WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LITERATE? HOW LITERACY IS CURRENTLY PERCEIVED BY ADULT LITERACY TEACHERS, LEARNERS AND POLICY-MAKERS IN ENGLAND

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Copyright statement

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Abstract

This study considers the ways in which literacy is defined and understood within current policy for adult literacy education in England. It also explores the perceptions of teachers of adult literacy and their learners about what it means to be literate at the present time.

In order to access the view of literacy on which current policy-making is based I undertook Critical Discourse Analysis of policy documents, and comparison with analyses of earlier policies found that this view has changed little over time. A similar functional and instrumental viewpoint, which understands literacy as a fixed set of skills based on the use of printed texts and focused on economic and employment outcomes, was found to that identified in previous education policy. Telephone and face-to-face interviews with seventeen literacy practitioners, followed by discussions with two groups of literacy learners, found that a much broader view of literacy exists in practice, however. Teachers' and learners' perceptions, while acknowledging the role of literacy in employability and economic success, also identify personal well-being, confidence and self-esteem, benefits for family life, social and community participation amongst the key aspects of being literate. Meanwhile, literacy itself encompasses, not just the reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities required to function in everyday life and at work, but also digital skills, numeracy, creative writing and reading for pleasure.

The research found that at times there are tensions between policy and practice, with teachers developing ways of working which allow them to meet the requirements of policy while still maintaining their own values, and those of their learners, in relation to literacy education.

Chapter summary

The thesis is structured and presented in seven chapters as explained below.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and the research questions it addresses. It outlines the social and political background to the development of adult literacy education and the different ways in which literacy has been understood over time.

Chapter 2 examines the literature relating to adult literacy education, with a focus on the policy context and on the ways in which literacy is defined and understood in political and social contexts. I begin by considering the development of policy for adult literacy in the United Kingdom from the 1970s until the present. I then address another key theme within the literature, which is the influence of international policy and organisations on UK policy. Finally, I examine the literature pertaining to the ways in which literacy has been defined and conceptualised. I consider this from the angles of policy, international surveys of adult literacy, the media and practice.

Chapter 3 identifies the aim of my research and the specific questions I address within it. I discuss the theoretical background influencing and underpinning my research, and I outline the methods I use to gather and analyse my research data. I also explain the sample of participants on which my research was based.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the documentary analysis of six documents relating to current policy for adult literacy education in England. I identify and explain the perceptions of literacy on which these policies are based.

Chapter 5 of the thesis considers the data from telephone and face-to-face interviews with teachers of adult literacy and discussions with two groups of adult literacy learners. I identify teachers' and learners' perceptions of what literacy means and also identify the similarities and differences in their viewpoints.

Chapter 6 focuses on policy enactment and, based on the data from the interviews, explores the ways in which the adult literacy teachers in my sample respond to and enact policy for adult literacy education in their practice.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings presented in the previous three chapters of the

thesis. It responds to the aim of the study and to each of the research questions. I identify the contribution to knowledge my work has made within the field of adult literacy and consider possible directions for further research. I draw final conclusions based on the findings of my research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The aim of this study is to determine how literacy is currently perceived in policy for adult literacy education in England and also by teachers of adult literacy and their learners. Definitions and perceptions of literacy have changed over time, from the simple ability to sign one's name in a marriage register (Gardner, 2007, p. 360) to the ability to read and write (Lankshear and Knobel 2006). They range from the understanding of literacy as an individual skill to a 'social practice' (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015, p.2). Some definitions also include skills in speaking and listening, while other approaches to literacy have conceptualised it in a wide range of ways, including academic, functional (MacLellan, 2008), quantitative (St. Clair, 2012), health and financial (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017). In this chapter I outline the wider social and political context within which these varying perceptions of literacy have developed and identify the research questions this study will address.

Definitions of literacy

Hanemann (2015, p.297) suggests that, 'despite the fact that definitions of literacy have evolved over time … there is currently still no universal consensus on one single definition' and the various ways in which literacy has been understood and conceptualised have become an area of significant interest in the field of adult literacy. Debate has also centred around the plurality of literacy (Street, 1995) with some commentators preferring the plural term 'literacies' to the singular 'literacy.' Writers and researchers, such as Street (1997) and Barton and Hamilton (2000) considered the nature of literacy and developed a discourse based on the desire to view it not as a fixed concept, but rather as a socially determined collection of practices. Proponents of what is referred to as the New Literacy Studies suggest that different 'literacies' are used by individuals within their various domains of work, domestic life, education and so on (Smith, 2005, p. 321). Smith (ibid.) comments that these 'literacies' range from the 'formal' to the 'vernacular', and include the ability to decode and manipulate pictures and icons in addition to written text.

The definitions and conceptions of literacy on which literacy education policy around the world is based have also been the focus of some discussion. Hanemann (2015), for

instance, recognises a narrow focus on reading and writing using print- based materials in international policy, which links literacy to employment and economic progress. Meanwhile, Benavot (2015, p.279) describes the 'official' policy definitions of literacy used in some countries in Asia and the Middle East as relying on set notions of reading and writing which are restricted to printed texts and are competency-based. Benavot (ibid.) compares these definitions with the broader 'socio-cultural' views of literacy held by non-governmental organisations that include the empowerment of individuals, gender equality and community development. He also identifies social development and cultural assimilation as aspects of literacy underpinning literacy programmes in Brazil, Chile and Argentina.

In England, where concerns regarding adult literacy have featured in education policy and the media since at least the 1970s, policy for adult literacy education has revealed different perspectives on what literacy constitutes. Hamilton and Hillier (2006) chart the progress of a series of initiatives intended to improve adults' literacy (along with their numeracy) from the 'Right to Read' campaign of the early 1970s up to the introduction of the Government's Skills for Life Strategy in 2000. Their work identifies a range of attitudes towards adult literacy over a number of decades ranging from moral viewpoints and ideas about social justice, to literacy being linked with a person's intelligence and the extent to which they are perceived as 'cultured'.

Literacy initiatives in England have been informed by a number of major reports and investigations, such as that of Sir Claus Moser's working group for improving adult basic skills (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) which led to the creation of a core curriculum for adult literacy, ESOL and numeracy and the introduction of new qualifications for teachers of these subjects. Literacy was also one of the concerns of the Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch, 2006) which contributed to changes in the provision and funding of adult literacy and numeracy education. Within such investigations, adults' skills, including those in literacy, are viewed from a social and economic viewpoint, both in terms of their effects on the individual's prosperity and well-being, and on that of the nation as a whole (Street and Lefstein, 2007). Both reviews of adult skills are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The wider social and political context

Definitions and perceptions of literacy have developed within a changing social and political context. There is a long history of concern for adult literacy in England although it did not become a policy issue until the 1970s. Prior to this, concerns regarding the literacy skills of adults had been voiced during the second World War, when recruits to the army were found to be lacking the skills they needed for modern warfare. The army then became the main provider of adult literacy education (along with some provision in the prison service) though it was a long time before this was extended to civilians. Reasons for this lack of provision for civilians reflect the social and economic context of the time, including the full employment experienced after the war which meant the wide availability of jobs for which little training was needed. Social attitudes of the time were also influential and included the assumption that the education system itself would deal with literacy and the association of low levels of literacy with crime and delinquency with the belief therefore that it was better dealt with by prisons and the military (Jones and Marriott, 1995).

In the 1960s and early 1970s it was recognised by the government and the media, however, that the country's formal education system was not preventing illiteracy (Jones and Marriott, 1995; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). This recognition, alongside wider concerns about social inequality and deprivation which reflected an increasing interest within Western Europe and developing countries in social justice, social movements for women and civil rights, influenced the growth of voluntary literacy provision for adults outside the army and prison service. It led eventually to the first national campaign for adult literacy in the United Kingdom ('A Right to Read') which, although supported by the BBC through its 'On the Move' programmes (Jones and Marriott, 1995; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017), was not associated with the government nor was it part of the further education system (Taylor, 2008a). It was largely run by volunteers, part-time and female, had no set curriculum or resources and was housed in temporary teaching spaces. It was however, student-centred and focused on the needs of individual learners (Taylor, 2008a; Hamilton, 2006). It has been estimated that the campaign helped more than 125,000 individuals and trained over 75,000 volunteers during a three-year period (Department for Education and Employment, 1999, p. 39).

The coming to power of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 marked

a significant shift in prospects for adult literacy education. According to Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.7) this was marked by rising unemployment, restructuring of public services, the marketization of education and a 'trend towards vocationalism'. Taylor argues that the 'community-based' and 'student-centred' literacy education provided as a result of the 'Right to Read' campaign came to an end in the 1980s when concerns for the economy raised a greater interest in the skills of the country's workforce (2008a, p.308). The wider social and economic concerns of the day also influenced the nature of the student body, which now largely comprised migrants, women, the unemployed and people who had been referred from other services (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). Policy-making for adult literacy was limited until the 1990s when adult literacy and numeracy became a 'college subject' following changes to funding mechanisms as part of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. This was accompanied by a move towards accreditation in order to attract funding from the Further Education Funding Council and nationally recognised qualifications ('Wordpower' and 'Numberpower') and the linking of adult literacy provision with training for work (Taylor, 2008a, Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2015). By the year 2000, 24,000 Wordpower and Numberpower qualifications had been awarded to learners (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007, p. 584).

Arguably the most significant policy for adult literacy, however, was the Skills for Life initiative introduced in 2001 which was the result of a number of social and political influences. Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.14) argue that the election of the New Labour government in 1997 was a turning point for adult literacy. Education was a major focus in the New Labour manifesto, which led to a series of reforms intended to raise standards in all sectors. These included new strategies for literacy and numeracy in schools, the introduction of Education Maintenance Allowance to support 16 to 18 year olds to participate in further study and reforms to the 14 to 18 curriculum to include more vocational qualifications (Heath et al., 2013). The focus on raising standards in education generally led to more resources being put into education than had been the case under the previous Conservative government, some of which was used for the development of post-16 and vocational education and training amidst the concern that around two thirds of the country's workforce did not hold vocational qualifications (ibid.). New Labour promoted lifelong learning, in particular the development of adults' basic skills as important for both the individual and for the nation's economic success (Hodgson et al., 2007). This was affected, at least in part, by the international influences of the United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which had played an active role in raising awareness of literacy issues in the previous fifty years (Hamilton, 2012; 2014) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in which the UK produced in a relatively poor performance in comparison to the twenty plus participating countries (Hillier, 2009).

Adult literacy thus became a New Labour policy focus, culminating in the commissioning of the Moser Working Group on Post-School Basic Skills in 1998. The group's report, 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy: a Fresh Start' claimed that 1 in 5 adults, or approximately 7 million individuals, lacked 'functional literacy' and 'functional numeracy' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999, p.8) and linked low basic skills with social exclusion and deprivation, limited work opportunities, crime and poor health. The report blamed previous schooling and people's personal home circumstances, along with a lack of national awareness on the situation regarding basic skills. Amongst its recommendations were an increase in the numbers of teachers from less than 4,000 at the time of writing to more than 15,000 (ibid., p.14), new qualifications for teachers, a national core curriculum for adult literacy and numeracy and a media campaign to raise awareness, ultimately leading to the creation of the Skills for Life strategy. The new Labour government provided 1.5 billion pounds for Skills for Life (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007, p. 587) and set a target of supporting around 500,000 adults in England with literacy (and numeracy) a year by 2002, an increase from the 70,000 a year who were receiving help at the time the report was written (Department for Education and Employment, 1999, p.11).

Although New Labour's interest in adult literacy has been linked to the Government's concern about social exclusion, a neoliberal agenda has also been identified in policy (Tett et al., 2012) and in Prime Minister Tony Blair's commitment to the 'Third Way', an approach which 'sought to marry social democracy and the market.' (Whitty and Wisby, 2016, p.317). This neoliberal approach was apparent in the Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch, 2006) which expressed concerns about the standards of the nation's basic and vocation skills in light of threats to UK economic success and competitiveness as a result of increasing globalisation. Adult literacy was one of the Review's areas of concern and as a result a revised Skills for Life target of 95% of adults to achieve basic functional

literacy and numeracy by 2020 was set (Leitch, 2006).

The neoliberal agenda continued and, some would argue, intensified, under the Coalition government which replaced New Labour in 2010 (Fisher and Simmons, 2012; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Reforms to education continued, but tended to involve reduction rather than expansion, such as the discontinuation of some vocational qualifications for younger learners (Whitty and Wisby, 2016), the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the end of public funding for level 2 and level 3 qualifications for learners over twenty-four years of age (Fisher and Simmons, 2012). Education was one of the areas from which the Coalition government's 'Big Society' approach resulted in a level of state withdrawal (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Support for Skills for Life, and with it policy interest in adult literacy, began to wane. Funding for Skills for Life learners was reduced as part of the broader cuts in public funding (Tett et al., 2012). In 2012 Skills for Life qualifications were replaced by Functional Skills, qualifications which had been introduced for younger learners from 2007 and were now extended to adults. Burgess and Hamilton view this in relation to the Coalition's 'over-riding priority' of cutting public spending to reduce the national debt (2011, p.13). They argue that it also represents a 'move to align school and adult education' (ibid.). The transition from Skills for Life to Functional Skills took place alongside wider reforms to Further Education for learners aged nineteen and over. Explained in the government report 'New Challenges, New Chances: building a World Class Skills System' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b) the reforms emphasized the contribution a successful Further Education and Skills sector could make to economic recovery and were focused particularly on the education of younger people and the unemployed. The report announced a review of teacher professionalism within the sector's workforce, changes to funding mechanisms and the development of qualifications.

Following the introduction of Functional Skills qualifications for adult learners there has been little further policy interest in adult literacy. While the Further Education and Skills sector has continued to see reforms, including new technical and vocational qualifications, higher level apprenticeships and subject area reviews (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016a), there has been little or no mention of adult learners in current policy, despite the fact that the results of the OECD's Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) published in October 2013,

and including literacy amongst the skills surveyed, showed that England compared relatively poorly in comparison to some other OECD countries (Wheater et al., 2013). Analysis of UK media coverage of the results as they were released found relatively short-lived coverage of the results and a lack of interest or awareness of adult or lifelong education. Although PIAAC was a survey of adult skills, for instance, newspaper reports, in interpreting the results as the outcome of a downward trend in the standard of education in the country, focused their discussion primarily on younger people and schooling (Yasukawa, Hamilton and Evans, 2017). Also significant is the absence of comparison in the media of PIAAC results with those of the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted between 1994 and 1998. The UK had also taken part in this earlier survey and was found to have performed relatively poorly and Yasukawa et al. (ibid.) argue that this was a missed opportunity to report on improvements in literacy between the two surveys, rather than on the negative outcomes. Equally significant, however, is that while the IALS results prompted England to develop the Skills for Life strategy to improve levels of literacy (Hillier, 2009) the results of PIAAC received a far more muted response. A government commissioned report on the FE Workforce Programme does mention England's below OECD average PIACC result and the country's position at 13th out of 24 countries, describing it as a 'compelling need to improved standards of maths and English' (Zaidi, Howat and Rose, 2018, p. 19). However, if this did lead to any policy-making it was focused on equipping teachers for GCSEs rather than the provision of adult education. (The FE Workforce Programme is explained in more depth later in this chapter). No such policy developments on the scale of those following IALS were made by the UK government as a result of PIAAC, providing further evidence of a current lack of policy interest in adult literacy.

The extent of government interest in adult literacy education is also reflected in the support given to teacher training. The Skills for Life initiative introduced by the New Labour government in 2001 had led to the creation of new specialist qualifications for teachers of adult literacy (and numeracy and ESOL) and increased expectations around teachers' continuing professional development (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). The Government's support for teacher development in adult literacy continued and can be viewed alongside the wider move to 'professionalise' teachers in the lifelong learning sector, with a call more generally for improvements to initial teacher training for the sector, the introduction of new qualifications and professional standards. Eventually, a

new professional status (QTLS) was introduced with a view to affording teachers in the Further Education and Skills sector the same professional standing as school teachers (Lucas, 2013). However, when the Coalition government came to power in 2010 the previous government's reforms lost their impetus due to the commitment to massive cuts in public spending. Furthermore, a review in 2012 of professionalism in the Further Education and Skills sector had significant implications for teacher education. The review was led by Lord Lingfield, whose recommendations were accepted by the Government and resulted in teaching qualifications, CPD and registration with a professional body (at that time the Institute for Learning) becoming no longer compulsory for teachers in the sector, including teachers of adult literacy (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012). In accepting Lingfield's recommendations about teacher qualifications the Government gave responsibility for decisions about staff and teaching qualifications to institutions, thus providing further evidence of state withdrawal from adult education.

The observation has been made that policy-making and government spending on further education is now directed more towards younger people and apprenticeships rather than adult learners (Clancy and Holford, 2018). Recently this has been seen in the way the government has supported initial teacher education and existing CPD for English (and maths) teachers in the FE and skills sector. This relates particularly to GCSE English (and maths) where since August 2014 conditions of funding requirements have meant that 16 to 19 year old students in colleges are required to study GCSE English and maths if they have not already achieved these subjects at grade 4/C (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2014). This policy created challenges which a joint BIS/DfE Further Education Workforce Programme was established to address, leading to a number of initiatives to increase the number of maths and English teachers able to teach GCSE in the sector; the target here included more than 2,000 additional English teachers by the end of the 2015/16 academic year (Zaidi et al., 2018, p. 11). The programme also provided English and maths enhancement programmes intended to 'upskill' existing maths and English teachers. It is reported that the enhancement programmes exceeded their targets with, for example, more than 1,600 teachers attending the English Enhancement Programme between September 2014 and the end of the 2015/16 academic year. An incentive to encourage enrolment on the specialist initial teacher education qualifications for trainee teachers of maths, English and Special Educational Needs was also provided in the form of government funded bursaries ranging from

£4,000 to £25,000 depending on a trainee teacher's previous degree classification. Between September 2014 and March 2016 1,132 trainee teachers (538 of whom were English specialists) had been awarded the bursaries at a cost of ten million pounds (ibid.). However, these incentives and CPD opportunities all related to GCSE reforms, therefore mostly benefitting the education of 16 to 19 year-old learners (the condition of funding regulations do not apply to learners over the age of 19). They do not imply a government commitment to adult education. Although some commitment to the education of teachers of English and maths in the sector is suggested by the offer of bursaries for trainee teachers and the subject enhancement programmes for existing teachers (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014) the support had none of the policy impact seen under Skills for Life and its future is uncertain. The report evaluating the FE Workforce Programme repeats the comment that it was commissioned under the previous coalition government and, therefore, may not represent current Department for Education policy (ibid.). Bursaries are to be discontinued from August 2019 (Department for Education, 2019).

Alongside this waning policy interest in adult literacy, adult participation in government funded further education has, in fact, declined in recent years. In 1998 there were approximately 320,000 basic skills learners in England and Wales (Tett et al., 2012, p. 34) but, according to government figures, by the 2008/09 academic year, 5.7 million adults had participated in Skills for Life provision, with 2.8 million gaining their first qualification (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education, 2011b, p.6) though this figure is likely to include 16 to 18 year-old learners. More recently adult participation in education has been declining, however. The number of adults aged over 19 studying English courses funded by the government, for instance, has been falling since the 2011/12 academic year seeing a 12.7% decrease between 2014/15 and 2015/6 (Department for Education, 2017) followed by a further 13.6% decrease, from 405,200 learners to 350,200 between 2016/17 and 2017/18 (Department for Education, 2018b, p.6). This is accompanied by a cut of almost two thirds in government spending on adult education between the early 2000s and the 2016/17 academic year (Clancy and Holford, 2018).

Definitions of literacy, then, have developed within constantly changing social and political contexts, ranging from second World War concerns with the literacy skills of army

recruits, to interests in social justice and civil rights in the 1960s and 70 and, more recently, a neo-liberal policy agenda with its concern for economic, employability and vocational issues. Over time, ways of understanding literacy have developed alongside changes in the literacy curriculum and in the wider educational context in which a pattern of expansion followed by reduction emerges. Growth in participation in adult education, is followed by decline, for instance. Funding for adult literacy is increased to be followed by funding cuts. Qualifications for teachers in the sector are made compulsory for a time, but then become optional. New qualifications for adult literacy learners are introduced and then abolished.

Background to the study

My own interest in adult literacy education began as a newly qualified teacher of English and literacy in the lifelong learning sector shortly after the introduction of the Skills for Life Initiative in 2001. It continued later as a teacher educator working with teachers of adult literacy. I became particularly curious about the ways in which the concept of literacy is understood after reading various analyses of literacy policies including Skills for Life (such as Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b) and Functional Skills (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011, for example) which led me first to wonder about the conceptions of literacy on which current policy for adult literacy education in England was based and then to think about the views of literacy teachers who were enacting this policy and their learners who were affected by it. A survey of the literature around adult literacy education failed to find any analysis of current policy for adult literacy in England and, similarly, I found little coverage in previous work of the views of literacy teachers or adult literacy learners, other than Kendall and McGrath's (2014) research on literacy practitioners' definitions of reading. I was also interested in the ways in which literacy teachers' views on what constitutes literacy are manifest in their practice, particularly in the ways in which they react to and enact policy for adult literacy education. Again, I found little coverage of this in the literature.

The lack of analysis of current policy and the perceptions of literacy on which it is based, along with the absence of knowledge on how literacy teachers and learners understand what it means to be literate, are, therefore, gaps in the literature which this study aims to address. The ways in which teachers' perceptions of literacy relate to their enactment of policy in their practice will also be considered, thereby making a contribution to knowledge in the field of adult literacy, while building on and extending

work previously carried out in this area.

My decision to explore the relationship between policy, practice and the ways in which literacy is perceived is supported by the work of Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2017, p.388) who comment that in previous studies of literacy, 'the emphasis has been on the manifestation of what constitutes literacy and how it is perceived.' They argue for an approach which also considers policy and practice as part of the 'trinity in the embodiment of literacy: theory / perceptions, policy and practice' (ibid., p.389). This study, therefore, considers all three of these aspects and asks the following questions:

- How is literacy conceptualised within current educational policy?
- What does the term 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?
- How is literacy policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature on the policy contexts through which adult literacy education has developed and on the definitions and perceptions of literacy identified within various social and political contexts.

