews from the audiotapes, and sent the result to each subject to ensure that they were satisfied that I had gathered their thoughts correctly. I did not claim them as word-for-word transcripts, although I strove for accuracy. All were happy to approve the outcomes. One individual sent me a thoughtful commentary, feeling that she had missed some opportunities. In my analysis I found that there were points where hesitations were significant, or a

humorous comment covered awkwardness. These were often related to terminology issues, and anxiety around the stigma attached to people with learning difficulties.

As I worked on the analysis of the initial interview data it became clear that readers might gain more from the material if they had more information about the interviewees. I kept to my plan to use initials which were allocated to each subject in alphabetic order, but I wrote to each of the participants to ask for their consent to include a brief pen-portrait which would enable readers to understand more about the experiences behind the data. I wrote a paragraph summarising the background information which people had shared with me, still maintaining anonymity. Everybody was content to agree to this change in the conditions except for one subject. I agreed to make alterations to meet their requests. The pen-portraits are appended as Appendix 2.

People with learning difficulties who studied adult literacy during the period 1970–2010 were obviously a central presence in this investigation. This is in part the story of a new group of students. The relationship investigated had a special impact on them, although they had little power in the situation. I was determined that the research should enable the student voice to be heard although it was not straightforward. I could not practically interview such transient students from across the whole period. I note too that the concept of ‘the student voice’ has been problematised. In the context of racial tension in US higher education Elizabeth Ellsworth demonstrated that ideas about ‘empowerment’ and the ‘student voice’ could be interpreted as ‘repressive myths of critical pedagogy’ (Ellsworth, 1989:297). I persevered because, as a practitioner and researcher, I believed the study would have been incomplete without student input. I agree with the position set out as a principle of research and practice by RaPAL, that ‘the students are the teachers as

well as the learners' (Herrington & Kendall, 2005:xxvi). I was committed to an 'active' conversation which allowed students to speak for themselves. I planned to speak to adults with learning difficulties who had experience of adult literacy education during the period under review. My intention was to use their memories of their experiences of adult literacy education to add another perspective to my data. In the end I met people with learning difficulties who remembered little of their past education but gave me great insight into their feelings as students. I argue therefore that the primary data I gathered from the student interviews is valid as a 'student viewpoint' which, while being specific to a particular time was nevertheless indicative of a broader student experience.

After discussion and some false starts, I decided on group settings for interviewing adults with learning difficulties who had experience of adult literacy education. I was anxious not to put disproportionate pressure on a single individual and I was not confident that any one student could be described as 'typical'. I was conscious too that in an unfamiliar face-to-face situation, where I had authority, an individual subject might be keen to please me. An exploration of the ethical issues involved in interviewing people with learning difficulties touches on this dilemma in discussing the case of 'Peter' who was interviewed by researchers from the University of Northumbria. 'Peter' was a willing subject and his agenda was 'to help the researcher'. However, 'Peter' 'told elaborate stories about stealing cars, which the interviewer believed to be false' (Swain et al., 1998:27). The article points out how the situation raised issues of respect, privacy and honesty. While I did not anticipate such a scenario, I believed that a group situation would support the students and alleviate the pressure on any individual student to 'perform'. I looked for a group who knew each other well and would be happy to meet me in a group setting

facilitated by their own teacher. I envisaged something more structured than a 'focus group' approach, while giving the group members opportunities to bring up topics. This was almost completely achieved. I recorded two student groups, one in London and one near my home in Suffolk.

In both cases I initially approached the organisations responsible for running the groups involved. Both bodies were happy to co-operate. I used the same paperwork that I had prepared for practitioner interviews and added an information sheet on the place of the group interviews. In Suffolk the organisation was Realise Futures, which is a social enterprise company operating across Essex and Suffolk, offering advice, training and support to people with disabilities. I liaised with the manager of the nearby wholefood shop, Poppy's Pantry, where she runs a retail business and a workplace training centre for people with learning difficulties. I discovered that they no longer organised literacy and numeracy classes but provided vocationally oriented training. Trainees could, for instance, work towards certification in food hygiene. After consultation I met the staff group, including the trainees who work behind the scenes, to explain who I was and what I was doing. We fixed a date for my interview session, and a member of staff was allocated to support the group. On the appointed day five of the workers present agreed to talk to me. We met in their workplace. They signed the consent forms after the support worker and I went through the papers again. The group members were aged between 25 and 60. Some of them would have been among the first cohort of students to attend college as a natural expectation. A member of the group told me that he had celebrated his 50th birthday the previous year, so he would have been born in 1966, four years before the seminal 1970 Act. He would have reached eighteen in 1984, the year of the publication of FEU's *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984), the

first book intended to support good practice in the education of people with 'severe learning difficulties' in FE. All the people I spoke to at Poppy's Pantry had studied English at school and at one of the FE colleges in Suffolk. They had not done any literacy education since leaving college, as far as they recalled. They were mainly non-readers. I did not get much information about the literacy (or English) that they had studied, apart from the fact that they had gained certification. I revisited the centre after sending the notes, so that we could check that they were happy with the record. We read through the notes together, with a different member of staff in attendance. The transcript revealed that I had fallen into the trap of asking too many closed questions. It also showed that they were willing to participate in conversation around the table and to listen and share, all skills which would have been integral to their literacy or English education. In this sense they represented a new generation of adults with learning difficulties.

The London student group met at Share Community, a social enterprise company, which offers training and support to disabled people in Lambeth. This group was different in that they were a recognised literacy class. They told me that it was a mark of distinction to be accepted for the literacy class. The students can achieve certification through an OCN (Open College Network) qualification. Again, after gaining the consent of the management, I had a preliminary meeting with the students and their teacher. The group was aged between 20 and 60. The teacher decided to make my request a learning opportunity. We talked about what I was trying to do, and the group suggested themes, which the teacher recorded and sent to me after the session. We met in a 'classroom' which other groups used during the week. On the day of the recorded interview seven students were present, plus their teacher. At the outset we checked that everyone had seen and understood the

information sheet and the consent form before they signed up. The teacher had enlarged the print to aid comprehension. Some of the students said that they did not like the audio recorder and chose not to participate. Four students agreed to take part. All were readers and skilled communicators. They told me what they liked about the literacy class. They listed being able to use a dictionary to check long words, and being able to ask questions and to put forward their own ideas without fear. One student explained how different literacy tools such as 'skim and scan' or 'phonics' were discussed. The students were more sophisticated and self-aware than the individuals that I had met in Suffolk. The teacher confirmed that the class dealt with difficult words/concepts such as 'consent' and 'independence'. I also heard that the class supported some of the students in their voluntary work, for instance in reception, or in catering jobs at the centre. The students all remembered English classes at school, and most had a chequered record of attending (or not attending) many different schools, special or otherwise. Like the Suffolk group they particularly mentioned certification and the fact that a public ceremony meant that family members could celebrate their success. Also, like the Suffolk students, they were warm and open and wanted to share their pride in their achievements.

Meeting and talking to the students was an important part of the research for this study, but I found it difficult to put their contribution into an historical analysis. I suggest that the students did however provide vital evidence. Some of them knew that being identified as a literacy student could be humiliating but, by contrast, they highly valued their achievements. The classes, I suggest, allowed them to challenge the negative stereotypes which were part of their daily experience. They told me of the pride and joy which could be gained as adult literacy students. The pride was expressed in the importance attached to the public award ceremonies remembered

by all the students I spoke to. They emphasised the fact that their families attended, 'And they can see that you ain't just been going Tuesdays, or when you go, just to waste time. You're learning something' (Student 2 recorded at Share, 23.5.17). The joy was especially obvious in the words of one of the London students when she told me about learning to use e-mails, 'I've learned how to do it...I've learned how to do it! I couldn't even do it before, but I've learned how to do it now. Look at me! I can't believe it! (Student 3 at Share, 23.5.17). Her exclamation is a demonstration of how she perceived her success as a break-through. She had thought that she, as a person with learning difficulties, was excluded from the world of e-mails. Her adult literacy class enabled her to break the taboo.

The pride and the joy involved in adult literacy education for students with learning difficulties are factors which are an essential part of the relationship, but are little remarked upon. They bring satisfaction to staff as well as students, and they sustained the relationship which I am examining. They are a measure of the worth of the relationship which does not appear in 'official' figures. I note that Zoe Fowler, researching Skills-for-Life in an unpublished thesis (Fowler, 2005) called for more research to include students. I have made a small contribution.

I had not originally intended to interview named people. I altered my plans because, in working on the answers to my research questions, I was speculating about how and why decisions were made. It seemed more sensible to ask people who were in positions where they had an influence on, or an overview of, the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties at the time, for their perspectives on events. I decided to approach people who held 'top' posts in the field and two knowledgeable practitioner/researchers for interviews. I thought it would add authority to my analysis if these 'key' individuals

were prepared to speak 'on the record'. I therefore revised the consent forms to make it clear that in these cases any quotations used would be attributed. The other conditions remained the same, although I stated that I would ensure that they knew which quotations I was intending to use.

On this basis I interviewed seven more individuals. They were (in the order I met them): Alan Wells, Director of ALU, ALBSU and the BSA (1978–2006); Sir Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE (1989–2015); Deborah Cooper, CEO of Skill (1984–97); Jane Mace, researcher, author and Director of Cambridge House Adult Literacy Scheme (1970s) and the Lee Community Education Centre (1980s); Dr Lesley Dee, researcher, author, FE Lecturer, Herts County Inspector for FE (1987–92), Lecturer, London and Cambridge Institutes of Education (1992–2006); Liz Lawson, Development Officer FEU (1994–2001) and Team Leader, Skills for Life, Standards, Curricula and Assessment for ABSSU (2001–4); Madeline Held, Director of LLU (1989–2008). These were extremely interesting and valuable interviews. I was able to record their memories of their involvement in the relationship I am studying, and to ask them specific questions, which were partly driven by the analysis of data to date. I learned how people have to operate to achieve policy objectives and the difficulty of putting forward a complex argument to politicians who need instant answers and results. Five of the interviews were in person and two were conducted over the phone for practical reasons.

I recognise that the 'key' people interviews are more subject to hindsight and 'polish' as they gave participants the opportunity to construct their version of the history, with the possibility of brushing out aspects which did not fit their narrative. At the same time I was conscious that each person had a unique insight from their own experience of events. Different points of view were expressed, but each contributor

was thoughtful and generous. They were willing to look again at a neglected issue, although they all claimed to have forgotten details over the years.

Analysis of the primary data

The data collected through the interviews was not homogenous. To help me answer my research questions I analysed the interview material first for meaning, and then for patterns and themes. I read and re-read the interviews and my notes. The voices of the various subjects spoke to all parts of my investigation. I felt that the interview material held up a mirror to the subject I was investigating and allowed me to see into corners which were otherwise hidden. Their statements enabled me to assess and evaluate the documentary sources and my own position. The data collected confirmed the questions that I could address. For clarity I repeat the questions here:

How did this relationship change over time?

What were the significant factors in shaping the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970-2010?

What are the enduring themes characterising this relationship?

How did this relationship affect adult literacy education in practice?

In order to clarify the message of the interviews I did a simple quantitative exercise based on the interview data. I wanted to include the views of participants on the 'significant factors shaping the relationship'. Taking the four most often mentioned issues I used colour coding to identify which were the crucial factors spontaneously remembered by the interviewees. I did not include the student

interviews, as they were more directed by my questions, but I did compare the outcome with the student transcripts. I found that across all the participants by far the most common theme (301 mentions) was pedagogy, a heading under which I included teaching ethos (eg employability), classroom practice (eg modifying resources, phonics) and theory of teaching (eg negotiated curriculum). The next most commonly mentioned item was institutions (at 229). I noted that there was little mention of the BSA or ALBSU, but more of FEFC and of NIACE, LEAs, colleges and awarding bodies. The students too mentioned teaching and institutions. It is interesting to discover that teaching was the most important factor in the view of all those interviewed, and that the context for that teaching, the institutions, emerged as the next concern. Funding, which I had expected to be highly significant to practitioners and to 'key' people, rated only 162 mentions. Least of the major issues mentioned was training (at 96). This was not a concern for students, but was also not mentioned much by 'key' people. The findings represent a basic analysis of the outcomes of the interviews. It is one aspect of identifying the significant factors which shaped the relationship I am scrutinising. My notes on the interviews and the transcripts provided much more detail.

Stage Four: From data collection to presentation

During the data collection and analysis stage I was helped by making presentations in research settings which required me to summarise my findings and conclusions to date. They were valuable tests of reliability and validity where I was open to questions from other researchers or students. Participants were experienced in research investigating various aspects of educational history. The feedback from a fellow researcher helped me to decide on the structure I have used to present my

thesis. I have adopted a chronological framework, dividing the research findings into four chapters, representing the four decades 1970–2010. To organise the material and to answer the research questions I have used four headings which bring together the findings of the literature review, the documentary research and the interview analysis. Each chapter is structured as sections headed:

The international and intellectual context

Legislation, government policy and official reports

The role of agencies

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice

I needed to revisit every aspect of this material, and to constantly sift and check the evidence in writing and rewriting the final presentation. As suggested by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'producing the report' is the last step in the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

Issues of principle and ethics are involved in my methodology. As stated above I used three types of interview. The first raft of interviews with practitioners is presented anonymously. Subjects are identified by initials in the alphabetic order in which I interviewed them. Pen-portraits of the individuals are available at Appendix 2, with anonymity preserved. I subsequently carried out interviews with 'key' individuals involved in the field who agreed to have their names recorded. I also conducted group interviews with adult students with learning difficulties. These subjects were also promised anonymity. I identified them as Student 1, 2 etc. in my presentation.

I needed ethical approval from UCL for my proposal. The students I intended to interview were classed as 'potentially vulnerable participants'. The Research Ethics

Committee of the university sought reassurance from me that no individual would be named, that individual consent would be agreed and that those involved would not be under pressure to join the project from 'gatekeepers' in their own organisation. They subsequently asked me to confirm that I recognised the possibility that the exercise might stir unhappy memories of failure and shame. I noted the guidance of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which emphasises an ethic of respect. I consulted literature about interviewing people with learning difficulties and theories of 'participatory' and 'emancipatory research'. I wanted to ensure that I was following good practice principles in recording the voices of students. It was generally agreed by these authors that 'people with learning difficulties have increasingly come to be seen as reliable informants who hold valid opinions and have a right to express them' (Stalker, 1998:5). However, in a chapter devoted to questions of 'emancipatory' disability research and Special Educational Needs (SEN), Barnes and Sheldon argue that ' "emancipatory" disability research cannot be built upon ontological foundations that construct disabled people and young people as having needs that are "special"' (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007:8). It is a statement that goes to the heart of my topic. I recognise that whereas I believed that the students whom I interviewed held valid views and had the right to express them, I was at the same time accepting to a certain extent the label of 'special'. All the adult students whom I interviewed had been at 'special' schools, and I was able to approach them because they were in a 'special' setting. Despite the labelling, however, I believe that this research can be considered emancipatory because I spoke to the students to give voice to their experiences and I use the data to build towards conclusions which show how provision can be improved, where it is not based on perceived 'needs'.

The willing participation of all those interviewed for this study has been vital. I am grateful.

Chapter 3. The 1970s – Throwing out the ‘Ladybirds’

Introduction

An examination of the evidence presented by documents, witnesses and commentators in this decade shows how the factors shaping the relationship over the forty years 1970–2010 began to operate. Some constant themes and tensions emerge which bear on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties as it evolved. The pressures of political priorities and social attitudes on funding are evident from the outset. The question of access to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties is problematic. Issues concerning the purpose of adult literacy education and the identity of the students start to appear. At the same time the shared ideas and values which allowed the relationship to support challenging and vulnerable students are present. These factors affected the thinking of practitioners and the practice of adult literacy education.

I discerned two main themes in exploring the fledgling relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties between 1970 and 1979. Both were clearly articulated by the people interviewed for this study. One defining aspect which connects the two activities is the demand for rights, empowerment and social justice which motivated people in both fields (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Sutcliffe, 1990). Practitioners in both areas told me that they felt part of a ‘mission’ and were inspired by the belief that they were working to overturn injustice and unfair educational privilege. The connection between the two fields was sometimes made because individuals worked across both adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties. A student-centred approach to education, based on the motivations and interests of students,

demonstrates how values could be shared. Practitioners were able to use teaching techniques which were effective in adult literacy education, such as the 'language experience' method, to respectfully teach and validate students with learning difficulties, focusing on their real lives and experience. Another common and linked theme is the search for a specifically 'adult' model, which was distinct from the existing school-based 'remedial' education currently provided (Devereux, 1978).

Adult literacy education in England was not part of the educational mainstream (Jones & Marriott, 1995; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). But new ideas about adult education were circulating. In 1972 UNESCO published the Fauré Report, *Learning to Be*. The report introduced the idea of 'lifelong education' through a 'learning society' and stressed the importance of education for democracy and for social development across the world (Fauré, 1972). Paulo Freire's book on adult literacy education as revolution, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, appeared in an English paperback edition in 1972. In 1973 a UK government investigation into 'non-vocational' adult education chaired by Sir Lionel Russell produced its report, *The Russell Report on Adult Education in England and Wales*. Russell called for a switch from an adult education offer which mainly served people who had already benefited from educational opportunities to provision which targeted 'the disadvantaged'. These publications put rights, social change and participation onto the agenda for adult education in England. The influence of the civil rights movement in the US was also significant, particularly in relation to disability (Barnes, 2005; Thomas, 2013). The ideas about entitlement and participation were important to people working in adult literacy education, and to the development of education for people with learning difficulties.

Shifting attitudes and developments in both areas represented a challenge to accepted conventions in education and in society. Two events critical to this investigation can be identified. In 1970 new legislation and government intervention altered the theory and practice of education for people with 'mental handicap', as it was then known (Barton, 1988; Oliver, 1990; Corbett, 1996; Borsay, 2005). The 1970 Education Act (Handicapped Children) removed the concept of an 'ineducable child', which had been enshrined in the 1944 Education Act. A right to education was written into law in Britain. It was a true conceptual shift because it established the principle of 'education' alongside 'care' for children with disabilities, introducing a complexity which would become an issue in adult education. Also during the 1970s, a successful campaign achieved the first national funding support for adult literacy education in Britain (Jones & Marriott, 1995; Withnall, 1994; Clyne & Payne, 2006; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). The two developments were not overtly related but both signalled new opportunities.

Conflicting forces were, however, evident in adult education in England in the 1970s. Two initiatives in 1973 represented different perspectives and priorities. One was the launch of the Right to Read campaign for adult literacy education funding (BAS, 1974). The other was the establishment of the government-funded Manpower Services Commission (MSC) which was intended to facilitate training to meet the needs of the UK economy (O'Brien, 1988). They demonstrated an ideological divide in approaches to the purpose of education for adults (McCaffery, 1985; Green & Lucas, 1999; Finger & Asun, 2001; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). The Right to Read campaign was based on ideas of rights, social action and empowerment, while the MSC had economic aims, reflecting the interests of employers and concerns about national prosperity. The relationship between adult literacy education and education

for people with learning difficulties was influenced and complicated by the interaction over time of these two aspirations, as government emphasis on 'employability' grew. Meanwhile questions of language and stigma reflecting contemporary social attitudes to learning difficulties and public perception of adult 'illiteracy' led to tension in theory and in practice.

Documentary and primary evidence reveal the tense relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties as it evolved during the 1970s. Adult literacy education campaigners at the time were anxious not to be identified with the school-based 'special/remedial' label. When Alan Wells (later head of ALBSU and then BSA) took up a new post in adult literacy education in Birmingham in 1973, the only LEA provision teaching literacy to adult students was 'run by a special school ... and the teachers all came from the school' (Wells, 2019). He described the classes for adults as 'an evening with Ladybird books', when he spoke to me in 2019. 'Ladybird books' were illustrated children's books designed as a structured reading programme. His account illustrates a belief in the contemporary established educational system that teaching literacy to adults was a branch of the remedial education offered in schools. By the end of the decade activists, including Wells, had revolutionised adult literacy education in the UK. They introduced new structures, training and materials reflecting adult experience and aspirations. At the same time new educational policy imperatives of integration in schooling and vocationalism in post-school provision began to change the wider picture. All these factors played a part in the relationship over time.

The philosophical question of whether education is about 'needs' as opposed to 'rights' is evident in contemporary debates. The Warnock Report, published in 1978, is significant to the topic, although it was not designed to deal with adult

education. The report on education for 'handicapped' children and young people was based on 'rights', but dealt with 'needs' (Warnock, 1978). Warnock's committee started from the principle that education was 'a human good ... to which all human beings are entitled' (ibid., 1978:2.6). They judged that the goals of education were the same for all pupils. Meanwhile they appreciated that 'labels tend to stick and children diagnosed as ESN (M) [educationally sub-normal/moderate] or maladjusted can be stigmatised unnecessarily for their whole school careers and beyond' (ibid.:3.23). They therefore urged 'the merits of a more positive approach based on the concept of special educational need' (ibid.:3.1). They recognised the problem that the argument for 'special' resources could emphasise 'separateness, an idea we are anxious to dispel' (ibid.: 3.30). The vocabulary of 'special needs' was intended to remove stigma. The new system they advocated centred on integrated education but depended on individual assessment of needs to trigger support. Critics came to argue that it highlighted 'need' and ultimately reinforced the idea of disability as 'individual deficit' (Oliver, 1990; Corbett, 1996; Tomlinson, 2014).

An echo of the 'needs' versus 'rights' debate was expressed in the notion of 'on-behalfism', which was the word used by author and adult literacy activist Jane Mace, talking to me in 2019 about the 1970s adult literacy campaign in England. She described a 'welfarist' attitude which coloured their thinking and which ties in with the pervasive discourse of deficit identified in reviewing the literature. She told me that, 'We were making the campaign for Right to Read **on behalf** of those who we thought couldn't make it for themselves' [Her emphasis], (Mace, 2019). The question of who has agency in adult literacy education is also significant to the developing relationship with education for people with learning difficulties. Mace reflected that

'the idea of having needs ... was a dominant idea in the early 1970s, and the Russell Report and so on ... Special needs, of course, being part of that' (ibid., 2019).

The analysis of the Russell Report (1973) categorised 'adult illiterates' and people with 'mental handicap' together as 'disadvantaged'. Looking back, Mace said that she felt ashamed of the response of adult literacy education, which she characterised as 'we must do all we can to rescue them'. The agenda for 'illiterates' and people with 'mental handicap' had parallels from this perspective. The sections below explore the developments in thinking and in actions which shaped the relationship under discussion during the 1970s.

The international and intellectual context

My study concentrates on England, but wider intellectual trends and international developments were important factors in the relationship. Adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties were marginal areas in national education policy. Their relationship to mainstream school education was not well defined and was sometimes fractious (Withnall, 1994; Barton, 1988). They both struggled in terms of legitimacy, status and security and they drew on ideologies outside the educational canon, for example, civil rights. Fresh thinking such as the feminist perspective of 'women's liberation' shook accepted certainties and opened new horizons in this decade. Mace has written about how adult literacy education at this time could empower women (Mace, 1992). There are parallels with the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, another group whose 'sense of personal deficiency could be seen as a product of systematic discrimination' (ibid., 1992:8). Looking back, 'EF', an early activist, long-term practitioner and researcher, remembered that adult literacy

education had an overtly political role. In the 1970s he said, 'I think we were all politically committed in some way ... We were quite angry ... some of us tutors' (EF, 2017).

Several practitioners told me that they were motivated to work in adult literacy education because they believed that they could make a difference for people whom they felt had been deprived of opportunities. Questions of 'rights' and 'needs' were not easy to disentangle. Both the Russell Report (1973) into adult education and the Warnock Report (1978) into education for children with disabilities made a rights-based argument, but demonstrated a needs-based approach which ultimately reflected a 'deficit' outlook, which fitted popular perceptions. Volunteers generally came forward to teach in the new adult literacy schemes because they wanted to 'help' locally. Most were initially paired with a single student on a one-to-one basis. Awareness of the political aspect of the role came with growing experience and the feeling of being involved in something bigger. Charnley and Jones confirm that volunteers often expressed 'anger at evident and unsuspected defects of the educational system' when interviewed for their research into adult literacy 1975–77 (Charnley & Jones, 1979:21). The idea that they were part of a movement which promoted social justice was a common factor across urban and rural schemes, both voluntary and LEA programmes. This commitment affected attitudes and teaching methods. 'GH', for instance, looking back on a long career in adult literacy, reflected on his own motivation and made the link to a student-centred approach: 'There was a sense of political ... just a sense of injustice really. Wanting there to be more opportunities for people, so very student-centred in that way' (GH, 2017). 'IJ' also a long-term professional in adult literacy, put into words her understanding of the 'power-sharing' aspect of teaching adult literacy, so that both student and teacher

were involved in a 'social movement': 'It did feel like a social movement. It felt like you were part of a plan where people could become empowered so that they could change their lives' (IJ, 2017).

'OP' told me in 2017 about her educational work with people with learning difficulties. The group produced a pack called *We Can Change the Future* (1985), which, she explained to me:

was all about self-advocacy and rights for people with learning difficulties. And the whole self-advocacy movement had originated in the 70s in America, and it was called by some, The Last Civil Rights Movement (OP, 2017).

These points of view are informed by hindsight and the language reflects twenty-first century understanding but they represent a positive commitment to using adult education as a tool of social justice. The ideas of 'rights' and 'needs' were both present, as the people involved in adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties worked out a philosophy.

On a world-wide scale UNESCO was a powerful voice in adult education. The organisation provided an international reference point, influencing funders and governments. It promoted a 'rights-based' approach to adult education based on the belief that improved knowledge and participation would encourage democracy and a 'more harmonious life'. UNESCO convened the first international conference on adult education in 1949 and its report included the following statement:

It is the task of adult education to provide individuals with the knowledge essential for the performance of their economic, social and political functions and especially to enable them, through participation in the life of their communities, to live a fuller and more harmonious life (UNESCO, 1949:12).

Learning to Be, the Fauré Report of 1972, reinforced and developed this liberal agenda. Fauré's ambitions were for education to enable everyone to fulfil their

potential, to 'learn to be' their full self. The emphasis was on the humane aspect of adult education. The recommendations of the report were based on the conviction that the speed of change in the world, the new developments in technology and the revolution in communications should lead to education that continued throughout life:

Over a long term, education stimulates, accompanies or sets the seal on social and political development, as well as technical and economic development (Fauré, 1972:xxii).

The vision of lifelong education created by Fauré's committee implicitly included all communities. It came the year after the UN published the Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (the US version of 'mental handicap') which restated the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and included the statement:

The mentally retarded person has a right to proper medical care and physical therapy and to such education, training, rehabilitation and guidance as will enable him to develop his ability and maximum potential (UN, 1971).

The writings and theories of more radical thinkers were also discussed by practitioners. Their thinking challenged the conventional roles of teachers and the traditional balance of power in classrooms. 'EF' remembered being influenced by reading the work of Ivan Illich as part of his teacher training, and then being introduced to the writings of Paulo Freire by one of his fellow adult literacy tutors (EF, 2017). 'KL' started as a volunteer in the 1970s and also told me that the work of Freire had been an inspiration (KL, 2017). Five of the eighteen interviewees I recorded, across both teaching and strategic roles, spontaneously referenced Freire's influence. Freire construed adult literacy education as a weapon of political and cultural revolution (Freire, 1994). He advocated a complete reform of adult literacy education which recognised the creativity and reality of the students:

It is not a matter of memorising and repeating given syllables, words and phrases, but rather of reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself, and on the profound significance of language ... The cognitive dimensions of the literacy process must include the relationships of men with their world (Freire 1994:256).

The rationale was based on an appreciation of the agency of adult students and ideas about teachers and students sharing learning. It underpinned a model of adult literacy education which validated the student's experience. The Freirean legacy is part of the intellectual background of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

Ivan Illich's work offered alternatives to traditional views about professional 'help'. His thinking is particularly relevant to the debate about 'needs'. Illich challenged the established institutions of education and medicine and is best known for the iconoclastic book *Deschooling Society* (1971). He coined the phrase 'disabling professions', making it clear that 'the disabling professions' in care and health needed their clients more than their clients needed them (Illich, 1977).

Reading Freire and Illich helped practitioners in England to imagine new possibilities for their roles in adult education.

Legislation, government policy and official reports

This section outlines a sort of 'official' narrative, and draws on first-hand data to see beyond the documents. The relevant changes in legislation, policy and government-funded reports are the factors most visible to a historian. They form a framework of primary documentary evidence and indicate movements in thinking which affected the language used by participants and commentators.

The 1970 Education Act was particularly significant because it marked a turning point in the official view of education for people with learning difficulties. The provision of education for young people with disabilities, including learning difficulties, was transformed during the 1970s and 1980s. Public attitudes did not instantly change but the Act led to structural alterations which affected education for adults with learning difficulties, probably in unplanned ways. After the 1970 legislation the Junior Training Centres (JTCs) which had provided care for young people up to the age of eighteen, and been managed by health authorities, switched to become special schools directed by LEAs. It was not an easy transformation. The staff suddenly found themselves with new responsibilities and objectives (Corbett, 1996). The Adult Training Centres (ATCs), catering for those over eighteen years, remained within the domain of care, under the new bureaucracy of Social Services. This decision had an unanticipated impact on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, as adults who had missed the opportunity of education looked for an alternative.

Deborah Cooper, later CEO of the charity Skill, talked about the uneasy transition from JTC to special school, when I met her in 2019. When she found a teaching post in the late 1970s 'at a brand newly-built lovely school with swimming pool in the middle' she was the only graduate on the staff. The building represented a sign of the new regime, but the staff were mainly products of the previous health-oriented system. Cooper had a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education for children with severe learning difficulties, and a Master's degree from a US university. The head and the deputy head of the school 'had both been untrained in the JTC,' Cooper told me, meaning that they did not have educational qualifications. There was no standard curriculum. Cooper remembered drawing on her own resources:

'You made up your own curriculum as you went along. But I kind of assumed that it was literacy, numeracy, stuff like that,' (Cooper, 2019). The government was investing in the special school system but there was still uncertainty, prejudice, ignorance and stigma attached to the field. The move from 'care' to 'education' took time. Corbett comments that, 'It took until the late 1970s and the language of special educational needs to make these establishments feel like schools,' (Corbett 1996:14). Cooper told me how the special school pupils themselves recognised the stigma and fought not to be seen using the 'spazz bus' (Cooper, 2019). It is not surprising that people campaigning for funds for adult literacy education did not want to be associated with the sector.

Corbett's reflections on the language of 'special educational needs' relate to the impact of the seminal Warnock Report (1978) discussed above. The Warnock Report brought together the idea of 'needs-meeting' with the concept of integration in school and training to enhance individual opportunity as well as serve the economy. The report included a strong element of social justice (McGinty & Fish, 1993), and recognised the rights of all individuals to access education regardless of disability. It made specific reference to how workers in the field of special education:

should regard themselves as having crucial and developing work in a society which is now committed not merely to tending and caring for its handicapped members ... but to educating them as a matter of right and to developing their potential to the full (Warnock, 1978:1.11).

In the end, however, the Warnock Report has a needs-based ethic. Corbett admits that Warnock changed thinking by putting the focus on 'educational obstacles' instead of the 'within-child deficits' of the previous 'medical model', but she argues that the language of special needs reinforces the 'status quo' (Corbett, 1996:7). Her

critique echoes Mace's thoughts on 'on-behalfism' in relation to adult literacy education.

One of the findings of the Warnock Report has particular significance for this study. It confirms that people with learning difficulties were attending adult literacy classes during the mid-1970s. The authors noted that, of those young people identified as 'handicapped' by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) who had received education since leaving school, more than fifty per cent were attending adult literacy classes (Warnock 1978:162). This was a small supplementary point for the Warnock committee, but it is important to this account of the beginnings of a relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties. It provides the documentary evidence that people with learning difficulties were finding their way to adult literacy provision:

Of young people ascertained as handicapped in the sample studied in the NCB research project, who had undertaken some form of further education since leaving school, over half were receiving tuition in adult literacy classes (ibid., 1978, 10:35).

Warnock's aside is an insight into the informal origins of how adult literacy education supplied the post-school provision that some adults with learning difficulties (or their carers) were seeking. The finding is based on the longitudinal research of the NCB, which surveyed a group of people born in one week in 1958. This study was later known as the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and is now managed by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS). By the time Warnock was reporting, those individuals were reaching the age of 20. The total number referred to here is small: 13 people. But the findings record that 10 of the 13 (77 per cent) were individuals who had the label ESN (Moderate). It is a small snapshot, but it reinforces the recollections of practitioners who told me that people with learning difficulties were

present in many adult literacy classes. In their 1979 study Charnley and Jones suggest that approximately 25 per cent of students in adult literacy provision had attended ESN schools (Charnley & Jones, 1979:170).

Warnock's findings identify the prejudice which marked attitudes to education for 'handicapped' people. Chapter 10 of the report focused on post-school provision. It was not their main concern. The committee was, however, clearly horrified by the poor educational opportunities offered to 'handicapped' young people after the age of 16. They pointed out the lack of good facilities, the inconsistency of provision and the desperate needs of young people with disabilities of all kinds. They recognised that prejudice and the current discourse around disability were big issues. 'Attitudes' were named as the main problem:

We cannot over-emphasise the urgency of finding ways of challenging attitudes so that such people are accepted as ordinary people who merely have certain special needs (Warnock 1978, 10:5).

The prejudice and stigma noted here represent one reason why the adult literacy campaign was so anxious to ensure that it was not perceived to be about 'handicap' or the 'special/remedial' educational system which went with the label. At the same time the report proves that there were students with learning difficulties who appreciated the non-stigmatised adult-oriented literacy provision which offered a 'student-centred' approach. The implications of the Warnock findings are that adults with learning difficulties were accessing adult literacy classes, and not that adult literacy practitioners were being asked to deliver a 'special' curriculum. The dilemmas about access and curriculum for students, carers, organisers and teachers touch on the 'rights' versus 'needs' discussions, and practitioners often made their own difficult decisions on these issues at local level, usually in the context of part-time mixed groups meeting in community settings.

Policy in the area was lacking. The government-funded Russell Report into adult education was published in 1973. It did not, however, result in any legislation or major investment despite calling for new infrastructure and increased funding. It is significant to this study because of the new thinking and re-orientation which it introduced into the field in England. As noted above, Sir Lionel Russell and his committee argued that existing adult education was benefiting those who had already had good educational opportunities, and that resources should be redirected to support 'the disadvantaged'. The report is remembered for the phrase 'the disadvantaged adult', which was the title of a book published in tandem with the report, written by the committee's research officer, Peter Clyne. Clyne demonstrates the perspective of the report, linking educational and social concerns. He lists the disadvantaged groups: 'The mentally and physically handicapped, the elderly, the mentally ill, the non-English-speaking immigrants, the adult illiterates and the socially deprived' (Clyne 1972:3).

Russell's emphasis is on the collective, social and humane aspects of education, rather than academic achievement. The General Statement opening the report declares that the value of adult education should be measured by 'The quality of life it inspires in individuals and generates for the community at large' (Russell 1973: paragraph 6). In this presentation people with 'mental handicap' and 'adult illiterates' are yoked together under the heading 'disadvantaged'. The report recommends that education and social work staff should work together to meet the 'needs' of the disadvantaged groups. Because of the divide between vocational and non-vocational adult education established by the terms of their investigation, the committee was prevented from taking what would become the MSC line on funding for post-school education which could directly benefit the economy (Clyne and

Payne, 2006). It did, however, stimulate initiatives in community education and open up discourse on the subject. Authors such as Tom Lovett (Lovett, 1975) and Michael Newman (Newman, 1979) wrote and taught about how adult education could be a force in social action. Alan Tuckett, then working at the Friends' Centre in Brighton, remembered being inspired 'by Mike Newman's work on adult education and community action to start asking who wasn't there and what mattered about that' (Tuckett, 2019). Adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties fitted well into the community education movement, which set out to empower local groups and to work with community-based projects such as Centerprise, which originally opened as a bookshop and café in 1971, and housed the Hackney Reading Centre from 1975. But Mace, looking back, remembered the Russell Report as a document which concentrated on 'needs' and not on the 'rights' or 'interests' of the students (Mace, 2019). There was no single driving force and practitioners looked to each other for strength and support. 'EF' remembered working in the mid-1970s as a part-time adult literacy tutor for the WEA, and told me that, 'The network was important. Our closest contacts were with people like Alan Wells, Alan Tuckett at Friends' Centre, because they were other voluntary organisations' (EF, 2017). 'AB' went from voluntary work in Blackfriars Settlement, London in the 1970s to become a teacher in a group setting in Suffolk in the 1980s, working for the LEA Community Education, and recalled that:

I had a very supportive organiser ... I would think that every week we had hour-long conversations on the phone, and she gave me a lot of support ... And some of the people in that group had learning disabilities ... There wasn't much of a distinction made (AB, 2017).

A range of initiatives and narratives were involved in formulating the thinking and language of the practitioners 'on the ground' and of the bodies involved in providing

adult literacy education. The people involved (including the students) were picking their way in uncharted and conflicted territory.

The role of the agencies

Adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties were both outside mainstream education funding and policy in the 1970s. Access to funding was often through agencies which mediated with government or other funding sources. This section examines the role of the various agencies involved in the relationship, specifically: the Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA); the British Association of Settlements (BAS) which co-ordinated the Right to Read campaign; the BBC, which supported Right to Read; the employment-led training body, MSC (Manpower Services Commission); the LEAs which administered most adult education provision and the Adult Training Centres (ATCs) funded by Social Services, which had responsibility for local provision for adults with learning difficulties. They were not 'policy' bodies, but each agency had characteristic features which helped to shape the relationship.

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was strained from the beginnings of the adult literacy campaign in the early 1970s. The tension can be traced to the group planning Right to Read. The campaign was led by a national voluntary agency, the BAS. It was an organisation dedicated to supporting poor communities, which had its roots in the university settlements established in the nineteenth century to enable privileged and altruistic young men from the universities to share their learning and culture with people deprived of opportunities through poverty. A commitment to fellowship and the notion of shared skills was theoretically built into the ethos of the charity. By the

1970s, partly influenced by US developments, the focus of BAS had shifted to concentrate on social action in inner city neighbourhoods. They were concerned, stated Jim Radford, new Warden of the Blackfriars Settlement, introducing the report *The Blackfriars Experiment* in 1973:

About co-operation, self-help organisation, participation and education, and about the role of volunteers and professionals ... and the wider debate that this publication contributes to about the division of power and responsibility in our society (Radford, 1973).

The adult literacy campaign fitted the BAS agenda of social action and empowerment. The campaign also drew inspiration from the US state-funded literacy education programme, Right to Read, which was set up because of the links which American research had established between illiteracy and poverty (Jones & Marriott, 1995). The UK *A Right to Read* document was, by contrast, couched in the language of 'rights':

We believe that power for social action depends on the ability to handle communications, in order to participate, to exercise certain rights, to choose between alternatives and to solve problems, people need certain basic skills: listening, talking, reading and writing (BAS, 1974:4).

The claims echoed the sentiments of Radford's explanation of the mission of the settlements. The rationale was based on enabling people to take control of their own lives and to act as full citizens. It was a theme echoed by my interviewees.

A Right to Read, however, expressly excluded people with learning difficulties from their claims. The decision was based on political calculation and anxiety about social attitudes, and not on educational arguments, or definitions of literacy. The people leading the campaign for funding for national adult literacy education in England were conscious of the stigma of remedial/special schooling and they were anxious to strike an entirely new note. They were determined to ensure that the

government and the public understood that the adult literacy issue was not about people who had any sort of learning difficulty. This is evident in the text of the UK *A Right to Read*:

It is a common misconception that all people with chronic reading problems are at least educationally sub-normal, if not mentally defective ... but the statistics we have made use of refer to adults whose disability is illiteracy, which may stem from a variety of causes, but cannot be explained away by mental incapacity (BAS, 1974:11).

The members of the BAS group needed to appeal to 'ordinary' people, and to distance adult literacy from 'remedial' provision. The parallel is drawn between 'disability' and 'illiteracy' which echoes the contemporary Russell Report categorisation of 'disadvantaged adults' and demonstrates the discourse of deficit which encompassed and elided the concepts. The analogy of sickness and 'handicap' appeared in the reference to people 'suffering' from 'inability to read'. The group explained that actually, 'They are a wide variety of men and women, doing all sorts of different jobs, suffering from their inability to read in different ways' (ibid., 1974:11).

Wells, one of the authors of *A Right to Read*, speaking to me in 2019, described their position as a 'political stance'. Wells told me that the question was one of 'political reality':

We didn't want to exclude, but we did **not** want to let the government off the hook by giving the impression that this was a 'special needs' problem [his emphasis] (Wells, 2019).

There was no room for nuance. The primary concern was to make it clear to government and the public that the issue of 'adult literacy' was definitely not about learning difficulties. I suggest that the 'problem' is multi-layered. There is an element which is about funding and control. The BAS campaign wanted new structures and

funding dedicated to adult literacy education as opposed to new resources for existing 'remedial' work. There is also an issue about stigma. The campaigners needed to reassure possible students that they would not be regarded as 'handicapped'. They also sought the legitimacy and status of an educational/social initiative which was free of the stain of 'disability' or 'mental incapacity'.

The BAS campaign was designed to shame the government into action on an issue of social justice. The manifesto document, *A Right to Read*, quoted a figure of two million 'functionally illiterate' men and women, claiming that six per cent of the adult population 'was unable to read and write at all, or has a literacy level below that of a nine-year-old' (BAS, 1974:4). This was an inflated 'guesstimate', extrapolated from the data collected on school-leavers by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), as Wells told me in 2019. The emphasis of the campaign was on the large number of people denied opportunities through inequities in the education system. Wells explained to me:

We actually went for a feeling that this was a deficit in the educational system ... It was not the individual's fault ... And here was an untapped group of people who, if educated properly, would have enormous impact on society going forward (Wells, 2019).

Wells was marshalling the economic as well as the social argument. His thinking included the idea of breaking the cycle of deprivation. There is a hint too that this 'untapped group' could be troublesome if not 'educated properly'. But another possible reason for insisting on the distinction between adult literacy education and the established remedial system might have been anxiety about racial identity. Wells later conceded that 'the early adult literacy campaign unduly concentrated on the needs of white men' (Charnley & Withnall, 1989:7). This statement raises the question of whether there was an unacknowledged racial element in the drive to

create a new adult literacy service, given that we know from Tomlinson's analysis that the contemporary special/remedial provision included a large proportion of black children and young people (Tomlinson, 1985).

The question of access for people with learning difficulties was discussed by the BAS Adult Literacy Steering Group which planned the campaign. Their discussions make it clear that people with learning difficulties were not always welcome as students. It is also evident that the issue was already problematic. The minutes of 1973 record that the various literacy schemes represented 'did not accept ESN (educationally sub-normal) pupils, or only occasionally, if they were motivated to learn' (BAS Adult Literacy Steering Group, 1973). This odd statement might refer to the fact that many people with learning difficulties were 'referred' to classes, rather than making their own decision to enrol (Sutcliffe, 1990). Most likely it was a veiled concern about how people with learning difficulties might or might not 'fit in'. The minutes go on to record that the group noted 'that we should bear in mind popular prejudice' (BAS Adult Literacy Steering Group, 1973). They were in a difficult position. The campaigners were determined that people should be able to admit to reading and writing problems without feeling the stigma attached to 'mental handicap'. The representatives of schemes from across the country (London, Liverpool and Birmingham) knew that most people who might benefit from adult literacy education did not seek help, and that they had to work hard to remove any barriers which might deter potential students.

Meanwhile the Right to Read campaign demanded a government response. The second half of the manifesto document set out a 17-point policy plan, including government funding for a media campaign, the involvement of Trade Unions and CBI and a National Resource Council for Adult Literacy. It was backed by Labour MP

Chris Price, whose wife was involved with the adult literacy scheme at Cambridge House Settlement in London. The demand was presented as a social issue about 'need', requiring state intervention:

It is difficult to think of any similar basic social provision in which so much need is answered by so little useful help ... This requires a policy where at present there is none (BAS,1974:19).

The outcome was a one-off grant of £1 million and the creation of the Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA). The BBC series *On the Move* accompanied the launch of the national campaign. The BAS campaign was successfully and powerfully voiced, and their reluctance to accept students with learning difficulties, and anxieties over public perception, carried over into tensions between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties in policy and practice. At the same time the campaign encouraged fresh thinking about the purposes of adult literacy education and promoted a positive image of the provision and the students.

ALRA did not provide adult literacy education but had major influence as the agency administering the new funding. The new body organised national and regional workshops and conferences, and produced guidelines and training materials, targeting the volunteers recruited through the BBC initiative. Their main message was that adult literacy education was not the same as school literacy teaching. William Devereux, the head of ALRA, reflecting on training the volunteer teachers wrote, 'An appreciation that working with adults means "teaching on equal terms", may be more important than qualifications' (Devereux, 1978:4).

Devereux was reaffirming the importance of an approach which recognised adult literacy students as adults and validated their agency and dignity. This was a message which could have been helpful to potential students with learning difficulties. The agency was aware of difficulties in teaching adult literacy where

disability was involved. A booklet devoted to teaching deaf students was produced in 1978. This guide, written by a specialist, was intended to make sure that deaf people could access adult literacy classes (Hewitt, 1978). But Devereux, in his introductory letter for the first 1975 training pack, *A Lesson Kit for Trainers of Adult Literacy Tutors*, advised people who were training new voluntary adult literacy teachers to be prepared for the question(s), 'Are we going to teach immigrants/mentally handicapped?' (Devereux, 1975). No ready response was provided, but I suggest that the answer was so obviously 'No' that Devereux did not deem it necessary to specify. The point was not stressed in the training pack, but I deduce that the rhetorical question demonstrates the initial assumptions made about adult literacy students. Devereux is reinforcing the 'political' message spelled out by Wells. My interpretation is that ALRA was continuing the focus of *A Right to Read* on 'ordinary' students ie native English speakers and working people. It is not a question of prejudice around disability, but more of 'othering', which applies equally here to 'immigrants' and 'mentally handicapped people'. The unacknowledged relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties continued to be tense.

The two bodies leading the successful adult literacy campaign which created ALRA were not primarily education organisations. They took on an educational role in a wider social context and could define the objectives and set the tone independently of the government and education establishment. In addition to the BAS, the BBC played a crucial part in the adult literacy campaign (Jones & Marriott, 1995; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). The link between the BAS and the BBC was Jenny Stevens. Stevens was one of the authors of *A Right to Read*. She moved from directing the adult literacy scheme at Cambridge House to work for the BBC

Education Department, focusing on further education. Her influence was behind the TV series *On the Move*, broadcast in 1975 to co-ordinate with the advent of ALRA and the national adult literacy education initiative. It was based on the story of a lorry driver who had problems with reading. The tone was adult, humorous and plain-speaking. The programme went out at peak family viewing time, 6.10 p.m. on Sunday evenings, and was a high-quality production. It included a helpline telephone number and a slick logo to encourage people to seek help locally or to sign up as volunteers. This was a completely new step in reaching out to the public (Jones & Marriott, 1995). It reflected the obvious fact that people who needed help with literacy would not be attracted by leaflets and posters in libraries. And it was very clearly targeting 'ordinary' people at home in their living rooms, with backup in the high street. The lorry driver character was chosen to be 'extremely normal', Wells told me in 2019.

ALRA reinforced the 'normal' narrative. A contrast in approach to education for people with learning difficulties was also evident at the BBC. In 1978 the BBC launched *Let's Go*, a TV series targeting an audience which included 'parents and all who work with the mentally handicapped' (*Radio Times*, Sept. 1978). Like *On the Move* it was produced by the BBC Education (Further Education) Department and broadcast at weekends for family viewing. The title had a similar message. The presenter was well-known entertainer Brian Rix, and it had a catchy theme tune and endearing animated characters to draw in the viewers. The focus was different from *On the Move*, as it clearly addressed carers and professionals. It was a traditional educational package, delivered in ten-week terms, with themes such as *Social Skills* and *Body Care*. Consultants involved included staff from a special school, an FE college and an ATC, as well as the Hester Adrian Centre at Manchester University,

which researched education for adults with learning difficulties. The essential difference between *On the Move* and *Let's Go* is significant. Although *Let's Go* was billed as for mentally handicapped people, 'the first of its kind made by a national broadcaster' (*Radio Times*, Sept. 1978), the presumed audience specifically included parents and professionals. People with 'mental handicap' were largely treated as children who could not make their own choices. Episodes were built around activities where an 'adult/carer' accompanied the person with a 'handicap', for instance, in a film about teeth cleaning, featuring a young man and his mother. Remedial/special education worked on this assumption. It was this philosophy which people working in adult literacy education were determined to break away from. *Let's Go* was well researched and it embraced the idea that 'mentally handicapped' people of all ages were entitled to education. But it was rooted in the established school-based system in terms of format and conventions.

Alan Tuckett, speaking to me in 2019, recalled a confrontational relationship between the National Association for Remedial Education (NARE) and the people involved in the campaign for adult literacy education. He told me that, 'Alan Wells and I took the strongest exception to the kind of educational assumptions of the NARE'. He described a strict system in remedial practice, using child-oriented reading material, and carrying low aspirations, 'that there really is no hope of anybody really reading' (Tuckett, 2019). NARE had established an Adult Illiteracy Sub-committee in 1967. Withnall reports that NARE believed that the adult literacy education campaign had hijacked their territory (Withnall, 1994:80). She devotes a passage of her investigation into *The Origins of the Adult Literacy Campaign in the United Kingdom* to the 'emerging theme of adults with literacy difficulties being in

some way “backward”, which she indicates is ‘highlighted in the NARE sub-committee report’ published in 1972 (ibid., 1994).

The evidence shows that in practice and in theory those involved were struggling with the concepts and complications which they perceived. Clyne (1972) includes a chapter headed *The Backward Adult* in which he explores the nature of ‘illiteracy’ in the adult population of the UK. He equates the term ‘backward’ with the approximately 20 per cent of school-leavers ‘with a reading age at least two years behind their chronological age’ (Clyne, 1972:49). He uses several different phrases to describe the group he is talking about including ‘non-readers’ (ibid.:51), ‘slow-learners’ (ibid.: 50) and ‘poorly-educated’ (ibid.:49). He lists separately ‘the sick, sub-normal and handicapped’ (ibid.:49) attending special schools. The message is that all of these people can be included in the term ‘backward adult’. Clyne concludes by supporting the argument of the adult literacy campaign, calling for ‘student-based’ provision, but he argues in terms of ‘needs’ as much as ‘rights’: ‘The efficient educationist or social worker will start from the needs and problems of the backward adult’ (ibid., 1972:53).

The adult literacy education campaign in a sense provided a new solution to the problem Clyne and others identified. It sought to distinguish between ‘the backward adult’ and ‘the sick, sub-normal and handicapped’. The debates indicate the challenge of new thinking in the area and the testing of unfamiliar ideas, while the continuing use of the term ‘illiterate’ reflects contemporary attitudes and language. Like those whose role was disrupted by Warnock’s fresh approach, people who had risen into senior posts in adult education were discomfited. An article on *Adult Illiterate Students* written in 1975 by Ann Risman, Head of Adult Education Services in Reading, Berkshire, demonstrates the shock felt by some practitioners in

adult education that adult literacy students were not necessarily 'the sick, sub-normal and handicapped':

Although many are undeniably in the lower socio-economic groups, and a few are weighed down by physical and emotional difficulties ... they are in the main, 'normally' intelligent, industrious people, made remarkable to us only by the fact they are of the type who traditionally avoid adult education (Risman, 1975:149).

Prevalent attitudes like those implied here were behind the drive to distance the adult literacy movement from the grip of the educational establishment as embodied by the NARE and characterised in the memory of those involved by the 'Ladybird' books widely used. The achievement of the 1970s campaign was to secure recognition and national funding from the government, and to wrest the initiative away from remedial education. We can observe that the rhetoric around 'backward' adults made access to adult literacy education at the time problematic for people with learning difficulties.

