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Adult literacy and social inclusion

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# Adult Literacy Education and Social Inclusion

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## **Aim:**

To explore the extent to which adult literacy education in England is about social inclusion.

# Social Inclusion

'Enabling people or communities to participate fully in society' (Charity Commission, 2001, p.2).



# My research

**Aim:** to determine how literacy is currently perceived and conceptualised by teachers, learners and policy makers within adult literacy education in England.

## **Methods:**

- Analysis of policy documents
- Telephone and face-to-face interviews with teachers of adult literacy
- Focus groups with adult literacy learners

## **Theoretical framework:**

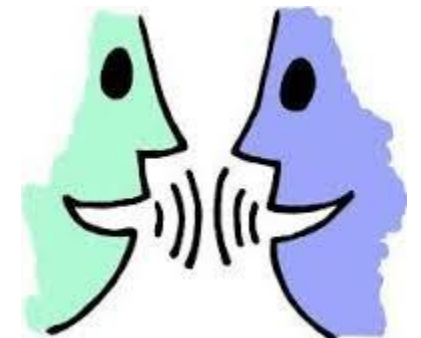
- Critical Discourse Analysis
- New Literacy Studies

# Interview and focus group questions

- What is literacy?
- Why should adults be literate?
- What can a literate adult do?

# Themes from interviews and focus groups

- using computers
- employability
- supporting children
- autonomy and independence
- well-being
- empowerment
- identity
- reading
- writing
- communication
- social inclusion



I think it's really a case of people being able to be active in their community. To be able to access all the services that they should.

You have to be able to do things yourself.

There is a whole world that becomes accessible once a person is literate

## **Typical responses**

It helps benefit the next generation because ... if parents are literate then their children have more chance of moving on in life.

It's like communication with different people.



# Without literacy ...

They can't participate fully in the social, economic life of the country or society

A person could be disadvantaged ... in dealings with authorities and organisations.

A person could very well lead an isolated life and have the potential not to be an outgoing person

You can't support your children, which is disempowering.

# Responses relating to social inclusion:

- Participation in society
- Community involvement
- Having access to opportunities, services, banking and housing
- Communicating appropriately in a range of social contexts
- Improving the prospects of learners' children
- Greater critical awareness
- Developing social skills, self-confidence and self-esteem
- Access to further study
- Increased confidence in digital environments

**Over 2/3 of participants gave responses relating to social inclusion (based on the previous definition)**

# Current policy on adult literacy education (for England)

Two documents:

- Dept. of Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) *Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Government Response to the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee.*
- Dept. of Business, Innovation and Skills (2016) *Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Programme.*

# Current policy:

- Hints at social inclusion eg. 'wider social and personal benefits' through literacy education including improvements to self-confidence, health and family life, greater social mobility (BIS, 2014, p.2)

## BUT:

Discourses of functionality and employability - *returns, economy, investment, market, performance, outcomes, impact, measurement, levels, drivers, Net Present Value, sustainability, function, employment, employers, work, demonstrable, prospects*

*'...labour market engagement, ie. work, is the biggest driver of skills development.'* (BIS, 2014, p.4).

# To what extent does social inclusion appear to be a concern within adult literacy education?

- In policy - some hints about inclusion but a narrower view which emphasizes economic and employability outcomes.
- For teachers and learners - a broader notion of social inclusion as an outcome of literacy education, which goes beyond the functional and economic concerns of policy.

# References

Charity Commission (2001) *The Promotion of Social Inclusion*.  
London: Charity Commission

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