The Policy Context

This section of the chapter examines the literature relating to the policy context of adult literacy education. There are various analyses of United Kingdom and international policy surrounding adult literacy, the focus of which have included the ways in which the adult literacy learner is constructed within policy, influences on literacy policy and the relationship between literacy policy and wider social and political discourses. The review of the literature in relation to policy also considers a number of surveys and inquiries for the contribution they make to the development of policy in the field. I begin by exploring the background to, and development of, policy for adult literacy education in the UK and internationally. The ways in which literacy is conceptualised within education policy will be considered later in the chapter.

The development of UK policy for adult literacy education

Although concerns about adult literacy skills were identified during the second World War (Jones and Marriott, 1995; Taylor, 2008a) the UK government was not involved in adult literacy education on a national level until the 1970s. The development of policy in this area since then has been traced in the literature up to the early 2000s, by which time it had evolved from being a relatively new field within education to becoming a mainstream aspect of the lifelong learning sector (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006), moving from 'an informal to a standardised system' (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007, p. 598).

In reviews of the historical background of adult literacy provision in the UK, a series of distinct stages in its development is often identified. While the time boundaries between these varies, a number of themes are shared. Most chronological analyses begin in the 1970s when the results of a British Association of Settlements survey

highlighted the extent of adult literacy problems in the UK and led to the first national government supported literacy campaign ('Right to Read') along with the BBC's involvement through television and radio programmes such as 'On the Move'. (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Hillier, 2009; Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017). Hamilton and Hillier (2006) explain that at this time adult literacy education was fragmented and there was very little standardisation in teachers' roles or in the names given to literacy classes, giving 'Remedial English' and 'compensatory classes' as examples (ibid., p. 4) while teaching spaces were temporary and often inadequate. Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2017, p.393) acknowledge a lack of 'definitive' policy for adult literacy in the 1970s, but explain the government funding that was made available and the setting up of the Adult Literacy Resource Agency to manage this.

Within the literature, the 1970s period is also characterised by the informality of adult literacy provision, the lack of a set curriculum or published resources, few qualifications and the voluntary nature of the teaching workforce. Provision tended to be student-centred and planned around individual needs (Taylor, 2008a; Hamilton, 2012a; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). A concern for social justice had also been identified. (Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006; Hamilton, 2012). Despite this, however, Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2017) comment that an instrumentalist, work-oriented, Human Capital ethos was already emerging at this time and they argue that this became more dominant during the 1980s, with greater government control over provision, and more concern with qualifications and standardisation. Other commentators identify a change in focus within literacy provision during the 1980s, identifying concerns with the economy, with employability as a driver (Taylor, 2008a; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006) and with a move towards greater central control over the curriculum (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007, p.581)

Hamilton and Hillier explain that during the 1990s, Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy (ALLN) became a 'designated area of vocational study' (2006, p.13) with formal qualifications, progression routes and a funding regime, influenced by 'growing discourses of accountability and performativity' in the public sector (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007, p.584). When an Organisation for Economic, Co-operation and Development (OECD) report classified the UK as performing poorly compared to other industrialised countries (Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006; Hillier, 2009), the Moser report

(Department for Education and Skills, 1999) led the way for the introduction of the Skills for Life initiative which included the development of the first national standards in adult literacy and numeracy and a core curriculum in the subjects, along with a set of national qualifications at a number of levels and professional qualifications for teachers (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Taylor, 2008b; Hodgson, Edward and Gregson, 2007; Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b).

The Skills for Life initiative is the aspect of UK literacy policy around which there has been the most discussion and analysis within the literature. Hodgson et al. (2007, p.17), for instance, describe the impact of Skills for Life on literacy provision as 'huge and unprecedented.' Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2017, p.399) claim that it has been the 'most significant policy' in the UK lifelong learning sector in the last twenty years. The policy has been analysed in terms of the way it presents the adult literacy learner (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011a; 2011b) and also in relation to New Labour's broader concerns around social inclusion, the regeneration of communities and support for the family (Hamilton, 2014). It has also been the subject of criticism, particularly, in relation to its perceived instrumentalist approach. For Duckworth and Brzeski (2015, p. 2), for instance, the policy was instrumental in the way it was based on 'quantifiable outcomes' such as tests and qualifications and did not take learners' particular needs or personal backgrounds into consideration. Criticism has also been levied not just at its 'instrumental ethos' but also at its 'rigid framework' which has a disempowering effect on teachers and learners.

A number of studies were conducted following the introduction of the Skills for Life policy to assess the impact of the policy initiative along with the responses it received from practitioners, provision managers and learners. Hodgson et al.'s report on the impact of Skills for Life, for instance, describes the initiative as a 'significant, long-term government commitment to improving adult basic skills, to social inclusion goals and to those who have either failed in, or been failed by, their schooling' (2007, p.214). Their research discovered that positive views of the strategy were held by managers and practitioners who noted the benefits of the funding mechanism and approved of the guidance provided by the core curriculum. There were, however, concerns about the quantity of paperwork required and the emphasis on targets and qualification outcomes which may not be appropriate for all literacy learners or in their best interests.

Two further surveys of literacy practitioners sought their responses to the Skills for Life policy. One, based on an online survey of over one hundred members of a practitioners' network, identified difficulties relating to the frequency of policy changes in the field and the criticism that policy focus had shifted under Skills for Life from learners' needs to the requirements of the government, presumably relating to economic issues. This survey of teachers also found that they largely felt constrained by the policy, feeling it limited their autonomy in relation to using approaches that maintained their own beliefs about practice. Ade-Ojo, (2011a) argues that this is different to the situation in the 1970s when adult literacy policy, although less developed than Skills for Life, did allow teachers freedom and was focused on the needs of learners. Another study by the same researcher considered the views of seventy-six literacy practitioners who had all studied specialist qualifications with the research within a five-year period. Analysis of the findings of this survey highlighted gaps between the Skills for Life policy and the 'reality of implementation' and issues caused by the policy-makers' values that underpin Skills for Life which, in being economic in focus, were in conflict with those of the literacy practitioners surveyed (Ade-Ojo, 2011b, p. 272). This concern with the difference between policy and practice was raised by both surveys and they both found a mostly negative view of the Skills for Life policy among practitioners.

The National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) also commissioned a series of studies to consider the impact of the Skills for Life policy, including the effects on learners. Appleby et al., (2007), for example, interviewed over 500 people (including learners, teachers and managers) to consider how the infrastructure of Skills for Life impacted on the literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners. Key findings from the survey included a number of outcomes that received a positive response, including the raising of awareness of basic skills on a national level, greater commitment to teacher development and the introduction of the core curriculum. The availability of recognized awards was also seen as a strength. Viewed less positively, however, were funding mechanisms which made it harder to provide for 'non-traditional' learners, such as the homeless and migrant workers (ibid., p. 63). Difficulties caused by the need to meet national targets were also acknowledged. Comments from practitioners who participated in the research included the existence of a difference in culture between adult community education and Skills for Life provision, which some saw as being

based on a deficit approach in which adults learn because of a lack of skills rather than because of a desire to learn something.

A further NRDC study on the impact of Skills for Life focused on teachers. Conducted between 2004 and 2007, the survey involved over one thousand teachers who participated via online questionnaires. Positive comments about the policy's impact included the quality of the teaching resources, the way it raised the profile of the sector and opportunities for CPD. Less positive were the responses to targets, inflexibility resulting from the core curriculum, the volume of paperwork involved and funding issues for lower level learners who needed more time to progress. The study found a variation in attitudes towards Skills for Life depending on the nature of teachers' roles, if they were full or part-time, for example or whether or not they had managerial responsibility. Where teachers had professional roles that were clearly defined, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, satisfactory support from managers and readily available resources they were more likely to view the Skills for Life policy favourably. The writers of the report conclude that Skills for Life made a major contribution towards teacher professionalism in the sector, but that for this positive impact to be maintained, practitioners need greater involvement in future policy changes and to be allowed the flexibility in the way they implement policy (Cara et al., 2010).

Skills for Life also featured in the wider-ranging Economic and Social Research Council Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) which ran for 10 years up to 2011 and aimed to improve learner outcomes in all sectors of education in the UK (James and Pollard, 2011). One of the programme's many projects considered the Learning and Skills sector, including Skills for Life provision. In common with the other surveys, this study was concerned with the relationship between policy and its implementation in practice, finding, for instance, ways in which practitioners 'use their deep commitment to giving students a second chance by shielding some of their weakest learners from the more perverse effects of funding and targets' and 'devise ingenious methods of compliance by, for example, bending … financial rules to favour their most disadvantaged learners' (Coffield et al., 2007, p.738). The study found similar perspectives to the other surveys on the policy with teachers and managers expressing concerns about targets, funding and paperwork but also approval at the

way national awareness of adult basic skills had been raised (ibid.).

Ten years after the launch of Skills for Life, the policy was still attracting interest therefore, and in addition to the TLRP, a National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) inquiry into adult literacy was led by Lord Boswell ('Work, Society and Lifelong Literacy'). The report produced following the inquiry acknowledged that in England over five million adults 'do not have the literacy skills to enable them to function effectively in modern society' (National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, 2011a, p.3). This was a figure from a 2003 review of Skills for Life, so its accuracy in 2011 may be questioned. However, it provides an attention-grabbing introduction to a report which, while acknowledging the achievements of the Skills for Life initiative so far, emphasizes the need for further work on adult literacy in order to support adults' literacy development. The report states that a further reason for the present focus is to avoid the need for further adult literacy campaigns and initiatives. This is interesting, given the then Government's later reluctance to initiate any further publicity campaigns to raise public awareness of literacy issues and availability of provision (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). The inquiry sought the views of learners, practitioners and providers and findings highlighted the importance of initial teacher training and continuing professional development for the teaching workforce and the value of family literacy and community learning programmes. Respondents identified that certain groups of people within society were not being supported by literacy provision under Skills for Life, such as those with the lowest levels of literacy, offenders and people with learning difficulties. They stressed, therefore, the need for differentiated approaches to provision, which did not focus primarily on employability at the expense of 'learning literacy for personal, social and democratic purposes.' (ibid., p.5). Concerns were also raised by respondents about literacy provision under 'Skills for Life' being qualification-led and the suggestion was made that alternative ways of measuring success should be made available. The use of the media to raise awareness was also seen to be important. The writers of the report use these findings to make recommendations which stress the need for adult literacy provision to be reviewed and changed in order to encourage participation, including the need to 'join up policies and practices', to support family and community learning and to develop the workforce (ibid., p.6). How many of the recommendations were actually put into practice is a matter for debate, however. The recommendation

that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should work with the media to increase public awareness and to promote participation, for example, was a step that the Government later said would not be taken (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014).

The various surveys and inquiries serve to illustrate the level of interest that Skills for Life received. Numerous individuals, organisations and agencies were keen to investigate its successes and shortcomings, and common ground between their findings included practitioner's concerns regarding targets, funding mechanisms and paperwork (Coffield at al., 2007; Hodgson et al., 2007) along with a shared recognition of the importance of developing the teaching workforce (Appleby et al., 2007; NIACE, 2011a) and a call for greater practitioner consultation in policy-making (Cara et al., 2010; Ade-Ojo, 2011b). No other policy for adult literacy has been subject to the level of investigation and analysis received by Skills for Life. This may reflect the trajectory of policy for adult literacy education in the UK which peaked with the introduction of the policy in 2001. A question arises with regard to the extent to which the extensive investigation into the impact of Skills for Life, much of which was conducted at a national level, and the resulting recommendations, resulted in tangible outcomes. Although Taylor (2012) suggests that the NIACE inquiry influenced the move to Functional Skills qualifications for adults from 2012 (explained later in this chapter) there has been very little major policy-making for adult literacy since Skills for Life, as discussed later in this chapter.

A further key theme within the literature around adult literacy education is the way in which international policy and organisations have informed UK policy, including the Skills for Life strategy. The European Union (EU) and OECD are held to be particularly influential (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b; Hamilton 2012, 2014; Ade-Ojo and Duckworth 2017). Hamilton (2012, 2014) argues that the influence of the EU and the OECD resulted in changes in the aim of adult literacy education and also in concerns for standardisation and measurement. She points out that international organisations, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and OECD, have had considerable influence in raising awareness of literacy as a 'policy issue' during the last fifty years, and that international influences are apparent in the definitions and conceptions of literacy used in policy documents.

She gives the notion of 'functional literacy' as an example, arguing that this narrow view of literacy which focuses on economic and employability issues, along with outcomes and targets, can be traced through a series of national and international campaigns from the 1970s. (Hamilton, 2012, p.170). Links between literacy and social exclusion are also an influence from EU policy, a point the writer reiterates in her analysis of the Skills for Life policy document (Hamilton, 2014).

International surveys played an important role 'in the justification and shaping of UK literacy policy by providing comparative data to be used to promote global competitiveness' (Hamilton, 2014, p. 112). Tables of results are used to justify policy strategies, for example (ibid.) and curricula and assessment processes are influenced by them. Various writers have reviewed the different international surveys that have taken place in recent decades, and they trace the influence of these on UK and other national literacy policies and on public opinion. Amongst the surveys considered is the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) led by the OECD, alongside other organisations, and carried out in over twenty countries between 1994 and 1998 (Boudard and Jones, 2003). Hillier (2009, p.535) argues that a relatively poor IALS result 'provoked' the four UK countries to each develop a strategy for dealing with the low levels of literacy (and numeracy) indicated by the survey. Walker and Rubenson (2014) comment on the extent of the survey's influence on the agendas promoted by the Canadian media, arguing that issues given 'air time' and 'surrounded by a language of crisis' in the media are likely to be considered of significance by the public (ibid., p.147). According to Walker and Rubenson, comparisons between Canada's IALS results and those of other countries became common in the media at the time, often presented in terms of 'a national crisis' (ibid., p.153). A further influence of the IALS noted in the literature is the setting of the level 3 international standard which was seen in this and subsequent surveys as a suitable benchmark for adult literacy, that is, a level of literacy that would allow people to meet the literacy demands of their working and everyday lives (Milana, Holford, Jarvis, Waller and Webb, 2014; Black and Yasukawa, 2014).

A more recent international survey involving adult literacy (also led by OECD) is the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the first results of which were released in October 2013. Milana et al. (2014) comment that,

although it is too soon to gauge the influence of PIAAC on policy and practice within adult education, the suggestion has been made that the results of PIAAC will lead to literacy returning as a significant issue in European policy agendas.

Hamilton (2014, p.113) argues, however, that because the UK has its own 'national statistical research base' it is not as dependent on the results of international surveys as some countries are in their policy making. She argues that in England, the Skills for Life initiative was presented in wide media coverage as a national strategy and its influences from international policy were not made apparent. In addition to international influences, she considers some of the more 'local' issues that have shaped UK literacy policy, much of which she relates to concerns with targets and audits, with responding to social issues such as the need to regenerate communities by linking them to literacy. Returning to PIAAC, it does appear that its results have had a limited impact on recent policy-making for adult literacy in England, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Yasukawa et al., 2017).

Policy for adult literacy since 2001
The overwhelming focus on Skills for Life within the literature demonstrates just how significant the policy has been for adult literacy education in England. Since the introduction of the strategy in 2001, however, there has been little in the way of major new policy with regard to adult literacy and from 2010 the coalition government allowed the strategy to remain in practice for a time, although with reduced funding (Tett, Hamilton and Crowther, 2012). Considering the international situation, Hanemann (2015, p. 301) comments that literacy is often 'not explicitly mentioned in lifelong learning laws, legal regulations or public policy initiatives' and this certainly appears to reflect the position of literacy in English policy.

At times the aims of the Skills for Life initiative have been revisited. The 2006 White Paper 'Further Education: Raising Skills Improving Life Chances', for instance, in addition to covering a range of issues such as the Train to Gain initiative, the establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs), reforms in initial teacher training for the further education sector and the introduction of CPD requirements for existing teachers, also emphasized the Government's desire to build on the success of the Skills for Life programme, continuing to fund the initiative and providing training

for its teachers (Department for Education and Skills, 2006, p. 21).

Despite the lack of major new policy after 2001, adult literacy received some mention in a number of broader policy initiatives. In November 2010, for example, the Government's strategy document 'Skills for Sustainable Growth' included a brief discussion of the literacy and numeracy skills still lacking in 'millions of adults in England' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010, p. 31) blaming this on 'an unacceptable failure of the education system' and stating that these adults should be given 'a second chance to acquire those skills' (ibid). The document states that the new strategy was to continue full funding for literacy and numeracy education but to review the way this was to be delivered.

One change in policy for literacy education was the replacement of Skills for Life with Functional Skills qualifications for adults from 2012 (Functional Skills had been introduced for young people in 2010). Functional Skills qualifications are only available in England and have become the most common 'non-GCSE qualification' (Education and Training Foundation, 2015). According to Taylor (2012, p.4) the transition from Skills for Life to Functional Skills was a 'significant policy shift'. She argues that, although the earlier strategy resulted in huge changes to the way literacy and numeracy were taught through its introduction of standards, curricula and qualifications for teachers, after ten years without any further changes, a review was necessary. She highlights the NIACE inquiry into adult literacy provision in 2011 which found that 'challenges' to addressing 'current adult literacy learning requirements' still remained and that they were different to those that existed in 2001 when the Skills for Life strategy was introduced (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2011b, p.15). According to the report on the inquiry, these challenges included supporting teachers, motivating learners, joining up policies and developing partnerships. Taylor (2012) suggests that this inquiry was influential in the move from Skills for Life to Functional Skills within adult literacy education. As previously explained, a survey of the literature on adult literacy policy in England has found a number of analyses of the Skills for Life strategy, however, there is significantly less discussion of the Functional Skills policy which has succeeded it. A review of Functional Skills including consultation with employers, practitioners, providers and learners during autumn 2017 has led to reformed qualifications to be introduced in September 2019 (Ofqual, 2018;

Education and Training Foundation, 2018).

The proposed review of adult skills provision features in the consultation document 'New Challenges, New Chances: next steps in implementing the further education reform programme' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011a; Taylor, 2012) which outlines the Government's aims for adult education, including improvements to the standards of teaching and learning, funding reform and the reduction of bureaucracy within the sector. The document repeats the claim that in England a lack of literacy and numeracy skills was still affecting 'millions of adults' and expresses the intention to provide 'a second chance to acquire those skills.' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011a, p. 25), reviewing the way provision is delivered, raising the standards of teaching, increasing qualifications amongst literacy and numeracy teachers and encouraging the use of new technologies to support literacy and numeracy learning.

Following the consultation on further education reform, the document 'New Challenges, New Chances - further education and skills system reform plan: building a world class skills system' makes reference once again to the numbers of adults without functional skills in literacy and numeracy; 15% in the case of literacy despite improvements made in recent years in literacy achievement at level two and above (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11). The document outlines a series of actions relating to adult literacy (and numeracy) education resulting from a review undertaken. The actions include the re-establishment of the terms 'English' and 'maths' within adult education and the prioritising of 'young adults' who lack skills in English and maths (ibid.). Prison education and the training of teachers also feature in the intentions for adult literacy education. Adult literacy is only one of a number of areas of policy reform outlined within the document. Taylor (2012), however, views it in a positive light, anticipating improvements to adult literacy (and numeracy) provision as a result.

More recently, adult literacy received some attention in the Government's response to the House of Commons Business Innovation and Skills Select Committee's inquiry into adult literacy and numeracy provision (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). It was also addressed to an extent in the *Post-16 Reform Plan* and in

Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Plan (both published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills / Department for Education in 2016). These three documents are among those discussed and analysed in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

In this section of the chapter I have reviewed the literature relating to the development of policy for adult literacy education in England, including the extent to which it has been influenced by international literacy surveys. The literature suggests that the decades between the 1970s and the introduction of the Skills for Life initiative witnessed a growing interest in adult literacy and its gradual development as a field of study and policy focus. This began with the provision of government funding and administration for adult literacy in the 1970s (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017) followed by a slow development through the 1980s and 1990s with the introduction of qualifications and the new funding mechanisms (Taylor, 2008a; Hamilton and Hillier, 2007). It reached its peak with the Skills for Life initiative in 2001. Following the introduction of this policy, which brought wide-ranging developments for learners, teachers, administrators and the curriculum itself, adult literacy education then became less of a policy focus in its own right and became subsumed by more general reforms to post-16 education (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Fisher and Simmons, 2012; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Although heavily criticised, Skills for Life is acknowledged as a major policy development, with no further policy-making of such significance since; its replacement with Functional Skills qualifications representing the biggest change. Concerns for adult literacy have been expressed at regular intervals by different UK governments, since at least the second World War (Jones and Marriott, 1995); the literature, however, suggests that policy-making has not followed consistently and this has depended on the priority that different governments have given to addressing these concerns.

In the next section of this chapter I examine the literature that considers the ways in which literacy has been defined and conceptualised in policy, in the international surveys of adult literacy, in the media and in practice.

Perceptions and definitions of literacy

The comment that 'Definitions of what it means to be literate are always shifting'

(Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001, p.1) appears to be confirmed by the various perceptions and discourses of literacy presented in recent literature. Duckworth and Ade-Ojo (2016, p.286) argue, in fact, that the ways in which literacy is perceived has been a 'dominant focus in the discourse on adult literacy in the United Kingdom in the last decade or so' and my survey of the literature found that it presents a range of views and perceptions. In this section of the chapter I have summarised these viewpoints under broad headings of autonomous model vs. social practice, multi-literacies and functional approaches. The concepts of literacy presented by international surveys and in international policy on adult literacy are also considered.