These tensions were felt in the administration of adult literacy education and therefore affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties within the LEAs. ALRA and the BBC produced guidance for teachers of adult literacy, but they had no responsibility for actual teaching or the management of provision. LEAs were the local bodies mainly responsible and had to deal with the lively challenge presented by the voluntary sector. Over 50 per cent of LEAs were running adult literacy programmes before 1973, according to the Russell Report, but there was no unifying body or policy direction (Clyne, 1972; Jones & Marriott, 1995). Part of the success of ALRA, and the Adult Literacy Unit (ALU) which succeeded it, was bringing together through fresh thinking, joint training and shared expertise the existing programmes in local authority schemes and the new dynamic and more politically driven voluntary

provision. For instance, Tuckett remembered that he and colleagues from the independent Friends' Centre in Brighton were 'sent off by ALRA to start Devon off with a county scheme in the mid-1970s. 'We were seen as kind of experts before we knew anything at all really,' he told me (Tuckett, 2019).

There was no official blueprint for how adult literacy education might involve people with learning difficulties. LEAs were used to delivering adult education, but *A Right to Read* and the Russell Report represented different models and shifting priorities. 'EF' remembered feeling 'different' as an adult literacy practitioner in the 1970s & 1980s:

Because you would go to a regional meeting or something like that, and there would be all these people talking about Keep Fit or History or GCSE (GCE in those days) and other things. And you would think, 'What are they on about?' You would start talking about your class, and about your group and about motivation and people's shyness and what you were trying to do. And there was a sort of pitying atmosphere, and we felt kind of very, very different (EF, 2017).

The BAS campaign was based on the Cambridge House model of practice, which paired volunteer tutors with students one-to-one, under the remote supervision of a paid co-ordinator (Jones & Marriott, 1995; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). It was obviously different from school structures and it signified the partnership of tutor and student as adults. This system accommodated adults with learning difficulties, and tutors might not be told if their potential student had been at a special school. It was initially adopted by most adult literacy education schemes, but LEAs gradually switched to supervised group teaching in their own buildings by the 1980s (Mace, 1992; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). At first it depended on individual local organisers, as 'EF' told me in 2017. He was appointed to a county LEA post in 1976 and found no

consistency even within that LEA. Structures depended on the decisions of individual organisers:

The whole city was organised on a one-to-one basis, and in the rural areas there were groups everywhere ... that was crazy.

He set about rationalising the provision by working towards group settings, recognising that:

The officers at County Hall ... wanted to normalise this provision ... they did not want it looking odd and weird ... they wanted it to be really very like the ... ordinary adult education classes (EF, 2017).

There was a specific step he could take to show that the service was 'adult' and not 'remedial'. He got rid of the Ladybird books:

They asked me about resources, and told me that they had just spent £2,000 on 'Ladybird' books recommended by the Remedial Advisory Team, one of whom had been doing the job before I arrived ... I had to sell those second-hand, somehow, deviously (EF, 2017).

Mace, who had experience of the large-scale one-to-one scheme at Cambridge House ('500 across London kind of thing ... it was happening all over the place,') saw an advance in the shift to classes. She believed that the move to group teaching was a mark of recognition and educational status:

It was still quite recent, the idea that adult literacy students should and could have the same attention as other adult education students and learn in groups (Mace, 2019).

For the LEAs, classes were 'normal', easier to supervise, and less trouble than managing large numbers of volunteers. It fitted their administrative and financial model, but it was also more institutional, and less like the radical programme of social action envisaged by the BAS activists.

Different patterns evolved without specific planning. Long-term adult literacy practitioner and trainer, 'KL', talked about her experience as a volunteer tutor in London in the mid-1970s, starting as a one-to-one tutor working in her own home, before choosing to join a group meeting in a local school. We learn something of the strengths and weaknesses of the one-to-one arrangement (apart from the safeguarding aspects which strike us in retrospect):

I saw some sort of advert for volunteer literacy tutors, run by Holloway Adult Education Institute as it was at the time. And I went for a volunteer training course, a six-week course ... after which I was given a student, a one-to-one student, who came to my house once a week ... And I just got on with it really. This was a young man with learning difficulties (KL, 2017).

'KL' had little training and no teaching experience. She and her student 'didn't get on very quickly', and eventually, after some months, he 'got bored and stopped'. The system proved frustrating for both parties. It shows how the one-to-one model could be isolating and hard for student and tutor. 'KL' switched to become 'a volunteer at an evening group', where she worked alongside an experienced teacher, and later took over as tutor. Classes were usually two hours per week, and not selective. People came to the class most convenient for them. She remembered that 'it was a very mixed group ... a huge range, some very basic people. But everybody got on fine ... and we began to talk together as a group ... and began to do a bit of group work' (ibid., 2017). The move to group work obviously felt like progress for 'KL'. Students too could benefit from the social aspect of classes.

Holloway AEI was one of nineteen adult education institutes within the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority). The ILEA was progressive, well-resourced and committed to adult education which targeted those most in need. The authority responded to the Russell Report by launching a community-based outreach

programme across the capital. In 1974 it created the Language and Literacy Unit (LLU) which enabled adult literacy workers to share training and resources. It is evident, however, that even within the ILEA there was no shared plan to manage the access of people with learning difficulties to adult literacy education.

When I joined the staff at Frobisher AEI in Southwark in 1975 a 'special' teacher taught literacy and numeracy to the students with acknowledged learning difficulties, working as part of a 'special' team. She had access to training through the main AEI, and attended subject-oriented meetings which gave her an identity as a 'basic education' tutor, but she did not teach students outside the 'special' Grange Centre. Her students did not cross the line into the open access adult education classes. On reflection I understand that the structural arrangement mirrored the mainstream/special school divide. The AEI was proud of its 'special' unit and the opportunities which it offered to adults with learning difficulties attending ATCs or referred by parents/carers. But it had the characteristics of an institution, as I recognised when I read sociologist Erving Goffman's seminal work *Asylums* (1961). It worked as a closed unit and did little to give the students more control of their lives outside the centre or to address power issues inside.

Practitioner 'MN', looking back in 2017 to teaching English and literacy in adult education in East London, told me:

Some people went into this work having done courses for children with learning difficulties. We hadn't done any of that ... but we realised that some of the people coming along to adult education obviously had learning needs that were beyond just that they had never learned to read and write ... so we just started this group. All day Friday was for the mentally handicapped (MN, 2017).

Her account illustrates how adult literacy education was extended to meet the perceived 'needs' and 'rights' of students. The line between 'care' and 'education' was difficult to define and the LEAs were in uncharted waters. The sort of funding partnership with social services encouraged by both Russell's and Warnock's recommendations could be put into practice and was a sensible way to share costs. The ILEA's approach was mixed and changing. At the AEI where 'MN' worked they moved to provide separate, but linked, provision; at Holloway they offered mixed groups, and at Southwark there was institutional segregation. The initiative lay with practitioners.

During the 1970s and 1980s FE colleges were within the purview of LEAs, opening the possibility of 'joined-up' thinking to support adult education for people with learning difficulties. In 1975 ILEA published a report on *The Reorganisation of Further and Higher Education*, which included, in the Appendix II, 'an approach to the needs of school-leavers with learning difficulties and limited achievements' (McGinty & Fish, 1993:20). Such provision included adult literacy and numeracy programmes. McGinty and Fish record that the ILEA took a lead, and that other LEAs undertook similar initiatives. They comment, however, that 'the status of the work remained generally low,' with staff on minimum salaries (ibid., 1993:20). I was told by interviewees that colleges in the north of England took on school-leavers with learning difficulties because they had spare capacity due to the fall in demand for apprentice and training places caused by rising unemployment (Dee, 2019; ST, 2017). One Leeds college was particularly pro-active because the principal had a personal interest. Developments were apparently piecemeal, low-key and uncoordinated.

Lesley Dee, working with young people with 'moderate learning difficulties' (MLD) at South Thames College in the late 1970s, found that there was no channel to direct support to teachers in the ILEA who taught young people with learning difficulties. She told me in 2019 that the ILEA provided time and training through the Appendix II initiative to adult literacy teachers, but not to herself and colleagues. She convened a group of teachers working in FE, meeting at first in her flat. When she did manage to gain support for the group and for joint training it came, initially, through the ILEA inspector with responsibility for children with severe learning difficulties. In the ILEA too the convention that 'mental handicap' was a school matter persisted.

Dee also told me of the problems she encountered when she recommended that two of her students should attend an adult literacy class at the local AEI. The story illustrates the barriers which could arise from the tensions written into *A Right to Read*. Dee thought that the issue was 'stigma':

The literacy providers wanted to put a distance [between our provision and theirs]. And I think it was about stigma. They felt they were almost protecting their learners from being stigmatised as having learning difficulties (Dee, 2019).

She felt that the literacy practitioners prevented her students from attending the classes in case the people in the class were upset. It seems to have been a situation where the adult literacy staff took on a 'gatekeeper' role and excluded two potential students to 'protect' their class. Dee's account supports the position described in the BAS campaign group minutes of 1973, where adult literacy schemes did not welcome students with learning difficulties. Dee was angry at the attitude and said that she thought that it was 'pretty widespread' at the time. I conclude that there was no plan or procedure to help students with learning difficulties in general to access

adult literacy education, although it could and did happen. The 'normal' narrative in adult literacy education was powerful but did not always dominate in practice.

The new Manpower Services Commission (MSC) did not have a policy which facilitated access for people with learning difficulties either. Employability was the main purpose of the MSC. It was another organisation outside the education system which appeared in the 1970s and influenced post-school education during this period. The impact of the MSC reflected the growing emphasis on vocationalism in post-compulsory education and the power of funding to change the field (Green & Lucas, 1999; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015).

I use the term 'vocationalisation' to convey moves to prioritise an agenda of employability. It also tacitly represents the view that adult literacy can be seen as part of pre-employment training, divorced from a social context. It is clear in retrospect that vocationalisation in adult literacy education was a threat to access for people with learning difficulties. The MSC was created to put resources directly into training which would meet the perceived needs of employers. It was a non-departmental quasi-independent body accountable to the Department of Employment, bringing together representatives of government, industry, trade unions, local authorities and educational organisations. The first chair, Sir Richard O'Brien, explained his view that the MSC 'had an integrated approach to its responsibilities. It saw the people who constitute the labour force as units of production ... and also as individuals seeking a satisfying life' (O'Brien, 1988:4).

The MSC started to take initiatives in adult literacy and numeracy education, adding a full-time basic education course, known as pre-TOPS, to the Training and Opportunities Scheme (TOPS), followed in 1978 by the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP). The courses were run through further education colleges or adult

education centres but the aim was to get people into employment, and attendance depended on signing in at the Employment Centre. Students were funded full-time for up to a year, a luxury unheard of elsewhere in adult education. The model was based on the aim of 'employability' and not on ideas of needs, rights or entitlement. It ignored potential issues relating to students with learning difficulties in terms of support or of social stigma, because the students were technically trainees falling outside the educational system. In practice my interviewees remembered that some individuals with learning difficulties did attend the courses.

The trend towards vocationalism and employability in further and adult education was underlined by Prime Minister James Callaghan when he called for 'a great debate' in education. Callaghan lauded the success of the adult literacy programme in the speech he gave at Ruskin College in October 1976, but his major point was about tying education more closely to the needs of the economy:

I am concerned on my journeys to find complaints from industry that new recruits ... sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job that is required ... There is no virtue in producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed, because they do not have the skills (Callaghan, 1976).

The difference in government priorities is spelled out in the evidence of the investment recorded by O'Brien. He reports that, in the financial year 1975–76, 22,800 staff were employed by the new MSC, and 'expenditure on all programmes (including payments to trainees) was £249 million' (O'Brien, 1988:3). At this point adult literacy education was receiving £1 million from central government and recruiting volunteer teachers. The MSC was initiated by a Conservative government, but the emphasis on employability remained a constant factor under all the administrations in power in the period 1970–2010. This agenda marginalised education for people with learning difficulties, and contributed over time to the

assumption that a 'special' curriculum was best suited to adult students with learning difficulties.

Other agencies played a part in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, but none had the funding power of the MSC. There are examples of positive initiatives, often on a small scale, where individuals could make a difference. Mencap, the charity promoting the interests of people with learning difficulties, funded a pilot scheme which paired volunteers with adult students to enable people with learning difficulties to access a range of adult education classes (Willis, 1984). The Rathbone charity adopted the adult literacy scheme where I was a volunteer, which worked specifically with young people leaving special schooling. Two of the practitioners who talked to me in 2017 remembered independently the pioneering work of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in the West Country (Plymouth and Bristol). Both described provision which enabled people with learning difficulties to participate. The regional structure of the WEA allowed local organisers considerable freedom, and my interviewees (CD, 2017; EF, 2017) mentioned the vision and leadership of particular individuals. 'KL' told me that when she joined Centerprise in 1981, 'there were students with learning difficulties in all the groups' (KL, 2017). In these settings and others, adult literacy education offered a student-centred adult-oriented practice which had no standard curriculum and was understood in the context of social justice. The evidence of my interviewees, plus that of the Warnock Report (1978) and the work of Charnley and Jones (1979) confirms that many adult literacy schemes included students with learning difficulties without 'labelling', despite the strictures of *A Right to Read* (1974). The concept of 'slow learners' underlined the

important factor of 'time' and showed that there could be a positive response which acknowledged the capacity of these students to learn and to gain success.

The national agency which followed ALRA and ALU recognised this reality by the end of the decade. In late 1979 an *Ideas Pack for Literacy Tutors* 'to assist literacy tutors working with slow learners' was published under the auspices of the new body, ALBSU (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit). It represented a complete reversal in acknowledging that students with learning difficulties were present and that they had a right to benefit from adult literacy education. The guidance is more in line with the 1978 ALRA booklet devoted to teaching adult literacy students with hearing impairment, as it was intended to support the effective teaching of students with learning difficulties. It was called *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979), and it was drawn up by an interesting group which did not include any 'care' staff. This was definitely intended to be used by people working in adult literacy schemes, but the special school perspective is evident. The authors were Paul Dumbleton, former lecturer in Remedial and Special Education; Fred Heddell, head teacher and adviser to the BBC *Let's Go* series; Chris Lloyd, Lecturer in Basic Skills, Southwark AEI; Barbara McVittie, Adult Literacy Organiser, North Tyneside; Cathy Moorhouse, former Director of the Adult Language and Literacy Unit, ILEA and Gillian O'Shea, Adult Literacy Tutor, London Borough of Waltham Forest. The document did not mention 'mental handicap', which suggests that they recognised the negative connotations of the label, and that stigma was a concern. It did, however, refer to the student group as 'educationally sub-normal', the term used in special schools:

People sometimes described as slow learners or educationally sub-normal are capable of learning to read, although by definition the slow learner may take longer than others (Dumbleton et al., 1979:1).

The pack reflected the thinking of the '70s. The aims were limited to 'reading' and it did not use the post-Warnock language of 'special educational needs'. It embraced the idea of working with the student and talked about 'using the interests and experience of your students to provide further materials acceptable to adults' (ibid., 1979:1). There was an assumption that the teaching was one-to-one. The (probably voluntary) tutor was encouraged to 'know your student', but to avoid 'clumsy probing'. The resource was not structured as an ordered sequence, but was:

based on the principle that the materials should be centred on the student and be as flexible as possible. We have not attempted to design a scheme to be followed stage by stage, but rather a series of ideas which will be of interest (ibid., 1979:1).

The pack was presented as a single concertina-ed sheet so that student and tutor could find their own 'starting point'. There were six themes, each presented as a story or drama with images included – *Going to the Cinema*, *Theft at Work*, *Finding a Job*, *The Sports Centre*, *Decorating* and *Accident at Home*. An effort has been made to find 'adult' themes and contexts. It is striking to note how much trust and confidence was placed in the tutor and the student: 'If you and your student find that one way of learning doesn't work, **try another way**' [their emphasis] (ibid., 1979:1).

And:

Clearly getting to know your student is a constant process and you are quite likely to have to revise your approach after the first few weeks (ibid., 1979:1).

The *Starting Points* pack shows how different the adult literacy education approach to working with adults with learning difficulties could be from the care regime. It is focused on the student as an adult with individual interests and experience, and it empowers the student and tutor to work creatively together.

Adult Training Centres (ATCs) were the bodies mainly providing care for adults with learning difficulties and were also important in the relationship under discussion. They were managed by Social Services Departments and funded by local authorities to provide care to adults deemed unable to work in open employment. The *Copewell Curriculum* (Whelan et al., 1984) shows how the ATCs responded to the challenges of the 1970s. The authors of the *Copewell Curriculum* were aware of 'the work currently taking place in Special Schools and in Further and Adult Education colleges' (Whelan et al., 1984). They wanted to encourage 'people to seek out and use community resources', in line with the 'normalisation' ideas being developed in North America at the time. They did not aspire to replicate the educational opportunities on offer but the compilers sought to 'embody sound teaching principles' which I assume were derived from special school practice.

Copewell was the result of an action-research project run by the Hester Adrian Research Centre into the Learning of Mentally Handicapped People at Manchester University. The centre was established in 1971. It was remarkable in including adults in the brief. I suggest that the initiative implicitly acknowledged that people with learning difficulties had 'rights' that did not exist before but also recognised that adults did not enjoy the benefits of education now available to children. The project was completed between 1977 and 1983 and involved the co-operation of the LEAs of Manchester and district and 100 ATCs run by local Social Services. They aimed to produce:

A curriculum which would become the first essential component of a new teaching system which would also incorporate assessment and recording components and embody sound teaching principles (Whelan et al, 1984).

The *Copewell* title tells us that its purpose was to help people 'cope'. It was, says Corbett, designed to help staff in the ATCs 'to assist people with learning difficulties

in successful functioning in the community' (Corbett, 1996:10). The 'curriculum' was a detailed and structured guide to supporting adults with learning difficulties in a range of tasks, plus a record-keeping system to note the progress of individual students. There were 174 activities grouped under four section headings – *Self-Help*, *Social/Academic*, *Interpersonal* and *Vocational*. Each task was broken down into a series of separate and sequenced actions. As an example, the first section, Hygiene, 1, starts with 1.i: Washing hands and 1.ii: Washing face, neck and ears. The approach was behavioural, with the objective of making the package accessible to ATC staff with no background in teaching or training. It uses a simple formula throughout and makes no attempt to contextualise or to suggest student-led deviations. The ethos is positive and non-judgemental, and does not impose any prescribed system of 'progression' or formal assessment. It was evidently an effort to raise the level of input at ATCs, in response to the new situation, bearing in mind that the staff involved were employed by Social Services, and not expected to take on teaching responsibilities, or to take the sort of initiatives which Cooper recalled as a teacher in a special school. It was, strictly speaking, 'care' and not 'education', and this was reflected in the funding (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984). *Copewell* represented a progressive, carefully researched and presented answer to the question of how far 'care' might involve 'education/training' for adults with learning difficulties.

At this point adult literacy education had a momentum and sense of new direction. In terms of the balance of the relationship *Copewell* (Whelan et al., 1984) acknowledged the positive contribution of colleges and adult education centres. It was not entering into competition in providing education for people with learning difficulties but sought to complement. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was not 'officially'

recognised. *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979), published by ALBSU, said nothing about other opportunities available to students, and the readings recommended to tutors did not include anything about learning difficulties, despite the context. The blindness of adult literacy professionals to research and progress in the field of learning difficulties is one of the constant factors in the relationship, echoing the attitude of the BAS campaigners to the remedial education system they observed in the 1970s. *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979) however, demonstrates a real effort to introduce a student-centred and adult-oriented educational experience to people who had been denied education in the past. The aims and context of *Copewell* (Whelan et al., 1984) and *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979) are not the same. The student might be in adult literacy education for two hours per week, while ATCs offered care all day. But I suggest that the different approach could have made attending adult literacy provision feel like a significantly positive and liberating experience for an adult student with learning difficulties.

The role of the various agencies playing a part in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England during the 1970s is important and confusing. The bodies I cite were not concentrating on the relationship, so their impact on it was sometimes incidental, like the contrasting programmes broadcast by the BBC. And it was also often conflicted. The BAS was a campaigning organisation which gave the adult literacy campaign of the 1970s its ethos and vocabulary of rights and social justice. At the same time the leaders of the campaign excluded people with learning difficulties from their vision for adult literacy education. This ambivalence created a tension which I suggest had lasting effects. The LEAs, which ran most adult literacy education outside the voluntary sector, generally welcomed students from all backgrounds, so many

students with learning difficulties found their own way to classes. Tutors, often voluntary, were willing to work with a range of students, and worked out their own strategies for 'slow learners'. In this context an 'adult-oriented' practice led policy and people with learning difficulties could often find supportive provision. By 1979 ALBSU recognised the presence of 'slow learners'. The ATCs administered by Social Services might acknowledge the positive contribution of colleges and adult education centres, and sometimes joint funding was put in place which enabled people with learning difficulties to attend adult literacy education as part of a 'care' package. The relationship was not acknowledged as a policy issue. Meanwhile the well-resourced MSC pioneered a model of adult literacy education, which was dedicated to employability and did not consider people with learning difficulties. The situation was fluid and inconsistent. A lot depended on local practitioners. The next section looks more closely at how the relationship worked in the classroom.

[The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice](#)

All of the practitioners to whom I spoke agreed that people with learning difficulties did attend adult literacy provision in appreciable (but unrecorded) numbers as it grew in the 1970s and 1980s. For teachers and managers in adult literacy education it was part of the job. 'KL', remembering her work at a London AEI, told me:

I don't think anybody ever mentioned learning difficulties. It was just, this is your group, and you do what you can for your group, and everybody in the group ... And they are all at different levels, but you just cope with it. And you do (KL, 2017).

'AB' started as a volunteer tutor in London and trained at Blackfriars Settlement in the late 1970s. Although she was qualified to teach in primary schools, she affirmed

that 'it was that [training] which was meant to inform your teaching, rather than what you knew about teaching children, which was different, because this was about teaching adults.' She told me that in Suffolk, where she later became a paid tutor and organiser in community education, 'I would think that at least half of them at any one time had a learning disability, a kind of cognitive ... but nothing that had a name' (AB, 2017). She remembered students who had no particular diagnosis, and no special support in the community. They:

had been to special school and they had come out without being able to read and write very much at all, but they were expected to get a job for themselves and have somewhere to live and do everything for themselves ... Some of them were doing very low paid work ... I think one of them had a job cleaning the streets and one of them had a job in a hotel kitchen (ibid., 2017).

The tensions evident at policy level were reflected in practice. The position of practitioners was complicated. The decisions they had to make included ethical considerations, diplomatic discussions, economic balances and educational judgements. 'AB' described a student who apparently did not progress. Her account shows how difficult it could be to decide about valid objectives for adult literacy students who had learning difficulties, and how many viewpoints and interests might be involved. The student:

used to bring Ladybird story books with him ... and what he wanted to do was read those ... and what I wanted him to do was to learn social sight words, things that would help him to be more independent ... When he first came I was saying, "Do you ever go shopping?" "Yes, I go and buy bread for my mother. She gives me the money and I give it to the man in the shop." And after three years I was saying, "What happens when you go shopping?" "I go to the bread shop. I give the man the money that my mother has given me." And really nothing much had changed. After about three years this time it was me saying, I think maybe it is time for this person to stop. And the Social

Worker said, “Well, he has just got used to crossing the road to come to class, and if he could just do another few months so that that skill was established, perhaps then would be the time to stop.” So that is what we did (ibid., 2017).

This is an example of the different expectations brought to the class by the student, the teacher and the social worker. In one sense the student achieved a success. He met a target which demonstrated progress to the social worker, so he had gained from his attendance at class. The question of student-centredness is interesting, as the student apparently wanted to use the time to read the children’s books which may have been part of his school experience. The teacher wanted him to move on into an adult literacy world. She wanted to support the student but felt that there needed to be noticeable progress in terms of the literacy (and numeracy in this case) aims of the provision. She was conscious of the time and resources devoted to this limited result, and decided it was not appropriate to continue. She was trying to reach a balance which respected the student’s rights, even if there was conflict over his needs, and a question about a reasonable level of resources. The story illustrates too how ‘partnership’ between agencies could be fraught. These were often difficult decisions to negotiate.

‘AB’, like many teacher/managers was teaching a mixed group. It included at least one, possibly more, students with ‘special needs’ and combined literacy and numeracy teaching. When I spoke to Jane Mace in 2019, about teaching students with learning difficulties she recalled that, ‘There was a worry about it,’ when she was the Head of the Lee Centre, which ran adult literacy classes in Lewisham in the 1970s and 1980s:

What I remember from the Lee Centre life was a sort of period when we were thinking maybe we should have special classes for people with special needs ... We didn’t have a large amount of spare room so it was just a case of what

we might do. To have the possibility for a bit of special attention really ... And we set up a separate session ... either as an alternative to, or an addition to, whatever that individual could come to. It felt our best effort. (Mace, 2019).

Mace's 'worry' was about providing appropriate teaching and support for students with learning difficulties, but it was also 'because otherwise other people were going to get impatient with somebody who was not quite clued up with where the whole group was trying to interact' (ibid., 2019). Mace did not mention social attitudes or protecting the students, but these were real issues, especially if teachers were balancing the demands of a range of students in a group. At Hackney too, after 1980:

We set up a group specifically for people with severe learning difficulties, who maybe would have found it more difficult to integrate into a group (KL, 2017).

Social factors fed into decisions, as well as questions of progression and funding. 'Separate sessions' seemed sensible, as schemes grew and the management issues became clear. We can see that these schemes were seeking a positive educational response, but behind the decisions we can also perceive that 'separate' can lead to stigma and labelling, despite organisers' commitment to the 'rights' of students.

The lack of appropriate material for teaching adult students with learning difficulties was a significant issue in one-to-one and group settings. Something was needed which was not in the Ladybird tradition of remedial education. In 1978 the Media Resource Officer at Frobisher AEI compiled a pack of copyable sheets entitled *7 Days a Week* (Edmunds, 1978). The publication was the product of a weekend conference bringing together representatives of various local schemes. It was the first adult literacy teaching resource pack which targeted students with learning difficulties. It was a low-key production intended as a practical solution to a

day-to-day problem, rather than an educational or political statement. It tells us that adult students with learning difficulties were present in a range of settings, and suitable materials relating to their 'real' lives were scarce. The pack was cheap (50p) and it was described as:

Some ideas for helping with literacy problems for remedial teachers in schools, literacy teachers in Adult Education and teachers of the handicapped in Colleges of Further Education (Edmunds, 1978)

It does not repudiate the language of 'remedial' or 'handicapped', showing how the lexicon reflected the attitudes and job titles of the time. The intention was evidently to produce something useful to people working in a range of settings which was rooted in adult experience and 'everyday' literacy. Practitioners worked together, co-operating and bridging the divides between schools, adult education, colleges and voluntary bodies. Twenty-four contributors were listed including Chris Lloyd, the lecturer in charge of the Grange Centre which was the site specifically catering for adults with learning difficulties within Frobisher AEI, and Richard Easterbrook, Head of Basic Skills at Frobisher, plus representatives from Cambridge House, The Lee Centre, Clapham Action for Vocational Education (CAVE) as well as several other London AEIs. *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al.) followed this publication, and ALBSU was more circumspect, using the phrase 'slow learners' to describe the student group.

A 'student-centred' teaching approach was fundamental to making the relationship work in practice. The Cambridge House model depended on one-to-one tuition, and as schemes moved to group sessions, the pattern of a volunteer working in one-to-one partnership with a single student was initially maintained in some schemes, although several pairs might work together under the supervision of a paid worker. 'AB' described working as a volunteer:

Mostly in a room, and I think there might have been other people working one-to-one with a volunteer, but we weren't working together, and it wasn't part of a group. And it wasn't supervised by a tutor. It was supervised by the organiser of the scheme, who would kind of come and talk to us from time to time, but not necessarily every week (AB, 2017).

Hamilton and Hillier entitle one chapter of their critical history of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy (ALLN) *Curriculum and Method in a Student-centred Field*, and state that 'perhaps ... being student-centred underpins the rationale of ALLN practice' more than any other theme (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:109). They suggest that a 'learner-centred focus' and 'student-ownership of the curriculum' derive from the early one-to-one pattern of provision (ibid.:110). The approach implies a recognition of the student's experience and autonomy as an adult. The phrase has different meanings for different people at different times, but it has special significance in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. In principle a student-centred approach could accommodate a student with learning difficulties and, importantly, treat him or her as an adult, so that the student experience was an enabling and empowering one. It was a teaching philosophy expressed in the *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979) pack produced by ALBSU. Most of the practitioners I interviewed told me that they subscribed to a student-centred approach. Some had first-hand experience of teaching in schools, which influenced their views on how adult literacy education could be different.

The Cambridge House model informed initial guidance for adult literacy workers. The 1975 ALRA Resource Pack (Clarke et al, 1975) for volunteer tutors stressed the fact that the student should choose their material and methods:

The aim of this kit is to offer you, the newly-trained and as yet inexperienced tutor, a wide range of adaptable material to enable you to use the different techniques which you can vary to suit the needs of your student ... Before you decide to use any of the material in this kit, we suggest that you and your student look together through the pack, so that the student is involved in the choice of work (Clarke et al, 1975:1).

The authors behind this pack included Alan Tuckett, also Sue Shrapnel (later Sue Gardener) of Centerprise and Cathy Moorhouse of the ILEA, plus representatives from London boroughs, and a student. It is based on the concept of a partnership between two adults. 'AB' remembered that, 'I had someone who was very interested in chickens, and we looked at books about chickens, and I simplified materials for him about different kinds of chickens,' (AB, 2017). 'KL' mentioned going slowly to allow a student to work at her own pace: 'Every week we worked on writing her name ... and it was so hard for her,' (KL, 2017). These examples show a student-centred approach which validated the student's experience and motivations as an adult. The teaching was based on the student's interests and not on a diagnosis of 'needs'. The progress in technical skills might be slow, but the investment in the person was valuable. The importance of writing your name could be about respect and identity (Mace, 2001). Alan Tuckett, talking to me in 2019, quoted the words of Freire, that it is more important to read the world before you read the word, and spoke about how such an approach gave people agency and a critical awareness. He also acknowledged the time factor:

We used to say with literacy issues ... the issue is what you do want to say, and how do you want to edit it, and not whether you ever pick up the technical reading of words ... And that kind of sense that it might take me much longer to learn something, but once learned it is learned (Tuckett, 2019).

Tuckett here expresses a radical view of student-centred theory and practice, which includes the notion of people with learning difficulties gaining more control through becoming adult literacy students. Some would be uncomfortable with the acceptance that 'technical reading' is not the 'issue', but Freire's ideas on learning were part of a wider concern about giving the student power in decision-making. Freire was interested in adult literacy education as a method of enabling people to rethink their relationship with the world in which they lived and worked in order to take more control.

When I trained as an adult literacy teacher in 1980, I was introduced to the 'language experience' approach. The idea behind the method was to use the student's own words as the material for learning to read. It was based on an understanding of Freire's concept of liberating education which recognises teaching and learning through dialogue (Derrick & Gawn, 2010:297). It acknowledged that the learning was a shared endeavour and that the teacher did not hold all the knowledge. Wendy Moss researched the practice in 1986 and explains that it had two particular purposes in adult literacy education:

To give a voice to those whose written language skills are early but whose oral voices are rich with content, and secondly as a technique to provide early readers with adult-based, and predictable, so readable, simple texts (Moss, 2005:149).

There is a strong connection between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties in the concept of 'finding' or 'giving' a voice to the students. The teaching method described by Moss was one way to validate adults at early stages of learning, although it was not flagged as a 'special needs' method. Practitioners were able to see the impact of writing your own story and they applied this lesson learned in adult literacy education to working with

students with learning difficulties. 'MN' remembered that 'we used the same sort of methods that we had ... We did a lot of individual story-writing. A lot of writing about my life and learning to read from something they had written,' (MN, 2017). Another practitioner, speaking of her experience of teaching adults who were in long-term residential care, told me about how adult literacy education could give people new dignity and identity. The passage shows how adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties could go beyond 'technical skills':

I couldn't teach them to read and write because they could already do that. But they were recording their experiences. And it was quite incredible ... These people ... were probably in their fifties or so. They would have been born way back in the '20s, '30s, '40s. And they would have been defined as 'idiots' or 'imbeciles'. One of them I can remember seeing something that said she was an 'imbecile' (ST, 2017).

'ST's account shows how a wider view of the purposes of adult literacy education gave students new power. Mace and others involved in adult literacy education came to believe that adult literacy education should not just concentrate on reading, but could address issues of power, agency and inequality through emphasising writing (Mace, 2005). Publishing student writing could literally give students a voice and a platform and provide relevant reading material for adult literacy students. Mace referred in her interview to 'the big effort ... we put in to getting [stuff] published' so that 'we had racks full of our own worksheets and things that had been written [by students]' (Mace, 2019). It became a powerful way to keep the spirit of empowerment and social action alive (Woodin, 2018). Learners became active producers of texts instead of just passive consumers. Sue Shrapnel at Centerprise was a leader of the movement. Other schemes included The Bookplace in Peckham and Gatehouse Publishing in Manchester.

A student-centred approach and an adult perspective implied that people would have different goals and measures of success. 'AB' said that she could not remember a time when there was not some sort of individual plan for each student, a sort of 'contract'. Potential students were interviewed by a paid organiser/co-ordinator, who noted the student's aims and objectives. She worked out an outline plan before placing the student with a volunteer. What Mace (working at the same time, but in a different place), talking to me in 2019, called a 'loose plan' was drawn up at the initial stage and then modified over time with the student (Mace, 2019). 'AB' remembered that the plan was written into the back of a notebook which the tutor and student used weekly to note progress in the front. The plan was intended to be a jointly owned and living document. Progress in this situation would be judged by teacher and student referring to a mutually agreed plan, and not by a test or standard 'target'.

Confidence was important to the idea of progress embodied in a student-centred model. In their 1979 study of *The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy*, Charnley and Jones conclude that 'confidence' was the central 'affective personal achievement' and 'objective' of a programme such as the national adult literacy project '(Charnley & Jones, 1979:101). One teacher-organiser recalled the process with me in 2017:

At the end of the year we would look at what progress people had made, and we would talk to them about it, but in a very informal way. We didn't really believe in formal assessments ... And we saw progression in very wide terms. For example, I do remember one young man who came to my evening class, Tuesday evening class. He was a young man with learning difficulties. And he had been coming for years. And he came every week without fail. And after I had been there about five years, he came in one day and *he took off his coat!* He always came and sat the whole evening with his coat on. And this one

evening he came in and he took off his coat, and he put it on the back of his chair. And everybody in the group clapped him ... I said to him, 'What progress! This is really progress' (KL, 2017).

This story illustrates an approach which recognised that adult education empowers people in different ways, that the process is as important as the outcome and that it might take a long time to see results. The points are particularly relevant in working with adults with learning difficulties. Being part of the adult literacy class was, in this case, a part of becoming a socially confident person with control in his life, alongside gaining literacy skills. Ideas of agency and respect were built into the agenda. It reflects a student-centred and open-ended view of student achievement. The same issues are at work as detailed in the account of the student who finally learned to cross the road independently. Both stories illustrate the complexity of the situations staff and students found themselves in, and the factors they had to weigh.

When I asked 'KL', now training teachers herself, if she thought that 'aspects of the pedagogy (of adult literacy education) had been influenced by work with students with learning difficulties,' she answered positively:

Yes. I would say, doing things in small chunks, and lots of repetition. Because I think in the old days we didn't really know whether someone had a formal learning difficulty, or whether they just learned slowly and worked slowly. And how slowly is slowly, you know? ... So we didn't label anybody in the old days. You just worked slowly with some people, and more carefully, and with more repetition, and more tiny little things. You know, like somebody's name and address. You would do it every week a little bit, in different ways. And lots and lots of practice. And giving people support in different ways. And I guess that still ... there are still people in classes who learn more slowly than other people, so the techniques that we might have used are still relevant (ibid., 2017).

'KL' here implies that she and her students both benefited from working slowly and patiently together, and that a student-centred quality was more important than a set curriculum. 'GH' too told me that he had gained skill as a teacher when he taught in an ATC:

That was interesting work. I felt I had an opportunity to try out different teaching approaches ... I really began to explore in much finer detail the underpinning skills in literacy development ... How you would develop recognition of social sight words, how you would develop really basic reading skills through language experience approaches, trying out different approaches to phonic development ... It was an opportunity with learners who were there most weeks over a year, whereas in evening classes people by nature would come and go (GH, 2017).

Alan Tuckett also felt that he had learned from working with people who used scribes or dictated their words. He argued that students could produce good writing without technical writing skills:

There was always a significant number of people who might never write independently ... but I certainly learned a lot about editing from people who were independent – well they needed scribes – but were absolutely independent writers (Tuckett, 2019).

These are examples which demonstrate how successfully adult literacy education could work with education for people with learning difficulties. It is clear from these accounts that adult literacy education could offer people with learning difficulties various attractions. They could attend as an individual or join a group and be accepted as an adult. Their choices and interests would be taken seriously. They would not be humiliated by tests and assessments which documented their weaknesses. They could take part in social activities, outings or celebrations with a friendly group outside their family. They would be listened to and might even get their name in print. When I met current students attending an adult literacy class for

people with learning difficulties, they were able to articulate some more subtle benefits. Students told me about how they gained competence and confidence, which were useful outside the class, by using a dictionary and discussing the meaning of words:

I do understand because my sister used to use the big words for me. And then she would explain what she was saying ... I might not be able to spell them but I know what they mean ... Like 'anaesthetic' [Student One]. And then you get the dictionary so you can have the full meaning [Student Two] (recorded at Share Basic Skills Group, 23.5.17).

Student Two emphasised an essential aspect of the class:

You know what I like about this class as well? You don't feel belittled in here. You don't get ... you know ... When you can't do it ... You don't pick out people (recorded at Share Basic Skills Group, 23.5.17).

The comment implies that the class provided a different experience from school. It highlights a positive aspect of adult literacy education which Wells, in 1989, called, 'sensitive, flexible, student-centred provision' (Wells, 1989:6). This student-centred approach and partnership perspective seems to me a defining feature of a constructive relationship which was evident when adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties worked together.

Summary

My research shows that the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was tense as events unfolded in the 1970s. This section summarises my findings in relation to my research questions. I identify the significant factors affecting the relationship. I consider the changes in the developing relationship and also the emerging recurring themes. I note specifically the impact of the relationship on adult literacy education in practice. I also discuss

how the analytical/conceptual structure of my study helps me to understand where impetus lay in terms of the relationship. In terms of the research questions posed by this thesis significant factors which would shape the relationship over the period 1970-2010 are evident. Social attitudes and political pressures, as well as educational dilemmas produced tensions. Stigma and the discourse of deficit are evident in the primary and secondary sources explored. My findings also reveal the foundations of student-centred practice and philosophy based on ideas of 'rights' and a specifically 'adult' approach. This ideal became central to the practice of adult literacy education, and was important to the relationship under discussion.

New thinking created different concepts and vocabulary. The 'disadvantaged adult' identified by Clyne (1972) and the Russell Report (1973) was presented as somebody who had been failed by the educational system. It was a positive alternative to the old concept of the 'backward adult' which was built into the established remedial tradition. In the new analysis the deficit was perceived to be in the system, and not in the individual. At the same time the concept of 'special educational needs', formulated by the Warnock Report (1978), put integration based on 'rights' as well as 'needs' on to the educational agenda for students with disabilities including learning difficulties.

Looking at the balance between the forces and institutions which I have used as a framework to structure and analyse my findings it is clear that government policy was not driving the relationship during the 1970s. The recommendations of the Russell Report (1973) into adult education were not translated into policy. The creation of the MSC (1973) and the 'great debate' initiated by PM James Callaghan (1976) indicated where government thinking was heading. A vocationally-oriented adult literacy education would become a major issue in the relationship. I suggest

that in the 1970s the non-governmental agencies took the lead. In this category I place the BAS, BBC and the national adult literacy bodies, ALRA and ALU. The energy of the campaign and the informal contributions of individuals fed into a perceptible transition from 'protest' to agency, but also stoked the tensions. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was an issue mostly addressed incidentally, but my findings reveal the emphasis placed on 'ordinary' (or 'normal') people as potential adult literacy students by all these agencies. For the adult literacy campaigners of the 1970s the question was a 'political' one, according to leading instigator, Alan Wells (2019). The evidence shows that social and financial concerns were behind this position. Their manifesto document *A Right to Read* (1974) needed to ensure that government and public perception recognised that adult literacy education had nothing to do with remedial education as it existed. Although the campaign demanded adult literacy education as a 'right' and question of social justice, people with 'mental handicap' were specifically excluded. The tension produced by this position appears in the evidence of my interviewees. People with learning difficulties did attend adult literacy education, as we know from the Warnock Report (1978) and from my interviews, but they were also rebuffed, as Lesley Dee reported (2019). The question of whether people with learning difficulties were entitled to access adult literacy education raised questions of pedagogy, purpose and identity which reverberate in this investigation.

My data also shows that attitudes and experience began to change the relationship by the end of the decade. In 1979, one year after the Warnock Report (1978) appeared, ALBSU, the successor to ALRA and ALU, published material and guidance specifically designed to support adult literacy education for 'slow learners'

or people with 'moderate learning difficulties' . It represented a reversal of the previous position set out by the early campaigners.

Untangling the issues is difficult. The 1970s adult literacy campaign fronted by BAS and the BBC successfully recruited many volunteers who wanted to 'help' people with poor reading skills. In retrospect Mace (2019) was 'ashamed' of the tone of the campaign. She felt that the 'needs' of students were defined by others. The role of the volunteer/tutor is an interesting factor in the relationship. Interviewees told me that they felt part of a 'social movement' working towards empowerment. Some saw it as a political role. Practitioners I spoke to were committed to a 'student-centred' approach, and the 1970s training for volunteers encouraged teaching which acknowledged that students were adults who might choose their own curriculum and objectives. It was a 'rights'-based approach. Adults with learning difficulties found their way, or were referred by teachers, parents or carers to local adult literacy provision. I argue that a strong shared agenda which supported students with learning difficulties in adult literacy education developed despite the tensions inherent in the relationship.

Shared values which motivated people in adult literacy education and in the promotion of access for people with learning difficulties could enable a constructive partnership to support vulnerable and challenging students. Students and practitioners were able to tell me about the benefits of adult literacy education for students with learning difficulties. It was fundamentally different from the offer in care settings and remedial education. In practice a flexible approach to ideas of progression and achievement allowed 'slow learners' to participate in adult literacy provision in the 1970s. An emphasis on discussion, writing life stories, language experience and student publishing showed how adult literacy education could give

students confidence and agency. Many teachers of adult literacy handled mixed classes including a wide range of student ability and experience. The evidence points to an understanding of adult literacy education which put empowerment and validation at the centre of practice. We also perceive that managing schemes which catered for a broad range of students was stressful for professionals and organisations involved. The existing institutions in education, health and 'care' had to meet the challenges of changing circumstances, while new community-based organisations tested the boundaries. Funding was not secure. There is evidence of concern about the altering relationship between 'care' and 'education'. It was a complicated and fluid situation. The emphasis on rights and not needs brought adults with learning difficulties into the classroom on an equal footing with their peers. There was no policy direction, but practitioners told me how they sought out materials and organised 'special' groups as adult literacy education secured LEA funding and became more 'mainstream'.

Chapter 4. The 1980s – Working it out practically, politically and theoretically

Introduction

In the 1980s the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England became more visible. Adults with learning difficulties were acknowledged as students, but tensions persisted. It was a difficult climate to work in because of cuts in public sector spending. Interviewees described issues in teaching, recruitment, funding and partnership work which sprang from negotiating the relationship in practice. This chapter looks at how people involved worked out the relationship practically, politically and theoretically. It is a patchy picture. I argue that practitioners worked out solutions in the absence of coherent policy direction. The momentum established in the 1970s continued to develop and to allow people with learning difficulties to access adult literacy education, and students and practitioners experienced success as well as frustration in a fluid situation.

Despite the fears of practitioners the new Conservative administration of 1979 agreed to fund a continuing central agency to co-ordinate adult literacy education, as the two-year funding for the Adult Literacy Unit (ALU) which had succeeded the initial Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) dried up. Adult numeracy education was added to the responsibility of the agency, suggesting a rationale related to anxieties about the employability agenda (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:12). But the new body, ALBSU (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit), had to live on a three-year grant, so that a lot of its energy was devoted to securing the next round of funding. Although it survived into the 1990s, ALBSU's publications during the 1980s demonstrate the difficulty the national agency had in proclaiming a 'student-centred' ethos, while

needing to stay close to a government increasingly committed to an employment-oriented agenda. ALBSU rhetoric altered to be closer to government priorities, and away from the 'rights' and 'protest' characteristics which had been part of the civil rights and social justice elements in the initial adult literacy campaign (Papen, 2005:80). The Unit was not officially a policy-making body, but it had a uniquely influential role in training staff and in project funding, so it was central to the direction which adult literacy education in England took during the 1980s (McCaffery, 1985; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). It was also the dominant voice in promoting and researching the field (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). Like ALRA and ALU before, it continued to be careful about its image and the perceptions of public and government. We know that the Unit had accepted that students with learning difficulties were present in classes, because it had published *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979) offering support to teachers working with 'slow learners'. But it was still anxious. In a foreword published in 1989 Wells tried to explain the delicate position:

Whilst the Unit does not believe that 'special needs' work is exclusively a part of basic education ... basic education plays a key role. Thus pioneering work with dysphasic adults, the mentally handicapped, the physically handicapped, those with partial hearing and other groups is now an essential element of provision in England and Wales (Wells, 1989:7).

His message is very different from the emphasis on 'normality' which characterised the Right to Read campaign for adult literacy funding. Wells recognised that the tone of the 1970s campaign had been too exclusively targeted, citing issues relating to gender and race as well as disability, but he was still determined to clarify that there was a distinction between 'special needs' work and 'basic education'. Issues of funding, perception and status were all constant factors.

Meanwhile the government was introducing new thinking and structures in education. They subscribed to a free-market philosophy of competition which led to the 1988 Education Reform Act taking responsibility for schools away from LEAs. The new system depended on the measurement of results to support funding decisions, on the basis that competition between schools would drive up standards and introduce choice. At the same time the government imposed central control and established a standard curriculum, with literacy and numeracy as core school subjects. The fact that ALBSU's title added 'basic skills' to the old 'adult literacy' vocabulary was significant. An emphasis on the economic benefits of post-school education pushed ALBSU towards vocational education, and the skills-based approach of FE (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). The 'official' discourse was changing. By the end of the 1980s ALBSU was working with partners on the BSAI (Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative) which aligned with the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system of assessment introduced into vocational education and training. Assessment, certification and measurement of results through standard criteria challenged the commitment to student-centred adult literacy education and made access for students with learning difficulties problematic.

A revolutionary alternative view of adult literacy education rejected the narrative of basic skills. The theory of literacy as 'social practice' was articulated by the writings of anthropologist Brian Street (1984) and developed by the RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) group. It supported an approach to adult literacy education which recognised the reality of context and power relationships in the use of literacy. It was a fundamentally different view to the concept of free-standing 'functional skills' aligned to vocational education which came to dominate adult literacy education in England. In Scotland the education authorities took on the

implications of literacy as social practice and one result was a more integrated approach to the development of education for people with learning difficulties in their adult literacy education system (Hamilton et al., 2001).

More attention was paid to education for people with learning difficulties after the 1981 Education Act introduced integration into schools. The Act implemented the recommendations of the Warnock Report (1978), bringing in a system of integration and support based on the assessment of 'special educational needs'. The legislation demonstrated changes in attitudes to disability since the 1970 Act (Corbett, 1996). No policy direction was spelled out for post-school provision but in England the Further Education Unit (FEU), founded in 1977, took a lead throughout the 1980s. FE mirrored school education in labelling students with learning difficulties. The vague and more inclusive term, 'slow learners', used in 1970s adult literacy guidance, disappeared. The FEU publication *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984) quoted the Education Act definition of learning difficulty, which was a relative statement focused on education and learning, and not on 'handicap'. According to the 1981 Act:

A child has a 'learning difficulty' if -

- a) He has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age; or
- b) He has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools, within the area of the local authority concerned, for children of his age (Education Act, 1981:1 (2)).

The editors of *Learning for Independence* also noted that since the 1981 Act 'the limitations of IQ tests have been recognised ... and children are placed into schools appropriate for their curriculum needs rather than solely according to their handicap' (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984:i). 'Learning difficulties' were basically defined in terms

of school education and institutions. But the closure of big residential hospitals for people with learning difficulties produced a particular pressure on adult education. The demands of the erstwhile residents highlighted the questions of where 'care' stopped and 'education' started. *Learning for Independence* (ibid., 1984) covered initiatives in adult and community education as well as FE colleges.

Professionalisation was a new and complicating factor. I include in this chapter an analysis which looks at the training and professional status of workers in both educational and care settings in the context of adults with learning difficulties during the 1980s because I argue that it was a significant factor in the relationship. As funding was secured for adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, the growth of professionalisation can be recognised in both areas (Jarvis, 1983; Perkin, 2002; Oliver 1990). It was a slow process. There was no established career route in either field; old attitudes prevailed. Training in teaching students with learning difficulties was school-oriented. But as students entered FE colleges in the years following the 1981 Act the government published *A Special Professionalism* (FE Special Needs teacher training working group, 1987), advising on how staff groups at all levels in FE colleges should understand and respect the needs of people with learning difficulties. It worked on the premise that students would not be segregated. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) recognised the specialist support need for staff involved in post-school work with students with learning difficulties and established advisory posts attached to the inspectorate (Hewitson, 1998). Adult literacy education was still largely staffed by part-time workers, many of them female (Fagg, 1989; Sellers, 2005; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006), but the sector no longer depended on recruiting volunteers. People who had started as young activists in the '70s became seasoned practitioners. These were new

developments and as practitioners in both spheres of activity worked out their roles they did not always agree. Ideas about 'agency' and the purposes of education were complicated by different conditions of service and issues of status amongst health, care and education staff. Practitioners in adult literacy told me of tensions in work situations, and evidence demonstrates the culture clash of different expectations which made partnership and joint-funded projects stressful.

One reason for the close relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties is the fact that literacy was assumed to be central to the educational needs and aspirations of people with learning difficulties. In the 1980s the curriculum for young people with learning difficulties studying at an FE college, and for older students who might come to adult education classes from residential or day care centres, included literacy and numeracy as a matter of course. It was partly a result of funding decisions. 'EF' told me that it was accepted by health, care and education providers that what was needed 'was likely to be basic ... literacy basically' (EF, 2017). It also reflected the core curriculum of schools and the expectations of parents and carers. Sutcliffe suggests that the close link was because a large number of the teachers who worked with people with learning difficulties had trained as adult literacy tutors (Sutcliffe, 1990:14). There is no evidence of a sophisticated educational rationale. Meanwhile alternative narratives emerged: an organisation called People First, which was run by and for people with learning difficulties, was set up in 1984, embodying the principles of self-advocacy. In 1985 the sociologist Sally Tomlinson wrote an article arguing that the growth of special education in Britain was actually an attempt 'to change education to fit the perceived needs of a technologically based society' in which a large group could never gain employment (Tomlinson, 1985:157). By 1988

the implications and assumptions of the 1981 Act and Warnock reforms were being challenged in a collection of essays edited by Len Barton, *The Politics of Special Educational Needs* (1988). The politics of disability was an active movement in the 1980s, and its momentum and language affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

The international and intellectual context

The 'politicisation' of disability, according to Colin Barnes, an academic in Disability Studies, originated 'outside the academy' in the 1970s and 1980s (Barnes, 2005:ix). The UN declared 1981 the 'International Year of Disabled Persons' (IYDP), with the theme of 'full participation and equality'. The IYDP called for plans at regional, national and international levels to equalise opportunity. It is no surprise that the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs found that 'social attitudes' proved to be critical:

The image of persons with disabilities depends to an important extent on social attitudes; these were the main barrier to realisation of the goal of full participation and equality in society by persons with disabilities (UN, 1981).