An 'autonomous' model of literacy vs. a social practice approach

A common theme within the literature on adult literacy is the comparison between a view of literacy described by Brian Street as an 'autonomous' model (Street, 1995) and a social practice approach favoured by the New Literacy Studies movement (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). This has been described alternatively as a 'cognitive' approach compared to a 'social practice' perception (Duckworth and Ade-Ojo, 2016, p.286). The autonomous model describes a traditional view of literacy which focuses on reading and writing, particularly of texts which are formal in nature and paper-based. According to this view, literacy is based on the use of a set of rules and standards within a national language and relates to a collection of cognitive skills to be acquired by the learner (Bartlett, 2008; Edwards, Ivanič and Mannion, 2009; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; St Clair, 2012). Edwards et al (2009, p.485) refer to this 'discourse of literacy' as 'a set of autonomous linguistic skills and competencies,' and argue that much policy-making is based on this. They consider the creation of standards against which literacy is measured and suggest that this privileges particular forms of writing and reading above others. Aikman, Maddox, Rao and Robinson-Pant (2011, p.577) also argue that many methods of measuring literacy 'tend to adopt standardised measures for what counts as literacy'. This autonomous model, as defined by Street (1995) is widely referred to within writing on adult literacy (for example, Bartlett, 2008; Taylor, 2008b; Crowther and Tett, 2011; Boudard and Jones, 2003; Parr and Campbell, 2012; Duckworth and Ade-Ojo, 2016) with the suggestion that it dominates policy and discourse (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). The model is described as presenting a narrow view of literacy as a technical skill to be developed through a series of gradual stages in which reading and writing are taught according to a set of rules, with no

consideration of its social context. Hamilton (2012) also comments that literacy education in the UK is always in Standard English (except in Wales) despite so many other varieties of language being in use. A social practice approach to literacy, however, according to Hamilton and Hillier (2006) is more concerned with how people use literacy in their everyday lives. Street (1995) explains the New Literacy Studies conception of literacy as a variety of social practices rather than a set of skills which can only be learned in formal educational settings. He stresses the 'pluralities of literacy', that is, the existence of multiple literacies 'that vary with time and place and are embedded in specific cultural practices' (ibid., p.47). He contrasts the 'autonomous' model, where literacy appears to exist outside of any social context, with an 'ideological' model, in which the concept of literacy is seen to vary according to the social context and 'cultural norms' (ibid., p.48) in which it is operating. Bartlett (2008, p.738) also describes an 'ideological model of literacy' which recognises differences in reading and writing practices according to social and cultural context.

The influence of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and, in particular, the views of Brian Street, have been hugely influential on subsequent writers and researchers on adult literacy. This is apparent throughout the literature, with a number of writers drawing a distinction between the traditional and autonomous concepts of literacy and that presented by the New Literacy Studies approach which places greater emphasis on the social context of 'literacies' (rather than 'literacy') and their situated, socially constructed nature (including Edwards et al., 2009; Edwards, Minty and Miller, 2013; Bartlett, 2008; Taylor, 2008b; Hamilton, 2012; St. Clair, 2012; Hanemann, 2015). This social practice approach to literacy considers learners' own contexts and uses for literacy and employs a view of literacy that considers '… what is done with the text, how the text is engaged, and why the text is engaged in this way, leading to questions of power, value and authority.' (Edwards et al., 2013, p.222). Kendall and McGrath (2014, p. 60) also review the NLS approach to literacy, and the understanding of literacy not as a set of decontextualized skills, but as socially and culturally defined, 'context bound' practices in which literacy relates to '…how we produce and make texts.' In contrast to this the authors describe the emergence of 'subject' literacy within educational institutions, where the focus is on formal learning and qualifications, with prescribed texts, course specifications and assessment practices. Within this framework they identify a particular conception of reading which, because it is based

on a prescribed set of 'de-contextualised' skills and competencies, they describe as 'highly performative' and 'technicist' (ibid., p.58) as with Street's 'autonomous' model.

Their research also highlighted views of reading as 'solitary, private and individualised' (ibid., p.67). They explain how this model of literacy has been linked to economic benefits (including individual prosperity) and productivity; a further recurring theme within the literature on adult literacy.

The Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LfLFE) project (2004 to 2007) which investigated college students' 'everyday literacy practices' and how these might be used to improve their learning on their courses (Mannion, Ivanič and the LfLFE Group, 2007, p.15) was also based on a view of literacy that recognises how it is situated in social contexts rather than being a set of skills that are independent from context. The researchers were concerned not 'with the learning of literacy as a basic skill, but with the diverse *literacies* that students may bring to their learning and those that their learning requires…' (ibid., p.16). According to the project's research briefing (Teaching and Learning Research Programme, 2008) the research demonstrated how most students were involved in a broad range of literacy practices every day, regularly involving technology, but that they often did not see these as literacy or use them in their college learning. The suggestion is made from this that 'notions of individual deficit misconstrue what is involved in literacy'.

In fact, a common theme emerging from much of the previous research is the existence of a 'deficit' model of literacy, in which the focus is on literacy as something illiterate individuals lack. Crowther and Tett (2011) argue that seeing literacy learning as a process by which people acquire skills through teachers responding to their own specific needs can reinforce this deficit concept. Analysis of various literacy campaigns of the past few decades, including the Department for Education and Skills' media campaign based on images of gremlins which were used as a metaphor for literacy difficulties (Taylor, 2008b; Kendall and McGrath, 2014) has discerned a similarly negative approach to literacy learning. In their analysis of the 'Changing Lives' document that updates the Skills for Life policy, Burgess and Hamilton (2011, p.11) also identify a 'deficit discourse', particularly through the ways learners are represented, the focus on employability and the 'discourse of individualism' where support is aimed at the individual learner with no concern for broader social issues.

Walker and Rubenson's (2014) suggestion that the media has played an influential role in shaping public perceptions of adult literacy in Canada was discussed earlier in this chapter, along with their comment that the way in which literacy is presented, particularly within the media, suggests a state of crisis on a national level. In addition, they comment on low levels of literacy being presented 'as a personification of an enemy who must be fought and defeated' (not unlike the gremlins in the previously mentioned Department for Education and Skills campaign). They also write about adult literacy in Canada being frequently 'discussed in the context of national shame' (ibid., p.158).

Functional literacy

A further theme emerging from the literature relating to perceptions and definitions of literacy is that of 'functional literacy'. Burgess and Hamilton's work (2011) for example, through analysis of two policy documents, *Skills for Life: Changing Lives* (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009) and *Functional Skills: the Facts* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010), explores what they identify as the 're-introduction' of 'functional literacy' into English policy, arguing that this has resulted in the current view of adult literacy as narrow and focused mainly on vocational issues. They suggest this is likely to have a negative impact on literacy education, as a functional view of literacy is target-driven, focuses on the individual rather than the community and is primarily concerned with economic issues and employability. The writers relate this to a 'deficit discourse' (ibid., p.1). Hamilton and Pitt (2011b) provide a historical analysis of the concept of functional literacy, tracking what they see as its development from being associated with literacy in real-life, every-day contexts, with connotations of human rights and social change, to an alignment more with economic and vocational issues, which they refer to as a 'human resource model of literacy.' This view also sees the concept of literacy as being more concerned with reading than with writing, along with employability and national and individual economic success.

Burgess and Hamilton argue that Durkheim's concept of functionalism which values a balanced society 'in which all elements have a pre-determined role' has influenced the notion of 'functional literacy' and the idea that being literate helps people to 'fit in' or to

be 'normal' (2011, p.8). In their analysis of the Functional Skills policy document, they argue that the policy presents a 'narrower vision' than in earlier documentation, with a focus on standards, targets, employment and vocational education. (ibid., p.12) They identify a concentration on the individual within the policy rather than on community, and suggest that the term 'function' itself has a narrower scope than 'grow' or 'develop', for example, arguing that this '…represents a marked impoverishment of the discourse which has underpinned adult literacy education in the UK for the last 30 years' (ibid., p.13). They conclude that the functional view of literacy, with its focus on vocational and employability related skills, would continue to be the dominant one because it suited the current (at the time) UK Coalition government's agenda. However, in their opinion, this is not a suitable basis for policy-making.

In analysing the 'relationship between metaphors, discourses and identities', Taylor considers the Skills for Life strategy and argues that it was 'based on a discourse of deficit, outcomes and employability that positions adult learners as "depersonalised others"'(2008b, p.131). She describes the introduction of the strategy and the way in which it was given authority and justification through being introduced alongside the established National Literacy Strategy within schools and through publications such as the government White Paper 'Skills for the 21st Century' (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). Taylor (2008b, p.132) identifies the strategy's focus on employability and argues that the policy of the time was based on the notion that language is a 'determined practice' and that learners can be taught the skills necessary to use in 'relevant contexts'. She calls this an 'appropriateness model of language use'. Taylor contends that the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, a key aspect of the Skills for Life Strategy, is based on the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1995) in which literacy is seen as a distinct and 'decontextualised' collection of skills. She argues that 'powerful' and 'value-laden' metaphors within policy discourses construct 'negative identities' for adult literacy learners (Taylor, 2008, p. 135).

Hamilton (2012; 2014) identifies a range of discourses within UK literacy policies including discourses of literacy itself, of learning, of citizenship, of economic prosperity and of social inclusion. She examines how some of these discourses have changed over time. However, she also identifies a 'human resource' model of literacy within recent policy (2012, p.169). This model 'sees literacy as a commodity to be

exchanged within the global market place' and links it with economic and individual success and prosperity (ibid., p.170). Hamilton says this approach to literacy learning favours formal rather than informal learning and is concerned with standardisation and measurement. There is also a moral aspect to it, with the literacy learner 'constructed as a responsible citizen contributing to global prosperity' (ibid., p.171). She concludes with the argument that policy commodifies literacy 'through attempts to describe and parcel up the "skills" of literacy and to place a monetary value on them' (ibid., p.179). Hamilton also identifies a link between the human resource model of literacy and citizenship, along with an individual's duty, as well as their right, to be literate. Again, the dominance of the 'human resource model' of education is acknowledged in relation to literacy, along with the importance of literacy skills to economic success, to an individual's prosperity, employability and achievement in the workplace. She again suggests that this view of literacy involves standardisation and measurement, along with a preference for formal rather than informal learning. She identifies a 'language of achievement' which has entered 'public discourse' (ibid., p.174) and the way this has been used to define literacy through testing, the introduction of a core curriculum and standards for measuring achievement. She also suggests that within this model, literacy has become a 'key indicator of social inclusion' and is linked to other policy issues such as the regeneration of communities and family learning (ibid., p.175).

The suggestion is made within the literature that functional literacy is still the dominant model within literacy policy in various countries, despite the popularity and influence of the social practice approach to literacy within research and practice. (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton, 2012). The Skills for Life policy with its national tests and its core curriculum is given as an example of the influence of the functional skills model and its concern with employability and economic success, as is the literacy measurement and testing used by policy makers, such as the IALS and, more recently, PIAAC (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b).

This discourse of functionalism is identified in some analyses as instrumentalist due to its focus on outcomes and targets, testing and qualifications, employability and economic issues (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015; Williams, 2008). Others suggest that this concern with employability and the economy (Allatt and Tett, 2018), along with the emphasis on individual responsibility rather than support from the state (Davies and

Bansel, 2007) in recent literacy policy in England is part of a neoliberal agenda 'that equates literacy with employment and earnings' (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b, p.600).

Multi-literacies

The notion of the existence of multiple literacies is addressed frequently within the literature. MacLellan (2008) comments that, generally, literacy has been understood as the ability to write and read, and, in common with other writers (for example, Edwards et al., 2009) refers to these skills being taught as a set of rules. However, she argues that current views see the concept more broadly. She identifies six forms of literacy, including that of functional literacy, which she traces to the OECD, and its perception of literacy as an individual's ability to understand and use writing in everyday life. She identifies a further five forms of literacy though: information, critical, academic, societal and dialogic, which appear to operate mainly within an educational setting and relate to what the writer calls 'pedagogical literacy' (ibid., p.1987). Similarly, three distinct forms of literacy, prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy are identified in the International Adult Literacy Surveys (Bartlett, 2008; St. Clair, 2012; Boudard and Jones, 2003; Tett, 2013).

Within the field of New Literacy Studies recent developments and additions to the concept of literacy are acknowledged, particularly as a result of social and technological influences that have resulted in a greater variation in the forms texts might take, along with the combining of written words with symbols and other visual images. Literacy is considered in terms of 'literacy practices' that are situated within 'domains' such as education and it is argued that certain literacy practices are more highly valued in some domains than in others; Edwards et al. (2009) give texting as an example. According to Mills (2010, p.247) literacy within the NLS is seen 'as a repertoire of changing practices for communicating purposefully in multiple social and cultural contexts.'

The concept of digital literacies is also regularly discussed in the literature around adult literacy. Mills (ibid., p.249) notes the criticism made against the New Literacy Studies for failure to identify clear boundaries to what might be considered literacy and explains that, while this issue remains largely unresolved, theorists within the field are

in agreement on a broad definition of literacy as being 'inclusive of sign-making practices that use various technologies.' The relationship between literacy and new and developing technologies is a recurring theme within NLS literature. Hamilton (2012), for instance, advocates that the concept of literacy should include digital technology, while Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue that developments in communication, such as email and the Internet, mobile phones etc., have led to the development of new literacies. While a traditional view of literacy focuses particularly on formal, written language, newer technologies present a broader range of demands on readers, or 'users' (ibid., p.181). The writers give as an example, the process of reading a webpage, with its mix of text, images, boxes and lists which require far more 'navigational effort' compared to the more linear presentation of traditional text. The argument is made that 'conventional views of reading and writing are no longer adequate to describe the combination of sign systems in digital texts.' (Mills, 2010, p. 250). Parr and Campbell, meanwhile, argue against perceptions of literacy that focus on printed texts, claiming that, 'Literacy in the real world has become much more than making sense of written words on a page …' (p.12, p.562). They echo the New London Group's viewpoint that literacy is more than reading 'page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language' (New London Group, 2009, p.9 in Parr and Campbell, 2012, p. 562) and the group's theory of multiliteracies which suggests texts are understood in a variety of ways, including linguistically, visually, spacially etc. (Parr and Campbell, 2012; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). However, Hamilton's analysis of the current view of literacy is that, despite the development of digital technologies, which have influenced the use of writing and of visual and other ways of creating meaning, in the media and in policy-making views of literacy are still often based on 'reading books' (2012, p.175). Little attention is paid to other types of text, a point with which Kendall and McGrath (2014) in their work on reading would appear to agree. Although they acknowledge the prevalence of concepts of multimodality (and multiliteracies) within current research on literacy, their own study led them to conclude that literacy teachers were not yet integrating the use of digital technologies with print based reading and writing.

International surveys and policy

The broader influences on policy and public opinion of the various international literacy surveys have already been discussed in this chapter. However, a number of writers have considered the concepts and constructs of literacy presented within them, and criticism is often levied against both the surveys and the definitions of literacy on which they are based. Again, the notion of 'functional literacy' features heavily, as does an emphasis on print-based literacy. Boudard and Jones (2003) trace some of these definitions, from the very simple ability to read and write (used in a 1950s UNESCO commissioned study) to the more detailed concept used by IALS in the 1990s, which encapsulates literacy that is 'functional' as based on the 'knowledge and skills that people need to understand and use written information.' (ibid., p.193). As in the discussion of multi-literacies above, different and distinct forms of literacy are also acknowledged within the survey. However, although this may be presented as an extension to the more traditional, autonomous models of literacy, the writers argue that the surveys were still based on a restricted view of literacy which focuses primarily on reading and on cognitive skills. It has also been argued that the OECD view of literacy (presented in the IALS survey) does not acknowledge the importance of context and of 'multiple literacies' (Tett, 2014, p.132); rather it links an individual's literacy with economic benefits promoting a 'human capital ideology' of competition within a 'global marketplace' and concern with measuring performance (ibid., p.130).

Bartlett's view is that international studies and surveys of literacy have presented the concept as 'either/or', that is, people are either literate or not literate, and that these surveys have often been based on UNESCO's definition of literacy as 'the ability to read and write, with understanding, a simple short statement on everyday life' (2008, p.739). She describes how later surveys widened the definitions used, for example, the IALS identification of 'prose, document and quantitative literacy' (ibid., p.740) but still identifies a focus on reading. She also questions the appropriateness of an approach based on the identification of levels of literacy, arguing that a sociocultural concept of literacy would dispute the measurement of literacy levels, with their 'notion of a hierarchy of skills', although this approach to measuring skills is prominent in current literacy teaching and in policy. To support this point she refers to research into second language acquisition which, she suggests, would contest assumptions that this hierarchy exists and that it is 'universal'. She also questions the notion that literacy

can be measured 'objectively' as the design of such measures 'is an utterly political process' (ibid., p.741); all definitions of literacy are 'socially interested and politically motivated' (ibid., p.742).

Black and Yasukawa (2014), reviewing the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (2006) from an Australian perspective, comment that each survey has had its own perception of literacy. They consider the 'level 3' criteria deemed in the ALLS survey to be the minimum level of literacy (and numeracy) required by individuals to meet the demands of life in a 'knowledge-based' economy (ibid., p.125). They go on to chart the emergence of an understanding of literacy that is largely functional and related to productivity, and echoing Hamilton and Barton (2000), they criticise the way this recommended level of literacy (and numeracy) is based on statistical information rather than a true understanding of the role literacy plays in people's lives; an argument not dissimilar to the New Literacy Studies viewpoint that 'Conventional literacy performance indicators', such as print-based assessment procedures, do not reflect real life literacy practices due to their lack of recognition of the role of digital technologies (Mills, 2010, p.262).

Walker and Rubenson (2014) in their exploration of the influence of the Canadian media on discourse and policy in relation to adult literacy, consider IALS and the way literacy is defined within the survey. They suggest that it presents literacy as being based on people's ability to use and understand printed information in their daily lives within their communities, their homes and their places of work. Achieving personal goals and potential is also an aspect of the IALS definition according to Walker and Rubenson. A later Canadian survey added 'problem-solving' to this definition (ibid., p.144). The authors argue that, prior to the IALS, conceptions of literacy as having the ability to 'function within society' (ibid., p.150) were widely used within the media but following the survey, a view of literacy as linked with both national and individual prosperity was commonly promoted.

An alternative view of literacy identified within international surveys and policies for adult literacy, such as OECD's PIACC and UNESCO's Literacy and Assessment Programme (LAMP) presents literacy as a 'continuum'. Benavot, for instance, compares 'conventional measures of literacy' which view it as 'binary', that is, 'literate'

or 'illiterate' with a 'continuum of proficiencies which are developed as part of a 'lifelong process' (2015, p.275). Hanemann also acknowledges a view of literacy as a continuum in which 'Dichotomous states of being either "literate" or "illiterate" no longer apply' (2015, p. 295). She describes this as 'a modern understanding of literacy' (ibid., p.299) in which the concept is 'increasingly perceived as a complex, content-bound and dynamic phenomenon' (ibid., p, 297). This way of understanding literacy is used by UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning, which describes it as a continuum of proficiency levels which depend on specific contexts (World Education Forum, 2016, p.47 cited by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017, p. 1). In this document, UNESCO provides a very clear explanation of its understanding of literacy as a 'competency' in using written texts. It recognises that it has 'evolved into a multidimensional and complex concept' along with the 'plurality of literacy and literacy practices' but argues that the term's broader uses such as 'health literacy', 'financial literacy' etc. should be avoided in order maintain clarity in the use of terminology. The term 'literacy' should only be used in relation to written text, whether printed, digital or produced by hand (ibid., 2017, p. 2). UNESCO argues that rather than being viewed as an isolated skills set which is 'completed' within a short space of time, literacy is just one aspect of a number of 'core competencies which require sustained learning and updating on a continuous basis' (ibid.). Hanemann, however, in reviewing 'official' definitions of literacy as indicated in UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's second Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 2) and found that while many acknowledged literacy as being situated most 'narrowly relate to functional reading, writing and numeracy skills necessary for everyday life' and literacy is usually seen as 'one component of a broader set of skills' sometimes 'packaged' into 'literacy, language and numeracy' or 'literacy, numeracy and ICT skills' etc. (2015, p.309). She identified an instrumental approach in the focus given to literacy education for employability and economic purposes and argues that GRALE 2 shows that most countries' understandings of literacy are still based on 'literate' or illiterate' rather than a continuum of 'proficiency levels' (ibid., p.310).

A focus on the written word is also seen in the definition provided by PIAAC's Literacy Expert Group which explains literacy as 'understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential' (Stein, 2017, p.33). However, this definition

differs from some of the other viewpoints by presenting literacy as a very active process and also in its consideration of purposes other than employability and economic success.

In this section of the chapter I have reviewed the literature which considers definitions and understandings of literacy as they are presented in education policy, in media campaigns and in international literacy surveys. Although the literature presents a wide range of ways in which literacy has been defined and conceptualised, there is a clear juxtaposition of two positions. The first recognises literacy as a collection of social practices which vary according to social context; the second, in contrast to this, views literacy as a more fixed notion, which is based on a set of specific skills regardless of context. In much of the literature, writers favour the first viewpoint, while the latter is criticised for being instrumental and functional, with a focus on formal learning and deficit, and economic and vocational issues.

Conclusion

The review of the literature of adult literacy education has shown how definitions and representations of literacy have differed over time. However, most previous analyses seem to stop at the Skills for Life initiative, with far less consideration given to the more recent Functional Skills policy or any policy since then, and the aim of the present research is to build on previous research, asking the question:

How is literacy conceptualised within current education policy?

Although numerous ways of defining and conceptualising literacy have been identified, the literature review has also identified some possible gaps in coverage of the issue. Most work on perceptions, for instance, is based on policy, international surveys and official documents and there appears to be much less coverage of literacy practitioners' views. An exception to this is Kendall and McGrath's work on reading in which they conclude with the comment that few teachers included in their study had clear definitions of reading, and that writing appeared to be of greater importance to them than reading. The way teachers perceived literacy was often 'aligned with dominant policy discourse' and the 'curriculum documents' with which they were

working (2014, p.71). Generally, however, there appears to be little consideration of the views of practitioners themselves on how literacy should be defined and conceptualised. In fact, the authors highlight a lack of research within post-compulsory education on teachers' perceptions of literacy. My survey of the literature did not find any recent coverage of the views of literacy learners. The Literacies for Learning in Further Education project carried out between 2004 and 2007 perhaps comes the closest to this (Mannion et al., 2007). From this perceived gap in the research literature, therefore, the following research question has emerged:

What does the term 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?

The literature review, similarly, found little consideration of the ways in which literacy teachers' perceptions of what literacy constitutes influences their practice and how they react to and put into practice policy for adult literacy education within their organisations. This has led to the third and final question:

How is literacy policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

In the following chapter I explain the methods I used to address these research questions, including my approach to the collection and analysis of data. I also discuss the theoretical background which underpins my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I explain the aims of my research, the questions I intend to address within it and the theoretical perspectives underpinning it. I discuss the methods used within the research, including my approach to data collection and analysis.