The UN findings echo the words of the UK 1978 Warnock Report on education for post-school students with disabilities. But there was new thinking in the 1980s. The ideas driving disability politics affected the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties.

Simon Brisenden explained the social model and its implications in a 1986 article in the international journal *Disability, Handicap and Society* (known as *Disability and Society* since 1993). He wrote:

We are only people with different abilities and requirements, yet we are disabled by a society that is geared to the needs of those who can walk, have

perfect sight and hearing, can speak distinctly and are intellectually dextrous (Brisenden, 1986:4).

He went on to declare that people with disabilities were 'oppressed by a hostile social environment' and by 'the medical profession's participation in the construction of disability which is partial and limited', and he clarified how the 'limited parameters of this model have been passed on to other professionals and to people with disabilities themselves' (ibid., 1986:5). Brisenden then talked about the concept of independence for somebody who may always need help with daily life:

We do not use the term 'independent' to mean someone who can do everything for themselves, but to indicate someone who has taken control of their life and is choosing how that life is led (ibid., 1986:7).

These ideas represented a fresh perspective on post-school education for people with disabilities and learning difficulties in England. They resonated with ideas of empowerment central to the claims articulated in the campaign for adult literacy education. The authors of *A Special Professionalism* (FE Special Needs teacher training working group, 1987) and FEU works such as the good practice guide *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984), plus curriculum and training documents *From Coping to Confidence* (FEU, 1984) and *New Directions* (FEU, 1988), were influenced by the writings of Brisenden and other disability campaigners. They appreciated the role education might play in challenging prevailing attitudes to disability. In the opening chapter of *Learning for Independence* Hegarty was clear that they shared these potentially radical views:

So long as the notion of defect was paramount and they (handicapped people) were seen as incapable of learning, education necessarily had a low priority. If ... handicap is at least in part a social construct and created by ways in which society deals with certain people, it is necessary to scrutinise

segregated institutions and other mechanisms by which society may act to 'create' handicap (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984:1).

The social model allowed people to think about issues concerning disability in a different mental framework. It fitted into a bigger intellectual shift. The concept of 'social practice' in adult literacy education can be connected with the contemporaneous development of the 'social model' proposed by disability activists. Both theories rejected the 'individual deficit' approach which dominated conventional understanding at the time. The link is on a conceptual rather than a practical level, but it could build shared understanding.

The implications of the social practice approach are particularly significant to our understanding of the place of students with learning difficulties in adult literacy education because a social practice understanding recognises the power relationships within adult literacy education policy and practice. Adult students with learning difficulties were not powerful and the nature of adult literacy education, and how it was provided, could underline that powerlessness (Sutcliffe, 1990; Barton, 2006; Baynham, 1995; Duncan, 2010). The unspoken assumptions and institutions of conventional education commonly emphasised the power and status of the teacher and the privileged literacy of education (Barton, 2007). I suggest that this attitude was strengthened by the growing formalisation of adult literacy education in the 1980s.

Some practitioners and academics were concerned about the direction of adult literacy education at the time. Ten years after the 1974 *A Right to Read* paper was published a seminar in Sheffield (June 1984) considered adult literacy education in the UK. It was an opportunity, independent of ALBSU and government funding, to reflect on experience and to try to ensure that lessons were learned for the future.

The event generated interest. Seventy-five people attended and the numbers had to be limited (Hamilton & Barton, eds., 1985: foreword). The subject of adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties was not shelved or dismissed. The benefits of 'literacy work with mentally handicapped adults as part of a socialising programme' were part of the discussion recorded at a workshop session (ibid., 1985:28). I take this to mean that the role of adult literacy education in opening opportunities for co-operative activities in a social setting was recognised. It was not designated as a 'special' or separate sort of work but fitted well into the workshop themes listed as: Practical skills; Personal Development; Participation, Autonomy and Control; Change (ibid., eds., 1985:28). I suggest that this reflects a rights-based agenda of empowerment.

This meeting became the launch pad for the independent body, RaPAL. The contributors were thinking in an academic and international context, with the intention of establishing adult literacy as a research discipline. The papers were published in Research Papers of the Association for Recurrent Education (ARE) as *Research and Practice in Adult Literacy*, edited by Mary Hamilton and David Barton (1985) and they tell us how contemporary practitioners and researchers understood the challenges which threatened a 'student-centred' approach focused on empowerment. The speakers were aware that 'the bounds of what can be taught may not be set by tutors or students but by funding agencies' and that in the English context, because 'the ideology behind literacy campaigns is not explicit', ALBSU may not be able to resist 'these pressures' (Foster, 1985:11–12). McCaffery drew attention to the MSC philosophy which 'correlates basic education both with individual employability and the demand for a more highly-skilled workforce'. She pointed out that MSC terminology replaced 'student' and 'education' with 'trainee'

and 'training' (McCaffery, 1985:25). Their fears were well-founded both in terms of the power of funding and of the encroaching vocationalisation in adult literacy education. The fact that the government scheme 'Training for Jobs' moved funds from colleges to the MSC in 1984 proved their case (Simon, 1985:30). In her paper entitled *Taking Control of Learning*, Mace showed how adult literacy education could challenge the conventional balance of power:

By promoting an idea that they [the students] can control their own learning, we are simply suggesting that they have an active role in this process – as readers of each other's writing, as commentators on their own work and as collaborators in planning what needs further study (Mace, 1985:68).

It was a statement which confirmed Brisenden's analysis of 'independence' as 'control'.

At the same time, in the particular area of learning difficulties 'normalisation' was developed as a new concept in managing provision. 'Normalisation' was an idea which originated in Scandinavia and was developed in North America by Wolf Wolfensberger, who published *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services* in 1972. The theory challenged the policy and practice of segregated institutional care and advocated the use of 'means which are as culturally normative as possible' (Wolfensberger et al., 1972). In its emphasis on social relationships it could be seen as part of the intellectual 'social turn'. Associating with non-disabled people was an important principle of normalisation (O'Brien & Lyle, 1987). The idea has special significance for the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties because adult literacy classes in the community or local college appeared more 'culturally normative' than provision in a closed institution or day centre.

One of the reasons that there was pressure from care providers to accept students with learning difficulties into adult literacy education in England was the importance attached by government to the principle of 'normalisation'. Jan Walmsley, using data from the King's Fund, states that normalisation ideas permeated policy and training in relation to the approach to learning difficulties during the 1980s. She lists the effects of applying the concept of normalisation to 'official UK policy' as community care was introduced in England:

Deinstitutionalisation, the introduction of community care, small residential units in ordinary houses in ordinary streets, the use of integrated rather than segregated facilities – schools, health services, leisure facilities – the move away from contract work in day centres to more leisure-orientated social education centres, and 'social integration' (Walmsley, 2001:191).

The implications of the term 'normalisation' and the use of the word 'normative' drew criticism as they were seen to reflect oppressive moral assumptions and a lack of respect for cultural, racial and sexual diversity (Booth, 1988). In 1983 Wolfensberger proposed the term 'social role valorisation' as a more acceptable concept in managing care. His ideas became the basis of John O'Brien's *Framework for Accomplishments* published in the USA in 1987. They were also integral to the paper *An Ordinary Life*, published in the UK in 1980 by the influential King's Fund.

O'Brien defined Five Accomplishments or 'rights' under the headings Community, Presence, Relationships, Choice, Competence and Respect, which became tools for the evaluation of services in UK practice, especially around the closure of long-term hospitals and the services which replaced them (Walmsley, 2001). In the context of education Sutcliffe writes approvingly that 'normalisation' can work against 'isolation' and 'dehumanising' practice (Sutcliffe, 1990:8).

The concept of 'normalisation' or 'social role valorisation' had significant influence in UK thinking, policy and implementation in relation to work with people with learning difficulties. But it was contentious. It was attacked by disability activists who pointed out that it was all about providing and managing services, and did not take the voice of people with learning difficulties as a starting point (Oliver, 1990). Opponents argued that it ignored diversity and that the logic of normalisation was to suppress deviancy and make people with learning difficulties or disabilities 'more acceptable' (Booth, 1988:113). Adult literacy education has only a marginal part in the story but opportunities were missed. Sutcliffe argued for self-advocacy as an essential element of literacy education for people with learning difficulties (Sutcliffe, 1990:19). She saw that, as Brisenden eloquently outlined, it was crucial for students to have agency, a place where they could take some control. Walmsley concludes that in principle and in practice normalisation theory promoted 'advocacy' rather than self-advocacy (Walmsley, 2001:194). Like the 1981 Act, 'normalisation' gave control to the professional who made decisions based on the available service and institutions, and their own understanding of 'normal'.

Legislation, government policy and official reports

No government plan existed for the relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties during the 1980s. The relationship was not an issue for government policy but, because the question of funding was critical to the relationship, government decisions had a big effect. Sutcliffe described how it felt to be chasing the funding in this area. She warned adult literacy tutors:

You may find yourself working in the space of one week in a FE college, a Social Services day centre, a Health Authority hospital. All three

establishments may have different ideas about who should pay for basic equipment and resources ... You may find that you have no option but to carry resources and materials around with you (Sutcliffe, 1994:20).

Sutcliffe's description, surveying policy and practice she had observed and researched during the 1980s and early 1990s, tells us that there was no single pattern of funding, content or support for practitioners who might be teaching adult literacy across authorities or providers, and that responsibility for curriculum and teaching material was essentially left to teaching staff. Each setting probably had a different claiming and payment system for the largely part-time staff. Teachers might well feel isolated in their work as they scurried from one complicated situation to the next.

There was no specific policy but there were two major pieces of legislation which both had impact over time. One was the 1981 (Special Educational Needs) Act, discussed above. The other was the Educational Reform Act 1988. Neither was focused on adult education, and certainly not on the relationship under scrutiny. This section searches for underlying direction rather than tracking overt policy.

The government recognised that the integration introduced into schools after the 1981 Act would have an effect on FE, as young people progressed into college and beyond. The Department of Education convened the FE Special Needs Teacher Training Working Group which, through the FEU, produced the publication *A Special Professionalism* in 1987 (FE Special Needs, 1987). They brought together a large group of specialists, many of whom had significant roles in the shaping of the relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties in England. The authors included HMI, Jean McGinty, a champion of education for adults with learning difficulties, John Baillie, the community-minded Principal of Newham College in East London and Merrilie Huxley (later Vaughan-Huxley), then

Development Officer for the FEU and later Inspector for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Chair of the government-funded report *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000). Sally Faraday, later herself an inspector and expert in education for people with learning difficulties, was one of the FEU officers commissioned to write up the recommendations. The preamble to *A Special Professionalism* demonstrates that the group understood how the approach to education for people with disabilities had been changed by the idea of the 'social model' and the new legislation:

New insights on the concept of handicap have emerged which place emphasis less on the characteristics of the individual and more on the interaction between the individual and his or her environment; human rights groups have campaigned against segregation in all spheres of life; there has been a reaction against the categorisation and labelling of people (FE Special Needs Teacher Training Working Group, 1987:4).

They also referred to the importance of 'attitudes' and recognised that there were issues in the workplace which could be interpreted as discrimination against the staff involved with teaching students with disabilities:

It also requires a reappraisal of attitudes to dispel the mystique surrounding the education of students with special needs as something that is essentially different from all other teaching and is undertaken by teachers who are themselves in some way different (ibid., 1987:6).

The report took the line that all staff had a part to play in integrating students with 'special needs' into FE. Given the evaluation of the situation in FE colleges reported by commentators this was more of a pious hope than a realistic plan. We cannot read into it a new commitment by the government. It was, however, a vision reaffirmed nearly ten years later in the recommendations of the FE sector report entitled *Inclusive Learning* (Tomlinson, 1996).

Attitudes were slowly shifting. Training in Disability Rights was introduced into the public sector after the UN International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) in 1981. The Disabled Person (Services, Representation and Consultation) Act of 1986 shows how legislation reflected new official thinking. The Act recognised the arguments for the rights of people with disabilities to be heard. Social historian Anne Borsay, however, comments that the 1988 Education Reform Act did not move forward on questions of integration in schools, but 'allowed for differentiated education' (Borsay, 2005:205), and that the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act imported 'market principles from the commercial sector', instructing local authority care managers 'to use voluntary and community organisations wherever possible' (ibid., 2005:204). Borsay implies that cheapness was the over-riding factor in the government's approach to care and education in the community. Cost was no doubt an important consideration, but the application of 'normalisation' theory in government policy regarding people with learning difficulties is an alternative and less negative, interpretation.

Meanwhile literacy itself was a political issue. The Conservative administration during the 1980s was subject to pressure from the New Right agenda, articulated initially in the Black Papers of 1969–77, and subsequently in the 1980s by the Hillgate group (Chitty, 1989). In terms which Stephen J. Ball characterised as 'the politics of derision', these campaigns claimed that state education in Britain had 'disintegrated into chaos', threatening standards especially in literacy and numeracy. They attacked English teachers particularly as 'dangerously politically motivated' (Ball, 2006:28). Literacy was politicised and used to stir up moral outrage. In 1985, cabinet member Norman Tebbit claimed in a national broadcast that to lose standards in English could 'cause people to have no standards at all' (Crystal, 2004:

526). Adult literacy education was operating in a sensitive field and such language made it difficult to challenge conventional stereotypes in terms of educational theories or disability initiatives. This was part of the context in which the new Secretary of State for Education implemented the 1988 Education Reform Act and introduced the standard National Curriculum, a model which would appear in adult literacy education in 2001.

In the absence of government policy on adult literacy education the MSC stepped into the vacuum in the 1980s. Their approach was vocational and tailored to meet government concerns about costs. The agency produced a report on *Literacy and Numeracy* in 1987, declaring that, as it worked with public, private and voluntary sectors, and invested £9m in the support of 30,000 trainees, it was confident that 'its influence will carry the policy recommendations' (Hillier, 1988:78). The report concentrated on 'functional literacy and numeracy' and recommended 'new methods and approaches', suggesting that technology could sometimes replace teachers. The authors claimed that such methods could be incorporated into existing MSC training programmes at less cost than developing new programmes (ibid., 1988:78). Learning difficulties did not feature. Hillier noted in a response that 'a great proportion of adult basic education is not strictly functional or vocational', and the nature of the expansion proposed by the MSC would put this 'curriculum negotiated by the students' at risk (ibid., 1988:78). She pointed out that:

The 'functional' view taken by the MSC reveals underlying weaknesses in the treatment of literacy and numeracy problems. It assumes that by addressing functional aspects of basic skills, those people who are unemployed or without training will be given opportunities (ibid., 1988:80).

The MSC was articulating a line which government wanted to hear. Access for people with learning difficulties to adult literacy education was not part of the MSC

agenda. An emphasis on vocationalisation in post-school provision made it more difficult to offer student-centred adult literacy education to people with learning difficulties.

The role of the agencies

This section analyses the publications of the agencies involved in order to get close to the shifting currents of policy and theory which were important to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. The agencies active in England between 1980 and 1989 had to operate in the difficult environment outlined above. The part played by non-government agencies continued to be important, as the relationship was not a government priority. It was not a main interest for influential bodies in the field either, but personal accounts and documentary evidence show that the issue was becoming more of a concern. This section will consider the roles played by the national agencies, ALBSU, NIACE and the FEU. The MSC was also an important player, in that it was close to government. The example of the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority), with a London-wide role covering policy and practice, will also be considered. I shall examine ALBSU's work first because it held primary position in adult literacy education in England in the 1980s, although initiatives often originated at local level.

ALBSU inherited the mantle of ALRA and ALU, but the agency moved away from operating as a pressure group calling for social justice, to fit the government's priorities. ALBSU was granted three years funding from 1980 but managed to survive into the 1990s, before it transformed again into the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) in 1995. To some extent the agency continued to behave like a campaigning organisation because it lived on short-term funding. Newsletters and reports kept up

pressure on government and celebrated the success of the Unit. It worked to maintain, develop and promote adult literacy provision, providing training and regular publications which created a feeling of solidarity in the workforce (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). The programme of Special Projects showed ALBSU's power to set the agenda for adult literacy education, and was significant to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties during these years. The agency was able to talk to government but it did not necessarily represent the voice of practitioners or participate in theoretical arguments. ALBSU could not sustain the revolutionary fervour and independence of the '70s as it fought for funding and security.

The main funding for adult literacy education and for further education for people with learning difficulties was now located within LEAs, but they had very limited budgets (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Green & Lucas, 1999). While other agencies such as the charity Mencap were involved in supporting education for adults with learning difficulties, their input was local and small scale (Smellie, 2009). The momentum achieved by Right to Read, ALRA, ALU and then ALBSU had measurable results. In 1982 ALBSU reported to their national conference that 37,000 new students had entered adult literacy provision in the last year, and 77,000 in total were attending literacy and numeracy tuition. In 1985 the total number was given as 110,812. The 1983 discussion document *Organising Provision: Good Practice in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills* demonstrated how ALBSU was seeking to retain an adult and student-centred philosophy plus the idea of entitlement to a second chance. The language, however, is that of 'needs' and not of 'rights'. The paper was essentially addressed to LEAs. The guidance advised that the organisation and structure of provision 'should be based as fully as possible on student-centred

approaches' and 'a variety of learning opportunities' (ALBSU, 1983b:5). It went on to say that it was 'crucial to a student-centred service' that students were involved in evaluation and development and their 'own identification of needs' (ibid., 1983b:5).

The final point emphasised negotiation:

The Unit believes that the curriculum of basic education should be negotiated between students and tutors, and that evaluation methods should be based on a similar approach (ibid., 1983b:12).

ALBSU is spelling out the values which Hillier feared would be overlooked by the MSC proposals articulated in 1987. It seems like a categorical statement in support of the idea of adult literacy education as a shared enterprise, giving students agency in terms of content and process. However, there was room left for manoeuvre. Wells, the Director of ALBSU, was aware that the agency needed to be nimble to ensure its future. The discussion document concluded: 'Basic education, as a relatively new service, is still very much involved in the process of consolidation, development and change' (ibid., 1983b:12).

The idea of negotiation and consultation within existing structures was not ultimately the same as the commitment to social justice which had been central to the BAS campaign for state-funded adult literacy provision. ALBSU had to tread a careful line. Wells told me in 2019:

We were good at publicity. We were good at blowing our own trumpet. We were sound. A senior civil servant once said to me ... that I was always seen in the Department as a safe pair of hands, and the Department officials like people who are not going to create problems for them (Wells, 2019).

Clearly ALBSU's relationship with the Department of Education was fundamental to how Wells judged his own success. He knew that ALBSU needed government support, and he recognised that local government depended on central government

to keep the wheels turning at LEA level. We can see, however, why the RaPAL delegates were anxious that ALBSU would not be able to withstand government 'pressures'. A particular example of how an issue could blow up occurred around the student newspaper *Write First Time* (WFT). *Write First Time*, founded in 1975, operated as a national collective. It was an important organ of the empowerment strand of adult literacy education (Woodin, 2018). In 1982 WFT included a poem which was bitterly critical of the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the policies of her government. As Wells remembered it, he was summoned to meet with ministers who:

were quite good about it really. They said, 'Well, it is freedom of the press ... but you need to make sure that it does not libel anybody; and was this poem really written by a student?' (Wells, 2019).

As a result, Wells told WFT that, as the funding organisation, ALBSU needed to see the copy before it went out. It shows the line that ALBSU was holding and their vulnerability to government pressure. It also demonstrated some nervousness at government levels about the possibility that extending literacy learning could unleash disruptive forces. The question raised about authorship suggests that officials did not believe that a literacy student might be able to think and write so powerfully, and reminds us of the 'moral panic' engendered by right-wing critics about the influence of politically motivated teachers. There was an underlying assumption that literacy students were 'vulnerable and easily led' (Woodin, 2018:88). Wells, in the end, chose to play his 'safe pair of hands' role. He prioritised government sensitivity over a potentially risky student voice. In 1985 the Unit ceased to fund WFT and other such publications (ibid., 2018:88).

After 1980 there were subtle changes to ALBSU's message. The power of the student in partnership with the teacher, as evident in 1970s guidance and advice

from ALRA, was being leached away to fit a more conventional view of education where teachers hold the power in the classroom. The context had changed as ALBSU worked to embed adult literacy education into the established system. The situation was critically appraised by Robert Merry, a student writing for the Gatehouse student publishing project. He wrote:

It is fashionable to talk about adult basic education (ABE) as to do with people taking control of their own learning ... This sounds good but in practice is not the case. I know of very few examples of this practice around and I have visited and experienced a lot of ABE ... It's too much of one person knowing what others would like to know, and keeping it like that (Merry, 1985).

Merry clearly thought that theories about a negotiated curriculum and evaluation processes shared by teacher and students were mere 'talk', and the practice he observed was the conventional pattern where the teacher has the power to control what happens, as far as students are concerned. He provides evidence of the gap between ALBSU's theoretical aspirations and the experience of students of adult literacy.

Another 1983 publication demonstrated how ALBSU needed to trim to fit the circumstances. It was a handbook designed to support teachers working with adults with learning difficulties. Ten years before, *A Right to Read* had rejected the idea that adult literacy education was appropriate for 'the mentally defective'. *Developing Communication Skills: An ideas handbook for work with mentally handicapped adults* (ALBSU, 1983a) targeted teachers working in 'special' settings. The vague term 'slow learners' used in *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al. 1979) was addressing a situation where many teachers had classes which included people with learning difficulties. The 1983 publication was in a different context. There was funding for classes in health and care institutions and partnership work with other agencies. In

the foreword Wells suggested that ATCs might also use the material. It aimed, he said:

to help tutors in adult basic education classes to extend their work, and to consider a range of possible learning approaches ... It is also hoped that staff in ATCs may find useful suggestions for integrating the development of basic communication skills into other activities on a day-to-day basis (Wells, 1983a: foreword).

It was very different to the former 'ideas' pack, which had emphasised adult experience and 'real-life' context. The new pack reflected changes in ALBSU's language and attitudes. The authors were five adult literacy organisers drawn from across the country. They wrote:

This handbook is intended for basic education tutors working with mentally handicapped adults. It focuses on communication skills, acknowledging that for most mentally handicapped adults the skills of listening, understanding and speaking are as important as the skills of reading and writing (ALBSU, 1983a:3).

The word literacy does not appear. This time the authors used the vocabulary of 1980s ALBSU, headlining the notion of 'communication skills'. The topics of 'listening' and 'speaking' are introduced, which will later be used in the Wordpower certification (1990). The authors are, however, aware that encouraging writing can be an especially valuable approach:

The process of developing writing can be particularly important to mentally handicapped students, bringing, as it does, a whole range of skills – talking, exchanging ideas, making choices, selecting material, choosing typefaces, illustrations etc. ... The value lies not only in the piece of writing itself, but also in the process of creating it (ALBSU, 1983a:45).

The document reflects real experience, and an appreciation of what adult literacy education can offer to students with 'mental handicap' in terms of agency and

process. At the same time it adheres to the ALBSU line that distinguishes 'communication skills' from a 'special needs' agenda.

ALBSU continued to maintain the position that adult literacy classes provided for 'ordinary' working men and women. Wells felt that the agency supported provision which included people with learning difficulties, and at the same time avoided the danger that the government, funders and public perception saw adult literacy education as 'special' or 'remedial'. In 2019 he talked to me about resisting 'special' labels:

A lot of literacy classes certainly would have included people who might have been diagnosed with learning difficulties, and certainly included people with special needs. But we didn't think it did any **good** labelling people as adults with special needs [his emphasis] (Wells, 2019).

We know, however, that the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was an issue for many people involved at various levels of adult literacy education because Wells addressed the concerns in the 1985 annual ALBSU report. He still avoided setting out a clear analysis or directions. The message seems to be addressed particularly to LEAs, which were central to adult literacy education and to ALBSU's vision for a more secure future. He needed to establish a position in the face of muddled LEA vocabulary and perceptions, and competition for scarce funding. His clarification is awkward and leaves the reader still unclear:

The place of special needs work is somewhat confusing, particularly as in some areas, special needs appears only to include communication skills with handicapped adults; in others almost the whole range of adult learning opportunities are included, as part of the LEA's basic education provision, rather than seen as a separate identifiable strand of adult education, or an

integrated part of the authority's adult and continuing education provision (Wells, 1985:4).

The passage is an illustration of how the vocabulary of 'basic education', 'special needs' and 'handicapped adults' can be thoroughly confusing. It is equivocal. Wells, I believe, was pushing back against a tendency to categorise indiscriminately all 'basic education' as 'special needs', or all 'special needs' work as 'basic education', by LEAs who might be confused, or seeking extra funding, or both. My interpretation is that Wells wanted to include possible students with learning difficulties in adult literacy provision, but not to make a point of it. He was mindful of the practitioners who were committed to welcoming adult students at all levels into mixed groups, but also determined to ensure that government did not see adult literacy education as 'special'. It was a delicate position. He went on to acknowledge that adult literacy education was sought out and seen as appropriate by parents or carers, and that people in the field faced a dilemma:

The Unit recognises that the sensitive approach of educational practitioners has often encouraged those involved with handicapped adults to see basic education as a source of opportunity for special needs provision. However, except in so far as such provision is centrally concerned with the improvement of basic communication skills, the Unit is not convinced that identifying all work with, for example, physically or mentally handicapped adults or recovering mentally ill people, is logical or appropriate in the long term (ibid., 1985:4).

Wells distinguishes here between 'basic education', which is concerned with 'the improvement of basic communication skills' and 'special needs provision', which he implies has different objectives. The use of 'basic education' suggests a narrower perspective than 'adult literacy', which we have seen can cover questions of confidence and participation alongside reading and writing.

Projects funded through the ALBSU Special Projects programme seem to embrace the wider view, and several target adults with learning difficulties. In a carefully worded foreword to the 1989 report on ALBSU Special Projects Wells wrote:

Provision needs to be carefully targeted with the needs of individuals and **specific groups** [his emphasis] in mind ... Many of the groups concerned have been sorely neglected for too long and continuing provision has often been notable by its absence. Whilst the Unit does not believe that 'special needs' work is exclusively a part of basic education, particularly as adults with special needs often want wide-ranging educational opportunities, basic education plays a key role (Wells, 1989:7).

This quotation reiterates a key passage referenced in the introduction above, adding the two preceding sentences to give more context. Wells was still anxious to draw a line between 'special' (or remedial in 1970s terms) and adult literacy provision (or basic education in 1980s terms). He implicitly rejects the 'socialising programme' aspect of adult literacy education for 'mentally handicapped' adults referred to by the 1984 RaPAL meeting. It is interesting to compare his statement with another interpretation of the same ALBSU Special Projects programme. McCaffery approvingly explains that ALBSU's conception of 'functional skills' enabled 'literacy for specific purposes in specific contexts such as in the provision of drop-in centres, travelling buses, caravans on gypsy sites and centres in outlying housing estates' (McCaffery, 1985:24). She elaborates:

The student-centred model of functional literacy can be related to the humanist approach of the development of the individual and society through educational opportunity (ibid., 1985:25).

For McCaffery the strength of the ALBSU Special Projects scheme lies in its variety and its capacity to reflect a range of contexts where adult literacy can help the broad

development of the individual and society. Her interpretation of 'functional skills' is a complete contrast to the MSC version. It is a justification of adult literacy education which goes beyond 'the improvement of "basic communication skills". 'Actually,' Wells told me in 2019, 'we did commission some projects that were very specifically special needs. We never drew the line. We took it on merit.' (Wells, 2019). Wells wanted to avoid 'labels', but the distinction he drew between 'special needs' work and 'basic education' shows that ALBSU was categorising students and separate approaches in the 1980s. ALBSU's need to relate to government priorities led to a combination of factors militating against the access of students with learning difficulties to open adult literacy education. One was the distinction which Wells articulated between 'basic communication skills' and 'special needs' work. This view of different purposes for adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties played into ideas of 'labelling' and categorisation, which Wells, in theory, said he wanted to avoid.

Employability was also a key theme of the 1980s. ALBSU needed to prove that it could be useful in one of the government's major concerns. The approach would prove to be a barrier for adults with learning difficulties. The annual report for 1981–2 included the suggestion that, given their limited resources, the Unit should:

Concentrate on some key areas of work, including literacy and post-basic literacy, and numeracy and essential basic skills related to work and training, including the basic education needs of the unemployed (ALBSU, 1982:6).

There was a clear switch in emphasis to the idea of 'basic skills' which were geared to employment. In his address to the 1982 3rd ALBSU National Conference, as well as making a plea for money which would allow the Unit to continue its work after 1983, Wells told the delegates that:

There's been little room for growth, most of the new growth seems to have come from the MSC, and to have related rather heavily to employability (Wells, 1982:13).

The grant to ALBSU was renewed for a further five years, and this time the remit included English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Employability was central to the new task. The proposed brief was to cover responsibility for:

Provision designed to improve the standards of proficiency for adults whose first or second language is English, in the area of literacy and numeracy, and those related basic communication and coping skills without which people are impeded from applying or being considered for employment (ALBSU, 1982:13).

Later, according to a footnote in Charnley and Withnall's report, the DES broadened the brief to focus less exclusively on employment (Charnley & Withnall, 1989:13).

But the changing ideology was evident as adult literacy came to be seen in an instrumental light, because of the need to scramble for government funding as each short-term contract came to an end (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). Limited resources and a focus on employability undid the broader vision of adult literacy education, which could include time to grow in confidence and the ability to take control.

Another difficulty in relation to working with students with learning difficulties in the 1980s was the growing emphasis on measurable outcomes, a perceived return for investment. 'AB', reflecting in 2017, recalled the problems involved in including students with learning difficulties in a rural community-based adult literacy scheme: 'One was the amount of progress that people made, especially when there was pressure on us to start recording progress,' (AB, 2017). It was an aspect of the marketisation and competition introduced into education in the 1980s. Hamilton records that during the 1980s 'public discussions about literacy increasingly became

linked to human resource investment' (Hamilton, 2010:20). This agenda led to questions about standards, outcomes and measures of achievement which could be understood by all (Hamilton & Hiller, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). It was important that employers and potential investors appreciated the significance of levels and measures in the field. In practice this meant that there was pressure on practitioners to demonstrate the achievement or progress of their students through tests or certification. This proved particularly problematic where students included adults with learning difficulties. A programme funded by ALBSU which supported students with learning difficulties in writing their own reading materials reported that it was 'difficult to actually measure the progress of these students in a tangible way' (Charnley & Withnall, 1989:77).

Many adult literacy schemes used some form of assessment to measure progress, but there was no standard system, and many practitioners in the UK felt that it was important not to 'test' students. They argued that it replicated the school system which had already failed their students. ALBSU recognised this when summarising lessons learned through the Special Projects. 'A profile of the student's achievement during the course' was recommended as 'the idea of examinations does not sit easily with the student-centred concept of basic education' (ibid., 1989:89). ALBSU developed their own Progress Profiles, based on this principle and focused on self-assessment (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:129). Such profiles should have been able to accredit the achievements of students with learning difficulties, but they were never fully activated. The tide of vocationalism and the demand for standard measures led in 1989 to the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative (BSAI), aligning adult literacy and numeracy accreditation with the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) established in 1986.

The move was clearly intended to pull adult literacy and numeracy education more closely into the education and training systems. The ALBSU rationale for BSAI referenced the National Curriculum introduced in schools in 1988 (Hulin, 1989) as well as the NVQs. The introduction of standard certification underlined the growing alignment of adult literacy and numeracy with mainstream schooling and vocational education. This was partly due to the government's response to unemployment during the period. Figures for unemployment could be massaged by arranging that people attended courses which were intended to help their chances of gaining employment (Green & Lucas, 1999:21).

Wordpower and Numberpower qualifications, introduced in 1990, represented a further step in the vocationalisation of adult literacy and numeracy education. Like NVQs they were based on demonstrating 'competences', a model of assessment which grew from practical learning 'on the job'. The vocabulary of 'skills' is part of the world of vocational education, where apprentices or trainees learn the skills of trades such as mechanics or hairdressing. A 1990 leaflet published by ALBSU with City and Guilds explained the new awards and the advantages of standards and recognition. The wording was unequivocally about 'basic skills' and not about 'literacy' or 'numeracy':

This certificate is awarded by City and Guilds. This means that it is recognised nationwide. It is based on standards published by ALBSU, who are responsible for encouraging high standards in Basic Skills provision in England and Wales.

Below was the message:

The world of work demands basic education (ALBSU/C&G, 1990).

The leaflet reassured possible candidates that the certificates were intended for adults, and made it clear that you were at a disadvantage without a qualification:

The C & G Certificate in Communication Skills (Wordpower) is a qualification for adults. It assesses and gives credit for how you use reading, writing, listening and talking skills. A huge number of adults have no qualifications which leaves them at a disadvantage (ibid.).

The message behind the publicity is very clear. Adult literacy has now become linked to vocational 'skills' training. The meaning of 'disadvantage' has also shifted from a fault of the system, as Clyne had used it in 1972, to the responsibility of the individual. There was a perceptible sense of blame. People should go for education and accreditation or accept that they were guilty of being unfit for employment. In a 1990 article Street neatly showed how calling it a problem of 'illiteracy' allowed the government to blame individuals for their unemployment:

Illiteracy is one convenient way of shifting the debate away from the lack of jobs and on to people's own supposed lack of fitness for work (Street, 2005:53).

By 1990 ALBSU had successfully managed to keep adult literacy in the public eye for ten years, while raising money from central government and embedding adult literacy education and training into the LEA system. At the same time, it had moved away from the aims of empowerment and social justice which had inspired the BAS adult literacy campaign of the 1970s. As employability became the priority it became more difficult to accommodate students with learning difficulties.

Another approach was modelled in FE during the 1980s, but it was not an 'adult' model. The core mission of FE was to deliver vocational education to young people. Various factors played a part in the growing attention to 'basic education' and provision for people with learning difficulties. One was the need to accommodate more students with limited employment opportunities into vocational education. As Tomlinson (1985) noted at the time, 'special' education expanded as jobs for

unskilled workers decreased. McGinty and Fish (1993) made the same point about 'special' provision in colleges. Another factor was the impact of the 1981 Act, and the introduction of integration into policy and practice (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984).

There was also the gradual change in social attitudes, pushed by the disability rights movement, which recognised that young people who had been excluded previously had rights, interests and potential (Corbett, 1996). FE colleges may also have been driven by pressure to attract new funding.

Lesley Dee contributed to the developments in FE and explained her approach to me:

When I first went into FE in 1977 I thought, 'I know all about this. I've taught in special school. I have just got a Master's in special education. I know what I am doing here.' But after six months I realised that I didn't. I realised that fundamental point, that actually the curriculum we needed to develop was a curriculum for 16-, 17-, 18-, 19-year-olds, but which was differentiated to allow them access to that particular curriculum. I mean it wasn't any different from the other work that was going on in the department (Dee, 2019).

Dee was taking a different line to Wells, who was guarding the territory of adult literacy. Dee took a 'rights-based' perspective. She argued that the teenagers with 'special needs' did not need a different curriculum. They were entitled to the same curriculum as everybody else, and the institutions and practitioners should enable access as far as possible. It was an argument later rehearsed in the Tomlinson Report (1996) and *Freedom to Learn* paper (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000). During the 1980s Dee worked on the staff training resource pack *From Coping to Confidence* (FEU, 1985), and wrote *New Directions: A Curriculum Framework for Students with Severe Learning Difficulties* (FEU, 1988). *New Directions* was a research project funded by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which provided advice and examples of good practice

designed to help FE colleges and LEAs and their partners in the community to co-operate on coherent curriculum planning. Dee and the FEU were thinking of work with adult students with learning difficulties in the context of FE colleges.

The FEU was significant in promoting work with students with learning difficulties in the post-school sector. The agency shared some features with ALBSU, but originated within the established educational system, funded by the DES as an independent body 'to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the UK' (Mansell, 1984b:39). Jack Mansell, its Chief Officer from 1980, described the FEU as a 'support unit for the system' (ibid.:39). It worked with awarding bodies and across the spectrum of FE, championing the sector and acting as a progressive force within FE. According to Mansell, 'the priorities are generally concerned with areas of neglect and change' (ibid., 1984:39). He saw two of these areas at the time as 'pre-vocational education' and 'special needs'. This view put adult literacy education, in its 'basic skills' version, and education for people with learning difficulties, high on the agenda for FE. In addition to the publications named, the Unit produced a series of Occasional Papers on Special Needs. FE reflected school policy and practice in terms of labelling students. Students were assigned to classes based on school assessments, or according to the recommendations of Social Services staff. Unlike ALBSU it was not fighting for an independent line or worrying about funding at this point.

Part of the mission of the FEU was to stimulate colleges and LEAs to think beyond literacy and numeracy provision. *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984) and *New Directions* (FEU, 1988) both included examples of successful creative work such as drama, music and art as well as discussion about how to involve students with learning difficulties in making decisions about their own

learning. Individuals who played major roles in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties were employed by the FEU, including Merrilie Huxley and Sally Faraday. They sought to address issues about integration, stereotyping and low aspirations. Cooper contrasted the UK approach to her experience in the USA as a research worker in special education. She described the US system as an 'evidence-based behaviour modification' system which used a 'semi-logarithmic chart paper' to track the progress of each individual student:

Very behavioural, very interesting and completely the opposite to the much more broad, more cognitive approach here. Over here was a completely other thing going on, about 'let these people speak for themselves and be human beings' (Cooper, 2019).

There was new thinking in FE, but it worked within the established system. Colleges were not designed to provide the small-scale adult-oriented experience which characterised a lot of adult literacy education. The FEU did not challenge the assessment and labelling of students according to a school model. Special needs and special funding were integral to the FE approach. They built 'special' courses which recognised the rights of students with learning difficulties but rested on the concept of needs. The programmes were often labelled as 'pre-vocational'. The curriculum tended to include literacy and numeracy alongside some version of 'independent living skills' and 'preparation for work'. On the other hand, the proactive approach to supporting staff working with students with learning difficulties encouraged by the FEU was a positive alternative to the prevarication offered by ALBSU.

LEAs were the main agencies involved in funding and organising provision in adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning

difficulties, inside or outside colleges, but they were suffering from funding cuts and threatened by a government bent on 'reform'. One particularly innovative non-government agency, with a high degree of commitment to adult education was the ILEA. It pushed the relationship between adult education and education for people with learning difficulties to a new level. It presented a model of integrated practice without the labels used in schools. The ILEA dedicated particular resources and effort to adult education, including adult literacy. In the 1980s it introduced advisory posts in education for adults with learning difficulties to work across the London boroughs. Experienced practitioners were seconded to the inspectorate for two years. People who held the posts included Sally Faraday, Chris Lloyd and Liz Maudslay, all of whom had a background in teaching adult literacy. They facilitated training and support projects and built personal links and networks. A newsletter was published to share learning. Their approach demonstrated how far the ILEA had moved since the time when Dee could only get training for her staff through the children's special inspectorate, and reinforced the fact that the provision was not a school or 'remedial' model (Hewitson, 1998). By the end of the decade the government had acted. The ILEA was abolished in 1990, leaving each separate borough responsible for education within London.

The ILEA produced policy as well as practice during the 1980s. After the 1981 Act the authority commissioned an investigation into provision for students with special educational needs across London. It was unusual in looking at all stages of education, including pre-school and further and adult education. Its chairman, John Fish, had been an HMI inspector in special education. The Fish Report, *Educational Opportunities for All?* was published in 1985. It stated a commitment to

comprehensive and integrated provision throughout the authority. The initial statement of principle declared that:

The aims of education for children and young people with disabilities and significant difficulties are the same as those for all children and young people (Fish, 1985:1.1.22)

It included especial mention of the exemplary work done in respect of integration by adult education:

Adult education can and does play an important role in enabling young people and adults with disabilities and severe learning difficulties to continue to develop their skills in a variety of ways. Other sectors of the educational service can learn a great deal from adult education (ibid., 1985:2.10.84).

The report required all London AEs, as well as schools and colleges, to produce a development plan which spelled out how they would ensure that students with disabilities and significant difficulties would be integrated into the education offered in the capital. Unlike authorities criticised by Wells, the ILEA had a policy for adult students with learning difficulties which was not entirely based on literacy and numeracy, but on integration across the curriculum.

My interviewees described some of the initiatives highlighted by the *Fish Report*. 'ST' remembered her role supporting integration for students with disabilities, including people with learning difficulties, in a South London AEI at the time:

I was working across the whole of Streatham and Tooting AEI. We had hundreds of students doing adult education. Literally hundreds (ST, 2017).

Tuckett was principal of neighbouring Clapham and Balham AEI from 1981 to 1988.

He remembered that:

Our Institute ran a special needs integration project for ILEA ... Kind of inclusion policies ... concerned that people had creative options (Tuckett, 2019).

He wanted to get away from 'the kind of classes that I inherited in ILEA' when art classes for people with learning difficulties relied on 'copying postcards', a process he saw as demeaning.

The practices and policy outlined by Fish and the practitioners quoted were exceptional in that they made it normal for students with disabilities, including people with learning difficulties, to attend adult education in a range of subjects. Literacy and numeracy were part of the offer. The 1987 *Induction Pack for New Tutors* produced by the LLU gives a picture of London adult literacy provision at the time. It presents a broad view, without 'levels' or 'labels', a distinct contrast to the FE model:

Students in a basic education class form a typical cross-section of the multicultural population of London. They present a wide range of needs and goals and a spectrum of starting points. This spectrum includes those who are beginning readers and writers, as well as those who, although proficient readers, have problems with writing because of anxieties about spelling or difficulty in marshalling thoughts on paper (Language and Literacy Unit, 1987).

In 1988 Tuckett left the ILEA to become head of NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education). NIACE became a particularly important agency in the development of the relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties. The organisation concerned itself, as Tuckett put it to me in 2019, with 'relationships between power and education, power and learning' in adult education (Tuckett, 2019). In his view, that made work with people with learning difficulties a priority. NIACE was able to take a more independent line than ALBSU, although both were technically independent charities. It had a long tradition of liberal adult education, and a membership that included universities, arts bodies and other agencies involved in adult education such as the WI (Women's Institute) and the WEA, as well as LEAs.

Adults with Learning Difficulties: Education for Choice and Empowerment (Sutcliffe, 1990) was one of the early publications which NIACE produced under Tuckett's leadership. Sutcliffe's philosophy put student agency and empowerment first and foremost. It was a completely different approach from the 1983 ALBSU publication, *Developing Communication Skills*, which was part of the 'coping' model of adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties, which accepted the status quo and helped people to manage their situation. Sutcliffe's study was funded by the Rowntree Foundation Trust, a charity supporting 'social change through research, policy and practice' (Rowntree Foundation, no date). The 'social change' perspective puts Sutcliffe's work in the same tradition as the BAS campaign for adult literacy, with rights, agency and participation as central issues.

NIACE was aware of the issues that practitioners might face in the field, and Sutcliffe picked up on the sort of dilemmas which Wells had pinpointed. Sutcliffe takes a directly student-centred line:

A narrow and exclusive educational focus on literacy and numeracy is common. It is likely to concentrate on areas where the student has already experienced difficulty (Sutcliffe, 1990:14).

This, she states, is:

based on perceptions of need, and linked to the fact that much of adult education work (with people with learning difficulties) is carried out by adult basic education tutors (ibid., 1990:4).

In other words, she suggests that other people are making decisions for the students on the basis of their own perceptions and on the nature of the institutions and provision. 'Literacy and numeracy should be chosen options,' she asserts (ibid., 1990:14). She is establishing a position which puts the student's agency first, a point which demonstrates the principle of 'self-advocacy' as opposed to 'needs-meeting' or

'on-behalfism' in terms of educational decisions. Sutcliffe is highly critical of some of the practice which she had encountered. In her later book on teaching basic skills to adults with learning difficulties she declares that it is:

not acceptable to treat people as children or to use pre-school or primary school materials such as cardboard clocks, plastic money or coloured bricks (Sutcliffe, 1994:12).

And she observes that:

Literacy and numeracy classes have in some areas become a 'dumping ground', where people with learning difficulties can end up for years on end without making any progress (ibid., 1994:8).

She is conscious of the factors which made life difficult for adult literacy teachers working with students with learning difficulties. Although students might not have made their own decision to join a class, they were often consistent attenders (possibly brought to class), as my interviewees confirmed. When your job depended on maintaining a certain number of students in the class a regular attender was a useful counter in the game. This could be another reason for placing them in a literacy class year after year. Tuckett remembered the story of a student who said:

No, I am not doing literacy any more. I know what the work-sheet is going to be next year. I have done it for the last ten years (Tuckett, 2019).

Sutcliffe's argument uses the insights of a 'social practice' approach, which puts the experience of students and the situation in a classroom at the centre of the discussion. In a truly empowering curriculum, Sutcliffe declared:

Self-advocacy should be a key component of learning, underpinning the development of a curriculum built on student choice, decision-making and empowerment (Sutcliffe, 1990:19).

Sutcliffe's clear exposition of a 'self-advocacy' approach to adult literacy education for students with learning difficulties underlines the differences evident in the

positions taken by the various agencies which had influence in the relationship under discussion during the 1980s. NIACE was staking out a much more radical and student-centred role than either ALBSU or the FEU aspired to. The ILEA had been dismantled by 1990. The MSC had no overt role in the relationship but was a powerful factor in terms of government thinking and funding. Meanwhile practitioners were working out the complexities on the ground.

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice

Training, professionalisation and questions of care versus education

I introduce here an analysis of the state of adult literacy education and of work with adults with learning difficulties in terms of status as professionals. I argue that questions of training and professionalisation were significant in the relationship, and that the issue was crystallising at this time. The growth of experience and solidarity amongst practitioners led to an increasing claim of professionalism in both adult literacy education and the care industry in the 1980s. Distinguishing between care and education has philosophical and practical aspects which impact on funding decisions and administrative procedures.

In the 1980s the debate I concentrate on in England was principally located in the public sector. Perkin drew attention to the competition between 'professional career hierarchies' as more and more people could aspire to professional status in the public sector (Perkin, 2002). It could give rise to tension and conflict in practice. Professionalisation was mainly a factor which concerned staff, but status, stigma and insecurity can affect both staff and students (McGinty & Fish, 1993; Bergin and Johnson, 1994). The relationship between adult literacy education and education for

people with learning difficulties involved practitioners in education, health and social care, all areas subject to political pressure and fraught with complications (Borsay, 2005). Individuals working in each of these sectors had anxieties about professionalisation and the possibility of achieving, or failing to achieve, professional levels in terms of training, status and security. Their jobs were not prestigious or well paid. This was at a time when the public sector was under attack in England in the climate of free-market thinking, with a government committed to introducing competition and market forces into the area. I argue that workers felt precarious about their own professional status and that this led to competition and tensions in the relationship. To clarify the argument and its effect on the relationship I shall look at the position of staff working in various roles which were part of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England during the 1980s.

I consider first the personnel working in FE colleges. During the 1980s, as in the 1970s, LEAs were responsible for local colleges, although they were under pressure from government cuts and the tensions of different funding sources, such as the MSC (Green & Lucas, 1999). I focus on the teachers, support workers or instructors who taught young adults attending colleges full-time for one or two years after leaving special school or receiving extra support in mainstream education. This staff group might also teach older part-time students with learning difficulties who attended Social Services or health or charitable care provision at other times, or younger students who were on pre-vocational programmes shared with schools (Dee, 1988). Most of the students had literacy and numeracy written into the programmes, sometimes identified as 'communications' or encompassed in 'independent living skills'. The people teaching literacy did not necessarily have any

qualifications in the subject area. Provision for students with learning difficulties in colleges was rarely integrated except in terms of 'location' or 'social' integration such as the use of sports facilities and refectories. 'EF', working as an inspector in FE, told me that 'they were still in Portakabins right up until the 1990s in some places' (EF, 2019). The staff involved formed a growing but not well-organised group (Dee, 1988).

The position of FE teachers was not straightforward. Jocelyn Robson stated that 'the many cultures of the FE workplace, reflecting the many different occupations and roles of FE teachers, co-exist uneasily' (Robson, 1998:585), arguing that there was no common culture and identity amongst FE staff. Robson believed that successive governments since 1944 had neglected professional training for FE staff, pointing out that in 1979 only 45 per cent of the full-time staff in FE were qualified teachers, and (unlike schools) only 48 per cent in 1991 were graduates. The figures suggest that little investment in teaching in FE took place during the 1980s. Robson was not concentrating on the status of staff involved in teaching people with learning difficulties, but she paints a picture of a tense and fragmented situation, where status in the college community and in public perception was a difficult issue. Qualifications, titles, pay, status, networks, hierarchies and security were all contentious. Her analysis is confirmed in a volume of essays, *FE and Lifelong Learning: Realigning the sector for the twenty-first century*, which described colleges 'not as single organisations, but as competing departments to which staff had allegiance' in a sector which had experienced 'expansion without strategic leadership' (Green & Lucas, eds., 1999:23).

It was not easy teaching students with learning difficulties in such an environment. A sort of stigma by association can be perceived and there were

instances which demonstrated that staff preferred not to be associated with the 'mentally handicapped' students. Dee told me in 2019 how she had encountered prejudice working in a London college, teaching students with 'moderate learning difficulties' (MLD) in the late 1970s and early '80s:

We used to be called *What Next?* courses, and then the other courses for the sort of school-leavers who didn't know quite what to do, and hadn't done very well, or dropped out, were called something else. Then they [the college authorities] decided to call them *What Next?* So we had *What Next 1? What Next 2? What Next 3? What Next 4?* And then the teachers who were teaching them [the classes targeting non-MLD students] said, 'No, no, we don't want them called all the same,' (Dee, 2019).

This account tells us that the practitioners wanted to make it clear that the classes they were teaching did not target students with learning difficulties, and the implication is that the staff involved were anxious not to be linked with the 'special' provision. In a struggle for professional respectability the link to 'special needs' was not helpful. When I spoke to 'EF' in 2017, he remembered that a colleague identified what he called 'the drooling hordes problem', which meant that staff in college would say something like:

We don't really want these students in our offices. So when they knock on the door, could you just go out and see them? We don't want them here in the staff room (EF, 2017).

Such attitudes kept provision for students with learning difficulties in Portakabins, and affected the morale and self-esteem of staff and students.

Staff working with people with learning difficulties in a care environment were similarly placed. The tense balance between care and education in post-school provision was reflected in conceptual and verbal terms. Staff in social care were rethinking their roles. Adult Training Centres (ATCs) managed by Social Services

were often retitled as Social Education Centres (SECs), a suggestion initially made by the National Development Group for the Mentally Handicapped in 1977, and quoted by the Warnock Report recommendations (Warnock, 1978:10.53). Their workers were rebranded as 'instructors', a job title which echoed that of vocational instructors working in colleges and training agencies (Lindsey, 1989). It was evidently a move to improve the standing of work in the sector. But they were not teachers; training in Social Services was not focused on education, and in practice their time, creativity and flexibility were limited by funding. 'The ATCs and SECs are poorly resourced for learning activities,' stated Rosemary Lee in her introduction to *Learning for Independence* (Lee, 1984:vii). The sensitivity of titles and responsibilities demonstrates that the territory around care/education for adults with learning difficulties was contested.

Adult literacy teachers also faced difficult issues. Considering the state of adult education in theory and practice in the UK, Peter Jarvis concluded in 1983 that, 'Adult education may be viewed as a semi-profession, in the very early stages of professionalisation' (Jarvis, 1988:209). Jarvis believed that adult education was forging a separate discipline:

The establishment of role-specific knowledge is, it is maintained, one step in the process of professionalisation and it is one that is currently occurring in adult education (Jarvis, 1988:281).

Most adult literacy practitioners during the 1980s worked part-time in community or voluntary schemes, funded wholly or partly by LEAs (Hamilton, 2010:22). Many taught mixed level classes which included adult students with learning difficulties, diagnosed or otherwise. Adult literacy education was basically part-time, often as two-hour weekly classes alongside provision such as badminton and French conversation, sited at schools, colleges or community venues. In 1986 ALBSU

reported the total number of paid staff in adult literacy, language and numeracy as 9,000 of which the vast majority, 8,100, were part-time (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:61). This made the claim of professionalism difficult. Adult education workers had no standard qualification, although many adult literacy tutors had degrees and/or teaching qualifications (ibid., 2006).

In the 1980s adult literacy education in England was moving from a social action programme spearheaded by the voluntary sector to become more embedded within the traditional LEA system of adult education (ibid., 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). Training was a priority for ALBSU and they organised regional programmes, national conferences and guidance, but there was no obligatory specific training or qualification. 'GH', who went on to become a trainer at regional level and consultant on national teacher training for adult literacy specialists, told me in 2017 about the stages he went through to become a full-time 'professional' in adult literacy education:

I started as a volunteer in 1980–81 ... I was working in an office when I saw the advert in our local paper for literacy volunteers ... And they had a once or twice yearly volunteer training programme ... It was kind of like a ten week course ... And then someone thought I might have something to offer, so they asked me if I wanted to do what was then an EARAC (East Anglian Regional Advisory Council) Stage 1 Teacher Training course, which was a generic teacher training course. So I ended up doing that course, which was for adult education teachers. I remember very clearly working with a group of mixed adult education tutors, some Tai Chi, lacemaking, yoga, then me, the adult literacy person ... And then within six or seven weeks a tutor vacancy cropped up. So ... it absolutely terrified me, but I just ... that's how I got started really ... I've still got the original BBC Adult Literacy Tutor Handbook ... It was a year-long course with some observations and stuff, but it wasn't any substantial qualification (ibid., 2017).

This account supports the assessment of Jarvis, that adult education was in the early stages only of 'professionalisation'. 'GH' did not feel that he had a 'substantial' qualification, and we can see that adult literacy, in training terms, was not differentiated from the part-time leisure pursuits taught in LEA adult education programmes, where people skilled in a craft or sport might work for two hours a week teaching an evening class. After a year or two 'GH' went on to pursue a teaching qualification. He could not find one to fit his career choice. The nearest thing he could find concentrated on 'slow learners' in schools:

I decided to go and do a year's PGCE ... It was called, amazingly, Supporting Slow Learners in Secondary School ... At the time it was very difficult to track down any training qualification, teaching qualification that had a 'special needs' focus ... And some of us ended up working in remedial classes within high schools, and others of us worked in special schools ... Our lead tutor had a special ed background (ibid., 2017).

'GH' wanted to continue as an adult education practitioner. He was motivated to work with 'slow learners' in the sense of teaching and supporting adult literacy students but could not find a suitable qualificatory course. He felt that adult literacy teaching was not taken seriously as a career:

And there was the sense of ... you know, as adult ed was and still is. It's a lot of part-time work. A lot of travelling out to village halls and all of that. I kind of loved all of that in some ways, but it didn't feel like a career. (ibid., 2017).

He thought of working in school but returned to his first choice. Like many others, mostly women, 'GH' combined part-time roles to try and build up his work:

The job (local LEA Co-ordinator for Adult Literacy) then was something like eight hours a week. And then I had another six or eight hours of teaching, so it was a mix of organisational work and teaching. So that was late 1980s ... And in the mid-1990s we were finally put on a permanent contract that was pensionable (ibid., 2017).

'GH's story makes it clear that there was no straightforward path to a career in adult literacy education in England at the time. Others described similar juggling of jobs and roles. It also indicates the overlap perceived between remedial work in schools and adult literacy teaching, certainly in the field of training and qualification. The hurdles which people had to overcome to follow a career in adult literacy education could also serve to enhance the feeling of 'mission'. As 'EF' told me in 2017:

We felt very different because all of our work was with people who had been hugely disadvantaged by the system. Whereas, as far as we could make out, most of the rest of adult education were people who had some advantage. So we felt ourselves ... and I suppose we were, a little bit snooty. A little above the others when I look back on it (EF, 2017).

This sense of having a superior calling, based on a moral scale of values, was something shared by practitioners in both adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It did not necessarily lead to solidarity and it may not have been justified or overtly acknowledged, but it partly compensated for poor pay and insecure employment, as my interviewees attest.

The conclusion that I draw from examining the various positions of practitioners involved in adult literacy, and particularly in adult literacy education with people with learning difficulties, is that each of the professional groups felt insecure. In Perkin's analysis the growth of professionalisation within the public sector as 'more and more people can aspire to professionalism subject to specialised training and expertise' leads to competition (Perkin, 2002:3). He describes a contest between careers 'to persuade society to yield as much power, prestige and income as it could win' (ibid., 2002:xxiii). None of the practitioners involved in work with adults with learning difficulties enjoyed much 'power, prestige and income'. Their worth was more indefinable. Perkin recognises that these professionals compete for

'indispensability'. They live, he states, 'by claiming that their particular service is indispensable to the client or employer and to society and the state' (ibid., 2002:6).

In the struggle for professional status each group involved in education for adults with learning difficulties needed to prove that they were indispensable to the students, their peers, their institutions and to progress in the field. In FE in England there were long-standing issues of status and fragmentation which gained a new dimension as more work with students with learning difficulties took place in FE colleges. In community settings, or 'special' provision where adult literacy was taught, friction might arise about timetables, rooms or class sizes, but actually the issues, I believe, were about respect, status and 'ownership' of, or indispensability to, the students and the system. 'MN' remembered strains in the relationship with partners in Social Services:

I think there was that with Social Services, certainly with Day Centres ... There was always that pay discrepancy ... I was asked to teach at an ATC ... But there was always this slight feeling of, you know... you get the holidays, you get the pay (MN, 2017).

Tensions played out in constant small confrontations. We can sympathise with care workers who had to clean and feed students ready for class but also with teachers finding their class had disappeared earlier than expected because the minibus had arrived to take people back to the Day Centre. The line between care and education was a boundary fought over daily, and the status of the workers involved was a key issue as well as a factor in shaping the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, as the staff involved worked out who was in control.

Managing and developing provision

My account of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice reflects the complex situation outlined above. This section concentrates on adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in adult education based in voluntary and community settings, where provision was mainly funded by LEAs, although pressure from local groups, voluntary agencies or charities was often significant (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006). Classes might be integrated or closed, depending largely on funding sources. It was in this domain that the tensions were most sharply felt (Sutcliffe, 1990). Provision for students with learning difficulties in FE colleges was more closely aligned with the school model. The 'labelling' of the school system was adopted, and there was no legacy of integrated work (McGinty & Fish, 1993). In adult literacy education outside colleges the staff were generally committed to student-centred adult-oriented provision (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006).

Practitioners working in the field of adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties had no 'official' plan of action. ALBSU was the lead agency but did not fund provision apart from the Special Projects. In effect the funders, LEAs and practitioners handled issues locally. They arranged partnerships, agreed programmes, chose materials and sorted out administrative details. Lack of central direction meant that the nature, quantity and quality of LEA adult literacy provision varied from one LEA to another (ibid., 2006). The multiplicity of interests involved in the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties was a continuing factor. Stakeholders included students, carers, teachers, managers and funding authorities. Each might have different views on questions of 'rights' versus 'needs' and how the dilemma

translated into the purpose and practice of education for people with learning difficulties, so negotiations were complicated (Sutcliffe, 1990).

Decisions about local arrangements customarily depended on funding. 'EF' described to me in 2019 the random way in which a substantial body of educational work for people with learning difficulties built up in one sympathetic local authority. He was County Organiser 'for Literacy and then Numeracy, and then ESOL, and anything else that they found really. That's how it developed,' he explained. One tutor saw the possibilities:

Originally it was a kind of naïve approach, which was a sort of ... there's people here who want to learn things, and it's likely to be basic in some ways, literacy basically ... She managed to do that really rather well, and then she began saying things like, 'Well, we could do more for the community. There's a Day Centre as well ... And actually the curriculum is wrong really. It shouldn't just be literacy' (EF, 2017).

Adult literacy was the first option considered (Sutcliffe, 1990). A broader range of subjects might then be worked out with the authorities involved. In this case the initial partnership led on to varied work in a large residential hospital:

In those days they would have been called Severe Learning Difficulties, probably by us in education ... the mentally handicapped in health care terms ... And we began setting up groups on particular wards (EF, 2017).

This is where the question of whether what was provided was 'care' or 'education' became an issue. 'EF' told me that nobody wanted to foot the bill. He became adept at stretching the budget:

It was my job to make it work ... But the difficulty was always money. The Education Authority wouldn't pay for it ... The Health Authority wouldn't pay for it ... So it had to be paid from somewhere else (ibid., 2017).

He found a source of funds called the No Area FE Pool. The money was top-sliced from local authorities to meet the cost of educational provision which was exceptional, such as on army bases. It could be used to support work in the long-stay hospitals because they were technically crown land, and therefore outside the administration of local authorities. 'EF' subsequently found himself an expert on funding, consulted across the country.

ALBSU Special Projects provided money for initiatives, but they were, by definition, short-term. This was a problem, since maintaining progress needed secure funding, as we can read between the lines of Charnley and Withnall's analysis of ALBSU Special Projects 1978–85. They note in their conclusions:

These innovative developments, some of which are ... still at an early stage, have implications for staffing, tutor-training, organisation, staff-student consultation, record-keeping and evaluation systems ... Such experimental schemes take considerable staff time to implement (Charnley & Withnall, 1989:102).

And that:

The provision of an effective basic education service to adults in rural areas presents special difficulties which can be costly and time-consuming to overcome (*ibid.*, 1989:79).

The detailed reports of Special Project funded initiatives demonstrate the built-in difficulties of making adult literacy education available to people with learning difficulties. The issues reported were partly about shifting attitudes, but also about competition for resources. Digging into the data shows some of the complications. Details of a Devon project show that it had an 'employability' element. The provision was intended for young people who were judged to be possible candidates for employment in the opinion of staff at local ATCs. At the end of the experimental period, 13 of the 55 students (about 24 per cent) involved were recorded as being in

full-time employment, and 24 in, or just having left, work experience situations. A good but not overwhelming outcome, and the practitioners involved noted that the continued good effects of the initiative would depend on maintaining movement through the ATCs, so that they were not perceived as long-term or final settings (Devon Education Authority, 1984). This suggests another perspective, as practitioners in Social Services could be under pressure to cease their own work with the most rewarding clients, possibly losing funding in the process. Other projects which targeted students with learning difficulties recorded problems in finding suitable teaching materials, and 'measuring progress in a tangible way' (Charnley & Withnall, 1989:77). The projects reveal small triumphs and the careful negotiations and frustrations involved in trying to support local initiatives and meet centrally imposed objectives.

These developments can be viewed as marginal but it can be argued that they both challenged and protected mainstream adult literacy education. Practitioners managed to implement innovatory practice and to push the boundaries of what their students could achieve, for instance, in taking responsibility for their own learning. Reports mentioned increased confidence and 'producing their own books' (ibid., 1989:77). At the same time the 'special projects' provided a sort of pressure valve diverting energy which could be problematic to local and national bodies.

The problem was one of success and of demand. Wells had identified the issue as the attraction of 'the sensitive approach' of adult literacy education for people with 'special needs'. As adult literacy education became more established within LEAs across the country, local organisers and teachers faced a major issue in terms of the relationship between adult literacy provision and education for people

with learning difficulties. It was a question of access, integration and educational opportunity, but also of rights and resources. Adult education, including adult literacy, was non-compulsory. People attended voluntarily. The 'ordinary' students might choose not to attend if they perceived that the classes were designed for people with learning difficulties. Providers did not want to take on large numbers of students with learning difficulties for this reason. It was the issue identified by the 1970s BAS campaigners in a new shape. There was no policy or national guidance on this sensitive matter.

Wells understood the dilemma and articulated it to me as a 'pragmatic' issue:

If you were in a class where you had eight people in the class, and you had four with Down's syndrome, for instance, the other four might pragmatically quite often have left, because they would have said that this is not the class I thought I was signing up for (Wells, 2019).

Tuckett described a crisis moment when an 'extremely bright' but vulnerable student announced that 'he was going to quit the course. He said, "I am not staying in the bloody funny farm any more"' (Tuckett, 2019).

Sutcliffe, writing as an advocate for students with learning difficulties, said in a 'practitioner's guide' (1992) that there was no ideal answer to the question of the right number of students with learning difficulties in an adult education class (Sutcliffe, 1992:15). She recognised that individuals coming to adult literacy classes often felt embarrassed, anxious or even ashamed to admit to problems with reading and writing. She understood that if it appeared that the local class was geared to welcome people with learning difficulties other potential students could be discouraged. And the experience would not be what people with learning difficulties were hoping for either (Sutcliffe, 1994).

'UV' described to me how she managed the issue as a county organiser for adult basic education. It made her uncomfortable, as we can hear in her delivery:

Once one individual came from a certain organisation, maybe a charity or something, then there was a strong possibility they would want to refer other people. So it did become ... it was difficult ... Our instincts were to welcome, but we were trying to attract [people to] quite unstable classes, some of which were quite precarious because of the numbers and things. We were trying to attract a certain group of people who in themselves were vulnerable, particularly because of their self-esteem. And if you had more than one, possibly two people with ... it is not PC ['politically correct'], but if they had obvious learning difficulties then it was difficult ... And we saw it as a barrier to recruitment (UV, 2017).

The difficulty that they were struggling with had funding elements, but also questions of principle touching on rights, access and participation, which were very much in 'UV's mind. For 'UV's authority it eventually became a policy matter, and was talked through at meetings which were chaired by an officer of the LEA, and included a representative from Social Services. 'UV' was relieved not to have sole responsibility, and to remove the burden from teaching staff. 'In the end', 'UV' told me:

I can't remember a lot of what we discussed, except that we did write a brief policy for literacy classes, which actually enabled us to set a limit on the number of people referred, who had recognised learning difficulties, into any group, in order to try and keep the proportions in a form that was acceptable (ibid., 2017).

Wells wanted to minimise the issue, but his own remarks, 'UV's account and Sutcliffe's statements (1992; 1994) make it clear that the presence of people with learning difficulties in adult literacy education was widespread. No schemes at this point would have assessed adult students in terms of learning difficulties. Most were

built on principles of integration and entitlement. Each class also had to prove its 'viability' in terms of numbers of students, just as French conversation or yoga courses did. Organisations worked out their own solutions, trying to balance the rights and needs of all the students. In practice the idea of what was 'acceptable' led to some control of the access for adults with learning difficulties in this local authority and, no doubt, in others. Some schemes opened separate classes; the 'gate-keeping' method described by 'UV' meant that a sort of 'quota' system was implemented which operated at inter-agency level, not at the point where a student might have been personally denied entry to a specific class. It remained a difficult issue.

While organisers tried to solve questions of funding and of access, a lot of work went into efforts to provide meaningful adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties during the 1980s. One aspect was in the production of suitable materials. Resources might be used in mixed level provision or 'special' settings. Because of the shortage of suitable material for adult students, practitioners published locally. In the *Changing Faces* archive I found examples such as *What is the Problem?*: a kit of photographs based on visiting the doctor, produced by Leicester Adult Basic Education, and *Supermarket View*, published by Leeds City Council Department of Education. Many other examples of similar resources produced by teachers and workshops have no doubt been lost. Such packs could have been used with a range of students, but were designed to be accessible to people with learning difficulties.

Examples using the students' own voices are less frequent, but some local projects published student writing (Woodin, 2018). It was a powerful way to give students agency. The Gatehouse publishing project in Manchester was set up in

1977 to publish student writing. *Opening Time*, a 1985 publication edited and compiled by teachers Gillian Frost and Chris Hoy, was subtitled *A Writing Resource Pack Written by Students in Basic Education*. 'Peter' (a student) wrote:

In this section is writing that has been dictated or taped by people who are learning to read and accounts by tutors and students of the ways they worked (Frost & Hoy, eds., 1985:1).

We know that contributions were made by people who may not have felt confident enough to write down their thoughts but were valued as authors. The practice fits into the purposes of the language experience method. The pack included work by 'Frank' and three others 'from the ATC, who worked with us to make a book about themselves, their work, their homes, their hobbies and interests, their views. Frank dictated what he thought about living on his own' (ibid.). Here the contribution of students with learning difficulties is included, without fanfare, alongside the work of other students attending adult literacy education. It is a striking testimony to the power of adult literacy education, and a positive light thrown on to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

The theme of partnership and working with other agencies is a thread running through the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It was present in both the Russell Report of 1973 and the Warnock Report of 1978. In practice the results could be positive or negative, and often combined both, for instance, where lengthy and awkward consultation between providers resulted in good outcomes for students. There was no policy directive, more a recognition and expectation that practitioners would work in various situations, often with partner agencies and mixed funding. ALBSU certainly encouraged co-operation and the idea of shared funding. As well as cutting costs it had educational and professional merits. Sutcliffe and others emphasised the

benefits of giving students a consistent message, reinforcing learning in college or classes and relating other activities to the educational curriculum (Sutcliffe, 1990, 1992, 1994; Dee, 1988; Duncan, 2010). It was not a simple step and could lead to conflict or tensions in the workplace.

There are examples of positive partnerships where agencies worked well together and students benefited. 'MN' remembered how her London FE college shared responsibility with Social Services. She was able to use the arrangement to inform her teaching, so that students did not have to make the 'conceptual leap' from class to real life, which Sutcliffe pointed out could be impossible (Sutcliffe, 1990:14):

We actually had joint provision with Social Services, so we had a Social Service house. And so, although they weren't residential, they could stay for odd nights. They would learn independence skills, cooking and everything, and I would have them at college. But I would go up to the house. So it was very nice. We had really good joint provision (MN, 2017).

'MN' mentioned the involvement of the voluntary sector and the rich mix she experienced of colleagues, agencies and ideas:

There was more voluntary sector. When I was at Kingsway, as well as linking with Camden Society for Mental Handicap, we also linked a lot with Elfrida Rathbone [charity]. And they were specifically moderate learning difficulties. So there were a lot more people to share ideas with (ibid., 2017).

There were also tensions. Status and professional rivalry played a part in the difficult negotiations needed in practice. 'AB' described getting funding for a project which was designed to:

try and find out what people needed, what was the best context for them to learn in ... If they were in a day centre if they could do more there; if we could support the staff in the day centres to do work with them. Again it was fraught with difficulties ... There was some resentment because it was like adding another task to their tasks. And if they came to a class the tutor was paid sort

of £18–25 per hour, and they were on a minimum wage. So why should they be doing the same sort of work? (AB, 2017)

As well as the real issues about status, pay and working conditions, joint projects had to confront different cultures and beliefs about the capabilities and aspirations of students involved. At the 1986 RaPAL conference Cilla Stanbury presented a paper on her experience of managing such a project. She talked about the two-year 'Caper' programme, funded by ALBSU and jointly run by Greenwich Social Services and Thameside AEI. Their aim was to 'devise assessment and teaching materials for adults with special educational needs attending basic education classes in the borough'. Stanbury reported that:

The materials produced consisted mainly of various types of games, worksheets etc., each tailored to provide an opportunity to practise some skills or impart some knowledge (Stanbury, 1986:69).

She pointed out to her audience that:

Whilst producing the materials was important, possibly more important were the processes the project went through and the questions raised (*ibid.*, 1986:70).

As Stanbury explained, the project aimed to allow students some control and agency, and this forced the staff groups involved to consider their own attitudes and preconceptions. We get the impression that there were different perspectives to be discussed:

It was necessary to consider how the students could be given opportunities to make decisions about what they wanted to learn. This entailed staff exploring their own roles and attitudes (*ibid.*, 1986:69).

The project is evidence of the challenging thought and energy going into such local innovations. It involved 100 students and more than 20 AEI and Social Service staff, starting with one full-time co-ordinator, to which additional hours had to be added.

The initiative clearly required a huge amount of work and creative energy. It is notable that RaPAL chose to include it in a national conference which also attracted delegates from Germany, Australia and Canada. This represented unusual validation of a complex and carefully worked out joint programme. It reminds us that RaPAL took seriously the literacy work accomplished with students with learning difficulties, which was not focused on employability. Fundamental questions about the purpose of teaching literacy lie behind some of the tensions which surface in joint and partnership adult literacy education for students with learning difficulties. Sam Duncan asks a series of pertinent questions:

Helping learners decide what kind of provision is best for them, working out what changes to existing provision are needed, and planning, teaching and assessing learning, involve negotiating a philosophical, political and social minefield (Duncan, 2010:334).

And then she asks:

Is it true that adults with GLD (global learning difficulties) have a 'ceiling' to their literacy development, beyond which they cannot progress? Or is this a dangerous myth leading to low expectations? Do most adults with GLD make little progress? Or are we measuring progress in the wrong ways? Are literacy classes for adults with GLD sometimes used as 'dumping grounds' [Sutcliffe, 1994:8] for people who have nowhere else to go? And, if so, is this a problem of inappropriate literacy provision or a lack of other services? Who decides if provision is appropriate or not for a particular learner? And is this decision based on what a learner can do or what a learner wants to do? (Duncan, 2010:334)

Duncan is describing the 'minefield' faced by practitioners in adult literacy education involved in joint and partnership projects. We understand that she is worried about who is making the decisions. And it is sobering to discover that the questions which

she raises are the same ones which were troubling teachers and managers 20 years earlier.

At a 1987 Adult Basic Education (ABE) conference, practitioners spoke of their anxieties about the priorities imposed on students with learning difficulties. One session of the Lancashire ABE conference was dedicated to 'working with mentally handicapped people'. The report suggests that practitioners wrestled with the same sort of problems as outlined by Duncan. They wanted, however, to make a positive stand for a student-centred approach. Summing up, the group made a value statement about their commitment to:

Valuing our students as unique adults and enabling them to use education as a vehicle to exercise their right to make their own decisions and choices (Taylor, ed., 1987:14).

This was a local event, but it reflects a wider picture. The staff involved worked in many different locations. The report started by commenting on the great diversity of settings where the ABE teachers were working – village halls, ATCs, hospitals, colleges, student homes and adult education centres. Despite their different contexts, however, the delegates who were teaching students with learning difficulties identified shared concerns. The overwhelming feeling was one of marginalisation. They felt that they lacked direction, were not part of current development and changes, and did not hear about courses and training opportunities, managers did not value their work, and they were unable to communicate easily with each other and with other significant people involved with the students. Some practitioners felt uneasy in staffrooms. Teachers felt colleagues did not share their values and that they were encouraged to look at students' deficits rather than their strengths. They complained of being pressurised into having to concentrate on pre-reading and pre-writing exercises such as shaping letters, at the

expense of social and communication skills, and being judged on inappropriate academic criteria rather than gains in a social context. It is a depressing account. It reveals some of the issues and pressures staff experienced working in a barely acknowledged field which lacked status within their own institutions, not to mention in public perception and understanding. The contributors did then turn to positives, and recorded that teachers who were able to work on 'functional skills' specifically tailored to individual situations felt happier with the outcome, and found that 'the desperate search for materials becomes considerably less important ... as teaching functional skills depends more on imagination, pragmatism and flexibility'. Teachers evidently interpreted 'functional skills' here to mean more contextualised and less 'academic', allowing them to devise appropriate materials with their students and to draw on student interests, rather than using child-oriented resources or subscribing to 'pre-employment' programmes. They also all agreed that 'the students gained a great deal from attending classes' (ibid., 1987:13).

These practitioners clearly thought that adult literacy education should offer students with learning difficulties 'choice and empowerment'. They also felt that as teachers they were undervalued, beleaguered and misunderstood. They were evidently working in the uncomfortable liminal area between education and care, with neither profession offering much support. The situation made those involved think about the purpose of adult literacy education. The colleges and schemes dependent on LEA funding were under pressure to produce measurable results in time-sensitive (e.g. academic year) periods. Conversely, ATCs or residential care settings were more likely to value a regime which worked along 'independent living skills' lines, and followed a curriculum based on social sight vocabulary and worksheets designed to help students to 'cope'. Teachers in the middle of these two systems often felt

unsupported. They turned to each other for solidarity, and tried to change attitudes which they felt limited the opportunities for their students.

There was one scheme which worked in a way that illustrates the potential impact of putting students at the centre of policy and practice. At City Lit AEI in London they turned conventional wisdom on its head and allowed students to arrive at reading and writing (or not) in the course of studying other topics. From the 1980s an approach based on self-advocacy for students with learning difficulties was pioneered by John Hersov. He was involved in the first *People First* self-advocacy group for people with learning difficulties from 1984, and ran *Speaking Up* groups at City Lit. He worked with Jan Wyatt, a trained musician, who organised a range of classes for adults with learning difficulties which drew students from all over London. 'OP' trained as an adult education tutor and self-advocacy specialist with Hersov and Wyatt, and she explained their philosophy and attitude to adult literacy education:

So, what they offered at City Lit was music, dance, drama and self-advocacy ... Jan was a woman of very strong opinions, and the way literacy featured in all of those courses was that it was recognisably always an aspect, but it wasn't an end in itself (OP, 2017).

Wyatt was critical of the traditional adult literacy provision offered:

What seemed to be happening is that people were going to classes endlessly ... so that not having done great at school with their reading and writing, they were going to classes, maybe at their local day centre, or maybe adult ed. evening classes, and still failing in the literacy and numeracy (ibid., 2017).

Her method was to embed literacy:

The self-advocacy, the speaking and the listening or the music or the art ... it's all seen as a form of communication. So you focus on what you can do. And very often alongside that, things you struggle with like reading and writing will come along (ibid., 2017).

This interesting approach to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties was a reaction to child-centred 'remedial' education and to the convention that says 'basic skills' must come first. It put dignity, self-expression and social development for the individual before reading and writing skills. 'OP' worked subsequently with Sutcliffe at NIACE, bringing these seminal experiences and thoughts with her. In 2000 she worked with people with learning difficulties, through self-advocacy groups, to produce a *12-Point Charter for Learning* published by NIACE. The belief in rights, choice and empowerment was crucial to her conception of work with adults with learning difficulties. In her case it led her to reject the version of adult literacy education provided for people with learning difficulties at the time. The City Lit scheme was exciting and innovative and its contrary ideology and creative enthusiasm inspired others. It was too idiosyncratic, however, to transfer into mainstream practice, and was out of sympathy with the drive for certification and vocationalisation.

Summary

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in 1980s England was subject to conflicting pressures. It is a complex picture, partly because it was not a policy priority for government. As it was not high on the political agenda nationally it was not seen as important except by the people actually involved. I suggest that local practitioners were largely shaping the relationship during this period. It is a shift in the influences and agents of change identified in the conceptual framework which structures my findings. The initial energy and ideological fervour which had propelled the adult literacy campaign of the 1970s, driven by national bodies outside education, was no longer so apparent. As a

result of the successful campaign most LEAs were running adult literacy programmes by the 1980s. The managers, teachers and administrators 'on the ground' had responsibility for making the relationship work. They were generally committed to a student-centred philosophy which had developed in the 1970s. They were operating, however, in a different environment because the Conservative government elected in 1979 promoted marketisation and competition in education and introduced a programme of cuts in the public sector. The new national agency for adult literacy education, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), surviving on short-term contracts, had to take a careful line. Studying the statements and publications of ALBSU in the 1980s suggests that it was not always leading but often trying to contain practice, in terms of the relationship under scrutiny.

ALBSU and the practitioners were dealing with factors which had been evident in the 1970s and with an evolving relationship. As before the issues were inter-related, difficult to unpick and not necessarily obvious to the people involved. The documents available in the ALBSU papers allow the researcher to see the factors at play. As in the 1970s social attitudes to adult literacy and to disability/learning difficulties were influential in shaping the thinking about the relationship. Social stigma continued to be important in public perception, and therefore a concern for ALBSU. Although adult literacy was becoming an accepted element of education it was hard to challenge the dominant discourse of individual deficit and to change the political view. ALBSU's statements show how difficult the Unit found it to maintain a 'student-centred' ethos while seeking to secure government support. The Unit won short-term government funding from 1980 into the 1990s. It was important in providing training, publications and a feeling of solidarity amongst practitioners. It worked to consolidate and validate adult literacy within LEA provision, and funded

short-term innovatory projects, which could, and did, support students with learning difficulties. But it was a difficult position. The Unit did not set out to represent practitioners and it avoided controversial issues such as the access of students with learning difficulties to open classes or the intellectual challenge of social practice theory. When the newspaper written by adult literacy students, *Write First Time*, published a poem speaking out against government policy in 1982 Alan Wells, as Director, was cautioned by government ministers. Speakers at the launch of RaPAL in 1984 recognised that ALBSU could not resist government 'pressure' (Foster, 1985). The practitioners understood issues around student agency and notes of the first RaPAL conference (1984) show that they feared the rise of vocationalism which threatened a student-centred approach to adult literacy education (McCaffery, 1985). Their analysis was correct, as we can tell from the growing influence of the training body, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC).

Vocationalisation was a powerful factor. The need for secure funding led ALBSU to move away from the demands for social justice which had inspired the initial adult literacy campaigners, in order to align with the government agenda which prioritised employability. Examining ALBSU publications and statements in the 1980s shows how the Unit abandoned the vocabulary of adult literacy and switched to use the word 'skills', as it moved towards FE and vocational training. The linguistic shift was significant. The idea of 'skills' represents an individualised concept which played into the discourse of deficit. By 1990 the rhetoric used by ALBSU had dropped the word 'literacy' and positioned the potential student as if to blame for their 'disadvantage' or 'deficit', rather than as a victim of the system. The change influenced the relationship under discussion; it foregrounded the 'needs' of individuals over the 'rights' of students. Wells articulated a careful argument for

'basic education' which differentiated adult literacy (and numeracy) from 'special needs' education. He constructed the argument on questions of different purposes in adult education. He suggested that students with 'special needs' had different objectives from those of 'basic education' students. I contend that his argument actually rested on perceived identity, although Wells was technically against the use of 'labels'. In effect Wells was restating the old 1970s division between 'ordinary' or 'normal' students of adult literacy and potential students with learning difficulties. This distinction would eventually lead to a 'two-tier' system of adult literacy education based on student identity.

In the 1980s there were new factors around the responsibilities of organisations and the professional relationships between staff groups as the relationship developed. Practitioners faced difficult issues. The closure of large residential hospitals for people with learning difficulties brought new opportunities and new challenges. The government embraced the concept of 'normalisation', which emphasised the benefits of people with learning difficulties making use of local facilities such as adult education. But at the same time claims of the collapse of standards in public education put forward by right-wing critics exacerbated the ongoing tensions. Questions about student identity, the purpose of adult literacy education and the curriculum led to debates about funding and where 'care' stops and 'education' starts. Practitioners recalled awkward confrontations in the workplace. Access for people with learning difficulties caused issues about 'acceptable' numbers of students with learning difficulties in open classes as well as conflict between staff groups. Solutions to issues might vary. My data includes detailed accounts of how local practitioners influenced the developing relationship, trying to balance 'rights' and 'needs'. The evidence shows that there was a lot of

energy and commitment going into local initiatives and partnerships which supported students with learning difficulties throughout the 1980s, sometimes with funding from the Special Projects programme run by ALBSU.

During the decade adult literacy education in practice offered real opportunities for adults with learning difficulties. Large numbers of students with learning difficulties attended adult literacy education in open and closed settings. My findings show that they were able to grow in confidence in terms of literacy skills and in terms of participation and social standing. Student-centred practice and pedagogic methods such as the language experience approach enabled adult literacy students, including those with learning difficulties, to become writers as well as readers. Several factors were involved in these positive developments.

Some important factors were ideological or theoretical. Disability politics gained a voice in the 1980s. Mike Oliver proposed a 'social model' of disability, seeking to show social workers and other professionals that 'disability' was created by attitudes and social barriers, rather than 'impairment' (Oliver, 1983). Practitioners in adult literacy education, in both the statutory and the voluntary sectors, felt part of a social movement which aimed to improve opportunities for their students. This commitment, partly a legacy of the 1970s adult literacy campaign for a 'Right to Read', resonated with the energy and anger of the disability rights activists. I suggest that both fields were affected by the 'social turn' in intellectual analysis which considered how the individual related to society. The idea of a 'social model' of disability helped people involved in education to understand how education could play a part in opening new possibilities for students with disabilities, including learning difficulties. I suggest that the theory of adult literacy as social practice, conceptualised by Brian Street in 1984, was also part of the 'social turn'. The

approach was not adopted by ALBSU or the government in England, although it was explored intellectually by RaPAL and the international New Literacy Studies (NLS).

Changes in the relationship during the 1980s were not the result of planned policy. Political dynamics led to chronic insecurity in the area. In post-school education employability became the prime objective, a purpose better suited to vocational education and the FE system than to community-based adult education. After the 1981 Education (Special Educational Needs) Act FE colleges, led by the Further Education Unit (FEU) and some charismatic leaders, took a more proactive role in catering for students with learning difficulties. The FEU championed work with students with learning difficulties and encouraged staff in FE to take a positive view. The FE model, however, was vocationally-oriented and based on the school system. It essentially provided a 'special' curriculum.

Tensions in practice reflected the changing policy and funding environment, although the implications for the relationship were not spelled out by the government or by ALBSU. A particular factor in the relationship in the 1980s was the tension around assessment and certification. Measures of achievement were required in a competitive environment. In the world of training and FE the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in 1986 was designed to help employers understand the levels of 'competency' achieved by trainees. The rationale of NVQs was in complete contrast to the student-centred and open-ended approach to adult literacy education embraced by many practitioners in the 1970s. But by 1989 ALBSU was working with partners on the BSAI (Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative). Work with people with learning difficulties became problematic when standard certification and time-bound assessment were introduced.

The 1970s perception of adult literacy education as social action was suppressed in the 1980s in favour of an 'official' version which focused on literacy as preparation for work. Despite the narrower interpretation of the purpose of adult literacy education, however, the evidence demonstrates a lively and complicated relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties throughout the 1980s. The impetus lay with practitioners. The ideas which inspired the disability rights thinkers and activists allowed the relationship to build on the adult literacy education campaign of the 1970s, which had called for empowerment and social justice. Shifting social attitudes, the introduction of integration into schools, the growing confidence and expertise of adult literacy practitioners and the hunt for new funding all contributed to the fact that people with learning difficulties were now accepted as students of adult literacy.

Chapter 5. The 1990s: a sort of merger

Introduction

The 1990s was a pivotal period in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England. For the first time a spotlight was trained on this area of educational activity because the government was determined to introduce reform in further education (Green & Lucas, eds., 1999). When the government established a new central funding agency, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in 1992, there was a new focus on the relationship. Learning difficulties were expressly included in the new category of SLDD (students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) for which the agency had responsibility. New funding, accountability and institutions reshaped the relationship. The incoming regime interpreted the task of adult literacy education and the education of people with learning difficulties to be essentially about transition and progression. Within the new FE structure the relationship became closer. But in practice the effects of the market philosophy and outcome-related funding methodology worked to create a 'special' route, in a vocationally oriented FE system which did not validate a more open and student-centred approach (Dee, 1999; Hamilton, 2005). The trend towards the vocationalisation of post-school education felt during the 1980s became irresistible.

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) fundamentally changed the world of post-school education, just as the 1988 Education Reform Act had revolutionised the ethos, organisation and management of schools five years before (Green & Lucas, eds., 1999). The FEFC took responsibility for post-school provision except for higher education. One result was the incorporation of adult literacy education and provision for adults with learning difficulties into the structure of FE

funding. Suddenly the official documents indicated that these two branches of post-compulsory education had equal status, and indeed appeared closely related educationally and organisationally. The unresolved relationship assumed a new shape and balance. In effect adult literacy lost status, and education for adults with learning difficulties shifted up the educational agenda, although this was not necessarily a planned result.

The purpose of government action was to improve the economic performance of the UK. To achieve their aim they moved to assert control over the vocational and training sector in order to raise the level of skills in the workforce. Adult literacy was not the focus of the government's interest, and neither was education for adults with learning difficulties. Both areas benefited from secure funding but were changed in the process. Writing in 1998 Hamilton argued that the FHE Act had undermined 'responsive literacy' and imposed a 'centralist discourse' (Hamilton, 2005:97). It is evident that in FEFC terms the diversity of funding sources and independence of practitioners in adult literacy practice were seen as problems. An emphasis on assessment and certification enforced more conformity. Outside the FEFC system a residual element of adult education provision labelled 'non-vocational' remained in local authority control. The 'leisure learning' area did include some provision for people with learning difficulties but all literacy and numeracy courses and most discrete post-school programmes for students with learning difficulties fell within the domain of the FEFC. In 1995, ALBSU lost its singular influence on the field, retaining a support, training and quality-monitoring role, and morphing into the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), with a brief which included school literacy. It was a time of upset and change, but also of new security and opportunity.

It felt like a boost for these neglected sectors: 'Literacy and numeracy, learning difficulties moved to the FEFC properly funded area. It was terrific. You saw an expansion of funding in that period,' Alan Tuckett told me (Tuckett, 2019). Legislation included for the first time a duty on the new FEFC to have 'regard to the requirements of persons having learning difficulties' (FHE Act, 1992:1.3). For the first time official papers focused on how the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was working and how policy might address the issues involved. But the distinction which the early literacy campaigners had fought to establish was blurred in the government's drive to enforce progression and accountability. Where the 1970s campaigners had tried to distance themselves from 'remedial' education' and the 1980s leadership promoted adult literacy education without levels and labels, the FEFC put them both into a unit called 'basic education'. Wells in the 1980s had used the term but differentiated it from 'special needs' work. The FEFC reinterpreted the distinction.

The new regime did not promote adult literacy education as empowerment or self-advocacy. Putting adult literacy firmly in a vocational framework curbed its political ambitions. The altered arrangements redefined and limited the thinking and vocabulary. Tuckett recognised the shift and went on to say of the wider field, 'That kind of education for democracy and so on became more marginalised' (Tuckett, 2019).

At the same time ideas and legislation in the field of disability resulted in more nuanced thinking about education for people with disabilities. There was an economic argument about wasted talent and vocational opportunities as well as a civil rights and citizenship aspect (Barton & Corbett, 1993). Mike Oliver had introduced the idea of a 'social model' of disability in 1983. In 1990 he developed his

arguments in *The Politics of Disablement*, suggesting that people with disabilities were oppressed by existing legislation, language and institutions (Oliver, 1990). In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act made it illegal to discriminate against people on the grounds of disability in terms of services or employment. It was thirty years after the first legislation against racial discrimination in Britain, and it did not include education, but it reflected slowly changing attitudes and discourse. The 1996 report, *Inclusive Learning*, produced by Professor John Tomlinson for the FEFC, was a landmark publication (Tomlinson, 1996). It forced post-school education to reconsider how it worked with students with disabilities, outlining an inclusive approach to further and vocational education. Tomlinson's report, like Warnock's investigation nearly 20 years before, was intended to confront discriminatory attitudes and practice, and to introduce consistent new principles, this time focusing on post-school provision. The report's recommendations demanded a pro-active programme of action by providers, rejecting a reactive response which put responsibility on to vulnerable students. It affected thinking about the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in putting learning at the heart of FE. I suggest that Tomlinson's thinking shifted the dial in terms of 'rights'. His report de-politicised the concept of a 'rights-based' philosophy for students with learning difficulties by constructing his arguments in an educational context rather than a human/civil rights framework.

Academic interest in the subject of adults and learning difficulties expanded. The Tomlinson Report was part of an effort to rethink the field. Jan Walmsley, drawing on self-advocacy work, explored how the current notions of 'citizenship' might apply to people with 'learning difficulties (mental handicap)' (Walmsley, 1991:219). Citizenship was discussed also by Len Barton arguing for 'a

social theory of disability in which the voices of disabled people are central' (Barton, 1993:236). In 1996 the Open University launched a module entitled *Equal People* as part of a degree course. Barton and Corbett underlined the complexity of 'courageous policy change', highlighting work with students with severe learning difficulties to demonstrate that 'including the most challenging learners is a way of creating new models of practice' (Barton & Corbett, 1993:18). And NIACE published Jeannie Sutcliffe's two guidance books for practitioners on education for adults with learning difficulties, *Education for Choice and Empowerment* in 1990 and *Teaching Basic Skills to Adults with Learning Difficulties* in 1994. Learning difficulties as a subject became more relevant because the 1990 Care in the Community Act allowed more adults with learning difficulties, now released from long-stay hospitals, to access adult education at this time. In 1992 NIACE produced *A New Life*, a programme specifically designed for people who were leaving long-term care (Hood & Lavender, 1992). Cogs in the relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties were moving in theory, policy and practice.

The international and intellectual context

Structural and theoretical changes in Britain were part of wider developments. The UN convened the first international conference on 'special educational needs' in 1994. The *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education* which resulted, spelled out a commitment to inclusive education in schools (UN, 1994).

The concept of 'inclusive' education was philosophically different from the doctrine of 'integration' introduced in England in 1981. In the 1990s the demand of those fighting for equal opportunities for students with disabilities was not just for

integration, but for inclusion. Instead of enabling children with disabilities to integrate into existing structures, inclusion required an adjustment from everybody, with pressure on institutions and providers to proactively rethink and change their approach. In England the Tomlinson Report *Inclusive Learning* (Tomlinson, 1996) brought the challenge to post-school education. It was a shock. As Tuckett told me in 2019:

When Tomlinson emerged it wasn't at all what [the FEFC] really expected. It took them a little while to think ... We asked him to write about people with special needs and he has written ... a report about everybody (Tuckett, 2019).

Calls for inclusion were not directed particularly at adult literacy education and its relationship to education for people with learning difficulties, but a new way of thinking was introduced into the discussion (Barton, 2003; Thomas, 2013).

Tomlinson's report became a touchstone for practitioners and commentators (Tomlinson, 2005; Dee et al., 2006).

Meanwhile the purpose of adult education was being discussed in the context of neo-liberal thinking at an international level. UNESCO in the 1970s conceived of adult education in broad terms of democracy, rights and access. The Delors Report published in 1996 reflected a different international climate, conscious of the disappointments in international progress since the end of World War 2, and the coming challenge of the twenty-first century. *Learning: The Treasure Within* highlighted the economic and social advantages of adult education for the individual and for society:

We need to rethink the place of work and its changing status in tomorrow's society. To create tomorrow's society, imagination will have to keep ahead of technological progress in order to avoid further increases in unemployment and social exclusion or inequalities in development (Delors, 1996:18).

The report introduced the concept of a 'learning society', which 'offers many and varied types of learning, both at schools and in economic, cultural and social life' (ibid., 1996:20). It was an active idea of education. The authors stated that lifelong learning 'should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community'. The theory of lifelong learning articulated in the 1990s by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) was different. The OECD published *Lifelong Learning for All* in 1996, underlining the contribution of lifelong learning to 'promoting employment and economic development' (OECD, 1996:13). The Labour government elected in 1997 was strongly influenced by the OECD and its commitment to a human capital model in employment, education and training (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). The definition of human capital used by the OECD was:

The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being (OECD, 2001:18).

This formulation expressed the link which, in the OECD understanding of human capital, exists between individual skills and 'social and economic well-being'. The OECD's publication of statistics which demonstrated that the UK was below the standards of international competitors in terms of literacy and numeracy skills, was behind the government's appointment of Lord Moser to investigate adult literacy and numeracy in England in 1998.

In 1997 the newly elected New Labour government produced a response to the Delors Report on lifelong learning. The Fryer Report was the first work by the new National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. It demonstrated that the incoming administration took further and adult education

seriously. The Fryer Report was enthusiastic about the introduction of a culture of lifelong learning in England. The report praised the work of the Basic Skills Agency and called for 'more energy and imagination to be given to the development of the skills of literacy and numeracy' for adults (Fryer, 1997:1.12). It also commended the Tomlinson Report and the commitment to learner-centred FE (ibid.:5.7). A section was devoted to how lifelong learning could support active citizenship and democracy (ibid.:11.12). Alongside the evident commitment to social justice and participation the report subscribed to the OECD theory that improving the skills of individuals was the key to 'personal, social and economic well-being'. It also suggested that individuals should take more responsibility for their continuing education (ibid.:1.9). These ideas reappear in New Labour thinking.

Also in 1997 the newly minted Basic Skills Agency (BSA) which replaced ALBSU in 1995, published *It Doesn't Get Any Better: The impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37-year-olds*. The report was based on an analysis of data collated by the longitudinal NCDS study of people born in a single week in 1958. The research investigated 'relationships between problems with basic skills and qualifications, employment and social exclusion' (Bynner & Parsons, 1997). This list shows how the report echoed the agenda of OECD thinking on adult literacy education. The authors found that:

As they reach 'the heart of adult life', it's clear that problems with basic skills have a continuing adverse effect on their lives ... As jobs require more skills, those with limited skills are increasingly marginalised ... The evidence in this report gives a stark picture of disadvantage in the labour market and social exclusion (ibid., 1997:2).

These arguments weighed heavily with the new government and informed the Skills-for-Life programme of the 2000s.

The direction of educational policy for adults in England in the 1990s was not based on ideals of social justice, such as those which had allowed adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties to find common ground in the 1970s and 1980s. Conceptualising adult literacy education as pre-employment training or as a monetary investment was inimical to student-centred practice. It represented the 'human capital' argument for adult literacy education which undermined a positive relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. Critics of the OECD theory of lifelong learning argued that it ignored social context and relegated people with learning difficulties (and others) to second-class status (Coffield 1999, Martin 2003, Field 2001, Biesta 2013). In his critical article of 1999, Coffield claimed that 'Fauré's enlightened and democratic vision of lifelong learning has been largely and unfairly forgotten' and that lifelong learning was being used as a 'guarantee of our permanent inadequacy' and a distraction from 'the structural inequalities in access' (Coffield, 1999:480–1). He called for a new discourse centred on 'social justice and social cohesion' (ibid.:482). Coffield saw the lifelong learning agenda as a form of 'social control', which is a theme resonant in this study.

Legislation, government policy and official reports

A major reform of further education in England was carried out through the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE Act). Unpicking the details and implications of the FHE Act for the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties forms the substance of this chapter, taking in the relevant FEFC publications and reports which followed the Act.

The FHE Act was the equivalent of the 1988 Education Act in the sphere of post-compulsory education. It was intended to bring order and raise standards in the vocational sector, concentrating on the 16–19-year-old age group. The LEAs were stripped of their responsibilities for funding and managing further education in England and Wales. FE Colleges were ‘incorporated’ as separate institutions, so that college principals became something akin to CEOs of corporate businesses. The FHE Act established the FEFC, a single national funding body, to manage the finance and to enforce standards and accountability in the FE system in England (Wales had its own agency). A deluge of paperwork, including news sheets, consultations, circulars and advice documents flooded into the providers. The college which I joined in 1994 set up a new department to administer the system. It was not alone in feeling under severe pressure, absorbing extra costs while exploring new relationships and working towards ‘convergence’, something which the FEFC initially expected to take place over three years, but eventually took five. This was one indicator that government and FEFC had underestimated the task of managing the complexity of post-school provision. As Helena Kennedy remarked in the introduction to her 1997 report on Widening Participation, ‘There is an appalling ignorance amongst decision-makers and opinion-formers about what goes on in further education’ (Kennedy, 1997:2). This is another side of the under-investment in the sector noted by Robson (1998) and by Green & Lucas (1999).

The first big change in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties signalled by the FHE Act was that work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) was important. The FHE Act included a specific duty ‘to have regard to the requirements of students with learning difficulties’ (FHE Act, 1992:1.3), so this strand was part of the organisational

fabric from the outset. Adult literacy education had fought for recognition and achieved some status through the establishment of a dedicated national body in the 1970s and 1980s. It was integrated into local provision by this date, funded mainly by LEAs throughout the country. Education for adults with learning difficulties did not have such educational momentum or political visibility (Dee, 1988). The provision for students with learning difficulties in FE was often segregated, uncelebrated and low-key. Many colleges had provision for young people with learning difficulties established as a follow-up to special schooling, with a full-time pre-vocational programme offering some 'work experience' in the college workshops. Students expected to enter college alongside their peers, and the FEU was actively promoting training, support and reflection for the staff involved. Most students with learning difficulties did not enter the labour market; they often went on to training schemes/workshops administered by charities or social services (Riddell et al., 2001; Tomlinson, 2005). People with learning difficulties over the age of 19 might attend college on a part-time 'day release' basis from day centres, funded by the local authority, a charity, or even the NHS. Their classes focused on 'living skills', taught by instructors, and were not certificated. When I started work as a new assistant manager in FE it was suggested that I might teach 'ironing' to this group, who had their classes in Portakabins in the car park. The FEFC began to address the marginalisation of these students and the low aspirations of the sector.

A second major change in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was that the FEFC bundled them together in management terms. 'Programme Area 10' in the new structure of FE combined a number of diverse elements of provision in a single administrative unit. It

was labelled as 'Basic Education'. It was a very mixed bag. The FEFC defined it in a 1995 document as:

Programmes of study in basic numeracy, literacy and English for speakers of other languages; discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities such as courses to teach independent living, numeracy and communication skills; programmes of study for adults, such as 'return to learn' which do not focus on a particular curriculum area and cannot therefore be placed in one of the other nine programme areas (FEFC Circular 95/02).

It was difficult to neatly categorise the educational offer of Programme Area 10 in a system which was designed to meet the needs of specific industries. Other programme areas were called Engineering, Catering or Beauty and Hairdressing. Programme Area 10 was obviously made up of provision which did not fit well. It was odd too, in that it named categories of students. There was a feeling of relief amongst practitioners that courses in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, as well as those catering for people with learning difficulties, were now securely funded, but it was combined with disquiet about how they would be treated and perceived within FE, which had not been committed to 'basic education' before. As 'GH' said to me of teaching an MSC-funded course in the 1980s:

I think we [the Adult Education Service] just rented this mobile classroom, because then the colleges did not get involved in that work at all ... And we were seen as ...you know ... they're the well-intentioned, well-meaning people there working with those people who can't read very well. So there was that, you know. It's not a mainstream concern for them at all (GH, 2017).

The FEFC too was under pressure. The government required results. Targets were set for the new council based on the perception that improving individual achievement in post-school education was vital to national productivity and competition in a global economy. The FEFC's tool was funding. It was not a

pedagogical or curriculum body, although its decisions had a big impact on content and teaching methods. An appendix entitled *Schedule Two to the FHE Act 1992 and the Council's Associated Criteria* was the basis of the funding methodology. (See Appendix 3). Although it was a single page (plus guidance) it was not easy reading. It included complicated sub-division and cross-referencing. It referred initially to a planned comprehensive qualifications data base 'designed to contain details of every qualification offered by FE colleges in England' with 'a unique reference code for each qualification' (FEFC 1997a). In effect it was not possible to list all qualifications offered by over 900 institutions, and the Schedule had to lay down principles which were particularly significant for people studying literacy and for adults enrolled on courses which could be described as 'independent living and communication for those with learning difficulties' (FEFC, Schedule 2, section j). Schedule 2 reveals that literacy and numeracy education and courses designed specifically for people with learning difficulties had to be crow-barred into the funding methodology, because they did not fit the vocational (or academic) model. The relationship which had been fluid was being defined and structured through decisions about funding.

The overarching principle applied was that of progression. The FEFC needed to demonstrate that students progressed. Providers needed to show the FEFC that students achieved. It was a stricter regime because money and survival depended on it, in a way that had not been the case under LEA control. *Schedule Two* lines referenced (a) to (d) covered courses eligible for FEFC funding which had conventional FE content, beginnings and ends. The courses (a) to (c) were identified as 'vocational qualifications', GCSE or GCE A/AS level and 'Access to HE' courses. Category (d) was for courses which prepared students 'for entry to courses listed in (a) to (c)'. This was relatively straightforward.