Research aims

The aim of my research is to determine how literacy is currently perceived and conceptualised in policy and by teachers and learners within adult literacy education in England and to identify the ways in which literacy policy is enacted by teachers of adult literacy. I also aim to contribute to theoretical understandings of literacy.
The specific questions I aim to address in my research are:

- How is literacy conceptualised within current educational policy?
- What does the term 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?
- How is literacy policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

In my research I take the term 'adult' to refer to individuals of nineteen years and over, and the policy to which I refer relates to adult literacy education in England only, as the other UK countries have their own policies regarding adult literacy.

In the following section I discuss the theoretical context of my research.

Theoretical background

The idea that literacy is not a fixed concept and is constantly evolving (Crowther et al., 2001) is central to this research. My interest in this field of study was initially influenced by the work of the New Literacy Studies movement (NLS) and its social practice approach in which literacy is seen not as a fixed concept or as simply a prescribed set of technical skills, but rather as a socially determined collection of practices (Street, 1997). A 'sociocultural view of literacy' (Stephens, 2000, p.10) in which people's everyday literacy practices in their own social contexts are important is a key feature of NLS and is recognised in the work of Brice-Heath (1984), Street (1995), Barton and

Hamilton (1998) and Gee (2004) among others. Also important within the NLS approach is the desire to find an alternative to the 'deficit model', which represents literacy as an attribute that people either have or have not. Rather, advocates of the NLS approach suggest that people use different 'literacies' depending on their current context, which might include their 'domains' of work, home and social life, and education (Smith, 2005, p. 321; Tett et al., 2012, Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2015a).

Also influential in the NLS field have been the 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models proposed by Street (1997, p.48). Some commentators, including Burns (2012) suggest that the 'autonomous' model, which presents literacy as a set of technical and uniform skills which are unrelated to the context in which they are used, is dominant in literacy education. Such a model, according to Burns, links literacy with the automatic improvement of people's cognitive skills and their economic prosperity. An ideological model, however, recognises that literacy varies according to social context and also that its 'uses and meanings are always embedded in relations of power' (Street, 1997, p.48). 'Multiple literacies' involving different literacy practices according to context and 'multiliteracies' which recognises other forms literacy might take, such as visual and digital in addition to print based, are further key features of NLS thinking (Street, 1997; Street, 2005). Of particular relevance to the present study is Street's claim that NLS researchers avoid making judgements about literacy until they understand 'what it means to the people themselves …' (Street, 2005, p. 419). This has implications for the present study because the meaning people attach to literacy is central to my research.

More recently, Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2015b, p.3) argued that such a 'sociological' approach' is more embraced within theory rather than applied to practice and that this allows a 'cognitive' or 'traditional' model of literacy to dominate practice. They call for an approach which makes 'literacy more social in practice' (ibid., p.6). My own position as a teacher educator and former literacy practitioner would also be rather more practical. I agree with the NLS approach, and the notion that people use different literacies in different domains, but also acknowledge that they still need to 'function' in their everyday lives and work. My preferred model of literacy would provide a balance between these two approaches.

Reflexivity

Being aware of the effects on the research process and data analysis of the researcher's own background, education, occupation, values and beliefs is important at all stages in a research project (Patnaik, 2013). This reflexivity or the 'ability to factor in the influence of oneself into what one sees and the interpretations one makes of one's world' (Fook, 2019, p.63) can shape both the design of the research and the analysis of the resulting data. My own position as an 'academic', a teacher educator and a former English / adult literacy teacher, for example, will affect the way I use language, frame questions and take meaning from the data collected. It will also influence my position within the research process itself, deciding whether as a researcher I am an 'insider' or an 'outsider' (Berger, 2015, p.220). In relation to the participants in my research I am both. With regard to the teacher participants, I am an 'insider' as a former literacy practitioner, which brings with it certain advantages, including easier access to the field, prior knowledge of the subject being researched and greater likelihood of understanding their 'nuanced reactions' (ibid., p.223). There are potential disadvantages, however. Having some shared experience with participants may lead to the researcher communicating their own values, perceptions and biases while participants may omit from their responses aspects of their views and experiences they feel will be obvious to the researcher. To an extent, though, I am also 'outsider' in my position as a teacher educator rather than a current practitioner. In relation to the learners involved in my research I have no personal experience of literacy learning as an adult. While positioning as an 'outsider' in the research process can allow a subject to be approached from a different and fresh perspective, a lack of experience in the situations being researched can, according to Berger, cause difficulties in framing questions that are 'relevant to participants' experiences' (ibid., p. 227).

In addition to the benefits and potential drawbacks of the 'insider / outsider' position of the researcher discussed above, there are a number of ways in which reflexivity, or the 'understanding of my own attitudes, values and biases' (Patnaik, 2013, p.100) has affected my research, one being language use. I have chosen to use the term 'literacy' throughout, for example, although a New Literacy Studies approach would prefer the term 'literacies' (Tett et al., 2012) and the UK Government's preference is for 'English'

to be used (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). This decision was made partly for simplicity, but also in order to maintain as neutral a position as possible as a researcher. As a result of my own 'insider' knowledge as a former teacher of adult literacy and my reading about the work of the New Literacy Studies researchers which helped to raised my initial interest in the subject, my own preferences would be to use the term 'literacies'. This, however, conveys a particular understanding of the concept being researched, so I have chosen not to use it to avoid the appearance of taking a particular stand.

My prior understanding of the field, from experience both as a practitioner and as a teacher educator working with adult literacy teachers influenced the sampling process, in that I was aware of the range of educational settings from which I should seek participants in order to achieve a comprehensive sample. Being already aware of the pressures faced by practitioners in the field aided my understanding when some did not have time to participate or when interviews or group discussions that had been arranged had to be postponed or cancelled at the last minute due to circumstances at participants' places or work or study. It also helped me to understand the frustration expressed by some practitioners (discussed in Chapter 5) at the policy environments in which they worked, their 'nuanced reactions' in other words (Berger, 2015, p. 223).

Being aware of my own position as researcher also influenced the design of the research. As explained later in this chapter, my position as a teacher educator led me to discount observation of literacy classes as a research method because, although this would have been a highly suitable approach in some ways, I was concerned that some teachers may feel that I was making a judgement about their practice, despite this being far from my intention. Similarly, I did not consider myself as researcher to be in a position of power at any point during the research process. However, I was nevertheless aware of the potential effects of my occupation, education and other aspects of my positionality on the comfort and confidence of the participants, therefore, holding discussion groups with literacy learners, rather than one-to-one interviews seemed to be a potentially less intimidating and more equitable situation. Emphasizing the fact that there were no incorrect responses and that all opinions were valued was also intended to address any perceptions regarding the balance of power in the discussion groups and to reinforce the notion that it was the learners' knowledge that

mattered.

Care was also needed in the data analysis process in which my own biases could lead to my being selective in the analysis process. My personal views regarding the wider benefits of adult learning and the value of learning or its own sake, rather than purely for economic or instrumental purposes, for instance, could influence the identification of themes in the analysis of documents or interview transcripts. I was mindful, therefore, to avoid focusing on terms or phrases that might reinforce my own beliefs or values but to consider all aspects of the texts that might relate to perceptions of literacy.

The following sections of this chapter explain my research design, that is, my chosen research methods, approach to sampling and data analysis. Consideration is also given to ethical issues relevant to the research.

Research design

Founded very much on the notion that both knowledge and reality are socially constructed, an interpretivist approach was chosen for the research. This is also in keeping with a key intention of the research which is to study people's perceptions. Interpretivism, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.17), is based on the desire to 'understand the subjective world of human experience' suggesting that it is a suitable approach for a study in which the socially constructed nature of 'reality', (literacy, in this case) along with the wish to access participants' meanings and perceptions, is central.

Certain assumptions based on my prior knowledge of the subject and of its literature underpin the research, notably that there are different ways of describing and conceptualizing literacy. Assumptions such as this were used as 'points of departure' (Charmaz, 2006, p.17), informing the aims of the research and the development of the research questions.

As is typical within an interpretivist study, the research methods were chosen to produce largely qualitative data. A qualitative approach seemed appropriate because it would bring about a richness of data and description that would allow the key

concepts of the research to be understood 'in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). Quantitative data would not allow for such a depth of description or interpretation.

Three qualitative methods were used in the research, all chosen to be appropriate to the 'issue under study and the research questions' (Flick, 2009, p.33). In this case the 'issue' would be the perceptions of policy-makers, of literacy teachers and of learners, and the research methods were selected as to best allow these perceptions to be accessed. Whereas in a more scientific or positivist approach to research, the use of more than one research method may improve the validity of the data and potential for generalisation, here the use of a number of different methods relates primarily to the nature of the research questions and the different groups of participants whose views are sought. The richness, depth and authenticity of the data, along with an inductive approach to analysis rather than the use of 'a priori categories' will contribute to the validity of the qualitative data generated (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.133). In keeping with an interpretivist approach, generalisation is not an intention.

The research methods used are:
- Analysis of a range of government documents relating to education policy (both current and somewhat older) in order to identify the conceptualisations of literacy presented within them.
- Structured telephone interviews with teachers of adult literacy to both explore their understandings of literacy as a concept and to identify similarities and differences with the way literacy is conceptualised within policy. Three of the telephone interviews were followed by semi-structured face-to-face interviews with adult literacy practitioners which allowed their perceptions of literacy in more depth.
- Group discussions with literacy learners to discover what literacy means to them.

Research methods

Documentary analysis
The analysis of written private and public documents which record an event or a process and are produced by people other than the researcher has been recognised as an effective approach within educational research, particularly when combined with

other research methods, such as interviewing (Cohen et. al., 2011). In my research, documentary analysis seemed to be the most practical way of accessing policy-makers' perceptions of literacy. The possibility of speaking directly to policy makers was deemed extremely unlikely and probably impossible, therefore not considered. However, written policy documents are freely accessible in electronic form via the Internet, and as this is the form in which literacy teachers and their institutions are likely to access policy, it seemed appropriate for me to do the same. Cohen et al. highlight potential issues with documents as a source of data, such as authenticity, credibility and reliability, particularly in relation to documents which, in presenting the 'approaches adopted by policy makers and administrators … may privilege a top-down view of education' (2011, p.253). However, the view presented by the policy makers, in addition to that held by teachers and learners, is exactly what my research aims to identify.

Interviews with practitioners

Structured telephone interviews were chosen as a means of exploring adult literacy teachers' perceptions of literacy and identifying similarities and differences in the ways in which literacy is conceptualised within policy and other documents. According to Creswell (2012) qualitative interviews involve the researcher asking participants open-ended questions which will allow them to voice their own views freely and are useful when participant observation is not possible. Observation of adult literacy classes as a method was also considered, but decided against due to the possibility that this might cause discomfort to teachers and learners. My concern here was that I am a teacher educator and wondered if some literacy teachers may feel I was making a judgement about their teaching as a result of this. In addition, although observation may have identified the model of literacy a teacher was working with, it would not allow teachers' viewpoints to be heard and therefore its relevance to the research questions was limited. Interviews appeared to be a more appropriate method on both practical and ethical grounds and telephone interviewing was chosen for practical reasons relating to time and accessibility.

The suitability of telephone interviewing as a research method has been the cause of some debate amongst qualitative researchers (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004) although a number of advantages have been identified; anonymity, for instance, can encourage respondents to be open and honest, hence increasing the

quality of the data. Furthermore, telephone interviewing is cost effective and time efficient, due to the lack of travel involved (Block and Erskine, 2012). They are also preferable from the point of view of interviewer safety (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Similarly, a number of potential drawbacks have been highlighted, including problems in establishing a rapport between interviewer and respondent due to there being less opportunity for chatting prior to recording and conversation feeling more stilted. Telephone interviews have also been criticised for the loss of meaning that can arise from non-verbal communication and for issues relating to the medium itself, such as loss of signal with mobile phones, problems for people with impaired hearing or for whom English is not their first language (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Glogowska et al., 2011). On balance, however, commentators feel that telephone interviews are an appropriate approach to qualitative research, for example, in research projects with clear 'aims and objectives' and a 'specific focus' (Glogowska et al., 2011) and where total 'immersion in the environment' (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004, p.116) is not needed. Block and Erskine (2012, p.437) advocate the use of telephone interviewing when 'there is a purposeful and appropriate sampling strategy to answer the specific theoretical question.'

For the purposes of my research, telephone interviews were considered a particularly useful method because they allowed a greater number of participants' views to be heard than if face-to-face interviewing was used. Due to constraints on my time, and that of the interviewees, this was a clear advantage. I made the effort to chat to participants to establish rapport before the interview started, simply missing this small-talk out of the transcription process (explained later in this chapter). I had, however, communicated with participants in telephone calls or emails prior to the interviews which meant that interviewer and participant already had some knowledge of one another, which should have led to increased confidence for participants (Trier-Bieniek, 2012). In accordance with the advice of Glogowska et al. (2011) I planned the telephone interviews carefully and used a script to ensure the necessary information was sought and high quality data (i.e. data that related to the research questions) gathered. Telephone interviewing was also deemed appropriate to my research because the 'immersion in the environment' (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004, p.116) mentioned above was not needed and the presence of a 'purposeful' sampling strategy' in order to answer a specific research question (Block and Erskine, 2012,

p.437) was a further feature of my research design (explained later in this chapter).

The choice of a structured approach to the telephone interviews was in part intended to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions. Cohen et al (2011) suggest that using the same sequence and format of questions can improve reliability in interviews. The intention was also to ensure a time limit to the interviews, for the benefit of both researcher and participants. Following the advice of Cohen et al. (ibid.) it was intended that the interviews would last no longer than fifteen minutes and a structured approach should facilitate this. There would be little opportunity for respondents or interviewer to go 'off topic' (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2014) at this stage, although participants were asked at the end of the interviews if there was anything they would like to add.

For the telephone interviews a schedule was devised which originally consisted of nine questions relating to the respondents' professional roles, their perceptions of literacy and their views on which policies governed practice in their organisations. The interview questions were influenced by the research question relating to teachers' perceptions of literacy, by the literature review which highlighted the existence of a number of different ways in which literacy was being perceived and by the researcher's wish to identify further policy documents for analysis. The interview schedule also asked for personal details such as age range and qualifications, as potential factors influencing practitioners' perceptions; a further issue of interest in this study. (See Appendix 1 for the pilot interview schedule). Following three pilot interviews carried out in May 2014, an additional question relating to curriculum was added to the schedule. The pilot interviews are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In most cases the process began with a telephone call to the selected organisation and a request to speak to the member of staff most likely to be interested in my research or able to help. After initial contact and expressions of interest had been made I sought institutional and participant consent prior to arranging the telephone interviews. The questions to be asked were sent to participants prior to the interviews taking place. (Copies of the participant consent form and telephone interview schedule can be found in Appendices 3 and 5).

In addition to the telephone interviews, a small number of face-to-face interviews with literacy teachers were also carried out which allowed the issues arising in the

telephone interviews to be explored in more depth. Originally I had planned face-to-face interviews as an additional method of data collection and intended to complete around twelve, with some of the participants from the telephone interviews to follow up some of the points they raised. In reality, this plan proved overly optimistic. After numerous telephone calls to organisations and emails to participants only four teachers were willing or able to participate further. This was for a variety of reasons. Two had changed job roles since the telephone interviews and felt, therefore, that they had nothing further to contribute. Another was currently on maternity leave, some said they were too busy at that time and others did not respond. Of the four interviews that were agreed, three actually took place. The fourth was cancelled due to circumstances at the teacher's place of work. This teacher did, however, discuss the issues around what it means to be literate with one of her groups of learners and shared the outcome of this discussion with me. (These data are explained later in the chapter). I decided to go ahead with the three interviews, however, as although I had adapted my methodology to focus more on the telephone interviews, I felt the face-to-face discussions would be a valuable source of additional data.

The three face-to-face interviews lasted around forty-five minutes each and, as intended, they were informal and conversational in nature, making use of what has been described as the 'interview guide approach' (Cohen et. al. 2007, p.353). Participants were not given the questions beforehand but were provided with a broad outline of the topics to be covered. In some cases, they were also reminded of the responses they had given in the telephone interviews. The reason for the semi-structured approach is that the identification of a number of open questions and themes for discussion beforehand should help to maintain the focus of the interviews while also ensuring some consistency between them. Data from the documentary analysis and the telephone interviews were used to inform these themes and questions. There was also, however, the opportunity for further themes to emerge during the interviews. Audio recordings were made of the interviews and they were then transcribed.

Group discussions with literacy learners
An important question in planning the research was how to access learners' views. I considered a number of approaches to this including questionnaires and an activity

which would involve learners creating some form of visual representation such as a collage or metaphorical model to signify what literacy meant to them, followed by a short discussion to elaborate on their responses. Both these options were discounted; questionnaires because of the demands this might place on participants' literacy, making completion burdensome for them. I decided against the visual activity because I was concerned about the amount of class time such an activity combined with discussion would take. I am aware that, for teachers and learners, class time is precious and I did not want to take up too much of it. In addition to the potential drawbacks of time and the fact that data from visual activity could be difficult to interpret, I have used creative and visual methods in my own teaching and have found that sometimes the activity itself can become the main focus and the meaning behind participants' contributions may be lost.

Finally, a simple class discussion, with a number of previously identified discussion points, and also the opportunity for issues raised by learners to be explored as they arose, seemed the most practical and productive method to use. The approach did not meet Cohen et al's (2011) description of a focus group in that the participants already knew one another, rather than being strangers who had been assembled to discuss an issue, and also in that interaction was not just between the participants themselves, but also between interviewer and participants. To some extent the discussions were more like group interviews, in that the interviewer asked certain questions, but they were informal with planned questions used only as a guide and discussions about literacy allowed to flow freely as they developed. This approach seemed to be very much in keeping with an interpretivist methodology and with the concern in my research with the meanings that people attach to concepts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Bryman suggests that interaction within a group in the 'joint construction of meaning' can be positive in encouraging participants to consider their views more deeply than they may do in an individual interview, resulting in a 'more realistic' account (2012, p.503). A further advantage is its potential for avoiding the unbalanced power relationships that might result in a face-to-face interview (ibid.). Group interviews also have an advantage of time efficiency, being quicker to conduct than individual ones

and have a further strength in that they can produce a range of responses. However, I was aware of factors that might limit the success of a group discussion, such as some participants dominating while others may feel inhibited and contribute less as a result, leading to their views not being heard to the same extent (Cohen et al., 2011). An environment needed to be created in which everyone felt they could speak and I attempted to encourage this by providing opportunities for quieter members of the group to join in the discussion if they wished to.

To arrange the group discussions, I asked the teachers who had participated in the interviews if they would be willing for their learners to take part. As a result, two groups of literacy learners were identified for an informal classroom discussion to explore what literacy meant to them. Some discussion points were identified prior to the discussions. Of particular interest were learners' perceptions regarding what they could do now in terms of literacy compared to what they could do before they embarked on their programme of study, along with some of the themes arising from the telephone and face-to-face interviews. However, the discussions were sufficiently open to allow further issues to be explored as they arise.

The discussions took place within the learners' own classrooms (following appropriate permission being granted by the relevant organisations) to maintain their comfort in familiar surroundings. Their class teacher was present, which I hoped would provide reassurance for learners and increase their confidence. I was also conscious of potential issues that could arise from this, such as learners feeling reluctant to voice their true opinions in front of their teachers. However, in reality this was not the case, and two open and frank discussions took place which, I felt, reflected the collaborative nature of the classes (which is discussed in Chapter 5). Duration of the discussions depended partly on how much class time the teacher could spare and on the level of learners' interest and how much they had to say. In reality the discussions lasted about thirty minutes. Again, I was conscious of taking up too much time and wished to avoid anything arduous for the learners. One of the telephone interview participants, however, had led a discussion about what constituted literacy with her learners prior to the interview. She had incorporated the discussion into one of her lessons with some really interesting results. I wished to emulate this approach if possible, by making the discussion of interest and value to the class while not detracting from their learning.

Audio recordings of the discussion were made, with participants' permission, and transcribed.

In the following section of this chapter I discuss the pilot telephone interviews I carried out during an early stage of the research process to test the interview questions, my interview technique and the recording equipment.

The pilot

Pilot telephone interviews were carried out in May 2014 with the intention of checking that the questions I was planning to ask were appropriate in relation to the aims of my research. I also wished to ensure the wording of the questions was clear and unambiguous. In addition, the pilot provided the opportunity to test recording equipment and to gain some experience in its use.

The pilot consisted of three structured telephone interviews with literacy practitioners from different further education colleges. The three participants were all individuals with whom I had previous professional contact, so I approached them directly to ask for their participation. Prior to the interviews I explained to them the reason for my research and I provided written information about the study, along with copies of the questions in advance. I also sought their consent via participant consent forms. (I make use of the pilot data in the main study). All participants agreed that I could make audio recordings of our telephone conversations. Difficulties with the equipment meant that an audio recording of the first of the three interviews was not made. Written notes of the responses were kept, however. Each interview lasted between ten and fifteen minutes.

The pilot telephone interviews highlighted a number of issues with the questions which meant that some revision was necessary before the main study began. For instance, the second and third questions - *In your opinion, what can a 'literate' adult do?* and *Why should adults be literate? -* resulted in very similar responses and the responses participants gave to the question about what a literate adult can do were much broader than I had expected. These questions required some revision to produce the more specific responses I was seeking. This also caused me to consider again theinformation I required from this stage in the research process and to feel that I needed to be clearer about what I was looking for. As a result, this question was revised

to ask about particular skills and abilities, and the order of questions 2 and 3 was changed to allow participants to focus on broader issues first, and then consider more specific skills. (See Appendix 1 for the pilot telephone interview questions).