Paragraph references (e), (f), (g), (h) and (j) all referred to 'Basic Education' or Programme Area 10. Paragraphs (e) to (h) referred to literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision. Paragraph (h) was about Welsh literacy courses only. Paragraph reference (j) covered 'independent living and communication for those with learning difficulties which prepare them for entry to courses listed in (d) to (g) above' (FEFC, Schedule 2, 1993). In this way the FEFC funding system decided that 'communication' for students with learning difficulties was only legitimate as a preparation for the study of 'basic literacy skills'. It formalised into an idea of 'levels' the distinction which Wells had argued between 'special needs work' and 'adult literacy'. There had not previously been a perception that provision for people with learning difficulties was valid only as a step into 'basic literacy', or indeed that 'adult literacy' was not a recognised part of educational provision for adults with learning difficulties. It is difficult not to conclude that the new differentiation came from a determination to fit the provision into the funding methodology.

Examining the intricacies of Schedule 2 demonstrates how the FEFC was intended to bring together a disparate and uncoordinated sector. FEFC-funded provision depended on three components: the entry, the learning programme and the final result of each student's journey through their course. Colleges were incentivised to get students through their courses to a successful outcome within a prescribed number of 'guided learning hours'. From the provider's point of view they had to maximise funding through achieving each of the elements. This was the basis of their decision-making. The various contexts of the students and the courses and their aims were not such important factors. The logic of the funding system was towards conformity.

The comprehensive funding methodology hides the complexity of the provision. Courses detailed in section (j), 'independent living and communication for those with learning difficulties', included programmes offered in a range of possible settings. Such a course might be in an FE college or in a community education centre or at an ATC or other facility which provided educational provision for adults with learning difficulties. The Lancashire teachers who met at a 1987 conference (see Chapter 4) noted how many different venues they worked in (Taylor, 1987:12). To generate FEFC funding the students needed to achieve 'acceptable evidence' (FEFC, 1997b) of a progression route. Commenting on the confusion created by Schedule 2 for providers, teachers and students, Dee points out that:

This blanket requirement [for progression] failed to take account of the complexity of students' learning, and in any case seemed to ignore the apparent contradiction that courses to support independent living were fundable, but moving on to live an independent life was not regarded as an acceptable outcome (Dee, 1999:145).

The idea of progression between institutions was probably part of the basis for the distinction drawn in Schedule 2 between 'communication' for people with learning difficulties, and 'basic literacy skills'. In the real world these courses might be organised by different agencies on different sites. 'Literacy' would often be a part-time programme offered through adult education, probably in an adult education centre, and not specifically targeting people with learning difficulties. These courses would not require any certification on entry, so the final outcome of the initial 'communication' course would be more about triggering money for the provider than enabling the student. I suggest that a distinction was made between 'communication' for students with learning difficulties and 'basic literacy' to signal theoretical progression, rather than to define the curriculum. It echoed the wording used in the

ALBSU document *Developing Communication Skills* (1983). The unspoken assumption may have been that the 'courses for independent living and communication for those with learning difficulties' did not include reading and writing, and therefore could not be described as 'literacy' courses. This is, in itself, a questionable assumption, which raises again the questions about the purpose of adult literacy education and the identity of adult literacy students. One interpretation might be that this unexplained distinction was based on a perception that courses described as 'independent living and communication' were about 'living skills', while the 'basic literacy' offered in Schedule 2's section (e) was considered part of an employability curriculum. Section (e) of Schedule 2 was categorised as 'basic literacy in English' which 'provides students with basic literacy skills'. The wording was opaque and a bit circular. The question of how progression from 'communication' to 'basic literacy' was demonstrated was not addressed. In terms of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties a difference which had not existed before was formalised. It is difficult to make an educationally based argument for this separation of levels in terms of adult literacy education.

The changes in practice were policed by a new inspectorate. It was an important step in the standardisation and scrutiny of further education. The FEFC inspectorate had a major impact on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties at this time. In an early circular (Sept. 1993) William Stubbs, head of FEFC, quoted the government White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, which foreshadowed the 1992 Act. It called for three levels of 'quality assurance': mechanisms within colleges, validation by bodies such as examination boards and external assessment. This was the

system adopted and it was a shock to FE colleges. The FEFC inspectorate was a strong agency for change and brought a fresh rigour to the operation. At the same time, the new inspectors represented an element of maturity and continuity because many of the people involved were individuals with real experience in the field. Some were alumni of the adult literacy campaign of the 1970s. Most of the team of FEFC inspectors took part-time contracts while continuing to hold senior roles in post-16 education. Stubbs himself had headed the ILEA. Peter Lavender worked for the FEFC on the Tomlinson Report, having begun his career as an adult literacy tutor. He went on to join NIACE as well as working as an inspector. Sally Faraday was an FEFC inspector, while working as a specialist in education for adults with learning difficulties at FEDA (Further Education Development Agency), the successor to FEU. Merrilie Vaughan Huxley became a senior inspector after working at a London college and the FEU. Adult education and FE specialists worked together. They saw their role as an opportunity to support educational improvements in a neglected domain. 'EF', inspecting work with students with learning difficulties, told me:

They were still in Portakabins right up until the 1990s in some places ... so I was able as an inspector to say, 'Well, if you are really proud of them, Principal, why don't you move them into the college, instead of having them in these huts behind a wall?' (EF, 2017).

Meanwhile there was pressure to adopt a business ethic. Quality assurance was a concept developed in industry and business. FE was being remodelled and rebranded and had to learn to conform. The language of business was used throughout, with reference to 'consumers', 'clients' and 'customers'. It was a new context and vocabulary intended to recharge and reorient the sector. In a statement which shows how the FEFC was framing its task, Stubbs told FE practitioners:

The educational service can learn from the approach to quality and its assurance adopted in the business and industry sectors ... to take account of the needs of the community as a whole, as well as those of individual customers (FEFC, 1993a:6).

There was a determined effort to break with the 'old-fashioned' model of an LEA service, housed in village halls and staffed by part-time tutors. But the new 'business' outlook did not support a responsive and student-centred approach. There were conflicting voices, particularly relating to education for SLDD.

As well as imposing new systems of administration and management, the FEFC required providers to rethink their approach. The FEFC commissioned a committee chaired by John Tomlinson:

to examine current educational provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to say whether the new legal requirements of the FHE Act were being satisfied and, if they were not in any respect, how that could be remedied (Tomlinson, 1996:1).

The *Inclusive Learning* report (ibid., 1996) articulated a new conception of how colleges should work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). It affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties because it provided a different perception of the job of FE. Tomlinson's committee was thinking mainly of young people attending FE colleges, but the principles obtained for other providers in the FEFC sector. The recommendations of the report required providers to focus on the learning of students rather than on programmes, buildings or procedures. It was a subtly rights-based and student-centred philosophy.

The big message of the Tomlinson Report was that the learning of students should be the central principle informing all FE provision. Tomlinson explained his notion of 'match' or 'fit':

At the heart of our thinking lies the idea of 'match' or 'fit' between how the learner learns best, what they need and want to learn, and what is required from the sector, a college and teachers for successful learning to take place (ibid., 1996:26).

The committee took note of theory and pedagogy, reading inspection reports and submissions over three years, 1993–6. It was looking for a new relationship between student and teacher as well as changes in structures and procedures. The thrust of the report was to put the responsibility for the 'learning environment' or 'learning ecosystem' on to the provider:

The components of the learning environment make up an individually tailored package of processes, equipment, teaching, the physical environment and so on, which enable the learner to engage actively in their learning (ibid., 1996:26).

Cooper, who served on the committee, understood that the report had implications for every part of the sector. Like Tuckett she recognised that it meant a real change of attitude for everyone involved:

That notion of inclusive learning that John Tomlinson was absolutely clear about; this isn't about people with learning difficulties, this is about learning. This is the same for everyone. It is good for everyone if you create an environment in which learning is what is important (Cooper, 2019).

The report came out a year after the first Disability Discrimination Act in the UK. It was supported by training rolled out across the country and reaffirmed by the power of the FEFC funding and inspectorate. It had real impact in a way that FEU advice

could not. Tomlinson knew that the committee was recommending an approach which challenged popular perception and commonly accepted views of disability:

We want to avoid a viewpoint which locates the difficulty or deficit with the student and focus instead on the capacity of the educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner's requirement. This means we must move away from labelling the student and towards creating an appropriate educational environment (Tomlinson, 1996:4).

His thinking was in line with the disability activists and emphasised the active role of students in learning. The approach demanded a shift in perspective, but it worked within the FE model and addressed the FEFC system. Tomlinson did not challenge the importance of assessments or the funding model. The report did, however, question the effects of the vocational imperative and the emphasis on a single-dimension model of progression. I suggest that this was a 'rights-based' philosophy centred on the student's right to access the curriculum. Putting learning first showed how prioritising vocational ends could hinder student learning. A case study quoted in the report highlighted how 'Tom', a student with 'severe learning difficulties', lost ground in literacy and numeracy as a student on a catering course. 'Tom' had literacy classes outside the catering programme, but he had no opportunity to practise or reinforce the learning. The catering course was prioritised and, although Tom was a popular student, he came to depend on the teacher and other students to direct and help him, taking no part in 'question and answer' theory sessions and losing his own capability (ibid.:31). The report recommended that students should be able 'to discuss and manage their own learning' (ibid.:27), and that Schedule 2 (j) should be reviewed to recognise the maintenance of skills and 'sideways progression' (ibid.:147). It was not an easy message for colleges to hear and to

understand and enact. It was particularly difficult in a period of new and tighter funding and a climate which encouraged competition and 'business' thinking.

A second publication, *Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities: A Good Practice Report*, was issued after the Tomlinson Report. This follow-up document called for improvements in both discrete and integrated provision, reporting that, 'The quality of work in this area has been judged by inspectors to be lower than the average for other areas of provision' (FEFC, 1996a:2). The advice for teachers and managers included explicit pointers on teaching literacy and numeracy in the context of SLDD. It did not feature Ideas of partnership between student and teacher. The tone was not student-centred in the manner of the Tomlinson Report but did reinforce the fact that this was an important area of FE work. Five pages of 'checklist' questions concluded the guidance, which must have terrified colleges about to be inspected. The clear message was that provision for students with learning difficulties should be a priority: 'These programmes need the most skilled and experienced staff, not the people with the best of intentions and little expertise' (ibid.:12).

The report advised that an ideal curriculum for people with learning difficulties combined the ideas of 'personal needs' and 'vocational concerns'. A good programme for SLDD, said the FEFC guidance:

strikes the right balance between the development of practical skills and understanding, and the development of basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy. As much as possible it sets basic skills within a 'real' context of specific personal needs or vocational concerns (ibid.:6).

The idea of 'balance' appears to involve the concept of individual 'needs' alongside the 'vocational' imperative built into the FE ethos. The language is negative. It stresses 'personal needs' or 'vocational concerns' as the context for learning, and

has nothing to say about the 'strengths', 'interests', 'rights' or 'empowerment' of students. The emphasis is on consistent organisation and not on the importance of active learning. The need for good planning and for whole college commitment is stressed. The accounts of good practice identify careful initial assessment, constant attention to progress towards agreed goals and conscientious record-keeping. These factors reflected the FEFC funding methodology. The FEFC 'good practice' document did not convincingly convey the commitment to active learning articulated in the Tomlinson Report.

The combined pressure of funding and inspection was enormous. The FEFC found poor practice and lack of consistency in post-school education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, just as Warnock had reported almost 20 years before. Inspectors were determined to improve the offer for SLDD, and colleges scrambled to respond. One way to demonstrate the requisite 'progression' and address 'personal needs' as well as 'vocational concerns' was to introduce 'special' certification. Courses in 'independent living skills', as delineated by Schedule 2 (j), burgeoned. ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) was a well-respected and well-used example of such a development. Having begun as a research project, ASDAN was established in 1991 as an educational charity. It marketed and moderated courses which addressed the FEFC requirements in focusing on 'independent living' or 'pre-vocational' skills, and offered a system of certification and levels to show progression, targeting the new market of SLDD in colleges. These 'special' courses often included 'communications' and were taught by instructors without teaching qualifications, who might have been described as having 'the best of intentions and little expertise'.

Students with learning difficulties were subject to individual assessments because providers applied for additional funding on the basis of a diagnosis of needs. It was another way that funding dominated the approach, despite a theoretical commitment to inclusion. In this the FEFC system in practice represented a backward step. There had been a recognition in FEU documents such as *Learning for Independence* (Dean & Hegarty, eds., 1984) and *A Special Professionalism* (FE Special Needs, 1987) that post-16 education could challenge 'the medical model' of disability which depended on diagnosis. I wrote in 1995 of my concern that 'assessment is increasingly perceived as the key to access to FE for students with disabilities or learning difficulties' (Rose, 1995:5). My conclusion was that 'Assessment can be the method of ... documenting failure and weakness and reducing the active student to the passive patient' (ibid.:5). Assessment remained an integral feature of FEFC and subsequent adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties, and is a constant theme in this study.

Assessments of two types were essential to the FEFC system. Both assessment of 'needs' and assessment of learning were considered vital, because they provided evidence which could be translated into data for the funding body. Together these factors worked to reinforce a 'special' curriculum within FE and to label students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although that was probably not the intention. The importance of assessment in the FEFC model is clear in the Basic Education inspectors' report of 1998 which I analyse below.

Each FEFC Programme Area was subject to specific inspection and report. The curriculum area inspection report on Basic Education (Programme Area 10) was published in 1998, using evidence from inspection visits and surveys, and quoting from earlier reports. It makes interesting reading from the point of view of the impact

of the FEFC on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties over time. They are reported separately but graded as one. The report opens by describing the complexity and scope of the programme area:

Basic education is one of the most complex and challenging aspects of further education for both teachers and students [page i] ... Basic education exists within an unusually wide range of organisational structures which rarely match the FEFC's description of the programme area [page ii] ... The differing histories of development mean that basic skills provision now varies significantly in style, size, range and quality [page 7] (FEFC, 1998).

This was the background to the task of imposing order in a large and diverse field which included different agencies and agendas. The report pointed out that the curriculum area provided for over 300,000 students, 'larger than art and design, hotel and catering, construction and agriculture' (ibid., 1998:1). The authors stated that 'standards of teaching and the promotion of learning are lower than in other areas (ibid., 1998:ii). They recognised the fact that the area was huge, covered multiple types of provision and students, and had suffered from neglect. The drive was towards getting rid of this messy diversity.

The inspectors commented on the varying aspirations of the students:

Many students in the programme area are disadvantaged when they begin their courses. Their achievements in developing confidence, self-esteem and skills for everyday living are important and, for some students, more important than the development of other skills (ibid., 1998:ii).

And on the burden on staff: 'Course managers often have too many functions and insufficient training for their roles' (ibid., 1998:ii). They knew that the low success rates and inspection grades:

reflect the difficulty which some colleges find in meeting the complex and diverse needs of basic education students and in organising and managing the programme area (ibid., 1998:ii).

They did not mention the disruption caused by the new bureaucracy, and the loss of autonomy represented by the structure of Programme Area 10. They noted that 1996/7 figures showed that, similarly to other areas, over 77 per cent of students were aged over 19, but that the proportion of part-time students was higher. This was not a standard FE programme, but there was no suggestion that the wrong criteria may have been used to measure its achievements. The merger element of the arrangements and the shortage of people with senior level experience of work with students with learning difficulties was another factor. In 2017 I was told by 'ST', who worked as inspector for the FEFC:

Sometimes you could get someone who was a specialist in literacy who ended up inspecting learning difficulty, but actually had virtually no knowledge of it ... They assumed that they could just do the learning difficulty and disability (ST, 2017).

In FEFC terms they were now all part of 'basic education'. The 'merged' structure brought the two areas into a close relationship where newly differentiated 'levels' might be looked for. We know however that provision could have been organised and administered by quite different institutions, with different agendas.

Throughout the report there was a constant theme about the poor standards in the courses targeting students with learning difficulties:

Inspection grades awarded to lessons for students with learning difficulties are lower on average than for other parts of the programme area (FEFC, 1998:ii).

Horror stories were recounted, like the literacy teacher in a class for students with learning difficulties who wrote the names of over 30 breeds of rabbit on a whiteboard for students to copy, while showing small pictures of some of the rabbits to the class

(ibid.:21). Individual learning plans, lesson planning and record-keeping were all recorded as worse in the provision for students with learning difficulties. Judgements about the programmes crossed all the subject areas, so the college statistics overall were brought down by the consistently poor grades for the teaching of students with learning difficulties. This was the legacy of a lack of interest, training, money and status.

It was evident to the FEFC that drastic measures were needed to sort out Programme Area 10. Their remedy was more conformity. It was a 'one size fits all' solution which was to bring all these disparate issues and people and programmes together. The inspection report reflected the FEFC view that the characteristic common feature of 'basic education' was that of 'transition'. The factors they therefore looked for were those 'important in helping students to make a successful transition, for example, the analysis of learning needs, guidance and support for learning' (ibid.:2). The report was clear that:

Learning programmes for students in basic education are most effective when they are based on individuals' assessed needs and aspirations, described within a clear structure and recorded in the form of a learning plan (ibid.:17).

These recommendations fitted general practice in adult literacy education. They were open-ended in theory and could accommodate a wide range of students and learning goals. In fact, however, 'learning plans' could be rigid, and more tightly tied to the targets of institutions and funders than this suggests. Interviewee 'UV' told me she had to alter the learning plans used in the scheme she supervised to suit new accountability measures. The stress on 'clear structure' implied timed transition and progression which suited a full-time FE-style programme rather than student-centred adult literacy education or part-time provision with 'choice and empowerment' at its core.

Assessment and accreditation of learning were stressed as important tools in the FEFC model of 'successful transition'. The relentless demand for progression led to curtailed options for students and teachers. The 1998 inspection report recognised that students had a range of aspirations and 'learning goals' but was adamant about the importance of assessing and recording progress. Negotiation and student interests were not mentioned:

Assessment is integral to effective learning. Properly organised, it helps students to recognise each of their achievements and to be aware of the progress they are making. It also helps teachers to plan further learning objectives and to set appropriate tasks (ibid.:24).

There was no encouragement for an 'authentic dialogue' which appreciates that a student has choices and adult experience. The emphasis was on progress in a pre-arranged curriculum.

In summary the report tabulated data that showed that achievements were dropping in this area. The figures for 1995–6 were worse than those for 1994–5 and 'achievement rates for learning goals in basic education, 1995–6, were lower than for all other programme areas' (FEFC, 1998:27). The council did not decide to reconsider the emphasis on meeting 'achievement' goals, or whether the goals set were inappropriate, but concluded that:

The low rate of achievement of learning goals is a consequence mainly of the development of basic education provision from generally non-accredited courses (ibid.:30).

The statement that the disappointing rates of 'achievement of learning goals' in basic education were caused by the history of non-accredited courses in the area is open to question. The aim of the inspectors was to improve the figures with more records of successful achievement. The question was really about the nature of the learning

goals, but the answer they needed was 'more accreditation'. The answer does not fit the question. The FEFC needed to reverse the downward trend in the data. The FEFC inspectorate looked at the multi-faceted and unwieldy area called 'basic education' with its roots in community settings and a workforce of part-time tutors with social justice aspirations, and recommended accreditation as the answer to the challenge. Thinking about the provision for people with learning difficulties my interviewee, 'ST', described the discussion:

We've got this poor quality eclectic stuff happening for people with learning difficulties. How can we improve it? We'll have accreditation. So accreditation was perceived to be the means of improving the quality of provision ... That certainly came from the inspectorate, I think. And you got things like ASDAN awards, and various other forms of accreditation (ST, 2017).

The FEFC and their inspectors were aware of the issues faced by managers and teachers in the sector, and they appreciated that students might have various aspirations and 'learning goals'. The motivation of the students and the commitment of the teachers were two of the strengths noted in the inspectors' report. But they needed to show positive results. Concentrating on progression and transition across the range of activities labelled as 'basic education' led them to recommend a focus on assessment, both in terms of the support needs of students and in the sense of constant evaluation of individual progress, and on accreditation. The strategy was backed up by a well-funded training scheme, the Basic Skills Quality Initiative (BSQI), launched in 1999. The BSQI team was headed by Merrilie Vaughan Huxley, the Senior FEFC Inspector in the area, and included members such as Pat Hood, a former Vice-Principal of Southwark FE College, who had worked on the 1996 Tomlinson Report, and Liz Lawson, previously an ESOL lecturer, now at FEDA, who had long experience in the sector. The BSQI foreword included a statement which

clarified the way the FEFC, and probably the government, saw 'basic education' and the role of FE by the end of the decade. It was a narrow view of adult literacy education, and of the role of Programme Area 10 in general:

All learners are entitled to high-quality basic skills provision. Making sure learners can read, write and use numbers confidently is part of the core business of further education. These skills give learners the opportunity to take part in education and training, to complete programmes of learning successfully and to progress to employment or further study (FEFC, 2000:2).

This introductory statement included a declaration of entitlement which established the historical context of 'basic skills provision'. It also clearly articulated the view that being able 'to read, write and use numbers confidently' was about enabling individuals to move on 'to employment or further study'. It voiced an instrumental approach to adult literacy education which did not include democratic participation, active citizenship, increased confidence or self-advocacy in the 'core business' of further education. Adult literacy education which prioritised progression and employability was not structured to accommodate 'slow learners' or diverse aspirations. The position outlined by BSQI underlined the difficulty of implementing Tomlinson's call to put learning before vocationalism.

The role of the agencies

As the government tightened its grip on post-school education through the mechanism of the FEFC the role of other agencies active in the field altered. ALBSU, which had exerted influence through funding projects and fighting for adult literacy education which was not 'remedial' or tied into school models, was obliged to concentrate on FE-style provision and, in 1995, became the Basic Skills Agency, with a brief which included school literacy education. NIACE, a more independent

and specifically adult-oriented organisation, became the pre-eminent body speaking for adult literacy and for adult students with learning difficulties. At the time it felt uncertain that adult education which had no vocational element would survive.

Looking back, Alan Tuckett told me in 2019:

We had to fight the government because they were going to stop funding adult education altogether ... [NIACE] was revitalised around the '92 legislation, I think. And I suppose I took it in a slightly different direction (Tuckett, 2019).

Some important agencies did not survive the sweeping away of institutions. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was abolished in 1990, before the FHE Act. Obviously, the ILEA Inspectorate and advisory system which had supported adult education for people with learning difficulties was terminated. The Language and Literacy Unit (LLU) managed to find a home at Southwark College, on the basis that it would raise half of its own costs. Freely available and specialist support for practitioners was less available.

The Manpower Services Commission (MSC) was also axed by the Conservative administration, and was replaced by a network of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). Like the MSC, the TECs could directly fund training schemes for young people and unemployed adults through the Department of Employment, until functions were merged in the Department of Education and Employment in 1995. The intention was to give local employers a leading role in vocational education and to 'marketise' the sector. Commenting on the changes, McGinty and Fish, writing from the point of view of practitioners and inspectors with experience of work with students with learning difficulties, warned that:

Colleges, with other trainers and TECs, now define the ethics of further education and ... one of the dangers of the commercial approach is that

students may be seen as unit costs and products rather than as developing individuals (McGinty & Fish, 1993:10).

And they have evidence to support their admonitions:

By 1991, after just one year's experience, TECs ... were pleading that their financial situation made it difficult for them to pay for training for disabled people (ibid., 1993:13).

TECs were technically private companies operating on a regional basis, delivering government-funded training, working with local bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, and answerable to local development agencies. By 2001 when they were abolished, there were 72 TECs, which each conducted their business independently. In effect they created competition for local FE colleges. The quality of provision was patchy and the instructors were not necessarily qualified teachers. Literacy and numeracy were offered as twin elements in up-skilling the trainees, with the objective of improving their employability. A briefing paper for the incoming 2010 government explained that at the time colleges (through FEFC) and work-based training organisations (through the TECs) were each awarded funding for delivering a target number of 'units', the more 'units' the higher the funding, prompting providers to compete for the learners in their area. The hope was that the system would drive up recruitment, retention and achievement. 'The government's key objective,' it was reported, 'was to ensure everyone had the basic numeracy and literacy skills they needed to access employment' (Panchamia, 2010: no page number). The arrangement confirmed the 'vocationalisation' of literacy and numeracy provision in the eyes of the government and the public.

Voluntary bodies, on the other hand, could sometimes gain the ear of government when statutory services could not. The charity Mencap claimed that its 'influence and campaigning work saw people with a learning disability included in the

FHE Act of 1992'. Mencap (initially called the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children) dated back to the 1950s, and had been involved in initiatives such as the Gateway Clubs, which offered leisure and sports activities to people with learning difficulties from 1966. In the 1980s Mencap had supported and reported on a pioneering scheme to place volunteers with adults with learning difficulties in adult education classes (Willis, 1984). The charity operated a specialist employment service, Pathway, to support adults and young people with learning difficulties into employment (Mencap, 2010). It was influential but not set up to deliver education on a big scale (Smellie, 2009).

Skill (formerly the National Bureau for Handicapped Students) had a specific brief to champion the interests of students with disabilities. It was a small charity which punched above its weight. 'What we could do was co-ordinate,' claimed Cooper (Director, 1986–97), when I spoke to her in 2019. Skill worked with larger charities, such as RNIB and Mencap, which had parliamentary officers. They maintained a network of honorary regional organisers and facilitated local activities and meetings, working hard to inform practitioners and to represent students and staff. They published a journal which covered the whole of the UK and ran a student helpline. Cooper spoke amusingly about how Skill could bring influence to bear:

Our President was Davina D'Arcy de Knayth, Lady D'Arcy de Knayth. And members of the House of Lords were very helpful. She was a cross-bencher, and there were times when she would say, 'Oh Debra,' she'd say, 'I don't know much about this, but I do know Lady So-and-So, who has done quite a lot on this. I think she is one of the government ministers. I'll have a word with her and see what we can do. Shall we have a meeting? Perhaps you could come to tea? ... And we would go and have tea in the House of Lords, and we could chat about these things. They are kind of magic moments really. And occasionally you could very politely beat a minister up, or talk to someone who was from the right place (Cooper, 2019).

Their authority and expertise allowed them to work closely with government agencies. Liz Maudslay of Skill worked alongside Sally Faraday of FEDA on the Moser Technical Implementation Group set up to collect and collate feedback relating to 'basic skills for people with learning difficulties' on the recommendations of the Moser Report (1999). The agency remained apolitical and independent.

ALBSU, entirely dependent on government funding, and now speaking only of 'basic skills' and not literacy and numeracy, was forced to focus more on further education FEFC-style, with a consequent shift to a college-oriented vocationally based perspective. A 1992 ALBSU document entitled *Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges* showed how the ground was shifting. Peter Davies, Chair of ALBSU, reflecting government thinking and vocabulary, and arguing for continued funding, wrote:

Current basic skills provision meets very little of the likely need, and unless we mobilise all of the resources available in the 1990s we shall continue as an under-educated and under-skilled nation well into the next century (Davies, 1992a: foreword).

He went on to spell out the ALBSU policy: 'ALBSU will give high priority to helping and supporting colleges which want to develop basic skills work' (ibid.: foreword). In a direct comment on the relationship between adult literacy (or basic skills) education and provision for students with learning difficulties, ALBSU carefully identified with the government/FEFC position:

The FHE Act distinguishes between courses to teach independent living and communication skills to people with learning difficulties, and courses to teach improved English language, literacy and numeracy skills. This reflects the situation in many LEAs and colleges, which see basic skills and special needs as two separate disciplines, whilst ensuring that there is effective liaison and

communication between basic skills staff and staff involved with wider special needs provision (ALBSU, 1992a:4).

This statement echoes the words of Wells, when he wrote in 1989 of the 'key role' played by 'basic education' in provision for people with learning difficulties, while differentiating 'special needs work' from ALBSU's responsibilities. But Wells was thinking and speaking at the time in the context of LEA-led adult education programmes. The FHE Act of 1992 changed the landscape. Now ALBSU had to concentrate on the world of FE. FE was a bigger scene than adult education and the culture was more fragmented. Learning difficulties provision in colleges was often strictly segregated. I heard evidence of detailed 'effective liaison and communication' in the LEA field which had the purpose of facilitating access to the adult basic education programme for people with learning difficulties. The idea of 'separate disciplines' suggests a more rigid structure, and less co-operation.

ALBSU introduced a Quality Mark (QM) in 1992. It was a move which underlined the drive to standardise adult literacy teaching and the position of ALBSU in the new arrangements. The concept was based on the 'kitemark', and other quality assurance schemes developed for the manufacturing and services industries. It resonated well therefore with FEFC philosophy and the vocational context. It was a set of criteria which could help adult literacy schemes to demonstrate that they had reached certain standards. ALBSU sold the service to colleges and LEAs, acting as an audit and support mechanism for the new system. The QM helped providers to meet the demands of FEFC inspections. Amongst features which literacy schemes needed to evidence were:

- Targets for improvement in performance in basic skills
- A negotiated learning plan for each learner

- Access to nationally recognised accreditation of basic skills (ALBSU Quality Mark, 1992 b).

Appropriate teaching materials and staff trained to national standards were also listed. The consultants involved were experienced adult literacy teachers. They drew on their experience and the fruits of ALBSU's research. It was a real effort to support good practice but it was also an exercise in enforcing conformity. Confirming the mutating priorities, ALBSU in 1993 reissued *An Introduction to Literacy Teaching*, first produced in 1980. In line with the new orthodoxy new chapters included: Student Assessment, Evaluation and Accreditation, plus New Approaches to Literacy. The introduction, reflecting the changing context, included a special addition which highlighted the vocational context of adult literacy education: 'Good reading, writing, speaking and listening skills are not only important in our everyday and social lives, but also in the workplace' (ALBSU, 1993a:6).

The new regime was significant too in confirming that basic skills teachers fitted into an FE model. *ALBSU Standards for Basic Skills Teachers* also came out in 1992 (ALBSU, 1992c). This located training and certification for teachers of adult literacy and numeracy in the vocational sector and not in the more academic and prestigious domain of 'Teacher Training'. Ideas of professionalism as adult education specialists were, in effect, downgraded. The specifications for certification were developed with the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) and written in the format of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The 9281 series of qualifications produced by City & Guilds was competency-based, with little discussion of the theoretical background of literacy or of learning. Learning difficulties appeared entirely negatively as part of the section on 'barriers', alongside factors such as poverty. Unlike applicants for teaching qualifications academically qualified people were not expected to apply. As the literature explained: 'There are

no entry requirements ... however participants should be able to communicate effectively in written and spoken English' (ALBSU, 1992c:3). Evidently the investment noted by Tuckett was real, but ALBSU was increasingly tied into a narrow vocational idea of adult literacy education. The access and validation of students with learning difficulties consequently suffered.

There is evidence of discrimination against students with learning difficulties. Social attitudes combined with funding pressure were overriding arguments about rights or educational priorities. The research of Sue Bergin and Andy Johnson (1994) suggested that providers were excluding students with learning difficulties because of a perception that they would not be 'able to fit in' rather than for educational reasons, and that 'concern for how other people might respond often means that adult students with learning difficulties are excluded from basic education provision' (Bergin & Johnson, 1994). Their findings are reminiscent of Dee telling me of the barriers she encountered when trying to refer students with learning difficulties into adult literacy education several years before (Dee, 2019). Bergin and Johnson argued that outcome-related funding plus stigma and prejudice were behind these actions. It is unfortunate, but not surprising, to find the carefully calibrated position that Wells had established being used to deny students with learning difficulties access to provision. Bergin and Johnson's conclusions echo the critique of authors on 'special' education such as Corbett (1996) when they argue that once 'labelled' in this way students were liable to have less options to make their own choices.

Wells remained as Director of the re-focused Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and the unit continued to function in essentially the same way. It was a nominally independent charitable organisation funded entirely through central government but accountable to a board including representation from LEAs, providers, voluntary

agencies and industry. Wells himself had not changed in the view that 'labelling' students was not helpful. The July 1996 edition of the BSA Journal included an article entitled *It's OK Mum, they told me I'm just SEN* (Wells, 1996). The point which Wells wanted to make was that the term 'special needs' was now educationally meaningless and served only as an administrative or financial trigger:

This term is used to describe a diverse range of need, ranging from the needs of people with learning difficulties or disabilities to those with behavioural, or presentational problems, to those recovering from mental illness, to those with literacy and numeracy needs. It seems that anyone that doesn't fit what is administratively convenient gets the word 'special' applied to them (ibid., 1996:2).

In a sense Wells is here making the same argument as he did when setting out ALBSU's position in the 1980s. He is pointing out that the loose use of the word 'special' does not help anybody. He is also suggesting that it has become a term which is used as a lever to release funding, while having no educational value.

NIACE took a particular interest in education for adults with learning difficulties, because Tuckett, Director after 1988, perceived the work as 'marginalised'. He felt that there was an issue central to adult education which he described as 'boxing and delimiting people's lived experience' (Tuckett, 2019). The agency was able to take a more independent line than the BSA and provided the counter voice to the FEFC imperative of progression and vocationalisation. The 1990 Care in the Community Act, which made it possible for more people with learning difficulties to attend adult education in open settings made it particularly important to establish the principles which NIACE considered fundamental. NIACE introduced Adult Learning Week in 1992, as a showcase for achievements in adult education

which were not necessarily employment-oriented and to enable rewards for students with learning difficulties. As Alan Tuckett told me:

Within that framework you were able to celebrate the achievements of people with learning difficulties alongside other learners ... like a manifestational metaphor (Tuckett, 2019).

Tuckett explained to me that:

What NIACE was constantly trying to do ... was to explore in different contexts the same kinds of questions about what works, what minimises exclusion. So who isn't there and what can you do about it? (ibid., 2019)

He was proud that NIACE published Sutcliffe's books on working with students with learning difficulties, and clear that Sutcliffe's 1990 *Adults with Learning Difficulties: Education for Choice and Empowerment* should be valued in the same way as another contemporary NIACE publication *Education's for Other People* (McGivney, 1990), which, he told me, 'brought together all the ways that people have common barriers to participation, but also delimited ones' (Tuckett, 2019). McGivney's book studied the experience of unskilled workers, unemployed adults, women with dependent children, older adults and ethnic minority groups. The Institute prioritised the learner's point of view, and did not champion any specific institutional arrangements. In 1992 Sutcliffe produced *Integration for Adults with Learning Difficulties: Contexts and Debates*. The aim was to 'encourage practitioners to reflect on possible developments' rather than to dictate answers (Sutcliffe, 1992:5). Sutcliffe used the same formula as before, surveying programmes across the country and highlighting 'good practice'. She quoted research from Canada which invited people with learning difficulties to identify 'dream' and 'nightmare' visions of the future, and she referenced the work of the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) in Britain. NIACE set out to inform practitioners and research options, trying to ensure

that those involved could see the big picture and make arguments based on evidence. The agency was a strong voice in support of students with learning difficulties and it worked to keep them as part of the adult literacy programme. It was not, however, a policy body.

Taking the student point of view led Sutcliffe to be critical of current policy and practice. She confronted the received discourse on purpose in adult literacy education and on the identity of students. She challenged the assumption, often made on behalf of people with learning difficulties, 'that adults with learning difficulties must learn to read and write in order to be more independent' (Sutcliffe, 1994:7). She was damning about the unwarranted stress on assessment, which was demonstrably based on a deficit model, stating that, 'Assessment has tended to be a process done to rather than with adults with learning difficulties' (ibid., 1994:23). She also warned that there were tensions to be managed for teachers working in a range of different settings with a number of professionals who could all have different ideas about priorities and approaches and that people with learning difficulties may be referred to literacy classes for various reasons outside their own control.

Ultimately, Sutcliffe was clear that self-advocacy and independent thinking should be essential elements in teaching basic skills to people with learning difficulties:

Discussion and communication skills as part of basic skills can help adults with learning difficulties to practise speaking up, while choice and decision-making should be an in-built part of the curriculum (ibid., 1994:11).

And:

Developing confidence in speaking and listening are a fundamental part of basic skills (ibid., 1994:64).

The priorities identified by NIACE and articulated in Sutcliffe's books addressed issues of power and of agency which were missing from the FEFC requirements, and which recalled the spirit of social action behind the 1970s literacy campaign. NIACE was embracing in a new context the Freirean view that adult literacy education should be about 'liberation' rather than 'domestication', and reflecting the ideas of literacy as 'social practice' developed by Street and others in the 1980s. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was in a new context, but a student-centred tradition lived on. Practitioners navigated the choppy waters as best they could, balancing pressure to deliver results for managers with their commitment to widen opportunities for their students.

[The relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties in practice](#)

The changes of the 1990s which affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties were top-down initiatives. Unlike the developments in the previous two decades, they were policy-led. Many experienced practitioners found themselves dealing with new pressures and out of step with the new systems and values. This section examines the consequences at a practical level. The 1992 FHE Act had big implications for workers in the field of adult literacy education and for people working in education for adults with learning difficulties. Most obviously both areas were firmly located within the structure of FE. At the same time, FE was going through a major reform affecting all colleges and their relationships with each other and the local community they served.

'UV' was working as County Co-ordinator for ABE (Adult Basic Education) in a large rural county where there were three FE colleges and an agricultural college. She felt that she was fighting for the survival of the well-co-ordinated literacy scheme she had built up, and for appropriate provision for students who wanted local adult-oriented classes:

It felt like trying to put round pegs into square holes, or square pegs into round holes. Because it was very, very difficult for us. Initially there was this huge exercise where we had to put all of our provision, literally, into their boxes on forms ... and tell them what we had, to get a basic level of funding ... Because then the FEFC said, 'Well, this is what you've told us, this is what you will get ...'

Initially, when the FEFC started introducing its funding rules ... we couldn't apply directly on our own account. We had to go through the colleges, so [my manager] and I had to go to each college and have meetings with the principals. And none of them were very happy. They would have liked to have taken the whole lot over. And we were fighting for our existence. Particularly with [one of the colleges] who were very aggressive. And so ... it not only put us in a new situation in terms of how we were funded and how we managed to retain that funding, but also in a new relationship with the colleges ... It became competitive ...

I think they [the colleges] probably saw this funding that was coming to us as money that could come to them, and they wanted to know why they were not getting it. And they saw us as Community Education, not well qualified, and not really kind of professional. We saw them as not sympathetic to the learners who didn't want to come into a big college (UV, 2017).

This is a graphic account of the issues that the LEA adult literacy schemes faced, knowing that they had the expertise and experience to deliver a successful programme, and suddenly having to protect the work from predatory college managers who had never been interested in basic education before. The FEFC

structure and funding were designed to put FE colleges in charge of the system, and were predicated on a view of adult literacy education as an element of vocational education. The resulting process was not always a simple or friendly operation, as 'UV' explains. She felt that she was fighting for her staff team and defending their professionalism:

We had a very good team ... and we did an awful lot with a very limited amount of money ... But we also had the freedom to think for ourselves, and plan and design, in a way that became more and more restricted as national standards and things were introduced (ibid., 2017).

This was a county scheme that had worked out a relationship with Social Services and was offering local provision in literacy classes to people with learning difficulties. 'UV' was anxious too about the students:

So we were trying not to change what we did too much for our learners, because they hadn't changed. And the tutors hadn't changed. And the needs hadn't changed (ibid., 2017).

Adult literacy schemes were forced to rethink priorities to meet the demands of the centralised FEFC funding system:

I remember introducing individual learning plans ... not just as a student-centred learning thing, but as a way of actually auditing progress (ibid., 2017).

And there was new and baffling bureaucracy, designed for much larger organisations:

In terms of the recording we ended up going to a unit that had been set up in Birmingham ... that actually began to set up a form of software called Aqua, which would enable organisations, particularly smaller organisations, to actually input their data in a way that would feed it through to the FEFC. And I went up and met them and an officer from County Hall came up with me. He knew about IT and data bases and things. And then we had to train the

administrators to use this software. And they were very good, very good indeed ... But it was complex (ibid., 2017).

It was one element of the FEFC mission to establish a single FE system. 'UV' found that the software had trouble with the complexity and human diversity of the ABE programme:

It threw up lots of questions. You know, how are we going to deal with this group? With this person? And then, of course, it was audited. So we had Waterhouse Coopers [Price Waterhouse, later merged with Coopers & Lybrand], whatever they were called, people, coming in. A young girl, fresh-faced from N..., knew nothing about basic skills, wanting to get the numbers to add up. Just not understanding, although she was very sympathetic, why we had any problems with the thing. And so it was quite a nightmare (ibid., 2017).

'UV's evidence reveals what a huge impact FEFC funding, systems and attitudes made on the running of a community-based adult literacy scheme, affecting relationships with managers, colleagues and students. The drive to impose a single system which could encompass all types of post-school provision felt like a hammer blow to carefully constructed partnerships. Despite all the 'consultations' and 'guidance' documents the FEFC imposed an inflexible approach which particularly affected the most vulnerable students.

'IJ', in another county, spelled out how the new regime affected the provision for adults with learning difficulties. She pointed out how the funding could distort the educational offer:

At that point we felt that the only way to keep the provision for people with learning difficulties was to somehow link it to Wordpower and Numberpower ... It was a function of the cuts [to funding for adult education]. We were not going to get the income unless it was allied to a qualification. And so we were trying really to wedge, to be frank, qualifications into wider-ranging classes.

Some of it would have worked, and some of it wouldn't. So if people were doing cookery then it was relatively easy to put a numeracy unit in, you know. If it got to something like art you were trying to wedge in Wordpower, it really got slightly more dodgy (IJ, 2017).

'CD' looked back on working first as a Learning Support Assistant (LSA), and then taking responsibility as an instructor in numeracy for students with learning difficulties. She felt that Wordpower and Numberpower were flexible enough to link to any interest, and were not work-associated like later qualifications. She explained, however, the burdens of collecting evidence for achievement in portfolio form, as needed for NVQs like Wordpower and Numberpower:

It was a nightmare to organise ... I remember going home, sorting it all out, and then, although they were supposed to be responsible for their own portfolio, you would say, 'Don't touch! You can look at it but don't take any pages' ... 'cos they did have difficulty building portfolios. You know that. It was a skill in itself. And trying to cross-reference it and everything ... (CD, 2017).

'CD's account shows how the procedures involved in meeting certification standards took away the agency and independence of the students, although they were intended to highlight achievement and to give students an active part in presenting their own work. The goals were not those chosen and valued by the students, and the system did not allow them to present their work in a way which enabled them to take real responsibility. The process in fact took away from the confidence and self-esteem of the students.

'IJ' talked about how she felt that the efforts to 'wedge' in certification effectively took away from people the rights and dignity of making their own choices:

It becomes so skills-focused that it is as though people don't have an entitlement to go to an art or pottery class. They only have an entitlement to get a qualification. Or to try and get a qualification, regardless of whether they are able to do that or not ... Where you are funding-driven you are shutting

down people's choices. And you are treating them as though they are not allowed to make a choice (IJ, 2017).

'UV' remembered an incident which demonstrated the dilemmas which could arise because of the FEFC requirement for recording achievement to maintain progression. In this case it was a student with learning difficulties on a numeracy course:

The tutor said, 'What do I do? I can teach her something and she can pass ... she can evidence it this week. And next week she can't. Can I evidence this?' (UV, 2017).

'UV' and 'IJ' were both deeply troubled by what they saw happening to adult literacy education and to the relationship which the previous LEA regime had in facilitating education for adults with learning difficulties. The idea of 'education for choice and empowerment' in Sutcliffe's words, was undermined by the operation of the FEFC funding methodology.

'KL' moved at about this time from a voluntary community-based adult literacy scheme to run an 'Adult Foundation Course' in a large London FE college. It was a full-time basic education course, with a mixed intake of mostly ESOL students. She told me that 'they just wanted to fill the course' and 'these young people wanted a course ... so they just threw them all into the Adult Foundation' and:

Some of them at the end of the year went on to an Access course, if they had moved on enough. Some of them went into work. Some of them went on to more vocational courses (KL, 2017).

The course was successful in FEFC terms. 'KL', however, tried to introduce a more student-centred curriculum, and told me how she moved the course into a modular certification system allowing more flexibility, using the Open College Network because 'you could be creative'. This was another area where the FEFC found such

'creativity' worrying. The 1998 inspectors' report was disparaging about OCN accreditation:

The use of Open College Network accreditation is growing rapidly and it is becoming the main accreditation framework for basic education. It provides credit for students' achievements but is not a qualification. Colleges prefer it to some other forms of accreditation because teachers can write programmes which suit their own students and because they find that they can fulfil the requirements for validation relatively easily. The rationale for combinations of modules on some programmes is unclear, and there has been a lack of consistent standards between Open College Networks, particularly at the lower levels (FEFC, 1998:33).

The flexibility of the OCN accreditation was able to accommodate students at varying levels, but it was suspect to FEFC eyes. 'KL' was drawing on her experience and planning a programme to promote the choices and aspirations of her students, but the example demonstrates a clash of values. The drive to standardise provision was more important than building student agency. Newer recruits to teaching would perhaps have seen no contradiction.

In another example of the crushing of diversity and creativity I recorded the impact of FEFC systems on partnership work in adult education. A 1993 ALBSU report on the special projects programme gave details on joint-funded work, something ALBSU encouraged:

About one third of projects are partnerships, mainly between colleges and LEAs. However, a range of other partners are involved, including libraries, employers, training providers, schools, prisons, NHS trusts, housing departments, community development organisations, family health service authorities, community relations councils, voluntary services councils and WEA (ALBSU, 1993:16).

They were evidently describing a thriving scene reflecting a wide range of creative possibilities. In 1994 the Skill Journal *Educare* published an article in which I wrote about the situation at Southwark AEI for students with a range of learning difficulties as the ILEA disappeared and FEFC funding systems took hold. I noted big cuts in the provision, 90 per cent in the off-site provision to psychiatric centres and a much reduced offer for students with physical disabilities 'resulting in under-used facilities such as the computer workshop' (Rose, 1994:9). The purpose of the article was to show how provision for students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities could benefit from a spread of agency funding. The responsibilities listed were: Teaching, Transport, Classroom Support, Premises, Student Fees, Materials and Management and Co-ordination. The costs were divided in different permutations between four different authorities (LEA, Health, Social Services and DODP, [Docklands Open Door Project] a project related to developing work, assessment and training) plus contributions in some cases from the students themselves (see Appendix 4). 'IJ' pointed out that the rural schemes had extra barriers to overcome:

We're working across a county, rural communities. I mean transport was incredibly difficult ... And so we were dependent on other institutions or organisations (IJ, 2017).

Help with transport could make the difference between a viable class and one that could not muster the numbers to make it feasible for funding support. But the complexity and variety of multiple funding and mixed management were not acceptable to the FEFC. The lines of accountability were too complicated. The 1998 report on Basic Education stated that, 'Often provision made through community networks creates a number of problems for the management, control and monitoring of provision' (FEFC, 1998:46).

Another issue was the part-time nature of the workforce in basic education. Part-time teachers had always been the mainstay of adult literacy education, which was essentially a part-time provision while LEAs were in charge. In 1996 according to figures quoted by Hamilton and Hillier, of 12,900 adult literacy and numeracy teachers, 11,610 were part-time (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006:61). The FEFC were unhappy with this situation and commented:

Provision in basic skills and ESOL is generally dependent on part-time teachers. They often have significant levels of responsibility but are generally unable to attend team meetings or engage in training programmes (FEFC, 1998:51).

There was huge pressure to conform to the FE model. Adult literacy education had mainly moved from one-to-one tuition to a more conventional schedule of weekly group classes. FE was built on a model of full-time training courses, designed for young people, and much more like a school pattern. Many adult literacy practitioners were anxious to maintain the adult and voluntary nature of provision, which they felt recognised the adult status and busy lives of their students. Although the proportion of students aged over 19 in Basic Education was 77 per cent, a sizeable majority, the inspectors' report did not distinguish by age in their approach. This attitude represented a significant break with a narrative of adult literacy education which centred on the understanding that it had a unique adult perspective.

The concept of 'basic skills support' in colleges could, however, represent a sort of inclusive practice in action. It recognised the right of students with learning difficulties to access the curriculum. It was a feature of the move into FE and it could effect a positive change in the relationship between vocational education, adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It was a product of the new funding regime, so it had an 'assessment' element. The 1993 ALBSU

Annual Report included an item about research into the need for literacy support in FE. The report indicated that 'about 40 per cent of all college students would need some help to achieve the level of competence to get an NVQ at Level 2' (ALBSU, 1993). The FEFC funding methodology allowed colleges to apply for additional funding, based on the assessed needs of their students. Across the college curriculum this mechanism enabled students with poor literacy or numeracy skills, sometimes with learning difficulties, to attend courses with support, on an integrated basis. The large proportion of students who could access this support could detoxify the 'special' label. But we know from the research done by Bergin and Johnson (1994) that students might be denied this support if they were perceived to have learning difficulties. It could sometimes depend on a charismatic 'leader' to show the way. The inspectors' report of 1998 was keen to promote the support model of literacy education, and it is one of the reasons that they laid emphasis on the initial assessment of needs in their recommendations:

This support is becoming effective in helping students to achieve their learning goals, often in other programme areas [than basic education] (FEFC, 1998:i).

Clearly, achieving more learning goals was a strong incentive and the FEFC report cited examples of good practice. These successful initiatives fitted the vocational education system, and helped students to recognise the value of literacy in their vocational field. The examples included an NVQ 1 course in painting and decorating, which had three Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) 'assigned to the group to work with the vocational teacher' (ibid., 1998:38), and a college which had established a workshop within the motor vehicle engineering area where students were able to achieve a Wordpower qualification following a scheme of work devised by the learning support tutor in partnership with the course tutor. LSAs might also be

assigned to work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, bringing another sort of 'merger' into the relationship, as the same LSAs might work across various courses. They had a sensitive and difficult part to play in making the relationships work, especially bearing in mind the splintered FE staff community. Many LSAs went on to train as teachers themselves. The City and Guild courses offered a career route.

'CD' was an example of this trajectory. She joined a college in 1994 as an LSA. Her first job was to support students with learning difficulties who spent some time studying catering, including work experience in the catering kitchen:

I didn't think our students were particularly welcome there. They [catering teachers] did not have much experience of working with students with learning disabilities at the time, and it didn't really fit with the pressures of the restaurant. They used to make their own things just to perhaps take home (CD, 2017).

The practice which 'CD' initially observed was not inclusive. The students with learning difficulties effectively had a 'special' curriculum. But the situation changed, and after more than ten years 'CD' reflected:

I think now that quite a lot of the students with learning difficulties do move on to catering. It is one of the more accessible courses for them. And they [the staff] do work very well to support their literacy actually (ibid., 2017).

'Embedding' literacy was not easy. A successful scheme demanded understanding and confidence on the part of vocational teachers. 'CD' remembered that a strong character 'had been taken on to make that work in the restaurant' (ibid., 2017). Such a leader could perhaps have managed the co-ordination lacking in the case of 'Tom' recorded in the Tomlinson Report (1996) cited above.

Simultaneously 'CD' was able to take up her own training opportunities. Her career mirrored the growing acceptance of students with learning difficulties in FE. 'I

was LSA to [numeracy tutor] for quite some time and eventually I got instructor hours to teach my own groups,' she told me in 2017. They were not 'special' classes, but geared to enable a range of students to catch up in literacy and numeracy and to complete qualifications. People like 'CD' often became valuable assets to college provision because of their ability to work across curriculum areas and student groups. These were examples of inclusion in practice, helping to normalise the concept of 'support' and the presence of students with a range of needs in different programme areas. 'CD' later worked with students re-taking GCSEs, and even with staff when FE teachers needed to evidence achievement in English and Maths after 2003. Her story illustrates how students with learning difficulties, adult literacy and the staff involved have grown in status in FE. 'CD' told me about working with staff:

There were a lot of people who had come from vocational backgrounds. You know – chefs and carpenters and builders ... and it kind of came out that they felt a little bit inadequate, and somehow I had all that knowledge (ibid., 2017).

The learning support system favoured by FEFC, however, suited FE colleges better than the community-based adult education sector. As 'IJ' told me:

Adult education didn't have the facility to pull down the same amount of funding as FE colleges. So we were slightly hamstrung. We were trying to work out ways in which we could get LSAs in, and people to support, but it was actually much more difficult (IJ, 2017).

Learning support was evidently a positive development where it was practicable and supported by strong leadership. 'CD' was able to tell me about students she had worked with who had gone on to employment in their chosen areas. The model supported new initiatives and opportunities for students and it broke down some institutional and attitudinal barriers. It showed how vocational education could adapt

to accommodate students with learning difficulties, while adult literacy provision was relegated to a supporting role.

Support workers could, however, be another complicating factor in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. They might have conflicting loyalties, and their own convictions about the priorities for students. It was not an easy role, and it required careful management. Managing a support worker or LSA was another demand on adult literacy teachers. After the 1990 Community Care Act a specific fund was available to support joint projects. The projects were definitely 'special' and designed to enable people leaving full-time care to access community education. The thinking was in line with the principles of 'normalisation'. Various partnership patterns were created, often including transport and support workers, who might be funded through Health Authority money or Social Care. 'OP' had a full-time post at a London AEI, with the cost shared by the Health trust and the LEA. She was committed to the principles of 'choice and empowerment'. She told me about the programme she ran:

All of those people came to class with support workers ... And I was very much coming into it as, 'We will run classes about what people are interested in, and not what we think they should be learning how to do' ... And half the battle ... was getting the support worker not to say what they thought the student should do, which is quite difficult when the student is not verbal (OP, 2017).

Often support workers wanted students to do literacy classes. It was the conventional 'reading and writing comes first' view identified by Sutcliffe (1994). The ethos which 'OP' was enacting was 'the negotiated curriculum', as she had learned it at City Lit. Self-advocacy was a key principle for 'OP'. It was a high priority for people who might have spent a lifetime in care. There were no assessments of needs and

no pre-set objectives, although progress was monitored and recorded. It is the 'quality of life' approach later defined by Dee and co-authors (Dee et al., 2006). And it was the opposite of the FEFC drive focused on individual assessment, accreditation and progression along standard lines. In this model adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties were taking opposite directions.

Summary

The 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act completely changed the policy and practice of post-school education in England. My investigation of the 1990s centres on the work and impact of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), a government agency created to reform and renew post-school education in England. The law fundamentally reordered the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. The impetus, in terms of my analysis of the factors and forces involved, passed definitively from the agencies and practitioners. The FEFC had responsibility for all post-school education except for the university sector. Changes in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties were driven largely by the funding methodology introduced by the FEFC. It was legally obliged to 'have regard to the requirements of persons with learning difficulties' (FHE Act, 1992) and therefore policy documents and decisions bearing on the relationship appeared for the first time. The new arrangements brought adult literacy education and the provision for people with learning difficulties together and addressed the marginalisation of work with students with learning difficulties in FE. The LEAs and ALBSU lost their pre-eminent roles, and the government took the lead for the first time. From 1995 ALBSU

took on a literacy role in schools, and NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) became the main body speaking for adult literacy and championing education for people with learning difficulties.

Top-down direction was a new factor. Government thinking, however, reflected the constant issues around prejudice and 'investment'. The moves did not represent new philosophical, educational or social insights into the relationship. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was not, moreover, central to the plan. The charity Mencap claimed that it successfully lobbied for the inclusion of education for people with learning difficulties in the FEFC brief. Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE, told me of the relief of those involved when adult literacy was also included. He suggested that the government was considering ceasing funding for adult education completely (Tuckett, 2019). The FEFC put adult literacy education and provision designed for students with learning difficulties into a single administrative unit called 'Basic Education'. Their system was intended to impose conformity and facilitate management of a complex and diverse FE sector. The government was determined to raise standards in vocational education and to bring consistency and accountability into the system.

During the 1980s ALBSU, the lead body for adult literacy education, had moved towards the vocational sector compelled by the need to maintain government support and funding. The FEFC essentially consolidated that move. However, secure funding in the FE structure brought new pressures. The FEFC introduced an outcome-related funding model which was based on individual assessment and accreditation. The system reflected the marketisation and competition in schools brought in by the 1988 Education Reform Act. The drive to demonstrate achievement and progression conflicted with a student-centred approach to adult literacy

education which validated empowerment, choice and social action. The right of students with learning difficulties to attend post-school education was recognised and consolidated but the emphasis on assessment as a central principle showed that the predominant idea of 'needs' was integral to policy and practice in the 1990s. In practice teachers and managers were obliged to design individual learning plans for students which fitted standard pre-set objectives and timescales. Students had to complete accredited courses to trigger funding. Adult literacy education and provision for people with learning difficulties had to fit into a plan devised for vocational programmes. A new distinction was identified between 'communication' courses for people with learning difficulties and 'basic literacy' provision. This unexplained step created a difference in 'levels', so that students with learning difficulties could in theory enter adult literacy courses only after a 'special' course. I suggest that the decision reflected the need to mark progression and to fit the provision into the funding model.

The purpose of adult literacy education was defined as progression into employment or further education/training. Literacy and numeracy programmes embedded into vocational courses were encouraged. Qualifications for adult literacy teachers were also located in the vocational sector, in contrast to more academic teacher training. A new FEFC inspectorate highlighted problems with part-time staff, community-led partnerships and flexible assessment regimes. Hamilton was among contemporary critics who argued that the approach discriminated against the values of what she called 'responsive' or community-based literacy education (Hamilton 2005; Dee, 1999; McGinty & Fish, 1993). In 2000 a Basic Skills Quality Initiative was established to roll out training, drive up standards and change the culture of adult literacy education. It was a major effort to impose conformity onto a disparate field. It

did not ignore learning difficulties, but it did help to formalise a divide between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

The FEFC also addressed the inconsistency of provision for students with learning difficulties. Nearly 20 years after the Warnock Report (1978) the FEFC published the Tomlinson Report, *Inclusive Learning* (Tomlinson, 1996). Tomlinson's report was a ground-breaking call for learning to be put at the centre of provision for all FE students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). It did not marry easily with the market philosophy of the FEFC. The recommendations of the report went further than theories of integration, which Tomlinson perceived as putting responsibility on to students to adapt. His approach was based on the idea of a 'fit' or 'match' pro-actively put in place by providers to enable students to meet their learning goals and requirements. It was a concept which relied on the rights of all students to access the curriculum as active learners. I suggest that in this way it represents a 'rights-based' and 'student-centred' philosophy. It was not, however, a partnership or self-advocacy model. Tomlinson's report was owned by the FEFC. It did not challenge the basic funding system or the logic of 'special' programmes. It did, however, suggest that emphasising vocational objectives and insisting on 'progression' above all else could undermine a commitment to learning as the primary mission for FE. Tomlinson used the phrase 'learning eco-system' to convey his idea of the carefully co-ordinated support required by all students. Colleges, under pressure on all fronts, struggled to interpret the message but they did understand that provision for students with learning difficulties was suddenly important. Many introduced new qualifications such as ASDAN, which provided a 'special' curriculum designed to meet the FEFC funding requirements.

The new system worked against the flexibility and creativity which allowed students with learning difficulties to thrive in adult literacy classes. It was more like the school regime in labelling students, courses and staff. Identity, purpose and pedagogy issues militated against an 'adult' and rights-based approach. Bergin and Johnson (1994) reported that funding issues combined with stigma to deprive adult literacy students of support in the new Open Learning Centres, and led to students being referred to 'special' programmes unnecessarily. Marketisation reflected the 'human capital' version of adult education promoted by the OECD, which essentially perceived students with learning difficulties as a 'poor investment' (Coffield, 1999). Assessment was a fundamental element of the FEFC system because it was tied into the funding methodology. In theory an assessment of 'needs' produced the support needed by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) to access the curriculum and put Tomlinson's theory into practice. In real life, assessment tended to label students as 'special' and take away their agency and identity as full students. Sutcliffe criticised the emphasis put on assessment of need in teaching adults with learning difficulties (Sutcliffe, 1994). She knew that it was a disempowering process for students. Assessment of progress was also essential to the system. My interviewees described how the pressure to chase funding deprived students with learning difficulties of choice and put them at a disadvantage in the race for accreditation-based funding.

In summary the FEFC reinforced the right of people with learning difficulties to further education but at the same time redefined adult literacy education so that self-advocacy, choice and empowerment were off the agenda. My analysis of the evidence reflects how this how this basic tension played out in policy and practice.

Chapter 6. The 2000s: Whose literacy is it anyway?

Introduction

The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was again affected by major changes in the 2000s. The 2001 Skills-for-Life initiative transformed adult literacy education in England. A new planned relationship between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties was possible. For the first time theoretical positions were discussed at policy level. Consultation which involved practitioners and students demonstrated that the relationship had moved up the educational and political agenda. *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000) represented an effort to build provision for people with learning difficulties into the essential fabric of adult literacy and numeracy education. Analysis of the documents and events, however, shows how attempts to redefine the relationship exposed tensions, rather than laying firm foundations for a new partnership. The pressures which have been evident throughout this study continued to exert a powerful influence. The realities of politics, funding and social attitudes, combined with anxieties in educational practice, compromised the possibility of implementing new ways of thinking and working.

The Moser Report, *A Fresh Start: Improving literacy and numeracy*, was delivered to the New Labour government in 1999. The report's findings informed the Skills-for-Life initiative. There is an element of going back to beginnings. Moser used the language of 'literacy' and 'numeracy'. The Skills-for-Life strategy represented the government investment which adult literacy practitioners had been calling for since the 1970s. It was a vindication of their struggle for legitimacy. But it built upon the

experience of the 1980s and '90s, and it reflected the context and priorities of the new millennium and the new government.

The incoming administration believed that the country faced a problem in terms of levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, and, therefore, in economic competitiveness. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) published in 1997 demonstrated that the UK was lagging behind the competition amongst developed economies. The 1998 FEFC inspection report on basic education logged a decline in achievement rates. The government wanted big changes. Skills-for-Life was centrally directed. National standards and targets were introduced, with new core curriculum documents based on school models. The FEFC disappeared in 2000, to be replaced by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) was created in the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The quasi-independent Basic Skills Agency, successor to ALRA, ALU and ALBSU, was dissolved in 2007.

The FEFC had emphasised the importance of a further education structure and system which catered for students with learning difficulties. As in previous years, this was not the government's priority. Moser's recommendations noted and side-stepped the issue by proposing that a separate study should look at access for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to the new adult literacy and numeracy provision. This demonstrated the presence, and the marginalisation, of the question and provided an opportunity to construct a single officially funded policy document bringing together research into adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties. There was suddenly space to open the debate and to think through a strategy. But it was a minor concern to most of the people involved in the huge changes inaugurated by Skills-for-Life. Teachers and managers were

looking for security and not seeking further complexity. As in schools, adopting the new systems of teaching and measuring was not an option for adult literacy educators but a mandate from government. A major programme of free face-to-face training in the use of the new Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy Core Curricula was rolled out from 2001.

This study highlights the long-standing and shifting relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties, but there had been little opportunity before Moser for professional discussion of the relationship. The gap in knowledge and understanding is a factor in itself. *A Right to Read* in 1974 had expressly excluded people with difficulties in the plan for adult literacy education. Adult literacy teachers had not been encouraged to read about, or consider positively, the issues involved in working with adults with learning difficulties (e.g. as part of 9281 City & Guilds Training introduced in 1989). The FEFC funding system had created levels based on categorisation of students, not educational theory. Concerns around professionalisation and stigma still resonated.

In 2000 *Freedom to Learn: Basic skills for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000) was published by the DfEE as a supplement to Moser's report. It brought together people who had substantial experience and real commitment to making the relationship work for students and practitioners, and sought to involve them in the process. There was a chance to reset the relationship after the FEFC decade. It was welcomed by specialists such as 'OP', who worked with adults with learning difficulties and called it 'very significant recognition' (OP, 2017). The reporting group was chaired by Merrilie Vaughan Huxley who had led the basic education FEFC inspection team, and it

included Sally Faraday from FEDA, Cynthia Klein from the Language and Literacy Unit, Liz Maudslay from Skill, Jim Pateman of the Basic Skills Agency and Jeannie Sutcliffe representing NIACE. The main agencies who had been active in the relationship were all present. There were also specialists on dyslexia, education for blind people and educational technology as well as one or two practitioners and people representing the Department of Health, Mencap, Employers' Forum on Disability and the Association of Colleges. This gathering, the production of *Freedom to Learn* and the other outcomes of their recommendations could be said to mark the highpoint of hope in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties.

The authors of *Freedom to Learn* claimed that people with learning difficulties had a right to adult literacy education and that Skills-for-Life should be designed to accommodate their requirements, but they did not argue for the freedom to build student-centred adult literacy work based on the interests of students. They accepted that assessment, standard levels and certification were part of the future of adult literacy education. Carol Dennis wrote in 2010 about the experience of workers in ALLN in navigating Skills-for-Life. I suggest that her work illuminates the processes behind *Freedom to Learn* and the documents which followed it. Her research identified thoughtful practitioners who were committed to 'implementing a policy not through any sense of allegiance to the policy itself but because of what the policy momentum enabled them to do' (Dennis, 2010:37). The Skills-for-Life initiative enabled people committed to ensuring that people with learning difficulties could choose to attend adult literacy education to get it written into policy, bringing the relationship out of the margins. Both students and staff benefited from the debates, training and practice which were implemented as part of the Skills-for-Life strategy

but hopes for a seamless programme which changed the face of adult literacy for all potential students were not to be realised.

The government's perception that adult literacy education was primarily about 'up-skilling' the workforce for a globally competitive world meant that including people with learning difficulties in their vision was problematic. The government's sights were on a competitive and flexible workforce (Dennis, 2010). Economic arguments prevailed. Broader aspects of the Skills-for-Life programme were soon jettisoned and the whole strategy was dismantled by the new administration in 2010. The LSC published the Little Report, *Learning for Work: Employability and Adults with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*, in 2009 (Little, 2009). In the end training for employment was the only objective which attracted secure funding. Behind issues of funding were other concerns about whether adults with learning difficulties were entitled to citizenship, adult status and the dignity of choice.

[The international and intellectual context](#)

Developments in England were part of a wider debate about the purpose and processes of literacy education. Adult literacy continued to be seen as an important part of international development. The effort to raise literacy levels globally was a constant theme. 1990 was demarcated as International Literacy Year by UNESCO; the World Education Forum of 2000 adopted literacy as a specific goal of the Education for All (EFA) programme. UNESCO moved on to declare 2003–2012 United Nations Literacy Decade. Thinking about adult literacy in a global context was ongoing and increasingly sophisticated. Improved adult literacy, according to UNESCO research, could strengthen democracy. They recognised that literacy was complex:

There is no single notion of literacy as a skill which people possess or not, but multiple literacies. We all engage in both oral and written practices and in learning new literacies at different stages of our lives ... The concept of 'situated literacies' draws attention to how the social, cultural and political context shapes the ways in which people acquire and use literacy (UNESCO, 2008:17).

This statement acknowledges the insights of the social practice approach and the importance of context in literacy education. The arguments, however, did not convince all governments and funders. In a statement of the UNESCO position after the literacy decade ended, Aaron Benavot, Director of EFA monitoring emphasised that, 'Future progress in literacy depends ... on meaningful and contextualised literacy work gaining visibility, support and vitality' (Benavot, 2015:291). In the same paper he criticised studies published by OECD which 'assume literacy to be a set of technical or functional skills to be measured on universal scales' (ibid.:276).

New Literacy Studies writers argued against the 'technical' measurement of literacy learning (Street, 2001). Using Gee's concept of 'new work orders' (Gee et al., 1996), Street analysed the 'total quality management' (TQM) approach. TQM, he said, reduced education to 'unitised notions of measurement and of quality' (ibid., 2001:14). The combination of an individual deficit-based idea of lifelong learning and a commitment to literacy as a set of 'autonomous skills' which could be objectively measured, led governments and funders to demand standard tests, levels and outcomes in return for investment in adult literacy education, despite the message of UNESCO and the criticism of academics.

OECD ideas on human capital were significant in defining English policy on adult literacy education. *The Well-being of Nations* (OECD, 2001) considered 'the evidence on human capital'. In a section headed 'What do we mean by human

capital?' the authors emphasise the individual nature of their concept of human capital: 'Unlike physical capital, human capital is embodied in individuals.' They list 'the personal attributes relevant to human capital' starting with:

Communications (including foreign language competence) in each of the items directly below:

Listening

Speaking

Reading

Writing (ibid., 2001:19)

The OECD makes an argument for literacy as a primary element of the human capital which resides in individuals and can contribute to the 'economic success of nations'. This understanding informed the rationale behind the Skills-for-Life initiative in England.

Challenges to the OECD notion of literacy education can be explored in terms of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties which is the focus of this investigation. Dee et al. looked at the purpose and processes of adult education from the point of view of the student with learning difficulties. They did not deny the value of learning 'basic' skills, but they understood how much more was involved:

As well as developing skills that have immediate and practical application, the role of education is to enable learners to articulate and act on their ambitions, and indeed appreciate their personal agency in shaping their own identities. Providing opportunities is necessary but not sufficient. Learners also require support in developing skills and capacities to take advantage of the opportunities available to them (Dee et al., 2006:42).

This expansive statement developed the idea of empowerment and highlighted the importance of student agency. In this quote from their work there is an element too of Sen's theory of 'capability', emphasising the importance of context and appropriate

support. It also underlined the link between agency and identity which has been part of the debate about the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties throughout this investigation. It demonstrates the gap between the OECD message and the idea of adult literacy education as social practice.

In England discussions of 'citizenship' were a way to look again at the purposes of adult education in the 2000s. Citizenship became a compulsory part of the school curriculum in England from 2002. The idea that citizenship and participation were important to a cohesive society informed the 'social inclusion' element of the Skills-for-Life agenda. The OECD vision of lifelong learning saw no conflict between a neo-liberal argument for the individual to take responsibility, and building a socially cohesive democratic community (Biesta, 2013). It was a live issue for people debating lifelong education. Coffield suggested that lifelong learning was about 'social control' (Coffield, 1999). Hamilton made the same point in her investigation of the use of individualised learning plans (ILPs) in adult literacy education (Hamilton, 2009) and in the analysis of 'functional literacy' policies (Burgess & Hamilton, 2011). The NIACE annual conference of 2002 had the title *Citizenship Education: For social change or social control?* Ian Martin told the NIACE audience that:

We keep getting it wrong because we keep trying to talk about lifelong learning in educational rather than political terms (Martin, 2003:567).

Martin debated what adult education could do and decided that agency was crucial:

Real citizenship reflects and expresses people's sense of agency, ie their willingness and capacity to act politically. Developing agency is also the central purpose of adult education (ibid., 2003:575).

Ideas of agency, citizenship and identity were clearly still potent elements in the ongoing debate about the purpose of adult education. Dee's work showed how the argument about agency has special significance for people with learning difficulties (Dee et al., 2006). NIACE focused on education for people with learning difficulties because the institute was concerned about 'relationships between power and education, power and learning ... for people who are most marginalised' (Tuckett, 2019). The initial rationale for the Skills-for-Life initiative showed that the government in England believed that improving adult literacy could benefit society and the economy.

Legislation, government policy and official reports

This section will look at the Skills-for-Life initiative for adult literacy education launched in 2001, and also at *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Working Group, 2000) published in 2000, which was the supplementary report focused on provision for students with learning difficulties. Both responded to the Moser Report, but they were quite different in form and impact. Skills-for-Life was a major investment and reorganisation programme, while *Freedom to Learn* was a little-remarked advisory document. Other government actions which were factors in the relationship included the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) in 2001 and the Health-led White Paper, *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001), which set out plans to give people with learning difficulties more influence in planning their lives.

Moser's report opened an opportunity to bring adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties together. The *Freedom to Learn* paper was subtitled: *Basic skills for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*, and was published before the launch of Skills-for-Life. It was the adjunct which Moser

had called for. Its recommendations were presented as advice to those implementing the government strategy. In the end its recommendations were not in line with the Skills-for-Life programme and the report has been mostly overlooked. The paper, for instance, is not mentioned in Hamilton and Hillier's critical history of adult literacy education at the time (2006) or in contemporary collections such as *Powerful Literacies* (Crowther, Hamilton & Tett, eds., 2001) or RaPAL's 2005 *Insights from Research and Practice* (Herrington & Kendall, eds., 2005). Most of my interviewees did not refer to it. It is referenced only in publications dealing specifically with education for people with learning difficulties such as the research report *Being, Having and Doing* (Dee et al., 2006), and 'Literacy Learning for Adults with Global Learning Difficulties', written as part of *Teaching Adult Literacy* (Duncan, 2010).

Freedom to Learn was presented in two parts: the first section was about general principles, and the second focused on specific student groups. It was not framed as a negative attack or challenge, but it did elaborate a new vision. The initial point was the acceptance of all the key recommendations of the strategy outlined by Moser. The report went on to consider 'the particular needs of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who wish or need to improve their basic skills' (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000:4). The idea of 'choice' is set alongside 'need' from the opening.

The ethos was one of 'rights'. This approach led the group to list 'entitlement for all learners' as the first recommendation, and then to itemise what that entailed. They included better teacher training, appropriate equipment and accommodation, plus accessible teaching, promotional and guidance material. These were factors previously highlighted by the Tomlinson Report of 1996. Their concept of entitlement went further and the paper went on to more radical territory. It talked about extending

the basic skills curriculum to 'meet the needs of those adults who communicate in non-standard ways' and 'for whom the proposed standards are too high' (ibid., 2000: 4). These proposals were then worked out in detail.

The proposals built on the whole history of the relationship so far and set out a radical new agenda. The recommendations rested on a commitment to choice, entitlement, access and flexibility. Unlike the FEFC model driven by a funding system, the writers of *Freedom to Learn* envisaged a programme built to accommodate diversity and difference where students 'must have more individual attention and be given longer to reach their goals' (ibid., 2000:23).

The document embraced both 'rights' and 'needs'. This is evident in the treatment of the vexed question of the assessment of needs. *Freedom to Learn* saw no contradiction in advocating the requirement for assessment, alongside the doctrine of rights and entitlement. Moser's report recommended a new right to assessment: 'Individuals with basic skills problems should be entitled to free confidential assessment' (Moser, 1999:11). The term 'basic skills problems' marks an individual deficit point of view which is not the tone of *Freedom to Learn*. Moser's wording places the onus on the person who 'suffers' the deficit to seek assessment. *Freedom to Learn* reported, however, that the fundamental importance of assessment reflected the view of teachers:

Teachers and other professionals want assessment tools in which they can be confident, which provide sufficient information to enable them to draw up a teaching programme to meet the learning needs of the individual and to identify the resources required to ensure that learning is successful (ibid., 2000:10).

In this they echoed the 1998 FEFC inspection report. It is perhaps not surprising to read this in light of the emphasis on assessment under the FEFC funding and

inspection regime. Practitioners who had begun their teaching careers in the FEFC years or came into the Skills-for-Life programme as new recruits would have relied on assessments in a way that people who had been teaching since the 1970s or 1980s did not. As evidence of this I was struck by the fact that 'CD' and 'QR', as practitioners in Skills-for-Life, talked about students in terms of their 'levels'. 'CD' told me that colleges needed to know that, 'You might have so many Entry 2s and so many Entry 3s before, but now they will be lucky if they get Entry 1s,' because of new regulations (CD, 2017). 'QR', telling me about a course called 'Skills for Work', explained, 'there was initial assessment processes, and ... we did have some students do the course who probably were Level 1, maybe Level 2, but had other needs' (QR, 2017). This Skills-for-Life vocabulary, I suggest, undermined a student-centred approach. Indeed, 'student-centred' took on a new meaning, which related to class management rather than to a partnership concept of curriculum planning.

Freedom to Learn drew on themes identified by responses from student groups and staff. Section Two considered the issues raised by basic skills education for specific student groups. One sub-section (pp. 21–24) was devoted to work with people with learning difficulties. A clear and positive demand was reported from the students: 'Learners wanted more classes, more choice, better access and clearer information' (ibid.:23). The report noted that there were 1.2 million adults in the UK with learning difficulties, and that their acquisition of basic skills might be impacted by their level of 'cognitive ability', and sometimes by an additional sensory or physical impairment. The perspective taken included the whole range of learning difficulties, seeking to broaden access and entitlement. The comprehensive interpretation of basic skills revealed a wide vision of their task:

In addition to literacy and numeracy, the basic skills requirements for people with learning difficulties should include the essential skills for everyday living,

learning to learn, communication skills including IT skills, creative skills to promote self-expression, and confidence-building skills (ibid.:22).

This summary of the purposes of adult literacy and numeracy education does not highlight employability or a contribution to the national economy. It reflects a view of adult literacy or basic skills education which is nearer to the comprehensive and student-centred theory of 'communication' articulated by people who taught at City Lit in London in the 1980s, but not accepted by Wells and ALBSU at the time. It was derived from the teachers and students and is a different message from that presented by the government's Skills-for-Life document published the following year.

The report then set out the barriers identified by learners and workers in relation to adult literacy education and people with learning difficulties. It mentioned transport, physical access, the need for flexible support and the complexities of inter-agency funding. But the authors also emphasised more attitudinal aspects such as the low expectations of tutors and others, and the need for research into learning processes for this group. Low status is a recurring theme. It was linked to the poor quality and inconsistent nature of provision. The points raised by Warnock (1978) and Tomlinson (1996) were still present.

Self-advocacy and student choice were set out as objectives, concentrating on the demand that students should make their own free choice to study and be involved in discussing aims:

People with learning difficulties should choose to participate in basic skills, rather than be forced to attend by staff or carers (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000:24).

And:

Each student must be involved in deciding, with help as necessary, which skills to develop ... The funding structure should support forms of flexible

delivery and allow providers to use imaginative approaches that suit students' learning requirements (ibid.:23).

It is a purposeful but limited view of agency, tailored to suit the moment. The recommendations noted the lack of 'resources which are appropriate, relevant to students' lives' (ibid.:23) and included the proposal that 'where learning outcomes are below the level of national standards they should be referenced to individual goals' (ibid.:22). They did not suggest a Freirean-style 'partnership' approach. The document did not challenge power relationships in the classroom. The importance of context for students was recognised, but the full impact of the idea of literacy as social practice was not explored.

In *Freedom to Learn* they sought to push beyond existing funding and delivery procedures to secure access for the most disabled students, and to create new learning and assessment models. These are points which recalled Tomlinson's 1996 demand that the learning of the student should be the overriding principle. It was an ambitious agenda claiming a right for all students to benefit from the new adult literacy curriculum, but it does not challenge Moser's analysis. Finally, the report drew up a sort of manifesto for basic skills education for adults with learning difficulties. It was a full and itemised list of demands which included: entitlement for all 'regardless of ability'; student choice to attend or not; an inter-agency framework which included support and transport where necessary, plus outreach; a new definition of basic skills to include 'sign, symbol, gesture and methods of augmented communication'; more flexible ways of recognising achievement; curriculum development based on individual needs and certification through a portfolio system. They also called for extended staff training.

In effect *Freedom to Learn* was proposing a completely new approach. Rather than simply laying out paths by which the students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities might access the curriculum, the underlying idea was to redefine literacy as something way beyond reading and writing. The group recommended that 'a flexible and coherent curriculum at pre-entry level be developed to enable learners at this level to progress towards the entry-level curriculum', and that 'alternative ways of enabling learners to demonstrate achievement be developed' (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000:4). These suggestions were intended to change utterly the approach to teaching literacy and numeracy. The group interpreted literacy very broadly as 'communication', extending the concept of literacy to encompass non-verbal elements of communication such as eye direction or signalling.

A subtext of the *Freedom to Learn* agenda was the professionalisation of practitioners. Those involved wanted to bring the teachers who had been left out in the cold into the family of adult literacy practitioners. 'OP' confirmed that:

It was really the first formal training. Certainly the Pre-Entry Framework training. The sorts of people you were getting, you know, were tutors working with people with learning difficulties. Some of them quite profound ... It was the first time that money and resources and recognition had been given to people working in that area (OP, 2017).

One of the authors, Sally Faraday, had been part of the FEU team which drew up the 1987 paper *A Special Professionalism*. Merrilie Vaughan Huxley, Chair of the reporting group, had been Chief FEFC Inspector responsible for the critical inspectorate report of 1998 which had identified the part-time nature of basic skills teaching as an impediment to progress. The staff supporting the most challenging

learners had low status, and often little job security in FE colleges. *Freedom to Learn* implicitly challenged the conventional hierarchies in FE.

For 'OP', the approach outlined in *Freedom to Learn* was a breakthrough because it predicated a single system which could accommodate adult students with more profound learning difficulties. The Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy which emerged asked teachers, for example, to recognise and support first steps in communication such as a learner looking at objects, words, signs, symbols or images 'while listening to and following short verbal accounts which are of interest to the learner' (Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, Curriculum element: Reading, Milestone 6). Stretching the term 'reading' to this extent shows how the ideas might work in practice.

'OP', with a background in teaching adults with learning difficulties, celebrated the Pre-Entry Framework. It seemed to her and others that it marked a political triumph. They had finally made their voices heard:

We felt that it was very significant recognition and formalisation of a curriculum for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties ... The Milestones. That was really significant (OP, 2017).

The Milestones were designed as markers of progression and achievement. In the Framework document they are described as 'significant points ... that have relevance to assessing a learner's attainment' (DfES/LSDA, 2002:9). This careful wording specifically avoided using the terms 'levels' or 'targets', but these subtleties were often lost in practice, particularly as the layout of the framework mirrored that of the core curriculum documents developed for Skills-for-Life.

The Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework was suggesting a different way of working, requiring confidence and particular skills. Some concepts linked to school practice and related more to developmental goals than to reading and writing

achievements. The demands on adult literacy teachers were unprecedented and challenging but should have been within their capabilities and understanding according to the *Freedom to Learn* perspective. 'OP' told me that teachers felt uncertain about it:

The problem was that people started using it as a curriculum, and not a framework. And not thinking about it ... So if you didn't have the confidence to say, 'This is a suggestion; I know what people want, I know what people are interested in, I know what their skills are, and we can embed this' ...I suppose that's one of the things around the Pre-Entry Curriculum framework that was a bit of a weakness ' (OP, 2017).

'OP' was articulating a reasoned position, and she knew from her own experience that skilled student-centred teachers could rise to the challenge. There was, however, some foundation for the unease of many adult literacy education practitioners. The background thinking which informed the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework had elements of behaviourism, reflecting 'special' education in schools. Work with non-verbal pupils might depend on observing performance to measure attainment. It was nearer to the 'competence-based' practice of vocational education. But it was an approach that did not sit easily with many adult literacy teachers, used to a discursive mode. And, as observed, there had been little motivation to understand the development of education for people with learning difficulties.

Explaining the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, 'OP' told me:

It was drawing on the P-scales from schools, I think. And making it more relevant for adults ... P-scales in education, as I understand it, are incremental steps in progression in learning for children (ibid., 2017).

'ST', who worked with Lesley Dee on the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, thought that the Milestones were not actually based on the school P-scales: 'Not really... but they did link. And they followed on' (ST, 2017).

Most practitioners in adult and further education would not have been familiar with this background. As part of the 'Guidance on using the curriculum framework' (DfES/LSDA, 2002:7) the authors listed the other publications which had been considered in writing the framework. They included the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy, and the new core curricula based upon them, and also the guidelines for pupils with learning difficulties published by DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), *Supporting the Target Setting Process (Descriptions of Performance for Mathematics and English)* 'known as the P-scales'. The word 'performance' is a clue to a behaviourist approach. The objective behind the framework and milestones mechanism was to provide a new and seamless comprehensive system for students to progress from school into further education:

The curriculum framework is set out as a single framework for development. It includes all learners and starts from the earliest stages of development in communication and number, forming a continuum through to Entry 1 of the Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy core curricula (ibid., 2002:8).

Another point of view perceived that the distinction which made adult literacy education different from school and 'special' education had been lost. Many teachers of adult literacy, while appreciating that the achievements identified by the Milestones could mark learning, were anxious about working with students with such substantial learning difficulties. They felt out of their depth, and uneasy about the sort of learning assessments that were involved. 'AB', who had worked as a literacy teacher and organiser, and then trained teachers said to me:

The Pre-Entry Curriculum? I felt it was very problematic. Partly because I had never had students at that level ... Then I felt very uncomfortable with the codifying of it all, and ... lots of the things seemed like things that you might do anyway if you were trying to help someone to talk. In a way what it most

reminded me of was being a parent with a small child who was learning to talk. It felt very uncomfortable ... I am not sure if there were not rather a lot of parallels with schools (AB, 2017).

It is evident from the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework itself and the accounts of people involved that it was a new and unsettling approach.

The concrete result of the *Freedom to Learn* report was a composite project known as 'Basil' (Basic Skills for Inclusive Learning). The title consciously quoted Tomlinson's 1996 FEFC Report, demonstrating the philosophical link. It encompassed the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework; *Access for All*, which was a big training programme; A Basic Skills for Adults with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Resource Pack to support staff development; a set of ten booklets written by learners called *Living Our Lives*; a Self-advocacy Action Pack; and a report of good practice in 'community-based basic skills for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities' with the title *Yesterday I Never Stopped Writing*. Two CD-ROMS were also produced providing 'practical literacy activities' for learners at entry level. It was an impressive outcome. All of this was accomplished between September 2000 and March 2001. The memories of those involved were equivocal.

One reason for the mixed feelings of those who worked on the 'Basil' programme could have been the difficulty of incorporating the strong views of all the agencies and experts involved, and the balancing act over policy and direction. Many experts and agendas were involved. 'Basil' was funded by the government and managed by a consortium jointly led by the Learning and Skills Development Association (LSDA) and NIACE. The partners comprised a range of organisations, some of which had been part of the *Freedom to Learn* team. They were: the Basic Skills Agency; Skill; the Language and Literacy Unit; Birmingham Rathbone; the Mental Health Foundation including the Foundation for People with Learning

Disabilities; the University for Industry; and the training company Cambridge Training and Development (CTAD). What they all recalled was that it was big and unwieldy. It was also revolutionary. A member of NIACE remembered that Susan Pember, Director of the new ABSSU, asked for help:

Just run this by me, because it is a lot of money. Why do we need to have a special amount of money for the development of literacy work and materials for people with learning difficulties? Because I am about to go and ask the Minister for the cash (EF, 2017).

The people involved in writing and producing these materials were very experienced. They knew that it was a major opportunity, and they were anxious to achieve as much as possible of the *Freedom to Learn* proposal. It was done under pressure in terms of time and of political exigency. 'EF' was one of the authors of *Access for All*. His thoughts in retrospect resonate with the findings reported by Dennis (Dennis, 2010). He was clear that their aims and ambitions went beyond literacy and numeracy to promote inclusion as a wider principle:

It was a massive programme with a huge pack and lots and lots of materials and development money ... When I look back at it now, what we were doing was squeezing the curriculum to fit the money, to fit what we wanted, because we didn't have any other development way. We probably wouldn't have got so much developed, but it did kind of twist out of shape the curriculum ... If you look at the materials you will see how they are twisted out of shape, but they aren't actually trying to teach literacy and numeracy. They are trying to teach lots of other things under the guise ... (EF, 2017)

'MN' too was involved:

Access for All ... was really looking at ways to make the regular curriculum more accessible. It became an incredibly long document, and I am not sure ... but apparently people still use it ... I suppose the *Access for All* document was trying to make it all inclusive. I think it was, but how useful [?].... (MN, 2017).

As someone who played a small part myself, as a trainer on the *Access for All* programme, I recognise the confusions and hesitations that interviewees voiced. It was too long (328 pages in all) and the approach was diffused because the curriculum was not the central focus. Like *Freedom to Learn* it was trying to bring together a huge amount of experience and hope for improvements in post-school education for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The overarching message was that good teaching practice supported inclusion for all learners. Teachers attending were appreciative of useful materials and practical suggestions. They also made purposeful use of the chance to discuss the issues and share their own experiences. Feedback was generally good. The 'Basil' programme was a significant achievement in terms of facilitating a positive relationship between adult literacy provision and education for adults with learning difficulties, but it did not mark a fundamental philosophical shift.

In 2006 there was a follow-up to the 'Basil' programme. It demonstrated how the all-inclusive vision outlined by *Freedom to Learn* had shrunk to become a distinctly 'special needs' project. A guidance pack, *Person-centred Approaches and Adults with Learning Difficulties* (DfES, 2006), was published under the Skills-for-Life banner. The intention was to support practitioners who were facing problems in implementing the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, and to echo the approach advanced in the 2001 White Paper, *Valuing People*. The introduction stated that:

The guidance documents have been developed primarily as a response to requests from those in the field that more guidance is needed on working with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (DfES, 2006: ix)

The guidance was produced as part of a programme called Learning for Living and was specifically targeted at 'practitioners who are working with people who experience a range of difficulties in learning' (DfES, 2006:1). Dee, who worked on

the pack, described a sort of counter-argument which extended the notion of ‘adults with learning difficulties’ to include categories such as prisoners and family-learning (Dee, 2019). Whereas *Access for All* had been planned to support inclusive practice in literacy and numeracy teaching in colleges and adult education provision generally, the Learning for Living materials were definitely ‘special’. The brave new world planned by the writers of *Freedom to Learn* had not materialised.

Skills-for-Life, launched in 2001, was also based on Moser’s report, *A Fresh Start* (1999). It was a major programme of government-funded adult literacy and numeracy education which changed the world of students and practitioners in the field. It had in a sense been demanded by campaigners since the 1970s, but it was a top-down initiative driven by policy, costing large sums of money and linked to parallel developments in schools. Levels and standards were at the heart of the plan. The main motivation was economic, and Moser’s report provided the justification. *A Fresh Start* clearly claimed that the economy would benefit from a government-driven strategy on basic skills:

Hard economic issues are involved. Improving their basic skills can enable people to earn more, to spend more, to help the economy to grow faster. The benefits to industry and the economy may be hard to calculate, but they must be vast (Moser, 1999:3).

Moser’s report quotes BSA research suggesting that 19 per cent of adults had ‘weak literacy skills’, with about 6 per cent of the ‘adult working population’ having ‘very low’ literacy skills (ibid., 1999:16). The launch document for Skills-for-Life chose more sensational language:

A shocking 7 million adults in England cannot read and write at the level we would expect of an eleven-year-old. Even more have problems with numbers. The cost to the country as a whole could be as high as £10 billion a year (Blunkett, 2001:2).

The government needed to justify the big investment. The figures were questionable, and it might be noted that eleven-year-olds were considered ready for secondary schooling in England, so definitely competent readers. There are echoes of the alarmist message of 1980s campaigners relating standards in literacy to standards in life.

Skills-for-Life established a completely new regime for adult literacy and numeracy education. Moser was clear that the programme for adult literacy and numeracy was intended to complement the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy launched in schools. The initiative included national standards and targets, a core curriculum, national tests, plus training for teachers and a national research body. Skills-for-Life also built on the findings and experience of the FEFC decade, imposing central control.

Skills-for-Life had an overt social inclusion agenda. Moser was sure that 'improved basic skills can help towards social inclusion and cohesion' (Moser, 1999:24). 'Our mission,' wrote David Blunkett in his introduction to the launch document, 'is to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first-century society' (Blunkett, 2001:2). The Skills-for-Life document published by the DfEE was explicit:

We know from existing research that literacy and numeracy difficulties are more common among certain groups. At least a third of unemployed people, for example, have literacy skills at no more than Level 1 – the level we expect of an 11-year-old. And over a third of people with poor literacy and numeracy are in receipt of social security benefits (excluding pensions and child benefit), compared with fewer than one in ten of those with better skills (DfEE, 2001:11).

Priority groups were identified, 'so that we can target and provide resources to those most in need'. They included the unemployed, the homeless, benefit claimants,

refugees and 'people living in disadvantaged communities' (ibid., 2001:14). People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities came under the heading of 'unemployed people and benefit claimants' in the list. The message is that people should be working and not claiming benefits. 'People with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are more than twice as likely to be unqualified or unemployed as their peers' (ibid., 2001:19). The categories virtually replicated those listed by Russell in 1973, but this time the pressure was on individuals. Russell's ideal of 'quality of life' for all was replaced by the objective of 'a fair and prosperous society' (ibid., 2001:9). The personal stories detailed in the strategy document were clearly intended to highlight success and transformation, illustrating a culture of empowerment, but while Moser had called for an entitlement to assessment, guidance and provision, the language of Skills-for-Life was more punishing. It included the suggestion of imposing duties of assessment of 'needs' on agencies such as Job Centres and prisons 'and in certain cases on the individuals themselves' (ibid., 2001:11). The definition of success was employment in most cases. The vocabulary of 'needs' and 'targets' was not respectful of choice or flexibility. It was not rights-based or student-centred and it focused on assessments and outcomes and not on process. Skills-for-Life was a hugely ambitious initiative but the imperatives of meeting targets in terms of numbers enrolled and success rates, did not ultimately allow for the time and costs involved in work with students with learning difficulties, as suggested by *Freedom to Learn*. Unlike *A Right to Read*, however, Skills-for-Life took an inclusive view. Adults with disabilities and/or learning difficulties were an acknowledged part of the mission, and not in principle relegated to 'special' provision. This was a change which can be seen in all post-Skills-for-Life thinking about adult literacy policy and practice. But there was a fault-line between the economic and social agendas wrapped into Skills-for-

Life, which is particularly evident in focusing on the relationship between adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties.

Practitioners were embroiled in the same dilemma. When Skills-for-Life was introduced, there were practitioners who welcomed some of the new thinking as well as the new funding. Looking back, 'MN', who had worked as a literacy teacher in adult education and then with people with learning difficulties in FE, told me in 2017:

I think there were ways we repeated things. We did the same thing over and over again. We didn't actually keep records. We didn't measure how people were progressing ... We kept people too long. I am sure there were a lot of negatives (MN, 2017).

She went on, however, to highlight the positive element which was the student-centred practice which she defined as: 'You absolutely started from where somebody was' (ibid., 2017). She knew that opportunities to include and support students with learning difficulties had been lost.

Contemporary research reinforced her perception. In a critical article Yvon Appleby and Anne-Marie Bathmaker argued that the 'new skills agenda' actually created 'new sites of inequality'. They quoted a 2004 National Audit Office report which indicated that at least 50 per cent of Skills-for-Life targets were achieved by 16–19-year-old learners, leaving older and more vulnerable students increasingly excluded from the figures. Using a distinction between a 'knowledge-based economy' and a 'knowledge-based society' they argued that a two-tier system was emerging, which valued those who might enter the 'knowledge-based economy' over people who might aspire to join the 'knowledge-based society'. In a conclusion which has particular significance for people with learning difficulties they argued that in the pursuit of targets the LSC was forced to remove funding from less 'productive'

students. Their review of the evidence found that there were decreasing opportunities in adult learning outside the FE colleges:

Where learners need the support of community provision or do not fit the funding criteria, they may find it more difficult to access the learning they want. Such learners may find themselves not only excluded from the high-skilled knowledge economy, but increasingly denied the opportunities of making the first steps towards inclusion in the knowledge society (Appleby & Bathmaker, 2006:714).

This analysis was confirmed in a report on the impact of policy on post-compulsory education by Coffield et al. published under the auspices of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). They found that:

For FE colleges and ALC (Adult Community Learning) providers, it is becoming increasingly difficult to protect ... valuable learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (Coffield et al., 2008:23).

The findings suggest that the implementation of Skills-for-Life in practice undermined the policy of inclusion embraced in theory.

In 2006, another report, the Leitch Report, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy-World Class Skills* (Leitch, 2006), hardened the government's commitment to the view that literacy and numeracy education were integral to a major programme necessary to improve achievement in the skills the nation needed to keep up in the global economy. A 2005 discussion paper produced by the Learning and Skills Development Association (LSDA) circulated the interim findings of Leitch's review (LSDA, 2005). The timing of the pre-report was to allow the Treasury to quote Leitch's findings in the Budget of 2005. Literacy had become part of the political agenda. The language had shifted too from Moser's subtitle of *Improving Literacy and Numeracy* to subsume literacy and numeracy into the shorthand notion of 'skills'.

As noted above, the shift in vocabulary from education to 'skills' signalled commitment to the achievement of standard 'levels'. This approach fitted the schools model, followed on where the FEFC had led and was the logical development of accepting the individualisation and quantification promoted by the OECD in terms of adult education. The emphasis on individual levels of achievement naturally led to targets for students, teachers and managers. The LSC published a statement of priorities in response to the Leitch Report. Under the heading *Adult Skills* the document declared, 'We will aim to improve the skills of the population, as a step towards ensuring a world-class skills base by 2020' (Learning and Skills Council, 2006:7). It went on to list a series of 'delivery targets for 2020' which included level-specific items including the aim for more than 90 per cent of adults to be qualified at Level 2. It might be argued that this was more 'social control' than educational aspiration.

Alan Wells was scornful of the target-driven culture of the 2000s, which he thought undermined the credibility of adult literacy education in the quest for successful outcomes. He explained his view to me in 2019:

They started defining the target group as people who did not have GCSE Grade A–C. That increased the group to 26 million, which was an unbelievable figure. It is just not a believable figure to anybody ... What they tried to do was anybody who did not have A–C they gave them a test, a kind of exam. They [the students] had no idea why they had taken it. If they passed it, then they [the providers] could claim those figures as a success (Wells, 2019).

Wells was referring to the national tests in literacy and numeracy, which allowed providers to claim money on proof of a 'pass'. This race for statistical 'success' undermined ideas of adult literacy education being specifically adult-oriented and different from school-based provision.

There were other government-led factors which were significant to the relationship. In terms of shaping adult education provision at the beginning of the 2000s the principal legislative step taken by government was the Learning and Skills Act (LSC Act) of 2000. The LSC replaced the FEFC and 47 regional LSCs took the place of 72 quasi-independent TECs. Central government took control, and the distanced 'business' vocabulary of FEFC featuring 'customers' and 'clients' was replaced by what Sally Tomlinson described as the 'language and practice of managerialism, of accountability, inspection, testing and targets' (Tomlinson, 2005:3). The new arrangements abandoned the word 'education' and identified all post-school provision outside HE as either part of the skills-based vocational system or the residual 'leisure learning' sector left with LEAs. In effect the local LSCs became the commissioning and the monitoring bodies for adult literacy education and the programmes run by colleges for people with learning difficulties. Tomlinson stated that the 'model for post-16 education was one of top-down, enforced change, professional disempowerment and heavy inspections' (ibid., 2005:148). It chimes with Street's analysis of 'total quality management' (Street, 2001). She was scathing about the lip service paid to inclusion:

Although a rhetoric of inclusion of disabled people and those with special needs figured in papers on post-16 provision, much of it taken from the 1996 FEFC Report, *Inclusive Learning*, the problems remained of ensuring that these groups had equal chances of education, training, employment or adequate living allowances if work was not a possibility (Tomlinson, 2005:145).

Tomlinson's observations reflected the warnings articulated by Hamilton in 1998, when she described a two-tier service in adult literacy which relegated non-vocational provision to second-class status. The schism she identified could be seen

as a barrier to the rights of adults with learning difficulties to access adult literacy education.

There was a contradiction within official policy. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) was passed in 2001. The move reflected the commitment made by the Labour government to adopt the 1994 UNESCO statement on inclusive education. It was the legislation which finally extended the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 (DDA) into education. As in employment and other services it became illegal for providers of education to discriminate on the grounds of disability. The Act also introduced a Code of Practice designed to categorise levels of support in schools. In this way it wrote into law the right of people with learning difficulties to education and at the same time strengthened the school system based on assessment of need. It was not the end of the debates. In 2004 the government published a new SEN strategy *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES,2004) while in 2005 Mary Warnock (now Baroness Warnock) called for a new review (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2006). Questions of funding and parental choice have continued to make special education a battlefield.

Meanwhile a long-awaited White Paper addressed questions of agency in relation to people with learning difficulties, and NIACE saw the opportunity to drive on this agenda. *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001) was intended to reform the process of planning provision for people with learning difficulties. Its central message was that the person whose life was being discussed should be part of the discussion. It was in part a response to the growth of the self-advocacy movement. A new structure of regional Learning Disability Partnership Boards (LDPBs) was envisaged which would facilitate the 'person-centred' planning process. NIACE produced a briefing paper (2003) for these boards on the role education could play in contributing to the aims

articulated in *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001). Yola Jacobsen of NIACE worked as a special advisor on post-16 education to the Valuing People Support Team in the Department of Health. She was well placed to pursue in practice and theory the ideas of 'choice and empowerment' which Sutcliffe had identified as integral to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties.

NIACE's briefing paper for LDPBs explained that the LSC was obliged to 'have regard to the needs of people with learning difficulties' (LSC Act, Section 13), and to 'promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled people' (LSC Act, Section 14). But it also stated that:

There can be a contradiction ... when an emphasis on all learners achieving recognised qualifications results in the exclusion of learners with learning difficulties who cannot achieve these standards' (NIACE, 2003:2.3).

Freedom to Learn had proposed an alternative universal model. But the official funding system prescribed a split between 'vocational' education provided by the LSC and 'leisure learning' funded by LEAs. Subjects such as creative writing, art or drama were defined as 'non-vocational' despite being central to the idea of adult literacy or basic skills education which supported 'communication' or 'self-expression' in the *Freedom to Learn* vision. The confusions outlined by Tomlinson were laid bare. Provision for adult students with learning difficulties was divided between LSC and LEA funding mechanisms and had no clear vision. The briefing told potential members of LDPBs that in relation to work with people with learning difficulties, 'distinctions between provision delivered by further education colleges and that delivered by adult and community education can be blurred,' and that 'provision varies from one LEA to another with some areas providing considerable high-quality provision and others very little' (ibid., 2003:1.3). The authors pointed out that adults with learning difficulties 'can get on a seemingly endless conveyor belt

which might include periods in a Day Centre, repeating educational programmes or moving from course to course without ever achieving a real outcome' (ibid., 2003: 2.2). Concepts of choice and empowerment had been abandoned and *Freedom to Learn* had not won the arguments.

The role of the agencies

The changes in legislation and administration which fundamentally re-ordered adult literacy education between 2000 and 2010 were reflected in new roles for the agencies involved. After 2001 the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) lost its leading role. The newly created Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) within the DfES oversaw the policy and implementation of Skills-for-Life. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) replaced the FEFC as the central funding body. The LSC inherited the legal role and duties of the FEFC, including that of 'having regard to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. In terms of FE and vocational training local LSCs replaced the TECs, continuing the principle of involving local employers and answering local needs. The structure was slimmed down, but often they were the same people in the same buildings. They also administered funding, doing away with the fearful Schedule 2, but still operating a system based on outcomes and qualifications. ABSSU was able to direct initial funding and allocate resources to a range of agencies until 2004, when the unit was wound down and the LSC left in control. There were other indications of how adult literacy education was losing its distinctive identity in the new regime. The BSA was no longer funded after 2007, and the Adult Learning Inspectorate was also disbanded. NIACE continued to focus on the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, but political pressure as expressed in the Leitch Report of 2006

ensured that mainstream government funding was directed to a skills-oriented adult education programme with the single purpose of employability. In 2009 the LSC funded the Little Report, *Learning for Work: Employability and Adults with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*, and the government produced *Valuing Employment Now*, building on the *Valuing People* strategy of 2001. It was clear that employability was the only viable future for education provision for adults with learning difficulties.

ABSSU was the main new factor in the relationship after 2001, but work with students with learning difficulties was, as previously, not high on the new body's agenda. The unit was headed by Susan Pember, a former FE College principal. Wells, head of the BSA, was understandably critical. He felt that the campaigning spirit of adult literacy education was compromised:

Once, in a sense, the state institutions ... got hold of it, they wanted to drive the whole thing into things that fitted state institutions ... The problem with colleges is that they are 16–18 years institutions, fundamentally. So actually you were not likely to attract a lot of adults to those kind of places (Wells, 2019).