Interestingly, all three participants in the pilot appeared to find the question - *What policy governs practice in adult literacy education within your college / organisation? -* difficult to answer. This caused me to consider whether this question was inappropriately worded or whether the participants' hesitation was because there was not a simple answer to the question. (Interestingly, locating policy had been an issue for me at an earlier stage in the research – see comments on the sample in the next section of this chapter). This question was also reconsidered, and replaced by one which asked about influences on the literacy curriculum initially rather than policy specifically. This could then be followed, if necessary, by an additional question about current literacy policy in evidence within participants' organisations if the issue of policy doesn't arise in response to the main question. I felt this approach to the questioning might support or encourage participants to think about policy in their organisations and, if not, might lead to some interesting data regarding other perceived influences on the literacy curriculum. An initial question I asked about the participants' roles within their organisation was also amended to include the nature of the organisation itself as, on considering the responses to the pilot questions, I wondered if teaching in a further education college or within a training organisation might be an influencing factor on practitioners' perceptions of adult literacy – an issue I consider in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

The pilot process also led to further consideration of the nature of telephone interviewing, particularly in relation to the extent of interviewer involvement. I stuck closely to the script when asking the questions, although at the time I felt it would have been more appropriate to adapt some questions according to what was emerging about the participants' circumstances; one for example, informed me she was no longer in a literacy teaching role (although she had taught literacy for around twenty years until recently). In hindsight, although the intention was for these to be structured interviews, a little more flexibility in approach to questioning would have perhaps been

appropriate. In recognition of this I added an open question to the end of the interview schedule inviting participants to add any further comments they wished to make.

An important lesson for me as interviewer which also arose from the pilot interviews was to take care not to speak at the same time as the interviewee. It felt unnatural to me to remain silent in between questions, but on a couple of occasions my interjections of 'OK', 'yes, and 'mmm', which were intended to encourage the participant and show that I was listening, obscured the recording of their responses. I felt it was important to do this though to show participants that I was listening and that their responses were being valued (Glogowska et al., 2011). I was, however, mindful of the issue in subsequent telephone interviews and remained silent while participants were speaking.

In the following section I explain the sampling strategies I used to identify policy documents for analysis along with teachers and learners for the interviews and group discussions.

The sample

Documentary analysis

In selecting written documents for analysis I was looking for texts that related to education policy in England and included adult literacy. In addition to current documents for present perspectives, I also wished to look at some older texts for comparison purposes. However, feeling that the period from the 1970s to 2001 and the introduction of the Skills for Life initiative had been comprehensively covered in the literature (for example, Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017) I decided only to include documents that had been published more recently than this.

Identifying current policy documents in relation to adult literacy education proved more difficult than I had expected. This fact may be significant in itself and will be considered further later in the thesis. In the end the documents identified for analysis included some which, rather than having adult literacy as their main focus, merely included a section on literacy education for adults.

The UK government website proved to be the easiest way to access policy documents, searching by department, such as 'Department for Business, Innovation and Skills', and then making a choice of document; 'policy papers', for instance. Accessing the documents electronically, as well as being convenient, had the added advantage of allowing them to be uploaded into Wordsmith analysis software as discussed later in the chapter. The documents finally selected for analysis were:

- *Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Government response to the House of Commons Business Innovation and Skills Select Committee. Fifth Report of Session 2014-15. (*Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014)

- *Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Plan* (Department for Education, 2016).

- *Post-16 Reform Plan* (Department for Education, 2016)

- *Functional Skills: the facts (*Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010)

- *Functional Skills Criteria for English* (Ofqual, 2011).

- *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System (*Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011)

The telephone interview sample

In keeping with an interpretivist approach to research, non-probability sampling was used to identify potential participants for the telephone interviews. The sampling strategy used was also largely purposive, in which respondents are selected based on their characteristics or typicality, or in the words of Creswell (2012, p.205) 'places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon'. Curtis et al (2014) suggest that this is appropriate in interpretivist and qualitative research where exploring the experiences of the research participants is often more important than generalising the research findings to a wider population, and where there is less concern with the sample being truly representative. To a certain extent the choice of sample was also influenced by time constraints on the part of the researcher, hence

the geographical restrictions; an element, therefore, of convenience sampling (Tracy, 2013). Although this would not be an issue with telephone interviews, it was of significance when considering the face to face interviews I had originally intended to conduct.

Participants for the telephone interviews were sought from a range of organisations in which adult literacy programmes are delivered. The intention was to access as broad a range of views as possible, hence the attempt to reach practitioners from different types of organisation, including further education colleges, offender learning and training agencies. The organisations from which participants were sought are all in West and South Yorkshire, partially for restriction of the search, but also to allow the researcher to exploit existing networks and contacts. Additionally, the geographical scope of the sample covered an area which is socially and economically diverse as both counties have a mix of urban and rural areas and areas of social deprivation; potentially a factor influencing participants' perceptions. Colleges of further education, training providers and offender learning were included in the sample as the type of organisation and the policy contexts in which practitioners work might affect their perceptions of literacy. Further education colleges, both general and specialist offering adult literacy programmes within the two counties, were identified using the researcher's own knowledge combined with an internet search. The size of the college, based on student population, was noted, and from this a sample of two each of large, medium and small colleges was chosen. (For the purpose of this research a large college was identified as having a student population of over 20,000, a medium- sized college as having between 10,000 and 20,000 and a small organisation less than 10,000). An internet search on five local authorities in West Yorkshire and four in South Yorkshire identified a number of training providers offering adult literacy programmes. From these an ideal sample of six providers was selected to include local education authority, private and voluntary providers in order to access a range of contexts.

In addition, a large urban further education college, as the provider of offender education in several regions across the country, including Yorkshire and the Humber, was approached regarding participants teaching literacy to offenders. The ideal sample would include at least two practitioners from this sector in order to access a broader range of opinions.

Although an attempt was made to prescribe the minimum number of telephone interviews that would be carried out in each type of organisation in order to achieve a balance over the various sectors, the intention was to carry out as many as possible within the timescale of the study so as to access as many practitioners' views as possible. This strategy took into account the views of Adler and Adler (2012, p.8) and the 'more open-ended' approach they recommend for qualitative researchers who might not know when planning their research methods how much data they will need to collect. They suggest continuing to interview until 'empirical saturation' is reached (ibid.). Given the timescales and restrictions of my research it was not practical to attempt this, however, I did feel that keeping an open mind about how many interviews to carry out and being flexible enough to respond to additional opportunities should they arise was a sensible and justifiable approach. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 181) in fact, also question the need to closely prescribe the sample in qualitative research, arguing that the sample size should be informed according to 'fitness for purpose' and, quoting Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, p. 42), that it should be large enough to allow 'thick descriptions and rich data'.

In reality most requests at colleges of further education, training providers and offender learning service met with no response. I left messages (telephone and email) and followed them up (usually after a two-week interval) after which I abandoned the attempt as I did not want to become a nuisance. Several months of this did result in a number of contacts; however, and a further six very productive interviews were carried out. However, these were predominantly in South Yorkshire, with three from the same organisation so not allowing the broad spread of responses I had hoped for. Following this the decision was made to try a more pragmatic approach similar to that used in the pilot telephone interviews and approach practitioners with whom I had previous professional contact. The required process of gaining individual and institutional consent would still be followed, however. The provider of offender education never replied. Seventeen telephone interviews eventually took place.

Participants for the telephone interviews included six based in further education colleges, nine from training providers (both privately run and local education authority funded) and two working in an adult education college. All were teachers, but

described their roles in different ways, including 'curriculum manager', 'curriculum leader' and 'Learning Development Manager' in addition to 'Functional Skills teacher', 'English tutor' and 'sessional tutor'. There was also one trainee teacher in the sample who was undertaking a teaching practice placement at a college of further education. The interview participants were predominantly female (only two of the seventeen teachers interviewed were male). And they ranged in age from 20s to the 56 to 65 age group, with the majority being between 45 and 55. Their highest qualifications ranged from a first degree to PhD, with some also having specialist qualifications for literacy teachers (Level 5 Additional Diploma for Teachers of Adult Literacy). Table 1 shows the pseudonyms and characteristics of the interview participants.

Table 1

Pseudonym	Type of organisation	f/t, p/t or voluntary	Length of time in adult literacy ed.	Age group	Gender	Follow-up interview
Carol	Medium FE college	p/t	12 years	36-45	F	
Catherine	Medium FE college	voluntary	6 months	56-65	F	
Lucy	Medium FE college	f/t	20 years approx.	56-65	F	
Jane	Training provider	p/t	2 years	45-55	F	
Sarah	Training provider	p/t	5 years	56-65	F	Yes
Pauline	LEA training provider	f/t	20 years	45-55	F	
Joe	LEA training provider	f/t	4 years	21-25	M	
Heather	Medium FE college	f/t	9 years	36-45	F	
Clare	LEA training provider	f/t	4 years	26-35	F	

Debbie	Large FE college	f/t	5 years	45-55	F	Yes
Moira	Large FE college	f/t	12 years	45-55	F	
Sonia	Training provider	p/t	1 year	45-55	F	
Faye	Training provider	p/t	9 months	45-55	F	
John	Training provider	f/t	11/12 years	36-45	M	
Mary	Training provider	f/t	12 years	45-55	F	Yes
Donna	Adult education college	p/t	11 years	36-45	F	
Felicity	Adult education college	f/t	8 years	45-55	F	

Face-to-face interviews and discussions with groups of learners

Potential participants for the face-to-face interviews had been identified during the telephone interviews. Each interviewee was asked if they would be prepared to participate in a face-to-face interview and the majority agreed. (Only one participant declined as she was about to take maternity leave). In reality three face-to-face interviews were carried out. (Appendix 7 shows the schedule used for these interviews).

The telephone interviews were also used to identify groups of learners to participate in discussions about what literacy means to them. Initially, three group discussions were arranged within different types of setting; a further education college, a private training provider and a local education authority class. The discussion planned to take part in the college was cancelled, however, and it was not possible to rearrange it due to changing circumstances within the organisation. Two group discussions were held, therefore, with the first taking place in a village community centre in a literacy class led by a private training provider. In this class, learners were developing their literacy

through creative writing, reading for pleasure and discussion and were not working towards a qualification. The group initially comprised four learners, though two chose to leave at the start without contributing. Both of the remaining learners in this group were female and had English as their first language. The second discussion took place in an inner city adult learning centre run by the local education authority. This group also consisted of four learners (two female and two male) studying for a Functional Skills English qualification. Two members of the group were ESOL learners. Although this was a small sample, there was no intention that the groups of learners would be representative of literacy learners in general therefore it was not detrimental to the quality of the research. My intention was to access a range of views about literacy which was possible through combination of the discussions with learners, interviews with practitioners and document analysis.

Table 2 shows the group discussion participants' pseudonyms and their characteristics.

Table 2

Group	Pseudonym	Learner or tutor	Type of organisation	Age group	Gender	English as first language
1	Julie	Learner	Private training provider	45-55	F	Yes
1	Jess	Learner	Private training provider	26-35	F	Yes
1	Sarah	Tutor	Private training provider	56-65	F	Yes
2	Martin	Learner	LEA training provider	45-55	M	Yes
2	Zara	Learner	LEA training provider	26-35	F	No
2	Eli	Learner	LEA training provider	21-25	M	Yes
2	Daniel	Learner	LEA training provider	21-25	M	No

| 2 | Mary | Tutor | LEA training provider | 45-55 | F | Yes |

(See Appendix 8 for prompts prepared for the discussions with learners).

Ethical issues

Potential ethical issues were considered at each stage of the research process. Given the topic and planned approaches, no moral issues or situations likely to result in harm to participants were anticipated. However, the necessary steps were taken to ensure that the research is carried out fairly, legally and ethically.

Care was taken, for example, to ensure that permission was sought and gained from organisations involved in the research and also that voluntary informed consent was received from participants. Consent forms that were easy and convenient for both literacy teachers and their learners to access were provided along with information sheets explaining the purpose of the research. (See Appendices 2, 3 and 4). I was also aware that classes of literacy learners may include vulnerable adults so it was important that steps were taken to enable them to give informed consent. Before the discussions began I explained each point on the consent form with the groups and the participants' right to withdraw from the research process was also made clear in line with British Educational Research Association (BERA) Guidelines 10 and 11 (2004). Throughout the project confidentiality and anonymity for all participants was maintained, as was sensitivity towards their feelings. As mentioned earlier in this report, I wished to avoid what may be seen as an evaluation of teachers' practice. Bearing in mind Merriam's (1988) caution to researchers that participants may experience discomfort about their views and perceptions, I was also aware that literacy, particularly perceived difficulties with literacy, may be a delicate issue for some learners, therefore discussion with learners was conducted in a relaxed and non-threatening manner and participants were reassured that they were not being assessed or judged. In discussions with learners I emphasized the fact that there were no incorrect answers and that all opinions were of value.

Where documentary analysis was carried out, legislation regarding copyright, freedom of information and data protection (Cohen et al. 2007) was also observed. However, the documents used are already in the public domain and easily accessed. No aspect

of the document analysis involved breach of copyright.

At the stage of submitting the research proposal (May 2013) ethical approval and permission to proceed was granted by the University of Huddersfield's School of Education and Professional Development.

Data analysis

Policy documents

For an initial, basic analysis of the documents and to identify themes within the texts I used Wordsmith Tools 6.0 lexical analysis software. This set of programs is used by researchers and lexicographers for identifying the frequency with which words occur in a text, highlighting key words, looking at the contexts in which certain words are situated, and for listing words or clusters of words, either according to their frequency or alphabetically (Scott, 2015). Uploading electronic copies of the policy documents allowed word lists to be generated for each one which displayed each word occurring in the text in order of frequency. This was extremely helpful in identifying significant terms within the texts. For example, in the document *Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Government response to the House of Commons Business Innovation and Skills Select Committee. Fifth Report of Session 2014-15* the word 'skills' was identified to be the 12th most frequently occurring word out of 1,900 different words used in the document. (An extract from a Wordsmith wordlist produced from this document can be found in Appendix 6).

The initial analysis using Wordsmith Tools was followed with a more in depth study of the documents using Critical Discourse Analysis as the approach. Discourse analysis, as the study of language use in context, was chosen as a method of analysis of the policy documents for its ability to highlight the ways in which social meanings and identities are produced through language and texts. (Tonkiss, 2004). After careful consideration the decision was made not to use this approach for the interview data. This will be explained in more depth later in this chapter.

When considering discourse analysis as a method I felt it necessary to clarify my understanding of the concept of discourse. Explanations of the concept vary in the literature, with definitions ranging from discourse as a series of statements on a related

topic to the language used by a specific group of people within society and to language with a clear meaning-making role (Mills, 1997; Wodak, 2009). James Gee makes the distinction between 'discourse': the grammar used in spoken or written language and 'Discourse': language use related to beliefs, values, identity and so on (Rogers, 2011, p.6). However, Blommaert (2005, p.2) puts it more simply as 'language-in-use' or 'language-in-action', and this is my preferred understanding of the concept. Also of relevance, however, is Foucault's understanding of discourse as constitutive in its role in society's production of truth and the privileging of some forms of knowledge over others (Mills, 1997). In relation to power, discourse not only constructs objects but also has the potential to 'constrain individual participation' in society (Gilbert, 2008, p.450).

A further decision to be made was which approach to discourse analysis should be taken. There is no one standard framework for discourse analysis, with researchers adopting a variety of approaches, and although it has been argued that discourse analysis should be viewed as a 'field of research rather than a single practice' (Taylor, 2001, p.5) various attempts have been made to categorise these different approaches. Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001, p.ii) identify a number of 'traditions' of 'discourse research', including conversation analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucauldian analysis. Differences in approach may be distinguished according to, among other things, the focus of the analysis (on language content or process, for example), the type of 'text' to be analysed and the relevance of the text's social, political or historical context to the analysis. The position of the researcher, the extent to which interpretation on the part of the discourse analyst is involved and interest in (or lack of interest in) power relations resulting from or manifest within language use may also be significant factors.

One of the most common distinctions made between approaches is whether a critical or non-critical stance is being taken by the researcher. A non-critical approach might, for instance, involve the close study of a text, identifying major themes within it, noting the repetition or emphasis of particular words and phrases, considering how different subjects are addressed and recognising 'silences', that is, issues not covered or voices that are unheard (Tonkiss, 2004, p.378). On the other hand, critical approaches to discourse analysis (CDA) have a greater concern than non-critical approaches with the way discourse produces and maintains social inequalities (Gilbert, 2008, p.448).

Other features of CDA might include the aim to explore the ways in which discourse produces and maintains power relations within society, and as a result of this has a 'clear political agenda' (Woofitt, 2005, p. 138). Blommaert, (2005) also suggests that CDA advocates actual intervention within the social issues it explores, not just analysing discourse, but also the relationship between discourse and social processes, and that it is normative rather than simply descriptive, in the way it aims to rectify 'social wrongs' (ibid., p.11). Van Dijk argues that critical discourse analysts should be politically engaged and that they should also be explicit in relation to their own social and political viewpoints. The researcher will not be a 'neutral observer' (as a conversation analyst might) but rather a 'social critic' (Wetherell, 2001, p.383). Part of the claim for criticality is the way CDA 'aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination, and in ideology.' (Fairclough, 2001a, p.229).

In choosing an approach to discourse analysis to be used in the present study, a number of issues needed to be considered, therefore. According to Wetherell et al. (2001) the kind of data the researcher requires, the topic of the research and the academic discipline in which it is situated will all influence the approach chosen. The position of the researcher as either a 'social critic' or 'neutral observer' (ibid., p. 384) is also key, as is the extent of the researcher's involvement in active intervention during the research process. Further questions would relate to the analyst's aims when approaching a text. For instance, is the aim simply to describe the structure of the text under analysis, or is it to examine how the text works in creating and maintaining social relations? How prescriptive will the approach be in relation to the framework or methods used for analysis? In the first instance, however, will the approach be critical in nature and what will be the extent of the researcher's political engagement?

Finally, the decision was made to use an approach to discourse analysis similar to that of Fairclough, who suggests that discourse can be understood as having three dimensions: 'discourse-as-text' (the linguistic and organisational features of a text), 'discourse-as-discursive-practice' (discourse types, conventions, style and register) and 'discourse-as-social-practice' which relates to power, hegemony and ideology (Blommaert, 2005, p.29). Fairclough provides a clear model for undertaking discourse analysis, though he does stress that this is a 'guide' not a 'blueprint' (Fairclough,

2001b, p. 92). This model includes a series of questions relating to vocabulary, grammar and the structure of the text, to use when carrying out an analysis. He refers to this as the 'description' stage of the analysis process (ibid.). However, a criticism Fairclough levels at other approaches to discourse analysis is that linguistic description alone does not allow the researcher to make links between the features of a text and their social effects, arguing that the relationship 'between text and social structures is an indirect, mediated one.' To understand this relationship, further stages of analysis are required which he identifies as 'interpretation' and 'explanation' (ibid. p.117). Fairclough also acknowledges that meaning can be ambiguous and subject to different interpretations.

Fairclough's framework for CDA (2003) allows a text to be analysed on a number of different levels; linguistically, considering features such as sentence types and sentence structure, tense, lexical choice, use of modal verbs, coherence and persuasive techniques - aspects of analysis used in the field of linguistics (Gilbert, 2008, p.448). In my analysis, for instance, lexical choice was particularly important in relation to semantic fields, which played a key role in the identification of the main discourses within the texts. In addition, the ways in which pronouns, such as 'we' and 'our', are used, along with modal verbs and persuasive techniques, were suggestive of positions of power and authority. Fairclough's approach also allows analysis at an 'interdiscursive' level in which recurring themes are identified between different discourses. (Taylor, 2004). Themes within and differences between the texts were also identified, along with issues or topics not mentioned, referred to by Tonkiss (2004, p.378) as 'silences'. Although the framework chosen for analysis was similar to that recommended by Fairclough, it was allowed to develop and evolve as the data analysis progressed. Active intervention in social issues advocated by some critical discourse analysts was beyond the scope of the present study, but Wetherell's warnings regarding the issues raised by taking a critical approach to discourse analysis with regard to objectivity and the researcher's own interpretations were borne in mind (2001, p.385.).

A critical approach to discourse analysis seemed particularly relevant to the study of adult literacy education for a number of reasons, including the relationship between literacy and notions of power, in particular, the role literacy can play in establishing

and reproducing unequal power relationships (Tett et al., 2012). Blommaert (2005, p.21) describes education as one of CDA's main fields of inquiry (along with politics, the media and racism) and suggests that CDA as a method for research within the field of literacy can be used in conjunction with approaches such as that of the New Literacy Studies. As much of the previous research which provides the context for the current study has emerged from New Literacy Studies, this comment was of particular interest. However, Fairclough, (2010, p.10) suggests that as a result of growing interest in Critical Discourse Analysis since the 1990s a considerable amount of research is identified as using this approach when in reality it does not, and I have felt it necessary to question whether my chosen approach to discourse analysis was truly critical. This issue was given lengthy consideration. The approach I have taken does not display all of the features of critical discourse analysts identified by theorists in the field. For instance, it does not involve actual intervention in the issues being investigated nor does it intend to rectify 'social wrongs' (Blommaert, 2005, p.11). Furthermore, the political engagement of the analyst is limited and as a researcher I have not been explicit regarding my own political and social viewpoints (Wetherell, 2001). I have tried to maintain as objective a stance as is possible and appropriate in a study of this nature. However, Rogers argues that 'all analyses of language are inherently critical' (2011, p. 2) and in terms of the political engagement some theorists require from CDA, I feel that education in itself is a political topic and this further justifies my final decision that my approach would be critical.

Analysis of data from telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews and discussions with literacy learners

Audio recordings of the telephone interviews were transcribed, but prior to this the decision had to be made whether the transcription process would be 'verbatim' or 'selective' (Fielding and Thomas, 2008, p.257). I chose to transcribe only the participants' words and not the hesitations, pauses, and so on. Although the potential advantage of verbatim transcription in avoiding missing out data that may be of relevance at a later date was acknowledged, I felt sufficiently confident in recognising what was and was not significant in relation to the interview questions, and chose a selective approach in which elements of the conversations which did not relate directly to the questions were not transcribed. Participants' responses were 'gathered' under

numbered questions as a *Word* document. Including all responses to the same question under one heading should aid the analysis process by allowing easier identification of themes in relation to each question on the interview schedule. The same approach was taken when transcribing the face-to-face interviews. The decision to use such an approach rather than using more sophisticated analysis software such as NVivo was because I felt that organising the data by hand would facilitate a greater familiarity with it at an earlier stage in the analysis process. The quantity of data I had gathered was small enough to make it practical to do this.