It could, however, be argued that Wells himself had played a part in what he called the 'domestication' of adult literacy education, as he had tried to preserve good relationships with the 1980s governments. Under his leadership ALBSU had pursued a path leading to vocationalism, in contrast, for instance, with the Scottish government's commitment to a social practice approach. Liz Lawson was recruited to the ABSSU in 2001 as Team Leader for Standards, Curricula and Assessment. She saw the positive side of the new agency, telling me that the unit valued real expertise:

In the Department they actually recruited a 50/50 mix of civil servants, who obviously didn't have any front-line experience, no knowledge really about literacy and numeracy and the other topics. But then a whole team of us was

brought in from the outside. And most people had an expertise. So – this was an amazing thing – as we developed the policy and the curriculum documents, there was a person, an expert placed in each of the English counties, and we would all come back together every fortnight ... so there was a really good debate ... And also we worked very closely with specialists (Lawson, 2019).

When I interviewed Lawson, she told me that she was not particularly knowledgeable about work with students with learning difficulties. She had to be reminded of the existence of the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, which was part of her brief. But she was keen to clarify that the ABSSU team made it a principle to work with specialists. She described how the unit consulted experts in the field, and how implementing Skills-for-Life felt like an evolution:

We used to have regular meetings, and we worked on it, and we argued about things. I mean in the way that good people who are friends do. We would tussle over it ... Because Skills-for-Life was trying things out (ibid., 2019).

Lawson related how she and Pember agreed that, 'Of course, you have got to have standards' (ibid., 2019). I took this to mean that she accepted the Skills-for-Life framework of levels and achievement measures. Lawson had worked at a London-wide level, and her experience convinced her that standards needed to be universal, recognised across education and beyond. It was an argument which was supported by FEFC findings, but the *Freedom to Learn* document had called for more flexibility to accommodate 'learning outcomes ... below the level of the national standards' (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Working Group, 2000:23). This was not the official line.

Thinking of the work of ABSSU, Lawson told me that Skills-for-Life was not just geared to employment:

Skills-for-Life aimed to cover both people who wanted it in order to lead a life, you know, basically go to the doctor, take their children to school, all that kind of stuff, and for those who ... wanted to, to give them the skills to get employment (ibid., 2019).

She recognised too how political pressure had changed the scene. She understood the concepts of citizenship and social inclusion and stated that they were 'absolutely definitely' part of the project, but that 'over the years this whole topic has become more and more oriented to getting work' (ibid., 2019). Her views reflected those of other practitioners and managers who had welcomed the energy and investment of Skills-for-Life and been disappointed by the increasingly narrow aims adopted. Meanwhile Wells and Lawson agreed that Skills-for-Life 'got millions and millions of pounds'. It was a huge investment and the government was anxious to see results. Lawson also told me that the ABSSU project team had been dissolved by the time she left in 2004. This meant that the LSC was in charge, and the development and consultation period was over.

Another aspect of independence was also short-lived. On the demise of FEFC a new inspection body, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was created. Lawson was full of praise for ALI:

They were wonderful inspectors ... they understood what adult education was. They were good people. They really did understand what they were looking at. And also what was wonderful about the ALI was that it had an arm for improvement and an arm for inspection. So what they did was take back the information that they had seen in the inspection visits and feed it into the arm of the ALI that was bent on improving the system. And of course, you can feed it into teacher training (ibid., 2019).

ALI was subsumed into Ofsted in 2007. It was another indication that adult education, and the ethos it represented as something significantly different from FE or school education, was not valued.

In recounting the role of agencies and their own relationship to government Lawson, Tuckett and Wells, from their different perspectives, all spoke of the importance of having the minister's ear. Tuckett described a relationship of trust and respect:

A huge amount of active interchange, a positive relationship with government ... And really by the late 2000s we had a compact with government, where they recognised that their policy was helped and improved by our critiquing it ... It meant that once they decided what they were going to do, even if it was really what we didn't want them to do, we would say, 'OK, then we will help you to minimise difficulties for adults in the implementation of that.' That is, we would still represent adult learners' interests ... We argued the case for learners (Tuckett, 2019).

The constructive approach outlined by Tuckett allowed NIACE to maintain an independent line and to take government funding. 'Basil', for instance, was a large management job, spending a lot of government money and balancing the voices of a range of outspoken bodies.

NIACE published studies which gave prominence to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties. The agency made the relationship a mainstream and respectable subject in a deliberate way.

The Skills-for-Life approach, *Freedom to Learn* and SENDA all contributed something to this new status. '*Testing, Testing...*' for instance was subtitled a *Policy Discussion Paper on Assessment in Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy*. In the introduction Tuckett wrote:

When the Skills-for-Life policy was adopted NIACE welcomed it warmly ... The adoption of national standards, a clear curriculum framework, the provision of training programmes and the development of national tests have all contributed to improvements in the offer to learners ... Nevertheless it is essential that the tools we have command the maximum level of support among learners, teachers, awarding bodies and the wider public. To that end there must be a case for extending the assessment regime beyond reading to other dimensions of literacy, and to other modes of assessment too (ibid., 2004:2).

The flexible assessment regime envisaged by the writers of *Freedom to Learn* had not been implemented. Tuckett pointed out that the local LSCs had a wider brief than the TECs they replaced but were taking a narrow interpretation of the role based on 'identifying and achieving targets' as the TECs had done before them. In a critical paper Lavender showed how the pursuit of targets and levels established through Public Service Agreements which were tied to funding, compromised Moser's recommendations. The outcomes, he said, would particularly impact on people with learning difficulties:

It will underestimate by a very long way the real achievement and participation of learners such as those at pre-entry and entry level (Lavender, 2004:9).

In the same vein NIACE also published in 2004, *Achievement in Non-accredited Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties* (Maudslay & Nightingale, 2004). NIACE and LSDA led the research funded by the LSC into Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) in non-accredited learning. The whole RARPA project was intended to look more widely at accrediting learners' achievements. The separate NIACE report by Maudslay and Nightingale concentrated entirely on adults with learning difficulties because, they pointed out, 'the majority of adults with learning difficulties in post-compulsory education are attending further education

colleges either on specialist programmes or in ordinary classes' (ibid., 2004:5), and were not in the specialist colleges covered by the wider study. The clarification indicates the gap between government perception and reality in the area. The authors state the importance of 'finding ways of evaluating and measuring non-accredited learning'. They reinforce the narrative of low esteem:

These learners have often found it very hard to attain recognised, external measures of achievement and may see themselves as failing in terms of usually recognised benchmarks (ibid., 2004:9).

They explored the distinction, recognised in school-based studies, between teacher-led and learner-led assessment. Supporting the evidence presented by Derrick in *Testing, Testing...* Maudslay and Nightingale noted that, 'Effective formative assessment allows learners the space to talk about their learning and express their own learning goals' (ibid., 2004:34). They acknowledged that this would take more time and referenced QCA guidance for useful detail on planning a learner-centred programme within an existing curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2002). Their fine-grained approach showed that education practitioners, as noted before, were not familiar with literature which supported education for people with learning difficulties. Teachers in the field, said Maudslay and Nightingale, 'are often unaware of the wealth of guidance material available on person-centred planning' (ibid., 2004:26). They stressed the importance of cross-disciplinary consultation and dialogue, just as Sutcliffe had in the earlier publications. This theme was a constant NIACE refrain, but hard to achieve for practitioners under pressure.

Pathfinders, part of the Learning for Living programme led by NIACE designed to 'develop access to Skills-for-Life for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities', produced teacher training materials which sought to ground

practice in real-life scenarios and provide patterns for all workers involved with the potential students to become involved. It was another attempt to create resources which reflected real adult lives, and to draw in personnel from disciplines outside education. It also echoed much earlier publications, written before standardisation, such as *7 Days a Week* (1978) and *Starting Points* (Dumbleton et al., 1979). The project included this aspiration:

The Learning for Living Pathfinder Project will look at literacy, numeracy and language to find examples of developing and interesting practice. As so many skills are learnt in everyday situations, we hope to encourage not only teachers, but carers, support workers and employers to be more involved in the learning process (NIACE, 2005:5).

It was hard to bridge the gap. Staff in care settings were busy and not prepared, trained or paid to do what many saw as the work of education. Education specialists were not generally familiar with the literature relating to learning difficulties, and did not see the area as a positive professional step. In *Left on the Shelf?* Richard Finnigan investigated why practitioners in adult basic skills did not use the Learning for Living materials (Finnigan, 2007). He reported that of 62 providers sampled '26 per cent were using the materials to some extent, 43 per cent were not using them at all, and 31 per cent professed to have no knowledge of them' (ibid., 2007:9). Reasons given by the 74 per cent who did not use the materials were various, but the guidance was clearly not seen as important.

In another effort to build mutual respect and understanding the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) published *Being, Having and Doing* (Dee et al., 2006) to give practitioners in both the care and education contexts better understanding of learning theory as it applied to adults with learning difficulties. As Dee told me it was intended 'to present a different narrative' (Dee, 2019). Previous

research in the field was essentially confined to school-age pupils. Now there was the opportunity for discussion of the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties from an educational viewpoint. In a way it was the intellectual discussion behind *Freedom to Learn* and the 'Basil' products. 'ST', who was instrumental in the design of the project, explained that the document:

Really tried to identify ... what it was that should be the outcome of education for them, because it clearly wasn't going to be for the vast majority of them, becoming literate, or numerate ... It was much more about those things such as developing a sense of self and agency and ability to communicate via whatever mechanism was appropriate to them (ST, 2017).

The authors surveyed relevant literature and sought to update the progress in the field since the Tomlinson Report of 1996, and to underline that report's focus on student learning. Dee, like NIACE, wanted to put work involving adults with learning difficulties into the mainstream of educational research and thinking about adult education. Some of the names acknowledged are familiar from other publications, including Sally Faraday, Yola Jacobsen and Liz Maudslay. These people were well-versed in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties, on the ground and in theory. The intention was to take the debate away from a 'care' approach, social prejudice and generalised stereotypes. As reported above, Dee et al. found that 'attitudes and beliefs about the nature of their disability, their status as adults and their place in society' were more likely to influence decisions about education for adults with learning difficulties than 'new knowledge and insights about learning' (Dee et al., 2006:1).

The report produced specific recommendations including the importance of teaching purposively, teaching in real-life settings and being aware of the

significance of context rather than concentrating on outcome. In a challenging summary the authors conclude that becoming students can enable people with learning difficulties to confront and undo ‘the negative and stereotyped views that are held by many in society’ and to take their part in the community:

In this context, learning is envisaged as a quality-of-life issue that emphasises respect for the real lives, experiences and aspirations of people with learning difficulties combined with the notion of community regeneration and empowerment (ibid., 2006:2).

Being, Having and Doing was able to look beyond the parameters of *Freedom to Learn*. People with learning difficulties had joined adult literacy classes in the 1970s partly because they offered these possibilities. Adult literacy teachers were also inspired by these ideals. The background had changed by the 2000s. The emphasis on learning as a process, and ‘quality of life issue’ is particularly challenging. It takes the Tomlinson (1996) principle of concentrating on learning to a new level and echoes Russell’s 1973 report as well as Coffield’s idea of a ‘social theory of learning’ (1999). ‘The notion of community regeneration and empowerment’ goes beyond the aspirations of *Freedom to Learn* and sounds more like ‘inclusion’ as explored by Thomas (2013) and ‘social action’ as articulated by *A Right to Read* (1974). These concepts were difficult to sell to funders, managers and, perhaps also, to cautious students. The principles spelled out by Dee and fellow researchers certainly did not reflect LSC policy or practice, which continued to stress outcomes in terms of levels of achievement.

Other agencies active in the new landscape of the Skills-for-Life decade in England were the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) and the Language and Literacy Unit (LLU). I shall look briefly at their part in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties.

The LLU had been part of the ILEA but survived, firstly attached to Southwark FE College, and subsequently as part of London South Bank University. It developed into a national centre for ESOL and literacy teaching, running teacher training and research, as well as providing a resource and materials library. They were close to practice and practitioners, and involved in policy development and advisory work. Under the LSC, agencies such as the LLU could bid for work in competition with the Basic Skills Agency. The BSA co-ordinated the rollout of national training for the new core curricula in literacy and numeracy. The LLU was the lead agency in promoting an ESOL-focused *Access for All* and was commissioned by ABSSU to work on the development of the curricula for Skills-for-Life. They were part of the front line for Skills-for-Life. Madeline Held, then Director of LLU told me:

We developed the training structures ... and a whole network of training the trainers as well. That was nationwide, including Northern Ireland ... The courses would be based at a particular college, and people from other colleges would attend (Held, 2019).

Held also mentioned working with prisons and with the awarding bodies who had a big part to play in validating accreditation. The LLU was important in promoting an inclusive philosophy, as Held stated:

Our main contribution to inclusivity was the learning styles approach. Being person-centred, it was integral ... The learning styles approach underpinned a lot of our thinking. The point of it is that people learn differently according to their different needs ... That wasn't specifically for people with particular needs, but it catered for a range of individual needs, and that was central to our training (ibid., 2019).

The learning styles approach was an important part of the *Access for All* message, and had a significant effect on adult literacy teaching. It was subsequently commercialised and became tokenistic and discredited, but had some positive

aspects. As I experienced it, it focused on the process of learning, which was a theme of the 1996 *Inclusive Learning* report (Tomlinson, 1996), and did not depend on the sort of assessment of level which was built into the Skills-for-Life strategy. It was, as Held stated, an inclusive way of working which did not highlight deficiencies or disabilities. These features were helpful and liberating for teachers who might have mixed groups of learners. The learning styles concept could also be seen as a challenge to the conventional practice of the adult literacy classroom. It introduced diverse and new methods and materials reflecting the idea that people had different learning strengths and weaknesses. Sensory methods were central to the theory, so coloured filters over texts, using coloured papers and pens, even scented pens, were encouraged. Mind Maps and new technology made the experience more inclusive and stimulating. The theoretical background had been developed by Howard Gardner, who explored the idea that the brain was divided into two learning areas, but it was in practice that it was mostly understood. The approach was influential and led teachers to look for potential in their students in a positive way. It was a marked improvement on the sterile worksheets noted in the FEFC inspectors' report of 1998, and it could enhance the confidence and achievement of students who had struggled. It did not, however, challenge the idea that individual students were responsible for their success or failure. In this way it contributed to the entrenched hierarchy of relationships within the classroom and in wider society. In terms of education for people with disabilities or learning difficulties they were still in the category of 'individual deficit'.

The NRDC, based at the Institute of Education in London, was not involved in hands-on delivery or training like LLU or the BSA. The new national research centre was one of the remarkable outcomes of the recommendations of the Moser Report.

It brought together organisations such as LLU, NIACE and the BSA with the Universities of Lancaster, Leeds, Nottingham and Sheffield. It was a consortium dedicated to conducting and publishing research into adult literacy and numeracy, co-ordinating other agencies active in the field, and bringing coherence, funding and enhanced academic respectability to the work. The NRDC was tied into government policy in that it provided the data and figures which vindicated the Skills-for-Life policy and investment. For example, it continued the work that the BSA had instigated using data from long-term studies such as the NCDS (National Childhood Development Study) to consider the long-term effects of poor literacy and numeracy skills on adults in the UK. In 1997 the booklet *It Doesn't Get Any Better* by Bynner and Parsons was published by the BSA, providing ammunition for the arguments of Moser and his team. In 2008 Bynner and Parsons produced a NRDC Report, *Illuminating disadvantage: Profiling the experience of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the life-course*. Summarising their findings they recommended that the Skills-for-Life initiative be extended 'as an essential part of the education system' (Parsons & Bynner, 2008:81). NRDC played a significant role in providing the research data, statistics and intellectual authority to promote adult literacy education.

From the point of view of this study it is notable that the work of the NRDC included adult literacy and numeracy education for people with learning difficulties as a matter of course. Whether in research reports, such as *New Ways of Engaging New Learners* (Hamilton & Wilson eds., 2006), or *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL* (Roberts, C. et al. 2005) or Practitioner Guides such as *Responding to People's Lives* (Appleby & Barton, 2008), examples of students at entry level or below, or in 'special' settings such as a horticultural training programme, were included. Particular subjects such as a literature review

covering *ESOL for Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities* (Armstrong & Heathcote, 2003), were also part of the research undertaken by the centre. Work with students with learning difficulties was accepted as part of the practice and theory of adult literacy education. The NRDC finally closed in 2015, marking the end of this government-supported joint programme of research into adult literacy and numeracy.

[The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice](#)

Skills-for-Life completely changed the practice of teaching adult literacy from 2001. As the Moser Report had recommended, new national curricula were introduced for adult literacy and numeracy in England. National tests and standards, teacher training and a comprehensive system of achievement levels were launched. The initiative was heavily influenced by the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in school education.

On page one of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum the introduction stated that the Skills-for-Life strategy drew on the frameworks for teaching literacy and numeracy in schools, the National Literacy & National Numeracy Strategies, the revised National Curriculum for English brought into schools in 2000, as well as 'key skills' units developed by QCA (devised to work with vocational qualifications taught in FE) and international examples. The introduction went on to quote the 1999 National Curriculum document on 'inclusivity and access'. It was evident that the thinking behind Skills-for-Life was imported from the schools in this respect too:

Education is ... a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy and sustainable development (BSA, 2001:2).

And:

The ... Curriculum secures ... for all, irrespective of social background, culture, race, gender, differences in ability and disabilities, an entitlement to a number of areas of learning and to develop knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes necessary for their self-fulfilment and development as active and responsible citizens (ibid.).

These quotations were presented in the document as scraps of paper torn from the 1999 DfEE publication *The National Curriculum*, parts of the section headed *The School Curriculum and the National Curriculum: Values, Aims and Purposes*. The image tells us that the philosophy of the Skills-for-Life initiative was lifted directly from the parallel school developments. The authors had not turned to the traditions of student-centred adult literacy education, or referred to theories of social practice or to the debates around lifelong learning. The values expressed do not run counter to the beliefs and ethos informing campaigners for adult literacy or for education for adults with learning difficulties, but they carried the message that the adult strategy mirrored the school version.

In practice as well as policy the model was largely based on school teaching. The idea of 'text, sentence and word focus' as a teaching approach came directly from the National Literacy Strategy. The curricula were laid out in similar fashion. The formal national levels were aligned with the National Curriculum. A new emphasis on speaking and listening linked into the 'key skills' reckoned particularly valuable in the workplace. FE systems were also important. The levels mapped against the National Qualifications framework used in vocational education, which linked to EU scales. In the vocational framework therefore, there was no equivalent to the three entry levels which marked achievement below Level 1 in the Adult Literacy Curriculum. Pre-entry did not figure in the plan at all. The intention was that

people outside education, such as employers, would be able to interpret the levels and measures of post-school education. It was not a framework designed to accommodate students with learning difficulties. Ideas about 'social norms' can be discerned in that Level 2 marks the end of compulsory schooling, and is translated into the adult literacy programme.

Practitioners reacted with mixed feelings to the Skills-for-Life initiative. Of course, the funding was welcomed. But for people who had been involved in the fight for recognition, and saw adult literacy education as a field of social action and political power-sharing, it marked the end of an era. Alan Tuckett took a balanced view. He told me in 2019 that 'What the national funding brought with it was good and bad. National standards at least articulated what kind of skills there ought to be, but it also delimited them' (Tuckett, 2019). He knew that this was problematic for students with learning difficulties.

Many of the practitioners who had been involved over years with adult literacy education felt that Skills-for-Life undermined the flexible and student-centred quality of the work. 'KL' reflected:

We had had a lot of freedom really ... Skills-for-Life controlled everything. And people found that quite difficult. Obviously new people who were coming in, they were fine about it. But the people who had been around, I think it was a big shock. And I think people found it quite difficult. There was a lot of opposition to it at the time because they felt that they couldn't do what they wanted to do with this curriculum (KL, 2017).

'KL', a very experienced teacher, said:

People didn't seem to understand that you could still do what you wanted within the curriculum. It just gave you more of a framework ... The curriculum I don't think was a problem, but the exams were a problem. The test (ibid., 2017).

The real issue was the fact that test results became linked to funding in the LSC methodology. 'KL' told me that work with mixed groups was lost because of the need to achieve test results:

That meant that all the old ways of working – mixed classes, people supporting each other, group work [went] ... So if you were in a E1 class you don't have anybody from any other levels in there with you ... Obviously there are benefits in having a class that's levelled. It's easier for the teacher. (ibid., 2017).

It is clear that the subtle social confidence issues which had been integral to adult literacy education practice, and particularly important to people with learning difficulties, were no longer addressed in such a model. 'GH' recalled that the pursuit of success in terms of achievements led to cynical practice:

What they did was to set the targets on the Skills-for-Life programme round qualification outcomes. And, of course, we all got good at reaching those, didn't we? The low-hanging fruit (GH, 2017).

One effect of the 'low-hanging fruit' phenomenon was that people with learning difficulties were excluded from adult literacy education except where it was catering particularly for 'special' students. They did not produce the achievement levels required. As noted by Lavender (2004), Appleby and Bathmaker (2006), and by Coffield et al. (2008) such an approach blocked inclusive practice. It also made the challenge of inclusive thinking irrelevant. The concept of learning as a 'quality of life' issue could not survive in this environment. For FE colleges managing tight budgets the logic was to provide 'special' education, just as schools did, and not to complicate things with mixed level groups.

Sometimes Skills-for-Life was used solely for 'special' courses. 'IJ' remembered that 'Quite a lot of the colleges were just really taking on Skills-for-Life and using it with their students with learning disabilities' (IJ, 2017). The colleges had

been pitched into new funding mechanisms with the FEFC ten years before. They had recognised that there was government money and commitment in the area of 'basic skills' and saw Skills-for-Life as the new channel for that funding stream. Skills-for-Life could become the 'remedial' branch of FE. It was an unanticipated and unfortunate outcome of the new system.

The world looked different for people who joined adult literacy education after 2001. Skills-for-Life was adult literacy education, and the levels and tests were facts of life. 'QR' trained as an adult literacy teacher, going through a route unknown to earlier generations of practitioners. After a first degree she did a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), taking the tertiary option which qualified her to teach in adult and further education. At the same time, she studied for Level Five Literacy Subject Specialism. It was a professional training. In 2007 she went on to teach at a big FE college in West London. She felt, however, that her training was not a realistic preparation for the work. She told me:

Adult literacy qualifications were being delivered to students 16–19 years old, 16–20 in the case of Special Needs provision, as their Maths and English. They were doing the Entry Level qualification and the Level 1 and 2 Numeracy and Literacy ... They were on a full-time course – they might be doing something like Level 1 Business, and as part of that they would be doing Level 1 Numeracy, and either Level 1 ESOL or Level 1 Literacy. Some of those students, though, wouldn't attain a Level 1, so we even did some E2 and E3 (QR, 2017).

Her perception was that the adult literacy teacher training was not an appropriate course for teaching FE students: 'We are talking about young people doing those adult qualifications' (ibid., 2017). It is interesting to hear the echo of Wells, declaring that the problem with locating adult literacy education in FE colleges was that they were fundamentally institutions for young people.

Most particularly 'QR' thought that the training did not help her to teach young people with learning difficulties. Like teachers in the 1970s 'QR' found herself making her own materials to address the realities of her students' lives. Her perceptions raise the questions about the identity of adult literacy students again:

I didn't feel the training I had had was relevant to what happened when I went into the classroom **at all** [her emphasis]. It was adult-focused. And I felt working with people with learning disabilities who are adults isn't the same as working with people who are adults who may need to develop their literacy skills ... We are talking about 16-year-olds who had never been outside school. They needed telling to pick up their pens and stuff (ibid., 2017).

'QR' felt that the true purpose of the provision was 'really about growing up and becoming independent'. The assumptions of adult literacy were not applicable:

I think that adult literacy is quite an ideological movement. And I think it makes assumptions of the students which are quite broad ... It's not that I disagree with those assumptions. I just came kind of loaded with all that stuff and it wasn't really applicable to what I experienced. And I think that is to do with the age of the students I was working with (ibid., 2017).

'QR's account of her experience teaching adult literacy in an FE college during the 2000s shows how Skills-for-Life had to be navigated in a complex practical situation. Students had to achieve because of funding pressures. In the end 'QR' appreciated the structure that Skills-for-Life offered:

I liked the way that the basic skills qualifications were broken down into levels and into the skills sets. I think that was very helpful in terms of planning and delivering learning to adults with learning difficulties and learning disabilities (ibid., 2017).

This positive message about the relationship between adult literacy education and education for adults with learning difficulties was made in the knowledge that Skills-for-Life would be coming to an end in 2010.

The Skills-for-Life strategy was dismantled by the Coalition government which came into power in 2010. They introduced instead a 'Functional Skills' programme which tied into vocational education. A 'Foundation' scheme based on developmental models used in schools was developed for students with learning difficulties. In 2011 NIACE reported in an 'inquiry into adult literacy in England' that:

The evidence suggests that those adults with some of the lowest levels of achievement, in the most challenging situations, and with the biggest barriers to overcome, have benefited least in the past (NIACE, 2011:5).

It was a damning report on recent provision for students with arguably most to gain from adult literacy education. The authors quoted from their research that:

Contributors emphasised the necessity to respond to diversity and complexity with differentiated approaches and not to focus on skills and employment at the cost of learning literacy for personal, social and democratic purposes. Great concern was expressed about provision being led by qualifications rather than learners (ibid., 2011:4).

This plea from people involved in the field was part of a document entitled *Work, Society and Lifelong Learning* (ibid.). The statement clearly laid out the major issues which have been evident in this study of the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties over forty years between 1970 and 2010 in England. Their findings confirm that 'literacy for personal, social and democratic purposes' has been sacrificed to a 'focus on skills and employment'. Students with learning difficulties were squeezed out. In 2016 NIACE itself was subsumed with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion into the Learning and Work Institute. The fact that NIACE disappeared into a body of which the name combined 'learning' with 'work' tells us that the battle to champion the cause of adult education for 'personal, social and democratic purposes' was lost.

Summary

Government action on adult literacy in the decade 2000–2010 was unprecedented. The evidence of those involved and the documentary sources reveal major changes in policy and practice. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was debated at policy level for the first time.

The controlling influence in the relationship was central government. In this way it was a continuation of the 1990s. The Skills-for-Life initiative launched in 2001 was propelled by government imperatives and dismantled the cumbersome FEFC funding methodology to take control through the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) established in the Department for Education and Skills. But it was also a fresh and direct approach, which sought initially to combine a social action agenda with the drive to improve skills and employability. Liz Lawson, speaking to me in 2019, remembered that the ABSSU brief included social and participatory objectives, but agreed that this agenda had been overtaken by the end of the programme. Driven by the evidence of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) the government was determined to raise levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy. The pattern they used was the school model – a national curriculum, standard tests and target-based objectives. Skills-for-Life was supported by a national training operation and new paperwork for all concerned. Practitioners who had long experience welcomed the new interest and funding but missed their freedom in the classroom. Newer staff accepted the new reality and quickly adopted the language of levels.

The Moser Report (1999) and the subsequent Skills-for-Life strategy document (DfEE, 2001) make it clear that the initiative was intended to improve the

economic prosperity of the nation through driving up standards of literacy and numeracy. It was not a new idea, as evidence quoted in this study demonstrates. The New Labour government elected in 1997 was influenced by the understanding of human capital promulgated by the OECD. As Coffield (1999) and others pointed out, the OECD version of lifelong learning relegated students with learning difficulties to second-class status on the basis that they were less valuable to the economy. The Skills-for-Life programme included a social inclusion element but the philosophy of Skills-for-Life emphasised employment, and not citizenship, as the primary mark of success. It did not embrace the lessons of UNESCO research or of the social practice theorists who argued that literacy was complex and socially constructed and situated in time and place. Governments and funders continued to seek measurable results based on ideas of 'autonomous skills'. The issues identified throughout this thesis continued to cause tensions in the relationship under discussion. Student-centred practice was still important to practitioners in adult literacy education. After the 2006 Leitch Report, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: World Class Skills*, the government position hardened. The Basic Skills Agency was dissolved in 2007 after voicing doubts about government strategy. In 2009 the Learning and Skills Council published the Little Report, *Learning for Work: Employment and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. Only work-related provision for students with learning difficulties would in future be funded by the LSC. The sort of adult literacy education which could support self-advocacy was no longer an option. Practitioners were under pressure to produce figures which demonstrated standard achievements.

The 2000s also, however, saw real discussions about the relationship between adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties. The LSC inherited the legal obligation to 'have regard to the

requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. *Freedom to Learn* (Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000), published by the government before the launch of Skills-for-Life, made radical proposals which showed how students with the most challenging learning difficulties might be accommodated in the new adult literacy and numeracy system proposed by the Moser Report (1999). NIACE published reports and research which put work with people with learning difficulties in the spotlight. The NRDC included adult literacy (and numeracy and ESOL) provision for people with learning difficulties in their brief. *Being, Having and Doing* (Dee et al., 2006) was a big research report funded by the Learning and Skills Development Agency. It continued the arguments of the Tomlinson Report (1996) and provided the intellectual background to the *Freedom to Learn* report and the 'Basil' project which followed. *Freedom to Learn* and the training and publications which it enabled gave practitioners new insights into the possibilities of inclusive practice in adult literacy education. Ultimately, however, the government commitment to a vocational model focused on employment prevented development of holistic adult literacy education which could give students with learning difficulties opportunities to gain agency, to grow in confidence over time and to challenge popular conventions and stereotypes.

Chapter 7. Final Conclusions

Introduction and explanation

This historical investigation explores the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England from 1970 to 2010. My purpose was to understand a complex and unrecorded aspect of the history of adult literacy education. This final chapter revisits the whole study to present my conclusions. It explains how the methodology and analytical tools used help to clarify the subject. The thesis established a chronological framework to identify significant events and to review the contextual background. I show how my findings built up my argument by addressing the research questions posed as a result of my survey of the relevant literature. I then discuss the implications of this thesis, consider the limitations of my approach and identify possible avenues for further research.

My review of the literature relevant to the topic showed that there had been no specific study dedicated to the relationship which was my focus. But my reading provided useful insights and themes which opened routes into the subject. Using the concept of 'enduring tensions' enabled me to identify themes which became generative and defining ideas as I pursued my investigation. The process of ordering my review produced headings which fed into the research. I recognised the fundamental division between a 'rights' and a 'needs' based approach to adult literacy education and was able to use this basic distinction as a lens which gave my study direction. This focus showed how an educational system built on a dominant perception of individual needs undermined the rights of people with learning difficulties to be fully accepted as students of adult literacy education, and thereby to challenge conventional labels and stereotypes about learning difficulties. I argue that

a rights-based approach validated 'student-centred' practice which gave students agency in the classroom, and recognised the collective 'quality of life' idea advanced as a measure of the benefits of adult education at the beginning of my time-scale by the *Russell Report* on adult education (1973) and by *Being, Having and Doing*, the report by Lesley Dee et al (2006) on learning theory and the education of adults with learning difficulties, near to the end of my study period.

In order to address the issues raised by my review of the literature I used an emancipatory research ethic and formulated open-ended research questions which I restate below.

- How did this relationship change over time?
- What were the significant factors in shaping the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970-2010?
- What are the enduring themes characterising this relationship?
- How did this relationship affect adult literacy education in practice?

As detailed in the methodology section (Chapter Two) my research drew on a range of sources. I examined the 'official' documentary record in the shape of legislation, government reports and publications such as the reports of national agencies established by the government to lead on adult literacy education. I also studied printed secondary sources held in archive collections. Contemporary literature was used as primary source material where appropriate, illuminating how language and attitudes changed over time. Data provided through personal accounts was central to my investigation. My interviewees reflected a broad spectrum of the people involved in this relationship, focusing particularly on practitioners and experts who could offer

long-term views. I recorded interviews with students with learning difficulties in two different group settings. The primary data supplemented and balanced the secondary sources and supported my own analysis.

A consistent conceptual framework was created to structure and make sense of the disparate findings presented in the thesis. I organised the data into four chapters which each covered a decade of the forty year period 1970-2010. Within each chapter the same four section headings were used – the international and intellectual context; legislation, government policy and official reports; the role of the agencies and the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in practice. This arrangement allows the reader to appreciate how the ‘enduring themes’ threaded through the relationship. At the same time the mechanism shows the changes over time within a comprehensive framework. The system also served as an analytical tool. I was able to evaluate the forces of change driving and shaping the relationship by comparing the respective roles of the four contextual constructs identified by these section headings.

Each chapter opens with an overview of the international and intellectual context within which events in adult literacy education and the development of education for people with learning difficulties in England were located. This was significant in showing that events in England did not happen in a vacuum, and that the developments which affected the relationship reflected conflicting forces such as the civil rights movement in the US and the economic views of the OECD. The international and intellectual context was meaningful but not familiar to most people involved in the relationship under review. UNESCO, for instance, exerted considerable influence in raising awareness and providing vocabulary to define concepts such as ‘A Right to Read’ and ‘lifelong learning’.

The second section in each chapter is headed 'Legislation, government policy and official reports'. It was very revealing about the role of government in the relationship. The evidence shows that in the main the various governments in power during the period did not prioritise, or even recognise, the relationship I study. Because of the new responsibilities of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the government of the 1990s took note of the relationship, but treated it basically as an administrative problem. The issue was 'managed' by re-defining adult literacy, dividing it into two separate courses based on the identity of the students. The New Labour government of the 2000s was obliged by law to include the relationship in the planning of Skills-for-Life, but took no lasting notice of *Freedom to Learn* (2000), the report it commissioned on the subject.

The third section looks at 'The role of the agencies'. The part played by the various non-governmental bodies involved was particularly significant to the relationship because of the lack of policy in the area. Their importance partly reflected the individuals who took a lead. The views of Alan Wells, Director of ALBSU and then the BSA 1979-2007, were crucial to the relationship throughout the 1980s. Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE from 1988, became more influential in the relationship in the 1990s because the BSA expanded into the school sector, while Tuckett prioritised work with students with learning difficulties, viewing it as a marginalised area.

The last section of each research chapter focuses on practice and provides a way to understand the part played by practitioners and the experience of students at each point. This section reflects the prime role of pedagogy in the relationship, as identified by all my interviewees. The framework made it possible to analyse the data collated within each ten-year period and to decide where the impetus for

change was located and why, even if it was not clear to those involved. As a caveat it should be noted that the material did not always fit easily into decades and it was difficult to entirely separate the influences at work in the relationship under the four headings. All the factors were interlinked and dynamic.

Summary and analysis of findings

In this summary and analysis I use the research questions quoted above to sift the data and present my findings. I first summarise the changes in the relationship revealed by my research. Secondly I analyse the 'significant factors' which drove the changes and 'shaped' the relationship. I then look behind the 'factors' to discover the 'enduring themes' characterising the relationship and informing my thesis. At the end of this section I concentrate on practice, so that my conclusions in this area reflect the whole study. My analysis of the impact of the relationship between adult literacy education and the education of people with learning difficulties on the experience of students and practitioners in England 1970-2010 in practice leads on to a consideration of lessons readers and researchers might draw from the study.

The changes in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England between 1970 and 2010 were rarely led by overt policy direction. Here I outline the changes which my findings uncover, using the chronological framework of the thesis.

I called Chapter Three, which deals with the 1970s, *Throwing out the Ladybirds*. The relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was not specifically recognised politically or theoretically at the time, but the Right to Read campaigners for adult literacy education were determined to ensure that adult literacy was distinguished from

existing 'special' or 'remedial' education, based on school practice. The campaign was construed as a fight to achieve the 'rights' of adults who had been let down by the existing educational system. It was successful in gaining national funding for adult literacy education, but the tension between an established 'remedial' system based on the idea of 'backward adults' and the concept of adult-oriented provision which targeted 'normal' people created a division which was reflected in the experience of staff and students involved. At the same time it was the foundation of the crucial student-centred adult literacy education philosophy based on student agency and a concept of partnership between student and teacher. A positive relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties built on this principle. My findings demonstrate that this understanding of the relationship continued to inspire staff and students throughout the period I review, despite the disruption caused by funding issues and changing administrative systems.

The relationship was different in the 1980s because the 1970s campaign succeeded. Adult literacy education programmes throughout England were created or consolidated, mainly through the LEAs, co-ordinated by a national body. It was still a tense relationship but practitioners developed positive initiatives to support students with learning difficulties. The title I used for the 1980s (Chapter Four) was *Working it out practically, politically and theoretically*. The heading reflected the new situation because practitioners were largely responsible for working out the relationship at this time. There was no central plan, and the background was fractious. Both primary and secondary evidence show that practitioners put together local programmes which allowed many students with learning difficulties to access adult literacy education and to participate fully in writing projects or creative

schemes. On the other hand the statements made by ALBSU, the agency speaking for adult literacy in England, demonstrate that the relationship was complicated. Alan Wells, Director of ALBSU, was at pains to clarify that although adult literacy (and numeracy) had a 'key' role in offering provision to students with learning difficulties they did not provide 'special needs' education. He was anxious to keep the distinction between 'normal' and 'special' education firm, for reasons which were to do with funding and socio-political perceptions as much as curriculum.

During the 1980s Wells steered adult literacy education in England towards vocational education, embracing the vocabulary of 'skills' and introducing standard certification. Meanwhile the FE sector was pro-actively developing courses for people with learning difficulties, often with labels such as 'pre-vocational'. These trends worked together to create a 'special' curriculum for people with learning difficulties in post-school education, even though there was no 'official' policy. At the same time ALBSU recognised that adult students with learning difficulties often attended literacy classes based in the community, sometimes supported by charities or other agencies. The data reveals a mixed picture. Social attitudes and funding issues militated against open access and flexible ideas of achievement, but continuing imaginative practice, where literacy education was part of citizenship initiatives or student publications involved students with learning difficulties, was evident.

After 1992 there was official policy relating to the relationship for the first time. Chapter Five is headed *A sort of merger*. The government dismantled the old LEA regime for FE to bring in new accountability and standards. The Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act (1992) brought adult literacy education and courses designed for people with learning difficulties together in a new structure and bureaucracy. The

Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) created a single administrative unit, Basic Education, which merged adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties together in management terms. Under the new regime both areas were funded through the vocational system and often managed together. Community-based adult literacy education was forced to fit into a vocational framework to suit the funding model. The changes meant that education for people with learning difficulties was under the spotlight. This shift was accentuated by the Tomlinson Report, *Inclusive Learning* (1996), which sought to reform education for students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities (SLDD) in integrated post-16 provision. The rights of SLDD were foregrounded, but funding support rested on individual assessment of 'needs'. The system created a new distinction in adult literacy education based on identity.

The FEFC divided adult literacy education into 'independent living and communication' for students with learning difficulties and 'basic literacy', which was defined as a progression route. No educational justification was advanced in the guidance offered, but the rationale may have rested on a supposed distinction between courses for non-readers and provision which fitted into a skills-based vocational model. It was a step which consolidated the idea that students with learning difficulties 'needed' a special curriculum. Tuckett described the approach to me as 'delimiting', meaning that students with learning difficulties were steered, without a choice, into specific provision built on a limited view of their aspirations and opportunities. I judge that it was a decision based primarily on administrative reasons. The 1990s 'merger' between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties was a change which gave adult literacy education and provision designed for people with learning difficulties secure funding and new

prominence but it was not student-centred. My findings show how the emphasis on vocational systems, certification and individual assessment undermined choice, validation and achievement for students with learning difficulties.

The decade of the 2000s was also marked by change. This time the government took direct control of adult literacy education through the Skills-for-Life initiative launched in 2001. Ultimately, however, the new strategy confirmed the trend towards a relationship based on vocational objectives and fixed patterns of assessment. I called Chapter Six *Whose literacy is it anyway?* because the evidence shows how power and agency in adult literacy education were taken from students with learning difficulties. The rights of students with learning difficulties to access adult literacy education were acknowledged and addressed in the report *Freedom to Learn* (2000) commissioned by the government. The report, written by a group with huge experience in the area, recommended a radical and comprehensive system which could accommodate students who could not achieve the proposed standards for Skills-for-Life. It was the highpoint of hope for coherently bringing together adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, but it was not implemented. The government was committed to an economics-led agenda of employability and a skills-based target-driven 'functional' view of literacy. The sort of open-ended adult literacy education which could validate students with learning difficulties and offer flexibility, time and the chance to challenge stereotyped views and labels was discredited.

Behind the changes set out above were several factors which were powerful throughout the period. This section of the conclusions identifies the 'significant factors' which influenced the changes outlined and thus shaped the relationship. It is difficult to untangle them. Social attitudes, political priorities and shifting terminology

were all constant intermeshed factors which are discussed. Disability politics, teacher training and professional status are also brought into the analysis.

Meanwhile I consider the on-going impact of new thinking and of experience.

Social attitudes were a constant issue. Both literacy and learning difficulties were socially contested and sensitive areas, where issues could change over time and place. Contemporary attitudes to disability/learning difficulties affected the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in a variety of ways. Social attitudes, or the anxieties about them, coloured political and funding decisions, as well as educational priorities. My findings reflect a circular situation where society does not offer or expect employment or meaningful activities for people with learning difficulties, and 'special' education produces disabled people who learn to accept limited opportunities. It is difficult for those with little social clout and low self esteem to challenge the accepted norms. Interviewees and contemporary commentators noted how employment-oriented adult literacy education did not celebrate the achievements of students with learning difficulties and worked against choice and flexibility in practice. This narrowly-focused approach failed to address the argument that adult education could improve the 'quality of life' for everybody and anybody.

Social stigma was a specific factor identified by interviewees. For instance social anxieties led some adult literacy education teachers and organisers to reject students with learning difficulties because they worried that the stigma attached to 'mental handicap' might discourage 'ordinary' students from attending classes (Dee, 2019). Elsewhere local agreements ensured that only 'acceptable' proportions of adult literacy students in any class had evident learning difficulties (UV, 2017).

Students then and now internalised the identity projected upon them. All the current

students I spoke to underlined the importance of public award ceremonies which gave them a chance, as people with learning difficulties, to showcase their achievements in defiance of conventional expectations.

Stigma affected staff too. By association teaching adult students with learning difficulties was not a high status occupation. It was not dealt with positively in training and Bergin and Johnson's research (1994) showed how social attitudes lay behind the idea that 'special' teachers were needed for 'special' students. Local policies and funding decisions tended to reflect public sensitivities, and perceptions of where 'care' ended and 'education' began were contested in terms of curriculum and of professional responsibilities. Teachers spoke of tensions in the workplace which related more to student identity and staff status than to educational objectives. I conclude that social attitudes rather than educational reasoning proved an effective barrier which prevented many students with learning difficulties from benefiting from inclusive adult literacy education throughout the period of this study, despite a growing understanding of 'disability rights' and increasing integration in society.

Evidence also shows, however, that many students with learning difficulties (diagnosed or otherwise) did participate in a full adult literacy curriculum, facilitated by teachers committed to a student-centred approach. In the absence of a clear policy practitioners could take the lead. A strong student-centred principle developed in adult literacy education practice. It built on the original model, where voluntary tutors were inspired to 'help' people whom they saw as disadvantaged and it could accommodate students with learning difficulties. Many of those involved were not taking a political stance, and would not have perceived a contradiction between accepting an 'individual deficit' understanding of disability/learning difficulties and recognising the rights of all adult literacy students to make their own choices in terms

of post-school education. This thesis examines a relationship which was not generally part of public debate. Tensions were often managed locally. I look next at the political climate in which decisions were made.

Political priorities were linked to social attitudes and were a major factor in the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties, although the relationship was rarely at the forefront of policy decisions. Vocationalism crept into the picture by degrees, because economic objectives informed national political priorities and funding decisions. The emphasis on employability as a purpose was present in adult education in the form of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) from the 1970s. But during the decades 1970 to 2010 the legal and political position changed. The 1981 Education Act (Special Educational Needs) acted to end segregation in schooling. The question of access to adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties in the 1980s was an issue for local practitioners, for LEAs and for the national agency, ALBSU. The rights-based argument was under threat. ALBSU was in a difficult position. The Conservative government was determined to cut expenditure on public services. It was wary of perceived left-wing bias in literacy teachers. The MSC meanwhile promoted adult literacy as part of 'skills' training. ALBSU responded to government concerns by claiming that adult literacy education could help improve employability. The Unit's public statements show how it tailored its language and position to fit the political priorities of the time.

In the 1990s political pressure was brought overtly to bear. The 1992 FHE Act recognised that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) had a right to education. Funding for post-school education for students with learning difficulties was secured by law, but at the same time it was more severely controlled.

The government wanted more accountability and conformity. The FEFC funding methodology, and monitoring by the new inspectorate, were the forces which drove forward these government objectives in the 1990s. They brought the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties out of the margins (or out from the Portakabins in college car parks). There were real advances in addressing marginalisation and inconsistency, but flexibility and creativity were not encouraged. My research shows how the FEFC was under political pressure to deliver results and imposed a system dependent on the individual assessment of students, designed to meet the requirements of the funding mechanism and the vocational imperative. Practitioners told me that the new arrangements deprived students with learning difficulties of choice. 'Special' courses and qualifications focused on 'independent living skills' were developed to meet the perceived 'needs' of students with learning difficulties. This provision was dedicated to helping people to 'cope' and not to take control of their lives or to challenge the power relationships in society or the classroom. Almost by accident a 'special' curriculum and 'special' staff group evolved. It was not the direct result of policy decisions or pressure from practitioners or students, but it was driven by political priorities. It reflected an identity-driven system which created a divide in adult literacy education. Despite the efforts of NIACE and the recommendations of the government-funded *Freedom to Learn* report (2000) Skills-for-Life did not reverse the trend. Students with learning difficulties quoted by Jacobsen and Berkeley wished that they had access to a full choice of subjects like other students (Jacobsen & Berkeley, 2006). It is interesting to note that London students I talked to in 2017 regarded attending adult literacy classes as a mark of distinction. They recognised that literacy was associated with power and status.

Language and terminology were important factors in the changing relationship outlined above. The shift from 'adult literacy' to 'basic skills' was significant. My findings show how ALBSU switched to use the word 'skills' during the 1980s. At the end of the decade ALBSU joined the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative (BSAI), demonstrating their new commitment to standard certification which fitted into a vocational model. The language of 'skills' suited the agenda of government. The idea that literacy could be taught and measured irrespective of context was easier to comprehend and sell as a computable investment in the economy. The Moser Report (1999) was entitled *A Fresh Start: Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*, but the government response was headed *Skills for Life* (2001). An understanding of literacy as 'autonomous skills' was better aligned to the idea of 'individual deficit' and therefore fitted into a system dependent on individual assessment. By the 2000s individual assessment of needs and of progress against pre-set targets was built into adult literacy education. Initial assessment was labelled 'diagnostic', carrying echoes of medical terminology. Newer staff did not see it as problematic. Skills-for-Life practitioners 'CD' and 'QR' talked of students in terms of their 'levels' (CD, 2017; QR, 2017). The 'basic skills' vocabulary worked against an adult literacy approach which treated students as adult partners and validated broader purposes such as confidence, citizenship and self-advocacy. It did not recognise the insights of the 'social practice' approach which understood the social context and power relationships inherent in literacy and in education.

This study highlights the part played by disability politics in the relationship. The growth of active disability politics calling for social review and educational reform during the period was a factor. It was important in providing a rationale and vocabulary which supported the rights of students with disabilities, including learning

difficulties, to access the same curriculum as their peers. An understanding of the theory of 'disability rights' was reflected in international thinking and gradually appeared in legislation in the UK. It was not necessarily mirrored in social attitudes. The 1981 Education Act legislated for integration in schooling. The policy did not cover adult education but it affected the expectations of students (and parents or carers) and led to tensions in policy and practice. Some educational writers and thinkers saw how student-centred and rights-based practice could challenge conventional thinking in post-school education. The idea that the purpose of adult literacy education was to increase the control which people had over their own lives and to promote social and democratic participation was part of the 1970s rhetoric and perfectly aligned with the agenda of disability rights. 'OP' told me that the principle of self-advocacy articulated by the 'People First' groups organised by people with learning difficulties in England after 1984 was based on the US arguments for civil rights. Jeannie Sutcliffe's work was published by NIACE. She believed that adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties was essentially allied to an agenda of empowerment and could put choice and self-advocacy at the heart of the curriculum (Sutcliffe, 1990; 1994).

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act was followed by the FEFC report *Inclusive Learning* (Tomlinson, 1996) which attempted to reject old labels of disability and to emphasise 'learning' as the primary purpose of all post-school education. It was a subtle challenge to vocationalism. Tomlinson proposed a student-centred educational approach, but the recommendations were undermined by the FEFC funding methodology which depended on individual assessment of need. FE colleges followed a school model in providing a 'special' curriculum. Within the educational practice of FE students were encouraged to take up opportunities. There

were integrated groups, sometimes with specialist support staff. The goal of employment became a real possibility for more students with all sorts of disabilities. These advantages marked progress in recognising the rights and aspirations of students with learning difficulties. However Dee and others commented at the time on the clash of values which made the marketised ethic of FE inimical to a truly student-centred curriculum, particularly in the case of students with learning difficulties. Many authors attacked the idea of 'lifelong learning' promulgated by the OECD, and embraced by New Labour after 1997, which, said Martin (2003), relegated people with learning difficulties to the status of 'second-class citizens'.

Adult literacy practitioners I spoke to throughout this study were committed to a student-centred approach. Some were aware of the implications of understanding literacy as a social practice. They saw that adult literacy education as it moved into more secure established education could reinforce the imbalance of power which took agency and choice from students. Practitioners had different perspectives. It was complicated. 'QR' noted the irony that her training as an adult literacy teacher in the 2000s, was ill-fitted to working with school-leavers with learning difficulties. They were young adults with little life experience. She told me that she appreciated the 'ideology' of adult literacy education. She wanted her students to have choice and dignity, but she also recognised how the structure offered by the standardised Skills-for-Life curriculum enabled her to build a programme which met college requirements in terms of time-based targets in standard certification.

An understanding of disability rights informed the thinking behind publications such as the *Fish Report* published by ILEA in 1984 and the recommendations of *A Special Professionalism* (1987), *Inclusive Learning* (1996), *Freedom to Learn* (2000) and *Being, Having and Doing* (2006), all government-funded reports focused on

work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in FE. The concept of 'choice' for students was a theme emphasised by practitioners and commentators. A negotiated curriculum and individual learning plan represented the theory in practice. The *Freedom to Learn* (2000) report placed a basic marker by stating that students should choose literacy as a subject, and not be directed to it by teachers or carers. Practitioners, meanwhile, mostly understood their role in a social and educational context, and did not take an overtly political stance. They also knew that the individual assessment of needs and achievement underpinned the funding system in adult literacy education by the 2000s. The disability rights movement altered the intellectual climate and the legislative context in education for people with disabilities, including learning difficulties, but made slow progress in shifting public attitudes. I found that few adult literacy teachers chose to read about education for people with learning difficulties, even if they were involved in teaching them. I conclude that stigma remained a problem.

This investigation covers four decades which saw adult literacy education transform from a campaign for social justice to become embedded in the educational establishment, mainly in the context of employability. The evidence shows that it was buffeted by factors which were not directed by a coherent policy, although vocationalism was an increasingly strong influence. At the same time, however, a philosophy of student-centred practice remained a constant characteristic element of adult literacy education. The relationship under scrutiny was never central in policy terms but my research throws into relief the underlying issues. It led to debates and tensions reflected in the data provided by long-term practitioners such as 'KL' who highlighted the social and educational value of mixed level classes, 'IJ' who lamented the lack of choice for students with learning difficulties and 'GH'

commenting on the incentive to concentrate on students most likely to succeed , ‘the low-hanging fruit’, when funding was tied to achievement targets.