A further decision to make related to data analysis and whether or not to use Critical Discourse Analysis for the interview transcripts as well as the policy documents. According to Fairclough (2003), interview transcripts are a legitimate text for analysis using a CDA approach, and an advantage of this would be consistency in my methods of analysis in various stages of the research process. However, while, for the reasons explained above, CDA was deemed highly appropriate for the analysis of policy documents, such an in depth and critical linguistic analysis appeared less beneficial for the other stages in my research. Although in analysing the interview and focus group transcripts, I aimed to identify respondents' perceptions, I felt that power relationships are less likely to be inherent in the data, therefore I could not justify the use of a CDA approach. Additionally, in the interviews and focus group discussions participants had the opportunity to develop their responses to a greater extent than that to which ideas may be expressed in policy documents. This should allow their views to be expressed more explicitly, meaning that there is less to be gained from a detailed linguistic analysis designed to tease out meaning from the text. I decided, therefore, that a more straightforward thematic analysis would be sufficient to identify teachers' and learners' perceptions. The approach I used involved colour coding themes (such as 'employability' or 'well-being') by hand. Again, the quantity of data involved made this a feasible strategy and coding by hand, although time-consuming, allowed a deeper knowledge of the data and encouraged me to consider the findings throughout the analysis process, making notes of issues and interesting points as they emerged from the data. An example of this analysis is provided in Appendix 10.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of my research aims, questions and methods, and

the theoretical background underpinning and influencing my research. The research design comprised the analysis of policy documents relating to adult literacy education using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, combined with thematic analysis of transcripts from interviews with adult literacy practitioners and discussions with learners. My research sample consisted of six documents outlining government policy for adult literacy education between 2011 and 2016, seventeen adult literacy practitioners from a range of organisations within West and South Yorkshire and two groups of adult literacy learners. Through these approaches I intended to achieve my aims of determining how literacy is currently conceptualised by teachers of adult literacy, learners and policy makers while making some contribution to theoretical understandings of literacy. A social practice view of literacy, in which literacy is seen as socially determined practices rather than as one fixed concept, has informed my research. In the next chapter I present the findings from my analysis of policy documents.

Chapter 4: Findings – document analysis

Introduction and background

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of policy documents relating to adult literacy education in England. The document analysis aimed to address the following research question:

How is literacy conceptualised within current educational policy?

In Chapter 2 (Literature Review) I discuss how policy initiatives around adult literacy education in England have been traced back to the 1970s and 'Right to Read' which was the first government campaign of its kind on a national level up to the introduction of the Skills for Life initiative in 2001. The latter brought about the first set of national standards for adult literacy (and numeracy) accompanied by a core curriculum, a suite of qualifications at different levels and new professional qualifications for teachers (Taylor, 2008b; Hamilton, 2012). The most significant policy change since then appears to be the replacement of Skills for Life qualifications for adult learners with Functional Skills from 2012 (Taylor, 2012).

As explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology), more recent statements of policy for adult literacy education in England proved difficult to locate and it would appear that there has been little major new policy for adult literacy education in England since the move to Functional Skills qualifications. Adult literacy has received some attention since then, but not on the scale of the Skills for Life Initiative. A number of government publications, however, include some mention of adult literacy, although, in some cases, only briefly and most documents cover numeracy in addition to literacy. The two subjects are rarely addressed separately.

Most of the policy to which I refer in this chapter is that of the UK Coalition Government (2010 to 2015) and in the majority of cases, the Government departments responsible for the policy, such as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, are now closed. A lengthy search for documents suggested that there has been no major new policy specifically for adult literacy education since the Conservative Government took

office in 2015. The focus of more recent policy making appears to be on younger learners rather than older adults, as seen in the policy paper on Further Education and Training (published in December 2012 and updated in May 2015), a document outlining a variety of policy changes for younger learners, including the requirement for students leaving school without achieving a minimum of a grade C in GCSE English and maths to continue to pursue these subjects (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015).

Six documents were eventually identified for inclusion in the policy analysis. The one that provides the most recent expression of policy in relation to adult literacy education is *Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Government response to the House of Commons Business Innovation and Skills Select Committee. Fifth Report of Session 2014-15.* The Select Committee's 2014 inquiry into adult literacy and numeracy intended to identify the reasons why so many people in the country were still facing difficulties with literacy (and numeracy) and to find ways of addressing this. The response claims to explain how the Government will address the Committee's recommendations (although it did not agree with all of them) and thus provides an indication of its policy on adult literacy education. This document forms the key text in the policy analysis. I then consider two more recent documents which briefly mention literacy, the Department for Education's *Post-16 Reform Plan* and *Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Plan* (both published in 2016).

A number of older publications were also included in the analysis because the policy to which they relate is still in operation. These include two documents relating to Functional Skills qualifications, *Functional Skills: the facts (*Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010) and *Functional Skills Criteria for English* (Ofqual, 2011). Although somewhat dated, and despite the Government's current preference for GCSEs rather than Functional Skills (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014) this document still has currency. The interviews carried out with adult literacy practitioners as part of my research revealed that Functional Skills is still the policy influencing their practice in the majority of cases.

The final document considered is *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System (*Department for

Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011), which is of significance because it proposed a number of policy actions, including the 're-establishment' of the terms 'English' (and 'maths') within adult education (ibid., p.11).

The documents chosen for analysis were written and published between 2010 and 2016 and, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, this was a period marked by falling rates of participation in adult education (Department for Education, 2017; Clancy and Holford, 2018) alongside a continuing interest in adult literacy. Concern for adult literacy around this time is illustrated by, for example, a NIACE inquiry which found that, ten years after the launch of Skills for Life, a significant proportion of England's adult population (over five million people) still had insufficient literacy skills to allow them to 'function effectively in modern society' (NIACE, 2011a, p.3). There was also sufficient interest in adult literacy (and numeracy) for a government Select Committee inquiry to be held (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014) but the outcome reflected more of a commitment to continuing some aspects of existing provision rather than the development of new policy. Additionally during this period, the results of the OECD's PIAAC (Programme for the Assessment of Adult Competencies) survey were released (2013). The survey, which included literacy, revealed that England fared relatively badly compared to some other countries. However, although it led to some debate about literacy in the media, up to present has had little impact on policy (Yasukawa, Hamilton and Evans, 2017).

This was also a period of reform within the Further Education and Skills sector. As outlined in Chapter 1, some of the New Labour Government's interest in educational reform continued under the Coalition administration that succeeded it in 2010, although this was more often related to reduction in provision and cuts in funding rather than development and expansion (Fisher and Simmons, 2012; Whitty and Wisby, 2016). The implications of this for adult education, in particular, are seen in the reduction of funding for Skills for Life provision, which had been a 'significant' policy initiative (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017, p. 399) making a 'huge and unprecedented' impact (Hodgson et al., 2007, p.17). Cuts in public funding led to its eventual replacement with the same Functional Skills qualifications which were already in existence for younger learners. Seen by some commentators as an attempt to align

school and adult education (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011, p.13), the move took place alongside a number of wider reforms in the Further Education and Skills sector for learners aged over nineteen, although it is argued that these were directed more towards the education of younger learners and the unemployed (Clancy and Holford, 2016) and were concerned with the country's economic recovery (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b). The reforms also included teacher training for the sector, with bursaries and new Continuing Professional Development opportunities for teachers of GCSE maths and English in the sector, though this would mostly benefit 16 to 19 learners (Zaidi at al., 2018). Despite the reforms within the sector and a continuing role for adult literacy outside Government (as explained earlier in this chapter) there was, however, little specific policy interest in adult literacy education, with more policy focus on the education of younger learners rather than adults.

In order to identify perceptions of literacy within the policy texts, the documents with significant content relating to literacy were analysed using Wordsmith Tools 6.0 lexical analysis software to identify the frequency with which words occur in a text, the contexts within which they occur and to highlight key words (Scott, 2015). Where documents only included a brief coverage of literacy, such as a paragraph or two, this initial analysis stage was omitted. As explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology), this initial analysis was followed by a more in depth study of the documents using an approach similar to Fairclough's (2003) which includes analysis of a text on a number of different levels; linguistically, identifying features such as sentence types and structure, lexical choice, use of modal verbs and persuasive techniques and also at an 'interdiscursive' level identifying recurring themes in different discourses (Taylor, 2004). An example of this analysis can be found in Appendix 9.

In the next section of the chapter I consider the findings from analysis of the key documents included in the policy analysis.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Government Response to the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee. Fifth Report of Session 2014-15

As previously explained, this document outlines the Coalition Government's response to the recommendations made by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Select Committee inquiry into adult literacy and numeracy and as such provides some insight into the ways in which literacy is perceived by those responsible for policy in this area. The document is substantial (twenty-eight pages) and in addition to stating the Government's position on adult literacy and numeracy, it gives its response to each of the Select Committee's recommendations. The actions it outlines include:

- Free tuition for adults who do not have a level 2 qualification in the subject
- Emphasis on GCSEs in English (and maths) as the preferred qualifications for adults although with the acknowledgment that for some adults Functional Skills may still be more appropriate
- Focus on various categories of learners which include those who are unemployed, people in prison, army personnel, the homeless and 18 to 21 year olds.

The document also explains programmes of work and research in the field to be carried out by ASK (the Behavioural Research Centre for Adult Skills and Knowledge – no longer a Government-run organisation) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The then Government's response to the Select Committee inquiry suggests its commitment to the development of literacy or English skills, but with few specific measures which are particularly for adults or purely related to literacy (literacy / English is always addressed alongside numeracy / mathematics). It ends with the claim that supporting English (and maths) 'continues to be a high priority for the Government' (ibid., p.25) though not specifying that this is for adults. Analysis of the text revealed a clear definition of literacy along with number of discourses within the texts, predominantly functionalism and deficit.

Defining literacy

This document, hereafter referred to as *Adult Literacy and Numeracy,* begins with a definition of literacy as 'speaking, listening, reading and writing' which were identified by the Inquiry as 'essential for learning and for operating in work and in everyday life' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.2). Interestingly, no definition of numeracy is provided, suggesting perhaps that the writers of the document

acknowledge that literacy can have different meanings while numeracy is a fixed concept. In its response to the Select Committee's enquiry, the then Government emphasizes the importance of literacy throughout the document with repetition of 'essential' and the use of other persuasive terms such as 'fundamental' (ibid.) and 'primacy' (ibid., p.3). Literacy is presented as a subject of national importance; *'This subject is of critical importance to the whole country and one not wholly owned by the Government but by all of us'* (ibid., p.4). The document states that 'Good literacy' is 'increasingly essential' for jobseekers to 'obtain sustainable work' (ibid., p.16). It does not explain what 'good literacy' constitutes, however, although the phrase is used on a further three occasions within the document. The suggestion that some literacy is 'good' implies the privileging of some forms of literacy above others (Street, 1997). That 'good literacy' is 'increasingly essential' seems to suggest that it is currently of greater importance than it was before. Again, however, this is assumed rather than fully explained.

Literacy is clearly perceived as a skill, with 'skills' being the twelfth most frequently used word in the document and the most frequently used noun (occurring a total of 118 times and preceded by articles, prepositions and auxiliary verbs). It is also seen as a skill which can be measured, with regular references to 'levels'. In addition, 'rates of literacy' are mentioned (ibid., p.2) and literacy is also referred to in terms of 'capabilities' (ibid., p.9).

In an earlier document, the Government stated its intention that the terms literacy and numeracy be replaced with maths and English (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 11b). However, *Adult Literacy and Numeracy* makes use of both terms. It is not clear whether a distinction is being made between the two and the document seems to use them interchangeably, although the frequency of the use of 'English' is approximately double that of 'literacy' due in part, perhaps, to the discussion of GCSE qualifications. One possibility might be that 'literacy' is replaced by 'English' when referring to the taught or academic subject, that is the 'subject literacy' in which the focus is on formal learning and qualifications as identified by Kendall and McGrath (2014, p.60). One reason might be to distinguish the study of the subject from its everyday usage. Another might be to separate adult literacy from its possible association with 'remedial' education, a label often given to adult literacy provision in

the 1970s with connotations of adults who needed help with literacy as 'illiterate, shamed and hidden' (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, p.56).

Functionalism

A functional view of literacy has been identified in previous analyses of policy for adult literacy education, such as Skills for Life, and it is argued that this leads to a narrow perception of literacy which focuses on employability, economic issues, vocational education, targets and benefits for the individual rather than communities (Taylor, 2008b; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b). This can also be seen in current policy. In *Adult Literacy and Numeracy,* a discourse of functionalism is introduced from the very beginning by the claim that literacy is 'essential' for 'operating in work and everyday life' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.2). In addition to the notion that literacy is needed for employment and for everyday life, the term 'operating' emphasizes this sense of functionality. The Government is keen to point out the 'benefits to the individual and to the wider economy and to society' of improved literacy, and amongst the suggested benefits is 'personal efficacy' further reinforcing the link between literacy and a person's ability to function. Developing literacy is discussed in terms of 'outcomes' (ibid.).

A theme relating to the economy, market and business quickly develops within the document, with a strong emphasis on financial terminology. For instance:

> *The NPV per pound spent on English and maths in adult learning is estimated to be around £28 and there are demonstrable positive effects on employment and earnings – in short adults who study these subjects subsequently improve their likelihood of being in work and/or increasing their wages and this plays back into a stronger economy and returns for the tax payer.* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.2)

The abbreviation *NPV* relates to Net Present Value which is 'the present value of an investment's expected cash flow minus the costs of acquiring the investment.' (Investing Answers, 2018). An explanation is not provided as to how the Government estimated the NPV per pound spent on adult literacy (and numeracy) to be approximately twenty-eight pounds. The fact that *NPV* is not defined within the text is interesting and, in assuming understanding of the concept, the documents perhaps

gives some indication as to its intended readership. Hamilton in her analysis of the earlier Skills for Life policy identifies a 'human-resource model' of literacy on which she argues the policy is based. This model links literacy development with economic success and prosperity, emphasizes measurement and standardisation and positions literacy learners as 'responsible' citizens who have a role to play in 'global prosperity' (2012, p.171). The extract above suggests that current policy may be adopting this model.

This discourse of functionalism, business and the economy is further reinforced by the phrases 'improved rates of literacy' and 'future investment' that can be 'smarter and more focused' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.2.). The terms 'invest' and 'investment' are in fact used five times within the text. Literacy is something that is brought about by investment on the part of the Government and the taxpayer. Discussion of literacy programmes that are of 'Value to employers' and 'translate into better long-term outcomes' (ibid., p.6) continues the business and economic theme. The word 'outcomes' occurs on a further nine occasions and the concern with outcome is also expressed through the use of metaphor; literacy development in schools, for example, 'is now beginning to bear fruit' (ibid., p.4). The phrase 'paid off' in relation to investment in literacy education (ibid., p.2) further reinforces the notion that literacy is something that produces outcomes or results.

The Government's response to the Select Committee inquiry shows that it links literacy very clearly with employability. 'Work' is mentioned fifty-nine times within the document, for example, and there are also regular recurrences of the words 'employment', 'employers', 'labour market', 'earnings' and 'wages'. Literacy is viewed primarily as something which will help people to 'get into work and contribute to the economy' (ibid., p. 23). The 'labour market' is mentioned six times in the document, as in the explanation that Adult Basic Skills certificates were discontinued in 2012, because, in addition to lacking rigour, they had 'little labour market value' (ibid., p. 9). The document identifies a number of groups of people the Government feel would benefit from literacy development and this includes the unemployed and the 'inactive' (ibid., p.3); 'Good literacy and numeracy are increasingly essential for claimants to obtain sustainable work' (ibid., p.16).

Some interest in broader social issues is also expressed, however. For example, the 'wider social and personal benefits' of increased literacy such as 'improvements to self-confidence … health, social mobility and family life' (ibid., p,2) are identified. The link between developing literacy and improvements to a learner's family's prospects is also recognised, in addition to the role literacy plays in further learning. 'Enabling participation' is mentioned, but whether this is participation in work or social participation is not made clear (ibid., p.3). There is some consideration of the context of literacy too in the acknowledgement that literacy learning should 'relate subject content to a context relevant to the learner' (ibid., p. 8). However, social issues are considered to a much lesser extent than economic and employability issues, the references to which far outweigh the discussion of literacy's wider benefits. The primacy of employability appears to be acknowledged in the claim, '… it is increasingly clear that labour market engagement, i.e. work, is the biggest driver of skills development' (ibid., p.4).

Deficit

A common theme emerging from analysis of previous policy for adult literacy education is the existence of a 'deficit' approach to literacy, in which literacy is understood as an attribute that some individuals are lacking (Taylor, 2008b; Crowther and Tett, 2011; Kendall and McGrath, 2014). Evidence of this is seen in current policy too. The metaphor of a journey is used three times in *Adult Literacy and Numeracy* in relation to literacy development and this sounds positive. Reference is made, for example, to people who are 'embarking on a journey to improve their and their family's prospects.' (ibid., p.3). However, the perceived issues with literacy that are identified by policy makers are expressed in a way that is much less positive throughout the rest of the document and a deficit view in which literacy is presented as a problem, a difficulty or a lack can be discerned. In *Adult Literacy and Numeracy* literacy is discussed in terms of 'needs' and something that adults in certain groups, particularly the unemployed, homeless people and prisoners might lack (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). This is emphasized particularly strongly through repetition. The words 'need' and 'needs' are used forty-five times in the text. A typical phrase, for instance, is 'the wide range of needs in the population' (ibid., p.3). It is also a need that must be 'overcome' (ibid., p.16). Elsewhere in the document, literacy, or the perceived lack of literacy, is described as a 'problem to tackle' (ibid., p,2). Indeed, one of the sections

carries the sub-title, 'Understanding the problem' (ibid., p. 5). It is also referred to as a challenge, further reinforcing the deficit viewpoint.

The positioning of literacy learners in relation to policy also reflects a deficit approach. Although the Government commits to supporting literacy (and numeracy) development in the document, in terms of investment and of 'enabling participation', for instance (ibid., p.3) the onus is placed clearly with the individual. Improving literacy is, for example, 'highly contingent on people's motivations and circumstances' (ibid., p.2). In saying that the ambition, for the nation as well as the Government, must be 'to create a culture of aspiration and expectation' the suggestion seems to be that this is something presently lacking. Learners' aspirations are mentioned on a number of occasions. The wish is expressed to 'encourage people to recognise that they simply have not yet achieved' (ibid., p.4) and to encourage them to 'fulfil their potential' (ibid., p.5) while 'getting' them 'to recognise they have a need' (ibid., p.6). The document also comments on the importance of people understanding the 'benefits arising from improving literacy' (ibid., p.7). The assumption is that people do not grasp what the benefits might be, and this is indicated particularly clearly by one of the headings in the text, 'Getting the message across' (ibid.) which may sound rather patronising and implies that the population needs to be told what it is lacking or that people need convincing of the need to improve their literacy. Assumptions are made about people's perceptions too. 'Attitudes to English and maths run very deep and many people with low skills approach these subjects with a sense of failure' (ibid., p.3). It is not clear on what evidence, if any, this claim is made. The recommendation that 'behavioural interventions' (ibid., p.6) are used to encourage people to develop their literacy, also suggests some wrong doing on their part and implies the view that literacy is a behaviour which can be modified. The term 'intervention' is used six times. With its connotations of people or organisations intervening or becoming involved in the lives of others, and the fact that in certain contexts, interventions are imposed by those in authority rather than being optional, it is suggestive of the power relations between those making or implementing policy and those who are the recipients of its effects. In the document the Government identifies groups of people it feels would benefit the most from improved literacy 'especially the more disadvantaged and unemployed …or inactive' (ibid., p. 3) and this also suggests a view of literacy that is based on deficit and the notion that is it something that a person may lack.

In the next two sections of this chapter I consider more recent policy documents which include some coverage of adult literacy provision.

Implementing the Further Education and Skills Reform Plan (March 2016)

A relatively short publication (just nine pages in length), this document is one of only two included in the policy analysis that relate to the current Conservative government. It provides a briefing on government policy and developments relating to a variety of issues, including apprenticeships, traineeships, technical education and a range of other topics relating to the further education and skills sector. Literacy or 'English' as it is referred to in the document (along with maths) is covered in just one succinct section, but this fairly brief coverage provides a clear indication of how literacy as a concept is viewed by policy makers.

The notion of literacy as enabling progression with other aspects of a person's existence, also seen in other policy documents, is hinted at here in the description of English (and maths) as 'essential building blocks for both life and work' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills / Department for Education, 2016, p. 6). This is repeated in the idea that English plays a 'role in helping people find and sustain employment.' Work also features in the explanation that reforms to Functional Skills qualifications in English will 'improve their recognition and credibility in the labour market' (ibid., p.7). While emphasizing the link to employability here, the 'wider social and personal benefits' which can relate to 'improved self-confidence, health, social mobility and family life' recognised in *Adult literacy and numeracy* are also identified in this document. A similar positioning of literacy learners to that identified in earlier documents is apparent. According to the Government, literacy development is an individual's responsibility. 'High expectations' are set for them 'so that they are clear about the importance of studying these subjects' (ibid., p. 6).

Post-16 Skills Plan (2016)

Presented to Parliament in July 2016, the fifty-eight-page document sets out the Government's plans for the reform of post-16 technical education and the introduction from September 2019 of new technical education routes. Both English and literacy are referred to within the document (using the terms interchangeably). A clear statement

of policy in this area is provided i.e. that Functional Skills qualifications are to be reformed at the Government's request by the Education and Training Foundation 'to ensure they are stretching and relevant to employers' needs.' (The new qualifications will be introduced in September 2019). Alongside this, free tuition in English (and maths) will continue to be available for adults who have not yet achieved a level 2 qualification in the subject and the achievement by adults of GCSE or Level 2 Functional Skills English will be encouraged.

In addition to a clear statement of policy, the document gives further indication as to the way literacy is understood by policy makers, that is, as a 'transferable' skill which is necessary for employment (Department for Education, 2016, p.12) or that is needed to allow employees to meet 'occupational requirements' (ibid., p.50). An interesting reference is to 'a single set of maths and English "exit" requirements' for learners on technical courses and apprenticeships, implying a view of literacy as a fixed and finite collection of skills. As in *Adult Literacy and Numeracy*, several references are made to 'good literacy' (implying that some literacy is seen to be better than others) but without any explanation of what this constitutes.

Literacy is clearly seen as something which can be measured; once again it is discussed in terms of levels (there is a 'minimum level' which 'all individuals must achieve' as part of their technical education or apprenticeship, for example). Concern with standards is also apparent. The term is used four times within a 185-word section, further emphasizing the notion that literacy is a concept that can be measured. Unlike the other documents analysed, comparison with other countries is made, '… current requirements [for English and maths] are still low by international standards' and should be raised to 'reflect those of higher-performing international technical education systems' (ibid.). The reason for this comparison is not explained, but an interest in the nation's performance globally is suggestive of a neo-liberal agenda of which performance measures and competing in global market places are key features, as is the focus on individual responsibility for well-being and for contribution to personal and national economic success (Davies and Bansel, 2007). In this document responsibility is placed on the individual once again as, '… we believe individuals should have higher aspirations' (Department for Education, 2016, p.50). Neo-liberal concerns are apparent in this policy document along with discourses of functionalism and

performativity, apparent in use of the terms 'requirements' (used six times), 'outcomes', 'performing' and 'standards', along with an emphasis on the compulsory nature of skills in English (and maths). Not only are they so important that they are 'vital', but also 'all individuals must achieve' them (ibid.).

The following sections of the chapter consider three policy documents that are considerably older than the others analysed, but whose influence is still apparent in practice (Functional Skills qualifications are referred to regularly in the interviews I held with teachers, for instance – see Chapter 5).

Functional Skills: the Facts (2010)

This publication provides a statement of policy regarding the Functional Skills qualifications in English, maths and ICT that were introduced for young people from 2010 and which replaced Skills for Life qualifications for adults from 2012. (The qualifications do not make separate provision for adult learners). The document is concise (eight pages) and uses tables and cartoon-like images in addition to text. As explained on the first page, the publication provides background and contextual information about the qualifications along with a timeline for their introduction. The document favours the term 'English' rather than 'literacy' (the latter being used only once, compared to eighteen uses of 'English') in keeping with the Government's position on the use of terminology (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b).

The document begins with an explanation of functional skills, emphasizing their importance by describing them as:

> *… the essential elements of English, mathematics and Information and Communication Technology that provide people with the skills they need to operate confidently, effectively and independently in learning, life and work.* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.2)

Unsurprisingly, the word 'skills' is constantly repeated throughout the document; used 104 times making it the second most frequent word in the text (only surpassed by 'the'). The view of literacy (and numeracy) as a skill is emphatic. Not only are the skills

essential, they are also 'vital' (ibid., p.4). The term 'elements' used in the quotation above suggests that it is selected aspects of the subjects that are deemed to be 'essential'. By implication, this would mean that some aspects of English are being omitted, while others are being privileged (Street, 1997).

The document presents, therefore, a particular view of literacy as skills based and linked very much to progression within education, employment and the economy, which is very similar to that expressed in the later policy texts. A discourse of functionalism is apparent from the terminology used in the text, 'operate', 'equipped', 'effectively' and 'function', for example (ibid.). In fact, 'functional' is the fourth most frequently used word in the text (seventy-seven times). Literacy (and maths and ICT) becomes almost like a tool people can use in their work and everyday lives. According to Burgess and Hamilton in their analysis of the Functional Skills policy, people will be able to 'function' (presumably in their jobs and day-today activities) but there is no mention of 'grow, develop or change' (2011, p.12).

As in *Adult Literacy and* Numeracy, the document presents skills development as a need on the part of young people and adults which has come about through the demands of the 'modern world' and 'global economic competition'. Although it is claimed that improved literacy will 'empower individuals to make the most of their life chances' (ibid.) it is also holding them accountable for improving their skills (Davies and Bansel, 2007). Literacy learners themselves are presented in a particular way, therefore, as not only lacking skills, but also needing to take responsibility for their literacy development. The implication is that they need to be made to recognise this and act on it and learning, at least for younger people, will be incentivised (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.4). The claim that Functional Skills qualifications will 'empower' people 'to make the most of their life chances' (ibid., p.2) implies that learners are not already making the most of opportunities. The document includes a number of large cartoon-like images, presumably of learners (some with books in their hands, others appearing to be going about their daily work) but these are simplistic and seem rather childish and patronising. They perhaps indicate the way literacy learners are perceived by policy makers, who are in a more powerful and privileged position. Literacy is once again presented as a 'need'; a term occurring with some regularity throughout the text (six times) as the 'needs of adult learners' or

'adult needs', for instance (ibid., p.7). The influence of the deficit approach to literacy is again apparent.

Although the document claims that skills development will help people in 'adult life more generally' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.2) these wider benefits are not actually specified, and the focus on employment and further study is stronger, legitimised in the text by the argument that the need for improved skills was in response to 'calls from employers' and from 'higher education institutions'. Literacy (along with maths and ICT) is seen as an 'underpinning' skill. Skills in literacy are needed for success in further learning, in employment and in adult life more generally but not, apparently for self-fulfilment or enjoyment. Literacy is something which is 'applied' (ibid., p.2) to other subjects or within work situations rather than having value of its own.

Literacy is seen as a concept that can be measured through a 'ladder of progression in these skills' (ibid., p.3). Progress and progression are mentioned on a number of occasions (seven in total) suggesting a view of literacy as a means to achievement in other aspects of life and study. There is no suggestion that improvement of one's literacy could be a goal in itself, for enjoyment and personal satisfaction, for instance. The term 'raised the bar' is used to emphasize the need for improvement and development, suggesting that expectations of the population are now higher. 'Standards' are important and require raising. Reference to the 'modern world' and the increasing pressures placed on people's skills (ibid., p.2) does seem to suggest that literacy is being recognised as having the ability to change and adapt rather than being a static concept. Again, literacy seems to be perceived from a neo-liberal viewpoint (Davies and Bansel, 2007), through the concern with individual empowerment, individual responsibility for making 'the most of their life chances', (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.1) the economy and global competitiveness.

My analysis reflects Burgess and Hamilton's work on the Functional Skills policy. For instance, they note the significance of the phrase 'global economic competition' in the text. They also comment on the focus on employment and vocational education (2011, p. 12) and remark on the statement in the text that skills are required 'from' people rather than 'by' them. In addition, they identify the emphasis on the individual rather than community.

Functional Skills Criteria for English (2011)

This concise document explains the criteria for Functional Skills English qualifications from Entry Level 1 to Level 2. (An explanation of these levels can be found in Appendix 11). It provides definitions of the three components of Functional Skills English (speaking, listening and communication; reading; writing) and describes what a person should be able to do at each level. It provides a useful indication of the way in which literacy is perceived within the functional skills policy, and similar discourses of functionalism and individualism can be detected. Skills in speaking, listening and communication, are described, for instance as 'non-written communication, normally conducted face to face' (Ofqual, 2011, p.62). Reading is defined as 'the independent decoding and understanding of written language and text in a purposeful manner'. Meanwhile writing involves 'the independent construction of written text to communicate in a purposeful context (ibid., p.3). In terms of what is expected from learners, in writing, they are required to show their ability in spelling, punctuation, grammar according to their level. Reading requirements are based around obtaining information from text, understanding the main points. More advanced skills are seen as identifying the purpose of a text or 'implied meaning' (ibid., p.9). Speaking and listening requirements range from understanding the main points of a discussion to giving a 'relevant, cogent response' (ibid., p.8). The language used throughout the document is suggestive of a functionalist discourse. Learners are required to 'use', 'construct', 'respond', 'utilise', 'detect', 'adapt' etc. reinforcing the notion expressed earlier in the document that reading, writing and communication needs to be 'purposeful.' The terms 'decoding', 'construction' 'conducted' and 'purposeful' reinforce a functional view of literacy by suggesting activity and productivity, while the emphasis on 'independence', as in the 'independent decoding and understanding of written language and text' (ibid., p.3), implies it is seen as an individual pursuit. People are required to use literacy on their own rather than in collaboration with others. Again literacy is presented as a 'need' (ibid., p.2).

Taylor (2008b, p.135) in her discussion of the Skills for Life initiative argues that the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, which the policy introduced, is based on a view of literacy as a distinct and 'decontextualised' collection of skills. To some extent, the same could be said of the Functional Skills criteria. Strict subject demarcation results

in distinct sets of skills without overlap, which is not the case in all perceptions of literacy. Hanemann (2015, p.297) for instance, explains how her understanding of literacy also encompasses numeracy, and Black and Yasukawa (2014, p.127) writing about adult literacy surveys in Australia discuss 'quantitative literacy' that is, 'applying numerical operations contained in print.' In relation to context, however, there is some mention of 'familiar situations' in which entry level learners might be assessed, a possible acknowledgement of social context (Ofqual, 2011, p.5). The definition of text as 'materials that include the use of words that are written, printed, on screen or presented using Braille' (ibid.) acknowledges that literacy might involve not just paper-based printed material.

New Challenges, New Chances - Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System (2011)

Adult literacy education also received some attention in the consultation on further education reform, *New Challenges, New Chances: next steps in implementing the further education reform programme* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011a*).* The response to this consultation *(New Challenges, New Chances - Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System*) outlined the Government's aims for education for learners aged nineteen and over, including reforms to funding and improvements to teaching and reference is made again to the extent to which adults in the country lack skills in literacy and numeracy. The publication proposes a numbers of actions in relation to this. These include the prioritising of 'young adults' who lack skills in English and maths (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b p.13). Prison education and the training of teachers also feature in the intentions for adult literacy education. The actions also include the re-establishment of the terms 'English' and 'maths' within adult education, presumably to replace literacy and numeracy, although the reason for this is not explained. Adult literacy is, however, only one of a number of areas of policy mentioned in the document.

In the Government's response to the consultation process, the focus is very much on skills and the training of the country's workforce with a sense of progress or moving forward, with its executive summary speaking of an education system which will 'fuel

individual achievement, power the common good and drive upward economic performance'. The intention to 'empower' people and provide 'a ladder of opportunity' reinforces the aspirational tone at the start of the document (ibid., 2011b, p.3). Literacy, or 'English' as is the preferred term in the text, is one of a number of issues covered in the publication, along with careers guidance, apprenticeships and community learning, among others.

The section covering literacy is titled 'Skills for Life: English and Maths for adults', an interesting title bearing in mind that, at the time of publication, Skills for Life was about to be replaced by Functional Skills for adults. In this section of the publication the term 'literacy' is used, even though the intention is expressed to 're-establish' the term 'English for adults'. 'Literacy' is used only eight times, however, in comparison to twenty-two occurrences of 'English'.

The links between literacy and the economy and employability in *Adult Literacy and Numeracy* also appear in *New Challenges, New Chances* in which the section on 'English and maths for adults' is concerned with improving 'the economic and personal returns' to the Government's 'investment' in adult literacy provision. Literacy is linked clearly with employment, where it is suggested that a lack of skills in English prevents jobseekers from 'moving into work'. Financial and economic terminology, such as 'investment', and 'returns' indicates the government's intentions behind the desire to improve the country's skills (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11).

A deficit approach is also discernible. *New Challenges, New Chances* states that the fact that 5.1 million individuals in the country 'lack functional literacy skills' is 'unacceptable' (ibid.). Presumably it is the Government which finds this unacceptable; the document does not make this clear. The word 'lack' is repeated four times in this section, emphasizing a deficit view. Literacy is also referred to as a need, for example of the unemployed, young adults and offenders, groups who are specifically referred to in the section on English and maths.

Literacy is again viewed as a skill; the term being used numerous times in just this short section of the document. The skills needed are those which are 'basic' (ibid.,

p.10) but also 'functional'. Literacy is presented as a concept which can be measured in levels, as in 'lower level' (ibid., p. 10) or in terms of the 'distance a learner has travelled' (ibid., p.11).

Conclusion

A clear picture of the way in which literacy is conceptualised within policy emerges from the analysis of the policy documents. All stress that it is 'essential' for a person's work and functioning in daily life. The overwhelming discourse is of functionalism, continuing the theme pervading previous analyses of UK policy and international literacy surveys. It is seen in the approach to literacy education that is largely target-driven and focused particularly on vocational and economic issues and employability (Maclellan, 2011; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). There is evidence of what Hamilton (2012) refers to as the human resource model of literacy in the concern with economic success and with measurement of literacy, along with the expectation that literacy learners should be responsible for their learning and should make a contribution to the nation's prosperity. There is some acknowledgement of the wider social and personal benefits a literate person might enjoy, such as greater self- confidence and social mobility, but this is limited and outweighed by the focus on economic and employment issues. The view of literacy apparent in policy could also be described as instrumental in its focus on literacy's value in producing a skilled workforce who can contribute to the country's prosperity and global competitiveness with little consideration of 'economic, political and social equality' (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2015a, p.65). These characteristics, along with the focus on individual responsibilities apparent in some of the documents, also suggest that policy-makers view literacy from a neo-liberal perspective (Davies and Bansel, 2007).

Rather than being desirable in its own right, literacy is seen in policy as enabling progression on to something else, employment perhaps, or further study. It is applied within certain contexts, work, for instance, or underpins development in other areas such as the study of other subjects. It appears that, at least in policy, literacy on its own carries little value.

Without exception literacy is understood as a skill or as a set of skills, and as such the view presented in these policy documents appears to reflect the 'autonomous' model

identified in previous policies for adult literacy in which literacy is judged against a set of standards, is concerned with skills and competences, is paper-based and focuses on reading and writing with no consideration of social context (Street, 1995; Bartlett, 2008; Crowther and Tett, 2011; Edwards et al., 2009). From this perspective, literacy can be measured and is understood in levels and stages. The repeated references to 'good' literacy (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.4; Department for Education, 2016, p.10) suggest that policy makers view some aspects of literacy as better than others. It also appears that literacy is presented through a 'deficit' approach, particularly in the way literacy learners (or potential learners) are positioned by policy. The majority of the documents explain the need to make people recognise what they are lacking in terms of literacy skills and require them to take responsibility for their own development. The change in preferred terminology in adult education from 'literacy' to 'English' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11) is a definite policy shift, though not fully implemented in the policy documents, with both terms continuing to be used. The reasoning behind the change is unclear. It could, however, further restrict the way in which the concept of literacy is perceived, through connotations of the rules and value judgements involved in 'schooled' literacy (Street and Street, 1997, p.72) and through the failure to acknowledge that literacy exists in other languages.

Adult, Literacy and Numeracy begins with the definition of literacy as 'speaking, listening, reading and writing' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.2) and it appears that this understanding of literacy is shared with the other policy documents. It is seen in the Functional Skills criteria, for instance, and none of the publications give any indication that literacy is based on anything other than these elements. Technology is mentioned briefly in two of the documents, as a tool through which literacy skills might be developed in *Adult, Literacy and Numeracy* or in the acknowledgement that text might include materials accessed via a screen in the Functional Skills Criteria. The limited presence of technology in discussion of literacy and the fact that skills in ICT are treated very separately (as a different qualification) suggests that literacy is understood predominantly as a print-based concept by policy makers. The policy documents certainly do not go as far as acknowledging literacy's potential for multimodality, which might include a broad range of digital technologies or the decoding of visual images as aspects of literacy (Cope and Kalantis, 2009;

Duckworth and Brezski, 2015).

There are a number of other absences in the texts. The emphasis on functionality, for example, seems to be at the expense of other possible benefits from being literate. It could be that in the face of functionalism and instrumentalism, 'Other discourses, such as personal development and social justice, have … receded into the background' (Taylor, 2008a, p. 308). There is no mention of reading or writing for pleasure as a result of a person's literacy development in any of the policy documents surveyed, for instance. Neither does any possible sense of personal achievement or satisfaction from literacy development in its own right feature in the texts. Similarly, creativity receives no consideration. Literacy seems to be seen as predominantly functional in the way it supports people in their everyday lives and in finding and sustaining employment. Even the concerns for social justice seen in much earlier approaches to adult literacy education (Hamilton, 2012) are not apparent in current policy. Nor is there any hint that literacy is seen as a right (Benavot, 2015; Post, 2016). Rather it is a responsibility on the part of certain sectors of society (young people, the unemployed, offenders etc.) to develop their skills in order to improve their own prospects and contribute to national prosperity.

Overall then, the policy documents present a view of literacy that is functional, instrumental, focused on employability and concerned with outcomes. Literacy is understood as distinct and measurable skills in reading and writing (using predominantly paper-based texts) along with speaking and listening that are essential for work and progression to further study but have limited, if any, value in their own right.

In the next chapter I present the findings from the interviews with teachers of adult literacy and the discussions with learners.

Chapter 5: Findings – teachers' and learners' views

Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from interviews with teachers of adult literacy and group discussions with literacy learners. The interviews and discussion groups aimed to address the question:

What does 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?

Four main themes emerged during the analysis of interview and group discussion data:

- What a literate adult can do
- Functional literacy
- The wider benefits of being literate
- The relationship between 'English' and 'literacy'

Below I present the findings first from the interviews and then from the discussions with learners according to these main themes.

Teachers' perceptions

In order to access literacy teachers' perceptions of literacy I conducted seventeen telephone interviews with practitioners from a range of organisations in West and South Yorkshire, including further education colleges, local education authority and private training providers, along with charitable organisations. (See the table in Chapter 3 for interviewees' pseudonyms and individual characteristics). Three of these teachers were interviewed again face-to-face at a later date. I asked teachers why they thought adults should be literate and what a literate adult could do. Questions about the difference between 'English' and 'literacy' and policy for adult literacy education were also included in the interview schedule. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to add any other comments they wished to make on the topic.

What a literate adult can do

In this section I consider teachers' views on the abilities, skills or qualities a literate adult should have. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, using computers and other digital technologies, along with numeracy or maths were all identified by interview participants as key aspects of being literate.

Reading featured in all practitioners' responses to questions about literacy. Clare, for example, felt that:

> *… there's not many things in life that don't require being able to read … and I think your life must be so limited if you're not able to read. … I don't know how people can appreciate everything in their life if they can't read.*

The teachers interviewed expressed various notions of what that reading should involve, however. Some described this as 'basic' reading, which might involve '*reading timetables or reading instructions*' (Catherine). Alternatively, it could be reading letters from the doctor or from a child's school (Jane). Gaining information from written texts is one of the definitions of literacy provided by Bawden (2001, p.221) and this is reflected in the teachers' responses, as summed up by John:

> *Being able to read simple straightforward texts is one of the minimal skills I think a literate adult should have.*

Joe referred to this as being literate '*technically*', that is, to be able to '*pick up a piece of writing, look at the words and know what they mean or what they say at least.*' Here he perhaps echoes Kendall and McGrath's comment on the adult literacy curriculum and its focus on 'acquisition of the ability to read in a technical sense' (2014, p.58). He goes on to add, however, that literacy involves more than this:

> *I think the literate part comes in … when you read a text being able to not just see what the words are but to piece them together and have some idea of the meaning and the background behind the text.*

Other participants also saw reading as more than a basic ability and felt that being literate involved being able to read for different purposes. They mentioned reading more deeply for meaning and recognising what is being suggested within a text rather than made explicit. As another of the interview participants explained:

I think they should be able to not just read for information but to be able to pick up on inference. (Heather)

Some of the teachers also felt that reading by a literate adult should involve a level of criticality, or as two of the participants put it:

… the ability to actually understand that what you're reading may not be what's entirely meant (Donna).

I suppose it's being able to read, obviously, but being able to read between the lines, what's maybe an underlying message. Is someone trying to persuade you about something in their advertising? Being able to be critical I suppose. Knowing exactly what something is saying maybe not just in the written words but what's implied as well. (Felicity)

The concept of 'levels' featured regularly amongst participants' responses, often in relation to qualifications, for instance:

I think adults should have a minimum of level 1. Because that will enable them to at least put things like basic letters together and fill in the necessary forms for everyday life and things like that. (Clare)

They should be able to read … To be able to write at level 2 and to be able to read at level 2 and speaking and listening skills at level 2 or GCSE grade 3 I think is a good minimum that people should aim to be. (Moira)

But also in another sense:

There's different levels now to be literate technically you need to be able to … write at a basic level at least you know to be able to pick up a pen and write words … when you're able to use sentences, use punctuation, use grammar … have some idea of the meaning and the background behind the text and that kind of thing that's why I think that comes in at the higher level …. (Joe)

To an extent Joe's comments reflect the autonomous model of literacy described by Street (1995) and referred to by others (including Bartlett, 2008; Crowther and Tett, 2011; Parr and Campbell, 2012; Duckworth and Ade-Ojo, 2016) in that he appears to view literacy as a technical skill which can be learned in a series of stages.

In contrast, reading for pleasure was a feature of some interview participants' responses. Sarah, for example, talked about one of her learners and the effects of discovering reading 'for fun':

She thought she wasn't a reader and she'd got an idea of what a reader was, I think, from school. You know she'd had to jump through certain hoops and found that she couldn't but then she discovered she could just read for fun, for her own pleasure. That it wasn't for anyone else's benefit … it kind of opened up a whole new world for her really.

This enthusiasm for reading for pleasure and the recognition of its benefits was not shared by all interview participants, however. One of the teachers said she didn't think it featured much in the ways people perceived literacy and also that it was '*a luxury because of the time involved*' (Mary) perhaps reflecting the views of one of the participants in Kendall and McGrath's study of further education teachers (2014, p.67) for whom reading was a 'solitary, private and individualised activity' that required 'time and space away from the distractions of work or family.'

The majority of interview participants also talked about writing in relation to the abilities of a literate adult. They had different views, however, on what they felt was important in a person's writing. One teacher from a further education college, for example, felt that neat and legible handwriting was a particularly important aspect of literacy, as was writing and spelling 'correctly' (Debbie). Others stressed '*being able to produce*

something that's sufficiently accurate' (Felicity) and the importance of making oneself understood through writing:

> *… to be able to write a letter that's legible and people can understand where you're coming from and what you want.* (Faye)

Some, but by no means all, of the teachers interviewed identified the 'correct' use of spelling, punctuation and grammar as a key factor of being literate. Donna, for instance, described these as the 'nuts and bolts' of literacy, although she went on to add that this is mainly in relation to handwriting and suggested that the use of computers for writing had led to them becoming slightly less important than they had been in the past. Joe felt that being able to '*pick up a pen and write words*' in itself did not constitute literacy, but rather the ability to use sentences, punctuation and grammar makes a person literate. Felicity expressed similar views: '*Being able to write effectively so that you aren't let down by poor spelling and grammar*' was important to her.