This thesis reflects a fundamental divide between a student-centred human rights-based approach to adult literacy education and a system which categorises students in terms of their economic usefulness, producing a ‘special’ curriculum for people seen as deficient. The enduring themes which emerge from this investigation all fit into this analysis. They lie behind the factors and tensions outlined above. I unpick them here to underpin my conclusions, but recognise that at the time students, teachers and managers were mainly concentrating on doing their best in uncertain times and not on political or social theory. The themes I examine are the basic conflict between a ‘rights’-based and a ‘needs’ based approach to adult literacy education, the pervasive ‘discourse of deficit’ and interlinked questions around the idea of ‘functional literacy’.

The struggle between narratives prioritising ‘rights’ or ‘needs’ is apparent in the accounts of the Right to Read adult literacy education campaign. It is a constant theme in this study but it is not straightforward. Those leading the 1970s campaign used the language of ‘rights’ and framed adult literacy education as an issue of ‘social justice’. Wells, one of the authors of the manifesto document *A Right to Read* (1974), told me that the campaign set out to demonstrate that potential students of adult literacy were not at fault, and that the problem lay in the educational system which had failed them (Wells, 2019). Similarly the *Russell Report* into adult education called for resources to be redirected to support ‘the disadvantaged adult’ (Russell, 1973). Interviewees told me that they felt part of a social action movement which could offer people opportunities which had been denied to them. But Jane Mace, who was teaching adult literacy at the Cambridge House settlement scheme

in London at the time, told me in retrospect that the campaign was 'on-behalfist' (Mace, 2019). She perceived that the campaign leaders defined the 'needs' of people they saw as incapable of doing it themselves.

At the same time a rights-based and student-centred philosophy was created in adult literacy education in England. It harked back to the UN assertion of education as a human right stated in 1948, and it was rooted in the one-to-one teaching model used in the university settlement projects behind the BAS Right to Read campaign. The accounts of people involved and the documentary evidence show that the ethos in adult literacy education practice as it developed in the 1970s was based on 'partnership' between adult student and voluntary tutor. The approach was partly informed by the writings of Paulo Freire, who saw adult literacy education as a tool of political revolution. The 1970 campaign fostered a pedagogy which recognised the agency of students and was entirely different from the school-based 'remedial' model. This approach was fundamental to the relationship which developed over time between adult literacy education and a commitment to self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties. A tension was, however, built into the relationship by the Right to Read activists. Their manifesto expressly stated that people with learning difficulties (the 'mentally defective') were not included in their call for adult literacy education (BAS, 1074:11). The campaigners were anxious to ensure that the government and the public understood that potential students of adult literacy were 'normal'. The message was reinforced by the landmark BBC series, *On the Move* (1974), which accompanied the national roll-out of the campaign.

Legislation during the period reflected changes in thinking about 'rights' and 'needs' and affected education for people with disabilities. The government-funded

Warnock Report (1978) stated that all children and young people had a right to education, but created a 'needs' based system. The report introduced the phrase 'special educational needs', and proposed a system based on the individual assessment of needs to support integrated schooling. The 1981 Education Act (Special Educational Needs) essentially enacted Warnock's recommendations. 'Rights' and 'needs' were both built into the thinking, informing the conflicted relationship which is the focus of this study. Critics of 'special educational needs' policy and practice voiced strong views in the 1980s, pointing out that individual assessment reinforced an 'individual deficit' philosophy, which took power from students (and parents) and gave it to the professional arbiters such as educational psychologists. Their argument reflected the emergence of 'disability politics'.

Mike Oliver, disability activist and academic, saw assessment of 'needs' as oppression. He, and others, believed that it was a disabling process and that students internalised the identity of 'disabled person'. Their thinking underpinned the ongoing struggle for inclusion in education. Educationalists such as the authors of *A Special Professionalism* (1987), produced to support work in FE, understood that work with students with learning difficulties could challenge labels and stereotypes. Sutcliffe, writing about adult students with learning difficulties, observed that 'assessment' was 'done to' rather than 'with' students of adult literacy, reinforcing their feelings of failure (Sutcliffe, 1994). But these insights did not necessarily affect existing attitudes or institutional policies. Practitioners I spoke to, and contemporary reports I read, articulated frustration that students with learning difficulties were obliged to take courses relating to academic or vocational objectives, which did not reflect their lives or respect their choices. During the 1990s education for 'choice and empowerment' (Sutcliffe, 1990) was not prioritised because the funding for post-

school provision focused on standard certification and vocational objectives. Students with learning difficulties were effectively relegated to second-class status and 'special' courses. The 'rights' of students with learning difficulties became a right to assessment, which then defined them by their 'needs'. The struggle between 'rights' and 'needs' was hard for people to discern in practice at the time, but was vital to the experience of students.

The 'discourse of deficit' is the second 'enduring theme' I examine. It is key to the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It validates a perspective which belittles individuals or groups in the community as 'deficient', and translates ultimately into prejudice and stigma. It reflects a common perception of disability and of learning difficulties, which can be seen in social attitudes throughout the period. The concept of 'the backward adult' current in the 1970s combined 'illiteracy' with 'mental handicap', and was a major reason for the efforts of 1970s campaigners for adult literacy education to distance themselves from 'remedial' provision. The discourse of deficit is present in *A Right to Read* (1974) and still pervades the Skills-for-Life documentation of the 2000s (Hamilton & Pitt, 2011). It reflects the 'individual model' of disability defined by Oliver (1983) and undermines the view that disadvantage has systemic and social causes. My research shows that this dominant perception justifies a system based on individual assessment and reinforces an educational approach based on 'needs' rather than 'rights'. I suggest that it provides the rationale and vocabulary for exclusion and the assumption that students with learning difficulties are entitled only to a 'special' adult literacy education which focuses on 'life skills'.

Questions of power and agency relate also to the discourse of deficit. The theme of 'agency' is particularly resonant in understanding the relationship between

adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties. It is evident in practice and pedagogy. In the 1970s teachers were urged to work alongside their students to choose aims, objectives and content in adult literacy education. A negotiated curriculum which built on a student's aspirations and strengths allowed people with learning difficulties to have some control. Adult literacy education which centred on 'choice and empowerment' (Sutcliffe, 1990) fitted notions of 'social action' articulated in the 1970s. It resonated with the agenda of citizenship which provided an alternative to the theory of adult literacy education as an investment in economic terms. It was also a view which aligned with the concept of literacy as social practice. A social practice approach to adult literacy education recognises the power imbalance in the classroom, as well as in society. Barton (2007) points out that students learn what is 'appropriate' behaviour as literacy students. It is a point particularly relevant to students with learning difficulties. I have suggested above that students with learning difficulties survive in education by adopting the identity presented to them. Giving the student power in the classroom was a theme central to student-centred adult literacy education and vital to a 'rights' based approach to working with students with learning difficulties. It distinguishes adult literacy education which allows students with learning difficulties to have control from a curriculum designed to help them 'cope' with the status quo.

A third 'enduring theme' characterising the relationship between adult literacy education and education for people with learning difficulties in England 1970-2010 also links into the discourse of deficit, and to questions of 'rights' versus 'needs'. It relates to the identity of students, and the purpose of adult literacy education. It can be captured by examining the idea of 'functional literacy' as it developed in debates over adult literacy education in England between 1970 and 2010. The notion that

literacy education should enable people to 'function' more effectively was derived from UNESCO definitions and was present in the manifesto *A Right to Read* (1974). The meaning was open to various interpretations, which are discussed by Burgess and Hamilton in the English context. They conclude that the term is useful in its vagueness, and allows the government of the 2000s to imply that 'functional literacy' is essentially linked to employability. They go further, and suggest that the term 'functional' has echoes of the sociological concept of 'functionalism', which envisions a society in 'equilibrium' which is 'functional' in that everybody plays their allotted role and the status quo is not disrupted (Burgess & Hamilton, 2011). The logic of this position translates into a view which would maintain that people with learning difficulties should not challenge their 'label' and consequently that a 'special' curriculum meets their 'needs'. Thus the use of the term 'functional' to describe adult literacy education can be used to justify discrimination based on both the perceived purpose of adult literacy education and on the identity of students. In this way it comes to echo the discourse of deficit.

This concluding section focuses on 'the effect of the relationship on adult literacy education in practice'. This is, as noted above, the 'nub' of the matter according to subjects interviewed in the course of my research. I conclude that the effect of the relationship on practice was complex. It reflects the 'close' but 'tense' nature of the relationship revealed by my research. Teachers spoke to me about the value of a student-centred approach, which could offer student agency in creative projects and a flexible curriculum. They often felt strongly that students should have choices in practice. The principle of a student-centred approach was woven into adult literacy education through practice rather than policy. It was not an element which was specifically concerned with education for people with learning difficulties,

but the evidence shows that it was particularly important to the relationship I study. It represented an understanding that the student experience was central to adult literacy education, and to inclusive ideas of achievement.

In the end the most obvious effect of the relationship under discussion was that the political agenda, supported by social attitudes and a perception of economic value, created a two-tier approach based on student identity. Many practitioners recognised that a system which depended on the assessment of 'needs' could support people with learning difficulties to achieve success in a 'special' curriculum. Practitioners (and funding) came to rely on it. *Freedom to Learn* (2000) included a call from practitioners for individual assessment alongside a demand for students to have choices. By the 2000s 'QR' told me that regular assessment was integral to practice. The right to education had become the right to have an assessment of needs. Most people involved in adult literacy education did not have the time or inclination to read the history or theory. The factors and themes explored above were not clear. My analysis shows that adult literacy education which gave all students time, agency and choice was suppressed by policies which prioritised employability as an aim and counted achievement in terms of standard certification. On the other hand a tradition of student-centred practice in adult literacy education survived. Understanding the relationship means accepting this dual nature and legacy. Looking closely at the practice of adult literacy education and how it related to education for people with learning difficulties shows how the contradictory history developed.

Although the stated position of the leading campaigners for adult literacy education in the 1970s, when my study opens, was against the access of people with learning difficulties to adult literacy education, students with learning difficulties

were present and were widely accommodated by 1978. The accounts of practitioners who spoke to me, plus the evidence of the archive material, show that students with learning difficulties attended one-to-one and group provision. They were able to participate because they were recognised as adult students. The initial emphasis was on social justice, not educational achievement. One-to-one tuition worked on a partnership basis which could encourage the student to choose content and negotiate aims and methods. A student-centred approach became central to the identity of adult literacy education through this early practice and the ideology of empowerment. Students with learning difficulties could be accommodated. Aims could include confidence and participation. The language experience method of teaching relied on a 'dialogue' between teacher and student. A tradition of student writing and publication gave students agency and validated the 'student voice'. Many practitioners worked their way up to responsible posts during the 1970s and 1980s and carried these formative experiences with them. My evidence demonstrates that they had to balance an array of pressures, but also that, in the absence of central direction, practitioners took leading roles in shaping the relationship.

During the 1990s the government sought to take control and to establish conformity in the post-school sector by law. Tuckett, then Director of NIACE, described a bruising period, which ultimately gave provision for adult literacy and education for people with learning difficulties secure funding, but also confirmed a vocational imperative for post-school education. Practitioners spoke of maintaining choice for students with learning difficulties by trying to 'wedge' inappropriate certification into provision. The delicate negotiations and partnerships which supported students with learning difficulties were seen as obstacles to consistency and accountability by the new FEFC funding body. An identity-based distinction

between 'independent living and communication' for students with learning difficulties and 'basic literacy' created a split which reconceptualised adult literacy education to fit the new funding model.

The Skills-For-Life initiative introduced by the New Labour government in 2001 was an opportunity for a re-set. The *Freedom to Learn* (2000) report commissioned by the government recommended a programme which would have validated students with learning difficulties as adult literacy students at every level. The report recommended flexible and negotiable objectives, reflecting student choice. The vision was not implemented. A system of individual assessment ensured that students with learning difficulties were defined by their 'needs' rather than their 'rights'. During the 2000s target-driven funding tied to outcomes reinforced the 'second class' status of students with learning difficulties and consolidated the argument for a 'special' curriculum focused on 'living skills'.

Implications

This thesis has implications in different dimensions. It shows that more work is needed to research, document and promote the value of adult literacy education for people with learning difficulties. I have pointed out that adult literacy education practitioners were unfamiliar with research into learning difficulties which could help them to look positively, and with better understanding, at work with students with learning difficulties, as they might do with issues of deafness for instance. Despite calls from Dee et al. (2006) and Duncan (2010), the gap in understanding is historically shaped by prejudice and stigma. An adult-based perspective on literacy education for people with learning difficulties, which looks beyond the 'independent living skills' model, needs to be developed. A particular implication of my work,

therefore, is the need to extend research into education for people with learning difficulties beyond school and college into adulthood.

Alongside that implication is a concern that research into learning difficulties is seen to fall naturally into the disciplines of health, psychology and care. I make an argument for an educational approach which considers the particular role of education for adults. My study specifically challenges the assumption that a 'special' curriculum is necessary or desirable in adult literacy work with students with learning difficulties. I show that an approach based on 'needs' isolates individuals and undermines choice and dignity. It echoes the discourse of deficit which 'labels' students and limits opportunities. The rationale for special education reflects a 'binary' understanding which categorises students as 'normal' or 'special', and does not look beyond existing structures and hierarchies.

I conclude that my work has further implications in respect of adult literacy education because it calls for a rights-based student-centred approach. The thesis reflects a social practice understanding of adult literacy education, which calls for policy and practice to recognise and address the conventional power-balance in the classroom. My findings suggest that student-centred adult literacy education can offer all students validation and a chance to question the status quo, where funding is not tied into imposed targets. I found that the aim of employability undermined student-centred adult literacy education, partly because it brought with it a system centred on individual achievement, assessment, certification and progression. Student-centred adult literacy education prioritises process and shared creative endeavour which measures achievement in 'quality of life' terms.

I recognise that this study is restricted due to my choices and my own limitations and life experience. I am aware that there are issues of intersectionality which are not investigated. My individual interview subjects did not include members of BAME communities. The experts and practitioners I talked to accurately reflected the majority of workers in the area at the time, but other aspects are missing. Different approaches would add to the knowledge available.

The thesis also reflects the perspective of a professional in adult literacy education, rather than a specialist in learning difficulties. I chose not to engage with questions about the nature or level of learning difficulties of students who might be involved in adult literacy education. The research in this respect simulated the experience of adult literacy practitioners who essentially take on the students who present themselves. I also chose not to concentrate on specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia in relation to adult literacy education, on the grounds that other studies cover these aspects, while general learning difficulties are neglected in the research literature.

Finally, another researcher could interpret the data differently and might come to other conclusions. It is a shifting and multi-faceted field. New work could take different approaches. Social policy analysis, case studies or individual life stories would have different perspectives. My interpretation is open to challenge.

References

- AB, 2017. [Interview] (14 March 2017).
- Ade-Ojo, G. & Duckworth, V., 2015. *Adult literacy policy and practice: From intrinsic values to instrumentalism*. 1st ed. London: Macmillan Palgrave.
- ALBSU, 1982a. *Annual report 1981-2*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1983a. *Developing communication skills: An ideas handbook for work with mentally handicapped adults*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1983b. *Organising provision: Discussion document on good practice in adult literacy and basic skills*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1992a. *Basic skills in Further Education Colleges*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1992b. *ALBSU Quality Mark*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1992c. *ALBSU Standards for basic skills teachers* London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1993. *Annual report*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education, UCL.
- ALBSU, 1993a. *Introduction to literacy teaching* (new edition). London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- ALBSU/C&G, 1990. *Get Ahead with Wordpower*. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.

- Appleby, Y. & Barton, D. 2008. *Responding to people's lives*. Leicester: NIACE/NRDC.
- Appleby, Y. & Bathmaker, A.-M., 2006. The new skills agenda: increased lifelong learning or new sites of inequality? *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(5), pp. 703–719.
- Armstrong, D. & Heathcote, V., 2003. *Literature review of ESOL for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. London: NRDC.
- Armstrong, P. F., 1982. The 'needs-meeting' ideology in liberal adult education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 1(4), pp. 293–321.
- Ball, S.J., 2006. *Education, policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Barnes, C., 2005. Foreword. In: A. Borsay, *Disability and social policy in Britain since 1750*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. i–xi.
- Barnes, C., 2007. Disability activism and the struggle for change: disability, policy and politics in the UK. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 2(3), pp. 203–221.
- Barnes, C. & Sheldon, A., 2007. 'Emancipatory' disability research and special educational needs. In: *The Sage Handbook of Special Education*. London: Sage, pp. 233–246.
- Barton, D., 2006. Significance of a social practice view of language, literacy and numeracy. In L. Tett, M. Hamilton & Y. Hillier eds. *Adult literacy, Numeracy and Language*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Barton, D., 2007. *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Barton, D. & Hamilton, M., 1998. *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge.
- Barton, D., Hamilton M. & Ivanic, R. eds. 2000. *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*. London: Routledge.
- Barton, L., ed. 1988. *The politics of special educational needs*. Lewes: Falmer.
- Barton, L., 1993. The struggle for citizenship: The case of disabled people. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 8 (3), pp.235-248.
- Barton, L., 2003. *Inclusive education and teacher education: A basis of hope or a discourse of delusion*. London: Institute of Education.
- Barton, L. & Corbett, J., 1993. Special needs in further education: The challenge of inclusive provision. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 8(1), pp. 14–23.
- BAS see British Association of Settlements.
- Basic Skills Agency, 2001. *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum*. London: DfEE.
- Baynham, M., 1995. *Literacy practices: Investigating literacy in social contexts*. Harlow: Longman.
- Bergin, S. & Johnson, A., 1994. *Learning difficulties and the power of labelling in ABE*. Bristol: Further Education Staff College (Mendip Papers).
- Benavot, A., 2015. Literacy in the twenty-first century: towards a dynamic nexus of social relations. *Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 61(3), pp. 273–291.
- Biesta, G., 2013. Interrupting the politics of learning. *Power and Education*, 5(1), pp. 4–15.
- Blunkett, D., 2001. Foreword. In: *Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*. London: DfEE, pp. 1–2.

- Booth, T., 1988. Challenging concepts of integration. In: L. Barton, ed. *The Politics of Special Educational Needs*. Lewes: Falmer, pp. 99–118.
- Borsay, A., 2005. *Disability and social policy in Britain since 1750*. 1st ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, P., 1986. The forms of capital. In: J.G. Richardson, ed. *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Westport: Greenwood, pp.241-258
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Brisenden, S., 1986. Independent living and the medical model of disability. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 1(2), pp. 173–178.
- British Association of Settlements Adult Literacy Campaign Group, 1973. *Notes of meeting 5.3.73*. London: BAS. Changing Faces archive, Policy and Special Topics, Lancaster University.
- British Association of Settlements, 1974. *A Right to Read: Action for a literate Britain*. London: BAS.
- Brooks, G., Giles, K., Harman J., Kendall S., Rees, F & Whittaker S, 2001. *Assembling the fragments: A review of research on adult basic skills*. London: NFER/DfEE..
- Burgess, A. & Hamilton, M., 2011. *Back to the future? Functional literacy and the new skills agenda*. Discussion Paper. Lancaster: RaPAL.
- Bynner, J., 2016. Whatever happened to lifelong learning? And does it matter? *Journal of the British Academy*, vol. 5, pp. 61–89.
- Bynner, J. & Parsons, S., 1997. *It doesn't get any better: The impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37-year olds*. London: Basic Skills Agency.

- Callaghan, J., 1976. A rational debate based on the facts. In *Education in England: the history of our schools*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk> [Accessed 1 December 2016].
- CD, 2017. [Interview] (13 May 2017).
- Challenging Behaviour Foundation, n.d. *Formal Definitions of Learning Disability*.
[Online] Available at: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk>
[Accessed 1 September 2016].
- Charnley, A. H. & Jones, H. A., 1979. *The Concept of success in adult literacy*.
London: ALBSU.
- Charnley, A. H. & Withnall, A., 1989. *Developments in basic education: Special development projects 1978–85*. London: ALBSU.
- Chitty, C., 1989. *Towards a new education system: the victory of the New Right?*
London: Routledge.
- Clarke, K., Lesirge, R., Moorhouse, C. & Tuckett, A. 1975. *Resource pack for volunteer tutors*. London: ALRA. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Clyne, P., 1972. *The disadvantaged adult: Educational and social needs of minority groups*. London: Longman.
- Clyne, P. & Payne, D, 2006. *Russell and after: The politics of adult education 1969–97*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Coare, P. & Johnston, R., eds., 2003. *Adult Learning, citizenship and community voices: Exploring community-based practice*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Coffield, F., 1999. Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(4), pp. 479–499.

Coffield, F., Edwards, S., Finlay I., Hodgson A., Spours, K. & Steer, R., 2008.

Improving learning, skills and inclusion: The impact of policy on post-compulsory education. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cooper, D., 2019. [Interview] (16 June 2019).

Corbett, J., 1996. *Bad-Mouthing: the language of special needs.* London: Falmer

Crowther, J., Hamilton, M. & Tett, L., eds. 2001. *Powerful literacies.* Leicester:

NIACE.

Crowther, J., Machlachlan, K. & Tett, L., 2010. Adult literacy, learning identities and

pedagogic practice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29 (6), pp.

651-664.

Crystal, D., 2004. *The stories of English.* London: Penguin.

Davies, P., 1992. *Basic skills in Further Education Colleges.* London: ALBSU.

Dean, A. & Hegarty, S., eds., 1984. *Learning for independence: Post-16 educational provision for people with severe learning difficulties.* London: FEU.

Dee, L., 1988. Young people with severe learning difficulties in colleges of Further

Education: Some current issues. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*,

12(2), pp. 12–22.

Dee, L., 1999. Inclusive learning: from rhetoric to reality? In: A. Green & N. Lucas,

eds. *FE and lifelong learning: Realigning the sector for the twenty-first*

century. London: Institute of Education, pp. 139–160.

Dee, L., 2019. [Interview] (9 April 2019).

Dee, L., Devecchi, C., Florian, L. with Cochrane, S., 2006. *Being, having and doing:*

Theories of learning and adults with learning difficulties. London: Learning and Skills Network.

Delors, J., 1996. *Learning: The Treasure Within.* Paris: UNESCO.

- Dennis, C., 2010. Is the professionalisation of adult basic skills practice possible, desirable or inevitable? *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 18(2), pp. 26–40.
- Derrick, J. & Gawn, J., 2010. Planning and assessment. In: N. Hughes & I. Schwab, eds. *Teaching adult literacy: Principles and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 278–309.
- Devereux, W., 1975. *Lesson kit for trainers of adult literacy tutors*. London: ALRA. Changing Faces archive, Policy and Special Topics, Lancaster University.
- Devereux, W., 1978. *Training in adult literacy schemes*. London: ALRA. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- DfEE, 2001. *Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*. Nottingham: DfEE.
- DfES, 2004. *Removing barriers to achievement. The government's strategy for SEN*. Nottingham: DfES.
- DfES, 2006. *Person-centred approaches and adults with learning difficulties*. Nottingham: DfES.
- DfES/LSDA, 2002. *Adult Pre-entry curriculum framework for Literacy and Numeracy*. London: DfES.
- DIUS, 2009. *Skills for Life: Changing lives*. London: Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills.
- DoH, 2001. *Valuing people: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st Century*. London: DoH.
- DoH, 2009. *Valuing Employment Now*. London: DoH.
- Dumbleton, P. , Heddell, F., Lloyd, C., McVittie, B., Moorhouse, C. & O'Shea G., 1979. *Starting Points*. London: ALBSU. Changing Faces archive, Teaching and Learning, Lancaster University.

- Duncan, S., 2010. Literacy learning for adults with global learning difficulties. In: N. Hughes & I. Schwab, eds. *Teaching Adult Literacy: Principles and Practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 331–343.
- Edmunds, L., 1978. *7 Days a Week*. London: Frobisher AEI. Changing Faces archive, Teaching and Learning, Lancaster University.
- EF, 2017. [Interview] (17 May 2017).
- Elliott, H., 2011. Interviewing mothers: Reflections on closeness and reflexivity in research encounters. *Studies in the Maternal*, pp. 1–20.
- Ellsworth, E., 1989. Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59 (3), pp. 297-324.
- Emerson, E. & Heslop, P., 2010. *A Working Definition of Learning Disabilities*. London: DoH.
- Fagg, V., 1989. *Part-time Lecturers*. Bristol: Further Education Staff College.
- Fauré, E., 1972. *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO.
- FE Special Needs Teacher Training Working Group, 1987. *A special professionalism*. London: FEU.
- FEFC, 1993. *Schedule 2 to the Further & Higher Education Act 1992 and the Council's associated criteria*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 1993a. Ref. 93/28. *Assessing achievement: Framework for inspections in FE sector*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 1995. *Circular 95/02, College strategic plans 1995-6 and beyond*. Coventry: FEFC.

- FEFC, 1996. *Provision for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties: A good practice report*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 1997a. *Circular 97/01, Annex A, Background:6*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 1997b. *Circular 97/14. Consultation on recording Schedule 2 (d) to (g) courses*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 1998. *Curriculum area inspection report on Basic Education*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEFC, 2000. *Guide to the Basic Skills Quality Initiative*. Coventry: FEFC.
- FEU, 1985. *From coping to confidence*. London: FEU.
- FEU, 1988. *New directions: A curriculum framework for students with severe learning difficulties*. London: FEU.
- Field, J. 2001. Lifelong education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (1-2), pp.3-15.
- Finger, M. & Asun, J. M., 2001. *Adult Education at the crossroads: Learning our way out*. London: Zed Books.
- Finnigan, R., 2007. Left on the shelf? *Reflect: magazine of NRDC*, Issue 8, p. 8.
- Fish, J., 1985. *Educational opportunities for all?* London: ILEA.
- Flick, U., 2007. Editorial introduction. In: S. Kvale, *Doing interviews*. London: Sage, pp. x–xi.
- Foster, P., 1985. Comparative literacy. In M. Hamilton & D. Barton eds *Research Papers of Association for Recurrent Education*. Sheffield, RaPAL. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Fowler, Z., 2005. *Politically constructing adult literacy: A case study of the Skills for Life strategy for improving adult literacy in England 1998–2002*. London: Institute of Education.

- Freeman, A., 1988. Who's moving the goal posts and what game are we playing anyway? Social competence examined. In L. Barton ed. *The Politics of Special Educational Needs*. Lewes: Falmer, pp.125-137
- Freire, P., 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1st ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education.
- Freire, P., 1994. The adult literacy process as cultural action for freedom. In: J. Maybin, ed. *Language and literacy in social practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, pp. 252–263.
- Frost, G. & Hoy, C. eds.1985. *Opening time: A writing resource pack written by students in basic education*. Manchester, Gatehouse Project. Changing Faces archive, Teaching and Learning, Lancaster University.
- Fryer, R.H., 1997. *Learning for the 21st Century: First report of National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*. Sheffield: NAGCELL.
- Fryer, R.H., 2009. Identity and belonging. In T. Schuller & D. Watson eds. *Learning through Life: Commission of Inquiry into the future for lifelong learning*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 37-53.
- Gee, J.P., Hull, G. & Lankshear C. 1996. *The New Work Order, Behind the language of the new capitalism*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Gee, J.P., 2000. The New Literacy Studies: From 'socially situated' to the work of the social. In: D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic, eds. *Situated Literacies*. London: Routledge, pp. 180–196.
- GH, 2017. [Interview] (6 June 2017).
- Goffman, E., 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Anchor Books.

- Gray, W. S., 1956. *Monograph on fundamental education X: Reading and writing*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Green, A. & Lucas, N., eds. 1999. *FE and lifelong learning: Realigning the sector for the twenty-first Century*. London: Institute of Education.
- Hamilton, M., 2005. Keeping alive alternative visions. In: M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from research and practice: A handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 96–117.
- Hamilton, M., 2009. Putting words in their mouths: The alignment of identities with system goals through the use of individual learning plans. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(2), pp. 221–242.
- Hamilton, M., 2010. The social context of literacy. In N. Hughes & I. Schwab eds *Teaching adult literacy: Principles and practice*. Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Hamilton, M. & Barton, D. eds. 1985. Research and practice in adult literacy. Sheffield: *Research papers of Association for Recurrent Education (ARE)*. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Hamilton, M. & Hillier, Y., 2006. *Changing faces of adult literacy, language and numeracy: A critical history*. 1st ed. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Hamilton, M. & Wilson, A. eds., 2006. *New ways of engaging new learners: Lessons from round one of the practitioner-led research initiative*. London: NRDC.
- Hamilton, M., Macrae, C. & Tett, L., 2001. Powerful literacies: The policy context. In: *Powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 23–42.
- Hamilton, M. & Pitt, K., 2011. Changing policy discourses: Constructing literacy inequalities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(6), pp. 577-656.

- Hamilton, M. & Tett, L., 2012. More powerful literacies: The policy context. In Hamilton, M, Tett, L & Crowther, J. eds. *More powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 40-66.
- Hamilton, M., Tett, L. & Crowther, J., eds. 2012. *More powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Held, M. 2019 [Interview] (19 July 2019).
- Herrington, M. & Kendall, A., eds. 2005. *Insights from research and practice: A handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Hewitson, C., 1998. *A study of learning support in post-compulsory education*. London: Routledge.
- Hewitt, A., 1978. *Adult Literacy and the Hard-of-Hearing Student*. London: ALRA.
- Hillier, Y., 1988. Literacy, Numeracy and the MSC. *Higher Education Review*, 20(3), pp. 77–82.
- Hillier, Y., 2006. Crossing Boundaries or Boundary Crossings: From practice to research and research to practice. In Tett, L., Hamilton, M. & Hillier, Y eds. *Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Language*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 175-184.
- Holland, D. & Lave, J., 2009. Social practice theory and the 'Historical Production of Persons'. *International Journal of Human Activity Theory*, pp. 1–15.
- Hood, P. & Lavender, P., 1992. *A new life*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Hughes, N. & Schwab, I. eds. 2010. *Teaching adult literacy: Principles and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hulin, P., 1989. *Accrediting basic skills: Basic skills and the national curriculum*. London: ALBSU.

IJ, 2017. [Interview] (15 June 2017).

Illich, I., 1971. *Deschooling society*. London: Marion Boyars

Illich, I., 1977. *Disabling professions*. London: Marion Boyars.

Jacobsen, Y. & Berkeley, V., 2006. We've come a long way, but.... *Adults Learning*, 17(10), pp. 18–19.

Jamieson, C. and the Stand Up for Your Rights Group, 2005. Developing literacies within ABE to promote self-advocacy work alongside adults with learning disabilities. In M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from research and practice*. Leicester: NIACE pp. 491–496.

Jarvis, P., 1988. *Adult and continuing Education: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge

Jones, H. M. & Marriott, S., 1995. Adult literacy in England, 1945–75: Why did it take so long to get 'On the Move'? *History of Education*, 24(4), pp. 337–352.

Jones, M-L., 2007. Handle with care. *Reflect:the magazine of NRDC*, 8, pp 4-5.

Kelly, S, Soundranayagam, L., Grief, S, 2004. Teaching and learning writing: A review of research and practice. London: NRDC.

Kennedy, H., 1997. *Learning Works: Widening participation in Further Education*. Coventry: FEFC.

King's Fund, 1980. *An ordinary life: Comprehensive locally-based residential services for mentally-handicapped people*. London: King's Fund.

KL, 2017. [Interview] (21 June 2017).

Kvale, S., 2007. *Doing interviews*. London: Sage.

Language and Literacy Unit, 1987. *Induction pack for new tutors (Literacy)*. London: LLU archive, Code 3.1.4, London South Bank University.

- Lavender, P., 2004. Tests, targets and ptarmigans. In: P. Lavender, J. Derrick & B. Brooks, eds. *Testing, testing.. 1,2,3.: Assessment in adult literacy, language and numeracy*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 3–14.
- Lawson, E., [Interview] (3 May 2019).
- Learning and Skills Council, 2006. *Statement of priorities 2008/9–2010/11*. Coventry: LSC. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2005. Leitch Review of Future Skills Needs in the UK: Interim findings. *Paper 11*. London: LSDA. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Learning Difficulties & Disabilities Working Group, 2000. *Freedom to learn: Basic skills for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. London: DfEE.
- Lee, R., 1984. Introduction. In: A. Dean & S. Hegarty eds. *Learning for independence: Post-16 educational provision for people with severe learning difficulties*. London: FEU.
- Leitch, S., 2006. *Prosperity for all in the global economy – World class skills*. London: HM Treasury.
- Lindsey, M. P., 1989. *Dictionary of mental handicap*. London: Routledge.
- Little, P., 2009. *Learning for work: Employability for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. Coventry: LSC.
- Lovett, T., 1975. *Adult education, community development and the working class*. London: Ward Lock.
- LSC see Learning and Skills Council.
- LSDA see Learning and Skills Development Agency.

- Mace, J., 1985. Taking Control of Learning. In M. Hamilton & D. Barton eds. *Research papers of Association for Recurrent Education*, Sheffield: RaPAL. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Mace, J., 1992. *Talking about literacy: Principles and practice of adult literacy education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Mace, J., 2001. Signatures and the lettered world. In: J. Crowther, M. Hamilton & L.Tett eds. *Powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 45-55.
- Mace, J., 2003. *Playing with time: Mothers and the meaning of literacy*. London: Routledge.
- Mace, J., 2005. The significance of student writing. In: M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from research and practice: a handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 251–256.
- Mace, J., 2019. [Interview] (21 June 2019).
- Mansell, J., 1984a. Introductory Letter. In: A. Dean & S. Hegarty, eds. *Learning for independence: Post-16 educational provision for people with severe learning difficulties*. London: FEU p. 1.
- Mansell, J., 1984b. The FEU and FE teachers: a summary of a presentation at Huddersfield Polytechnic. *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 36(93), pp. 39–40.
- Marshall, M.N., 1996, Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), pp. 522-525.
- Martin, I., 2003. Adult education, lifelong learning and citizenship: Some ifs and buts. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(6), pp. 566–579.
- Mason, J., 2004. Personal narratives, relational selves: Residential histories in the living and telling. *The Sociological Review*, pp. 162–179.

- Maudslay, L. & Nightingale, C., 2004. *Achievement in non-accredited learning for adults with learning difficulties*. Leicester: NIACE.
- McCaffery, J., 1985. Literacy for what? In M. Hamilton & D. Barton eds. *Research Papers of Association for Recurrent Education*. Sheffield: RAPAL. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- McCulloch, G. & Richardson, W., 2000. *Historical research in educational settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McGinty, J. & Fish, J., 1993. *Further Education in the market place: Equity, opportunity and individual learning*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- McGivney, V., 1990. *Education's for other people: Access to education for non-participant adults*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Mencap, 2010. *Mencap.org.uk*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.mencap.org.uk> [Accessed 29 August 2016].
- Merry, R., 1985. What control? In: G. Frost & C. Hoy, eds. *Opening Time: a writing resource pack*. Manchester: Gatehouse Project. Changing Faces archive, Teaching and Learning, Lancaster University.
- MN, 2017. [Interview] (29 June 2017).
- Moser, C., 1999. *Improving literacy and numeracy: A fresh start. The report of the working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser*. Nottingham: London: DfEE.
- Moss, W., 2005. Talk into text: Reflections on the relationship between author and scribe in writing through language experience. In: M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from Research and Practice: a handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 148–156.
- Newman, M., 1979. *The poor cousin: A study of adult education*. London: Allen & Unwin

- NIACE, 2003. *Valuing people: Briefing paper for Learning Disability Partnership Boards*. Leicester: NIACE.
- NIACE, 2005. *Pathfinders: Learning for living; Developing access to Skills for Life for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: Creating learning materials*. London: DfEE.
- NIACE, 2011. *Work, society and lifelong learning: Report of the inquiry into adult literacy in England*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Norwich, B., 2004. *Moderate learning difficulties and inclusion: The end of a category?* Manchester: BERA.
- O'Brien, J. & Lyle, C., 1987. *Framework for accomplishments: a workshop for people developing better services*. Decatur: Responsive Systems Associates.
- O'Brien, R., 1988. The rise and fall of the Manpower Services Commission. *Policy Studies*, 9(2), pp. 3–8.
- OECD, 2001. *The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital*. Paris: OECD.
- Oliver, M., 1983. *Social work with disabled people*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Oliver, M., 1986. Social policy and disability: Some theoretical issues. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 1 (1), pp. 5-17.
- Oliver, M., 1988. The social and political context of educational policy: The case of special needs. In L. Barton ed. *The Politics of Special Educational Needs*. Lewes: Falmer, pp.14-21.
- Oliver, M., 1990. *The politics of disablement*. London: Macmillan.
- Oliver, M., 1996. *Understanding disability: From theory to practice*. 1st ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- Oliver, M., 2013. Social model of disability 30 years on. *Disability and Society*, 28(7), pp. 1024–26.
- OP, 2017. [Interview] (8 June 2017).
- Panchamia, N., 2010. *Choice and competition in further education*. London: Institute for Government.
- Papen, U., 2005. *Adult literacy as social practice: More than skills*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Parsons, S. & Bynner, J. *Illuminating disadvantage: Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the lifecourse*. London: NRDC.
- Perkin, H., 2002. *The rise of professional society: England since 1880*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Portelli, A., 2016. What makes oral history different? In: *Oral History Reader*. London: Taylor and Francis, pp. 48–58.
- Putnam, R., 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2002. *Designing a learner-centred curriculum for 16-24 year-olds with learning difficulties*. London:QCA.
- QR, 2017. [Interview] (24 July 2017).
- Radford, J., 1973. *The Blackfriars experiment*. London: Blackfriars Settlement.
- Radio Times, *Issue 2862*, September 1978. <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk>
- Riddell, S., Baron, S. & Wilson, A., 2001. *The learning society and people with learning difficulties*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Risman, A., 1975. Adult illiterate students. *Studies in Adult Education*, 7(2), pp. 142–150.

- Roberts, C., Baynham, M., Shrubbsall, P., Brittan, J., Cooper, B., Gidley, N., Windsor, V., Eldred, J., Grief, S., Castellino C. & Walsh, M. 2005. *Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL.: 7 case studies*. London: NRDC.
- Robson, J., 1998. A profession in crisis: Status, culture and identity in the FE college. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 50(4), pp. 585–607.
- Rose, J., 1994. Partnership: Some models of multi-agency work in the education of adult students with disabilities or learning difficulties. *Educare* no. 48, pp.7-11.
- Rose, J., 1995. Access to FE for students with learning difficulties or disabilities: The role of assessment. *Access Networking*, Issue 3, p. 5.
- Rowntree Foundation, www.jrf.org.uk, accessed 16.5.21
- Russell, L., 1973. *The Russell report on adult education in England and Wales: A plan for development*. London, HMSO.
- Rye, J., 2001. *The Spastics Society to Scope: The story of the name change and relaunch November 1994*. London: Scope.
- Saner, E., 2021. *Frances is the most joyful person!* Guardian, 17.06.21: pp 6-7.
Available at <https://guardian.com>.
- Schuller, T. & Watson, D. eds., 2009. *Learning through life: Inquiry into the future for lifelong learning*. Leicester, NIACE.
- Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2006. *Third Report*. London: HMSO
Available at <https://publications.parliament.uk>
- Sellers, J., 2005. Walking the tightrope: Experiences of women part-time tutors. In: M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from Research and Practice: a handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 189–192.

- Sen, A., 1999. *Development as freedom*. Oxford: OUP.
- Sen, A., 2003. The importance of basic education. Commonwealth Conference speech, no page numbers. Available at <https://guardian.com>. Accessed 8.6.2015.
- Shaw, M., 2003. Warnock calls for rethink. *Times Educational Supplement*, no.4550 p 22.
- Simon, B., 1985. *Does education matter?* London: Lawrence Wishart.
- Slee, R., 2018. *Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Smellie, I., 2009. The perspective of a local Mencap Society. *Mental Health Review Journal*, 14(2), pp. 20–21.
- ST, 2017. [Interview] (6 Sept 2017).
- Stalker, K., 1998. Some ethical and methodological issues in research with people with learning difficulties. *Disability and Society*, pp. 5–19.
- Stanbury, C., 1986. In G. Lobley ed *2nd London conference of Research and Practice in Adult Literacy*. London: RaPAL. Changing Faces archive, Policy and Special Topics, Lancaster University.
- Street, B., 1984. *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, CUP.
- Street, B., 2001. Contexts for literacy work. In: M. Hamilton, L. Tett & J. Crowther, eds. *Powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 13–22.
- Street, B., 2005. Putting literacies on the political agenda. In: M. Herrington & A. Kendall, eds. *Insights from research and practice: a handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 52–61.

- Street, B., 2006. Autonomous and ideological models of literacy: Approaches from New Literacy Studies. In *Media Anthropology Network*. Available at <https://easaonline.org>.
- Sutcliffe, J., 1990. *Adults with learning difficulties: Education for choice and empowerment. A handbook of good practice*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Sutcliffe, J., 1992. *Integration for adults with learning difficulties: Contexts and debates*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Sutcliffe, J., 1994. *Teaching basic skills to adults with learning difficulties*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Swain, J., Heyman, B. & Gillman, M., 1998. Public research, private concerns: Ethical issues in the use of open-ended interviews with people who have learning difficulties. *Disability and Society*, pp. 21–36
- Taylor, J., ed. 1987. *ABE Conference*. Lancaster: Lancs Education Committee. Changing Faces archive, Policy and Special Topics, Lancaster University.
- Tett, L., 2010. *Community education, learning and development*. Edinburgh: Dunedin.
- Tett, L., Hamilton, M. & Hillier, Y., eds. 2006. *Adult literacy, numeracy and language: Policy, practice and research*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Thomas, G., 2013. A review of thinking and research about inclusive education policy, with suggestions for a new kind of inclusive thinking. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(3), pp. 473–490.
- Thompson, P., 2000. *The voice of the past: Oral history*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tomlinson, J., 1996. *Inclusive Learning: Report of the disabilities and/or learning difficulties committee*. Sheffield: FEFC.

- Tomlinson, S., 1985. The expansion of special education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 11(2), pp. 157–165.
- Tomlinson, S., 2005. *Education in a post-welfare society*. 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Tomlinson, S., 2014. *The politics of race, class and special education: Selected works of Sally Tomlinson*. 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Tuckett, A., 2004. Introduction. In: P. Lavender, J. Derrick & B. Brooks, eds. *Testing, testing..1,2,3.: assessment in adult literacy, language and numeracy*. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 1–2.
- Tuckett, A., 2019. [Interview] (2 May 2019).
- UN, 1971. *Declaration of the rights of mentally retarded persons*. New York: United Nations General Assembly.
- UN, 1981. *International Year of Disabled Persons*. New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Disability. <https://un.org.devt/>
- UNESCO, 1949. Summary report of the international conference on adult education. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO, 1994. Salamanca statement on principles, policy and practice in special needs education. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO, 2006. *Education for All global monitoring report*. Paris: UNESCO
- UNESCO, 2008. *The global literacy challenge: A profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid-point of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003–2012*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UV, 2017 [Interview] (14.11.17).
- Wagner, D.A, 1990. Literacy and Research: Past, present and future. *UNESCO International Bureau of Education*, pp. 1–8.

- Walmsley, J., 1991. Talking to top people: Some issues relating to the citizenship of people with learning difficulties. In *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 6 (3), pp 219-231.
- Walmsley, J., 2001. Normalisation, emancipatory research and inclusive research in learning disability. In *Disability and Society*, 16 (2), pp187-205.
- Warnock, M., 1978. *Special Educational Needs: The report of the committee of enquiry into the education of handicapped children and young people*. London: HMSO.
- Webster, R., 2018. Why the Warnock report still matters today. In *Times Educational Supplement*, no 5298, pp.38-39.
- Wells, A., 1982. *Report*, ALBSU Annual conference. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Wells, A., 1983. Foreword. In *Developing Communication Skills: An ideas handbook for work with mentally handicapped adults*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Wells, A., 1985. *ALBSU Annual Report 1984/5*. London: ALBSU. Basic Skills collection, Institute of Education library, UCL.
- Wells, A., 1989. Foreword. In: *Developments in basic education 1978–85*. London: ALBSU, pp. 5–9.
- Wells, A., 1996. It's OK, Mum, they told me I'm just SEN. *Basic Skills*, Vol. June/July, pp. 2–4.
- Wells, A. [Interview] (1 April 2019).
- Whelan, E., Speake, B. & Strickland, T., 1984. Action research: Working with ATCs in Britain. In: R. I. Brown, ed. *Integrated Programmes for Handicapped adolescents and adults*. London: Routledge, pp 87-113. Chapter 4.

- Williams, R., 1983. *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. 2nd ed. London: Fontana.
- Willis, P., 1984. The integration of mentally handicapped people into adult education. In: A. Dean & S. Hegarty, eds. *Learning for Independence*. London: FEU.
- Withers, R. & Lee, J., 1988. Power in disguise. In: L. Barton, ed. *The politics of special educational needs*. Lewes: Falmer, pp. 175–188.
- Withnall, A., 1994. Literacy on the agenda: the origins of the adult literacy campaign in the United Kingdom. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 26(1), pp. 67–85.
- Wolfensberger, W. P. et al., 1972. *The principle of normalization in human services*. Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation.
- Woodin, T., 2018. *Working-class writing and publishing in the late twentieth century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Appendix 1

Adult Literacy Education/Students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities Timeline 1970–2009

Adult Literacy Education	Date	SLDD
	1970	Education (Handicapped children) Act removes concept of 'ineducable child' All children have right to education
BAS Literacy Campaign Group formed <i>Russell Report</i> on adult education published MSC established	1973	
<i>A Right to Read</i> published by BAS	1974	
Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) set up for 1 year	1975	
Adult Literacy Unit (ALU) set up for 2 years	1977	
	1978	<i>Warnock Report</i> introduces Special Educational Needs (SEN) recommending integration based on statement of needs
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) set up for 3 years	1979	
	1981	Special Educational Needs Act enshrines SEN in schools
	1984	<i>Learning for Independence</i> published by Further Education Unit (FEU)
ALBSU joins BSAI (Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative)	1989	

	1990	Community Care Act
Further & Higher Education (FHE) Act incorporates colleges FEFC established	1992	Schedule 2 defined by FEFC excludes non-vocational courses from core funding
Basic Skills Agency (BSA) replaces ALBSU, now including schools	1995	Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) excluding education
	1996	<i>Inclusive Learning</i> (Tomlinson) Report published by FEFC SEN Code of Practice for schools
Moser Report on improving adult literacy and numeracy published	1999	
Learning and Skills Act replaces FEFC and TECs with LSC	2000	<i>Freedom to Learn</i> report published
Skills for Life strategy launched Core Curricula for Adult Literacy and Numeracy	2001	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (SENDA) extends DDA to education
	2002	Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework and Access for All training launched
	2005	Learning for Living Programme set up by NIACE
Leitch Report on 'world class skills'	2006	
Functional Skills replaces Skills-for-Life	2009	Functional Skills/Foundation Learning programme introduced

Red represents labour administration, blue conservative.

Appendix 2

Pen portraits of individual interviewees, December 2017.

AB started in 1978 as a volunteer at an Adult Literacy Scheme based in Blackfriars University Settlement, when working as a primary school teacher. Having moved to Suffolk, she became a literacy and numeracy teacher in the 1980s, then an area organiser, later joining the Suffolk team which developed the Level 4 Teacher Training for Skills for Life practitioners as a numeracy specialist.

CD started in 1992, doing voluntary teaching in Plymouth, alongside a Part 1 Certificate of Education for teaching in the post-school sector. She moved to Suffolk, and obtained a post as a learning support assistant at an FE College, subsequently training as a numeracy specialist, and teaching in FE and Community Education. She has moved into the school sector as Maths co-ordinator for a special school.

EF began as a teacher of humanities in a comprehensive school in Bristol. He was asked to take a remedial group, and then opened an evening class for parents. In about 1974 he joined the WEA (Workers Educational Association) as a literacy tutor. In 1976 he obtained a post as county organiser for Adult Literacy in another part of the UK. He subsequently worked as an inspector for the Further Education Funding Council, and adviser on the Inclusive Education Report funded by the FEFC. He held senior posts in research and policy, working at a national level.

GH joined the local Adult Education Service as a volunteer in 1980–81. He took a generic Part 1 training for teaching adults, and then a PGCE designed for remedial teachers in secondary schools. He became an adult literacy tutor, then area co-

ordinator of adult literacy for a region of Norfolk. He was increasingly involved in teacher training, being part of the team which developed the 9285 City and Guilds qualification, moving to a regional cross-county body as a full-time trainer and consultant in 2004.

IJ trained as a primary school teacher and started teaching adult literacy and numeracy as a part-time tutor at a South London Adult Education Institute in 1982–3. She subsequently moved to Norfolk, and after teaching adult literacy and numeracy for Norfolk Adult Education Service, took on a development post at UEA for two years. She returned to the LEA as an area organiser, then manager at county level. She worked for the LSC (Learning and Skills Council) to develop the 2001 Skills for Life Level 4 Teacher Training in Norfolk, and then joined ACER (Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region) to develop and deliver the SfL teacher training courses. She has worked as a free-lance trainer and consultant for some years.

KL trained as a volunteer for a north London Adult Education Institute, and then built up to 20 hours a week as a part-time literacy tutor working across Adult and Further Education in North and East London. In 1981 she was appointed to run a literacy and publishing project based at a community centre in east London. She subsequently managed Basic Skills programmes in Further Education in the 1990s, and then became an academic and teacher trainer at the Institute of Education.

MN started teaching for a London Adult Education Institute in 1972–3. As an adult literacy tutor, she began to work with young adults with learning difficulties, and then moved to full-time work in FE. She worked as an adviser in teaching adults with

learning difficulties for the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority) and then moved on to a national charity working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties, as a policy worker. She was involved in the work of the Tomlinson Committee and the development of Skills for Life. She has been a full-time free-lance trainer and consultant for some years, working on policy at a national level.

OP became involved in working with adults with learning difficulties as part of her work at Skill (formerly the National Bureau for Handicapped Students) in the mid-1980s. She subsequently worked and studied at the City Lit AEI in London while completing a generic PGCE. After part-time teaching across London she obtained a post as lecturer for Adults Returning from Long Stay Hospital at another London AEI. She moved into management in a voluntary charitable project for people with learning difficulties, and then returned to education and part-time work as co-worker for a woman with learning difficulties. She then joined NIACE to work on a project promoting good practice in teaching adults with learning difficulties, staying to develop the area until 2013. She now works as a free-lance trainer and consultant.

QR trained to teach in Further and Adult Education at Greenwich University, specialising in Adult Literacy. She worked on placement at a London FE college in 2007, and joined the staff there in 2008, working on a course for young people with learning difficulties. She became course leader for the course in 2009.

ST took a post teaching Art and Literacy at an Adult Training Centre before training to work as a teacher in special schools in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s she moved into teaching literacy at a London AEI, later becoming a senior lecturer there

with responsibility for a big programme of adult education for people with learning difficulties. She subsequently became an adviser with a cross-London brief to support work with adults with learning difficulties in ILEA, and then moved into a post at the national agency for FE development, continuing to work there until retirement. She was involved with FE development at a national level, including as an FEFC inspector. She was also active in the work of the Tomlinson Committee and in the development of Skills for Life and Access for All.

UV taught English to schoolchildren in Swaziland in the early 1970s, and, on returning to England, gained a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and took up a full-time post as an ESOL teacher. After having children, she taught evening classes at the local FE college. On arriving in Suffolk in 1983 she worked locally in adult literacy, taking up a range of temporary posts, before obtaining a more settled post as an area co-ordinator in about 1986. In 1989 she became county co-ordinator for Adult Basic Skills, responsible to the County Council. In 2000 she joined a national agency as a development adviser, specialising in basic skills, and, from 2004, worked freelance, managing research projects relating to adult literacy.

Appendix 3

Schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992

Appendix 4

Who Pays? Table of shared costs of adult education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, Educare, March 1994