Debbie also described the accurate use of punctuation as a key aspect of literacy, '*to use commas, full-stops in the right place, especially colons etc.*' She followed this by expressing her concern about the prevalence of abbreviations used in writing text messages, giving her students' use of abbreviations such as '*C U l8ter*' as an example. Debbie's views on her students' language use reflect concerns expressed in the media about 'text-speak' and possible detrimental effects on its users' literacy. (Drouin and Davis, 2009). Her comment, '*That's literacy to them*' did perhaps hint at some acknowledgement of the existence of different literacies (MacLellan, 2008). She does, however, seem to favour what Edwards et al. (2009, p. 486) describe as a 'hierarchy' of literacy practices, making value judgements about literacy and what counts as being literate and what does not.

For most participants, writing had a largely functional purpose, it would seem. The ability to complete forms and write formal letters and CVs was commonly mentioned, for instance. However, the focus on the more functional aspects of writing was not shared by all interview participants. For some teachers, literacy was about self-expression and being confident to share one's own opinions in writing, as Sarah added

'rather than just filling in a form.' Writing for pleasure, in the form of creative writing, also featured strongly in one interviewee's response:

> *People find it a really good way of expressing themselves … so I feel those kinds of things are important too. It's not just about passing an exam.* (Felicity)

Writing for different purposes, then, was a prominent feature in teachers' views on what literacy involves, as Donna explained:

> *… the ability to write in lots of different ways, the ability to sort of tailor your writing appropriately is very key.*

Although speaking and listening did not feature as regularly amongst interview participants' responses as reading and writing, a number of the practitioners felt that it was another major aspect of literacy. Lucy's response to the question about what a literate adult can do was fairly typical: '*reading, writing and speaking and listening.*' Other participants provided more detail:

> *Having the speaking and listening skills to be able to talk to a variety of people…* (Pauline)

> *So they can participate in discussions in normal day situations.* (John)

Sarah summed up its importance when talking about reading and writing as literacy skills. She said that in her classes, '*The speaking part of it kind of reinforced everything else … so all those skills were combined.*' Debbie gave speaking to make oneself understood as one of the most important reasons for being literate:

> *I think that how else are we going to communicate with each other if we don't speak properly?*

Her use of the word 'properly' seemed to refer to her concern for the use of abbreviations and 'text-speak' (as previously discussed) along with what she describes as '*street talk*' such as '*wiv*' instead of '*with*'. She also suggested that literacy

involved body language too:

> *The way we speak is really important. It says something about us… It's perhaps as much about what's not said too. It's body language and all that…I think it's really important. It's the unspoken word. It's communication.* (Debbie)

The two examples given above are atypical in focusing on speaking without listening, as these were usually linked by interview participants, possibly reflecting the way they are addressed within the curriculum. The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, for instance, in outlining the standards literacy learners are expected to meet in order to achieve particular levels of competence, separates reading and writing but treats speaking and listening as one set of skills (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). Similarly, the more recent Functional Skills specifications provide separate criteria for reading and writing but cover speaking and listening together, along with communication (City and Guilds, 2017). None of the teachers mentioned listening on its own in relation to literacy, although this was a topic raised by learners in the discussion groups (covered later in this chapter).

Generally, the need to communicate effectively featured in many participants' perceptions of why an adult should be literate:

> [Because] *they need to communicate.* (John)

> *I also think it's about social skills and being able to understand what is appropriate when communicating with people.* (Pauline)

> [Because of] *the expectations that are put on people for working and expectations such as email, verbal communications, written communications.* (Heather)

Meanwhile, self-expression was a further factor in participants' perceptions of literacy. Some of the teachers felt that literacy helped adults to better express themselves:

> *It's about self-expression. It's about building confidence… It's not just about passing an exam. It's about enjoyment as well … a means of self-expression.* (Felicity)

The relationship between literacy and numeracy / maths was also identified in teachers' responses to questions about the nature of literacy, as one participant explained when asked why an adult should be literate:

> *It's about being able to function in everyday life. Obviously being able to read and write, having basic numeracy and ICT. (Pauline)*

She added that:

> *… to me literate is not just about having a good command of English and communication. It's also about being literate in things like your maths and ICT … it's about being able to go to the shop and … check your change…* (Pauline)

> *They should be numerate because that hinders them as well in society and in the home if they're not numerate and sometimes to be numerate is to be literate.* (Moira)

Participants also mentioned the ability to manage one's finances in their response, but in addition to the relationship between literacy and numeracy in everyday tasks, for others it was linked to the study of maths:

> **…** *so much of effective literacy requires numeracy as well and the other way round because of the language around maths. (Lucy)*

> *… literacy does come into maths in a big way.* (Debbie)

Pauline (above) mentioned ICT in addition to maths in relation to numeracy and this was another issue that arose regularly in the interviews. Digital literacy has been described as involving reading and writing, selecting relevant sources of information and synthesizing information from these sources (Bulger, et al., 2014) and according to Stordy (2015, p. 456) 'Digital literacies have transformed what it means to be literate

and to experience literacy.' To some extent this is reflected in the responses of the literacy practitioners interviewed, many of whom included the use of computers and digital technologies in their understanding of literacy. Some typical responses were:

(Literacy) *also now includes being able to use IT and digital technology.* (Sarah)

I believe that a literate person should be able to use ICT effectively as so much is electronic today. (Moira)

… nearly everything now is done online isn't it and that is a really important part of being literate. (Pauline)

It's not just the ability to read and write, but it's the ability to then use the machinery to process this. (Donna)

More specifically, texting, emailing, using social media and searching the internet were considered by some of the participants to be key aspects of literacy. For certain teachers, this reflected the changing nature of literacy:

Things change re. what they need, like technology. That's a completely different kind of literacy, like Facebook and texting. (Mary)

I think ... with advances in technology, not being literate is like having a disability these days. (Donna)

Others were keen to preserve more traditional forms, however:

We've got a Kindle and we've got ipads and all the rest of it, but I still like to touch and feel a book. I don't get the same enjoyment from reading something off a screen. (Debbie).

To some extent, the interview participants' perceptions of what a literate adult can do could be seen to reflect a 'traditional' view of literacy which is based on reading and writing, predominantly using print-based texts (Edwards et al., 2009). Many of the

participants described reading, writing, speaking and listening as distinct aspects of literacy and often spoke in terms of 'skills' in these areas. Additionally, some thought that certain aspects of literacy were more significant than others. Mary felt, for example, that reading was a more important aspect of literacy than writing, arguing that '*People can get by without writing, but not reading and reading critically is important.*' She was not the only teacher to suggest this and certainly writing was not addressed as unanimously or in the same depth as reading in teachers' explanations of what a literate adult can do.

Debbie seemed to privilege certain forms of literacy above others, in preferring certain ways of speaking and being concerned with correct forms in speaking and writing, standards and also perhaps her preference for traditional, paper-based forms of literacy. There is a suggestion here (and also in Sarah's reader who felt she had to '*jump through certain hoops'*) of the influence of 'schooled' literacy which Street and Street (1995, p.72) argue focuses on rules about correctness and makes value judgements about what constitutes literacy. They suggest that this became the 'defining type' of literacy, setting the standard for other forms of literacy.

On the whole, however, the teachers interviewed took a fairly broad view of what a literate adult should be able to do and some acknowledged that this might vary. One teacher, for example, recognised that literacy skills '*might not be the same for everybody*' (Lucy) and even the teacher discussed previously in this chapter who was concerned about falling standards and the use of abbreviations and text-speak (Debbie) seemed to acknowledge that her students may have a different concept of literacy. In addition, many of the teachers talked about the different kinds of texts a literate adult should be able to negotiate along with the various situations in which they would use their literacy. With the exception of the practitioner discussed above, no one seemed to favour certain forms of literacy over others. Some also acknowledged that literacy, and the skills they associated with it, was a changing rather than static concept. Although some were keen to preserve print-based forms of text, most agreed that the ability to use computers and digital technologies was now a key aspect of being literate.

An interesting comparison with the views of the West and South Yorkshire literacy practitioners is Kendall and McGrath's research on further education teachers' reading in which their participants demonstrated 'a very fixed interpretation of what constitutes literacy … that emphasizes the singularity of literacy…' (2014, p.69). Kendall and McGrath concluded that, although the teachers in their case study acknowledged the use of computers, the internet and social media as a 'type' of reading, they were 'not necessarily grappling with the meanings of literacy in the context of new spaces and places for writing, reading and meaning-making'. They describe as 'typical', responses that made a distinction between digital and printed texts, seeing print-based as more valuable and note that only one out of eight of their participants 'mentioned digital technology positively.' (ibid., p. 66). Most of the participants in my sample seemed to have broader views than this. The fact that many participants' notions of what constitutes literacy include maths / numeracy was well as reading, writing, speaking, listening and using computers suggests a fairly broad perception of what a literate adult can do.

Functional literacy

In addition to the more specific aspects of literacy, such as reading and writing that interview participants identified in their responses, the notions of 'functioning in everyday life' and 'getting by' occurred regularly. Pauline's comment, for example, was typical, '*It's about being able to function in everyday life*.' Many participants felt that '*managing*' or as one teacher said, '*being in control of one's life*' (Carol) were amongst the key reasons for being literate and they identified a range of contexts and situations within which adults needed literacy, including the workplace, job hunting, home and family, communicating with children's schools, shopping, reading timetables and health care. Another teacher summed this up as: '*A literate person should be able to run their own affairs.' (Debbie)*

Often participants viewed literacy in terms of levels and the term 'basic' was used on a number of occasions in relation to the literacy required to function on an everyday level:

> *… to carry out basic tasks at home and at work as well as to be able to listen and speak in a way that's appropriate to the workplace.* (John)

It's reading and writing, putting it back to basics. (Sonia)

To put things like basic letters together … (Clare)

Others made a distinction between basic tasks and what they saw as more advanced actions:

… from everyday things like being able to pay bills, choosing a gas and electricity provider … to more sophisticated things like being able to interact through writing in different forms for different purposes. (Felicity)

The notion of functioning in society also featured in teachers' views of why adults needed to be literate, as in the following explanations:

They can't participate fully in social, economic life of the country or society without those literacy skills … It's a functional need in order to be able to have the opportunity and participate as an adult member of society. (Jane)

… to function in the real world. … functioning in your everyday life. (Sarah)

You can't survive *in society without literacy these days.* (Felicity)

To some participants the functional aspect of literacy was related to work, either in the work place or a person's employability in terms of their ability to find and sustain employment. A number of interviewees mentioned CVs, application forms and letters, for instance, when discussing the forms of writing a literate adult may need to undertake. As John put it:

It's to improve employment prospects really… And also to do things, tasks that we might see as menial like completing a CV or completing an application form or being able to read simple instructions. That's one of the prime reasons for being literate.

Again, a sense of change is discernible among participants' responses, with some feeling that work places greater demands on people's literacy skills now than it did in the past:

> *So much now depends on the ability to read and write and even for someone who was functionally not literate twenty or thirty years ago there were still jobs you could do. That's no longer true really.* (Donna).

Interview participants differed, however, in their views on the extent of the relationship between employability and literacy. One teacher (Sarah) said, for example, that she didn't really think it was about work at all, but more general issues such as confidence and empowerment, which made people '*feel more able to go out into the wider world.*' Donna also thought literacy was about more than employability:

> *It's not just about the skills and abilities an adult should have …should people be trained up just to do the jobs they do?*

In fact, some of the participants expressed a certain amount of frustration with the focus on employability within the settings and policy environments in which they worked, arguing that it had restricted their curriculum, leaving little room for reading for pleasure and creative writing. Furthermore, they argued that due to the need for learners to achieve formal qualifications it had resulted in a certain amount of 'teaching to the test.' As Felicity said, '*We are just having to drill it in.*' Meanwhile, another participant described as '*strategic compliance*' the way she worked within the employability agenda but still managed to find space to explore other aspects of literacy she felt were important, such as creative writing (Carol). Sonia explained how deeply ingrained the employability agenda was in her organisation, adding that in order to receive funding they had to re-name some of the courses they offered to 'Communication for Employment' rather than calling them 'literacy' or 'English'. For another of the teachers interviewed, her frustration with the employability focus motivated her to leave the organisation within which she was teaching at the time of the telephone interviews. Between the first time I spoke to her, in the telephone interview, and meeting her for the second time when I conducted the discussion group with some of her learners, she had set up her own business teaching adult literacy

through creative writing and project work. (Sarah).

Functional literacy is a recurring theme within the literature around adult literacy, with a number of analyses identifying the extent to which current policy for literacy education is based on a functional model, with its focus on employment, standards and economic prosperity on both a national and individual level. (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Taylor, 2008b). Hamilton and Pitt (2011b, p.599) writing about the 'discourse' of functional literacy that they identified in their analysis of UK policy for adult literacy education, say it 'argues that literacy is a necessary part of daily life' allowing people to 'access normality.' The authors suggest that this discourse positions literacy learners as 'deficit' or not normal and that it leads to a restricted view of literacy as a set of 'competencies.'

To some extent, practitioners' views may seem to suggest a discourse of functionalism. In addition to the actual references to 'functioning' in everyday life, their focus on reading, writing and speaking for very specific purposes, such as completing a job application, constructing a CV and reading communications from a child's school or from the doctor's surgery, seem to reflect the way in which a 'functionally literate' person was defined in the 1970s, that is as someone who 'has command of reading skills that permit him to go about his daily activities successfully on the job or to move about society normally with comprehension of the usual printed expressions and messages he encounters' (British Association of Settlements, 1973, cited in Burgess and Hamilton, 2011, p.5). The fact that some of the interview participants also appeared to stress reading rather than writing as the most important aspect of literacy further supports this similarity (ibid., p.2). A functional view of literacy may also be suggested by the fact that although the pleasure or self-fulfilment to be gained from being literate are mentioned by some participants, they do not occur to the same extent as the more practical aspects of reading and writing. However, participants' identification of a number of wider issues and benefits in relation to literacy shows that they do not view literacy in purely functional terms. These issues are discussed in the following section.

The wider benefits of being literate

In addition to what appear to be seen as the more 'functional' aspects of being literate, that is reading and writing, speaking and listening, numeracy and using technology, the teachers interviewed often considered literacy in terms of its more general benefits for the individual. In some cases, this related to well-being, personal identity and self-fulfilment, while autonomy and independence also featured frequently in the responses. The following comments were typical:

> *So much in life requires you to have literacy skills and you miss out on so much in terms of your own independence … to be self-sufficient.* (Lucy)

> *So that they can access all sorts of things without having to have the level of support that some people need in terms of banking, in terms of managing the house, in terms of parenting, things like that.* (Moira)

Sarah felt literacy was about people being '*able to make informed decisions about their own futures.*' For some interview participants, this also meant empowerment. According to one of the teachers, for instance, literacy allows a person:

> *To be in control of one's own life. To function independently and have autonomy… and empowerment. Disadvantaged without it in dealings with authorities.* (Carol)

This view was reflected in a number of responses, including that of the teacher who felt that:

> *I think it's important because it empowers you, I guess, the biggest reason, it gives you so many more opportunities than if you're not.* (Faye)

Participation and inclusion were also recurring notions:

> *… to give them the most out of life and participation in society … (Lucy)*

> *If an adult isn't literate you could very well lead an isolated life … potential not to be an outgoing person.* (Catherine)

So they can participate and so they've got choices, basically (Mary)

For Jane, it appeared to be an issue of equity, she argued that without literacy a person would not be able to participate in society '*as effectively as other people'* and have the same opportunities.

Personal confidence was another regular feature in interview participants' responses. One teacher, for instance, described her learners as '*blossoming in confidence*'. She went on to say that:

> *I think it's about confidently adapting to different areas of your life whether that's as an individual or as a family member or in your work place, in your job or in the wider community.* (Sarah)

A number of the teachers interviewed also identified the relationship between literacy and family life, such as helping children with homework and, as previously mentioned, in communication with school. However, for one practitioner this went beyond the purely functional to suggest longer term aspirations as well:

> *It helps benefit the next generation because obviously you know it's been well researched hasn't it that if parents are literate then their children have got more chance of being helped at home and moving on in life as well.* (Pauline)

Literacy was also related to '*hopes and aspirations*' for families (Sarah).

> *If you don't have* [literacy] *you can't support your children, which is disempowering … It's a good role model I think as well … you're passing that message on to the children.* (Sarah)

Many of the teachers' responses, therefore, appear to suggest that they see literacy as allowing people to be informed and active members of their communities with a sense of equal access to opportunities. Adults are not the only beneficiaries of literacy, families and children benefit in a number of ways in addition. Many of the participants'

responses seem to reflect a broader understanding of literacy and what it means to be literate, and to some extent this contrasts with the functional view of literacy discussed above. For some of the interview participants, functioning was not enough, for example:

We want people to be more than functionally literate. (Donna)

The relationship between English and literacy

Although the term 'literacy' is widely used in the literature, government policy for literacy education prefers the use of 'English', along with 'maths' instead of 'numeracy'. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b). I was curious as to the extent to which this change had been applied in practice, and feeling that it would be useful in further identifying interview participants' perceptions of literacy, I raised the issue in the interviews. In particular, I asked the teachers if they thought there was a difference between 'English' and 'Literacy' and, if so, whether or not this policy change had resulted in any impact on their practice. Although most of the practitioners interviewed were still using the term 'literacy' in their practice, and the majority said the policy had not made any difference to their practice itself, they expressed some interesting views about the relationship between the two concepts. Some felt that literacy was a more basic, or lower level, concept, as Catherine put it, '*Literacy sounds a bit more basic than English.'* Another teacher described English as more '*academic*' than literacy, requiring people to:

have more knowledge of literacy techniques… it would seem to suggest more in-depth techniques, a high level of knowledge … It's what's behind the writing as well, I feel. (Felicity)

There was also some consideration given to how 'literacy' may be perceived as inferior to 'English':

You know when you say literacy sometimes it's seen as if it's a second class qualification… It [English] *gives it more status… literacy gives you the impression illiterate which is not always the case, is it?* (Moira)

Others commented on the possible negative connotations for literacy learners:

I suppose literacy has the potential to be a little bit stigmatising maybe. (Jane).

I think the idea of literacy, adult literacy, it used to be for people who had failed at school who needed to come back and learn to improve their reading and writing. (Sarah)

I think perhaps some people felt that perhaps literacy and numeracy seem demeaning, going back to English and maths more meaningful. (Lucy)

Pauline considered the issue from employers' point of view:

… for the employers, I think when they see that they've got an English exam rather than literacy I think that they see that as more of a robust qualification.

Some saw a difference in scope or content between 'literacy' and 'English'. For example, one teacher described English as '*wider*' than literacy (Sarah) whereas for Joe, English was more technical than literacy and:

Not necessarily about being able to pick out where an apostrophe should go in a sentence, for example, but actually being able to use the apostrophe in your own writing.

Heather also had her own view of the difference:

As far as I understand literacy was the sort of acquisition of English or the acquisition of writing and the acquisition of being able to read for a particular purpose.

Some interviewees offered views on how literacy and English may be viewed differently by their learners, suggesting that 'English' was more meaningful to them:

… literacy is something that they don't understand … for quite a lot of them it wasn't called that when they were at school. (Sonia).

It makes a difference to the learners because I think they understand English and I think they don't always understand the term literacy. (Pauline).

It's certainly very straightforward isn't it? It's English or maths. You're doing English or maths. (Jane)

Another teacher took a different view, however, seeming less keen on the implications of 'English':

I am trying hard to make it not make a difference. 'English' implies a standard English for particular purposes leading to a top-down approach. I'm trying to avoid this to focus on learners' own needs and purposes instead. Trying to hold on to the term 'literacy' rather than 'English.' (Carol)

Perhaps because of the way the question about 'English' and 'literacy' was worded, some participants seemed to automatically link the terms with particular qualifications; Functional Skills (and GCSE) with English and literacy with older initiatives such as Skills for Life and the identified differences between the two. This may have influenced their responses and meant that sometimes they were talking about the qualifications rather than the concepts of literacy and English themselves. However, their responses still gave some clues as to ways in which the teachers perceived literacy. Debbie, for instance, was one of the few practitioners who felt the change had made a difference to her practice: '*We are now teaching to the exam rather than teaching a life skill.*'

A further distinction came about where one teacher worked with both ESOL learners and native English speakers. She said, in her view, for ESOL learners English was taught as a language, whereas for native speakers she was teaching them a skill. She was teaching them, '*to use their language properly.*' (Faye). Another teacher commented that, '*Literacy is not just in English, is it*?' (Mary). This response may support Bawden (2001, p.221) who describes literacy as a 'relative concept' and refers to McGarry's (1993) comments that being literate in Honduras is different to being literate

in London; an interesting consideration given the policy decision to replace 'literacy' with 'English', as discussed in Chapter 4 of the thesis (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b)

Fulford (2009, p.44) discusses the distinction between literacy and English, with the latter being 'commonly associated with a form of cultured schooling' and although teachers' responses suggested a range of views on this issue, generally the sense was of English having a higher status than literacy. If teachers did not necessarily feel this themselves, many seemed to recognise that it might look this way to learners, employers and the public. However, the picture emerging from their responses to the question about English and literacy, is not a straightforward one. Although most participants suggested in some way that literacy was more basic than English, one of the teachers interviewed explained how, in her opinion, English meant more focus on '*spelling, punctuation and grammar*' and she described this as '*a retrograde step, the going back to basics.*' (Donna).

Learners' views

Moving now to learners' perceptions of literacy, discussions with two groups of learners allowed me to explore their perceptions of what it is to be literate. The first discussion was with a small group of learners taking part in a privately organised 'literacy through creative writing' class in a village community centre. Initially there were four learners in this group, although two were unable to stay for the duration of the session. The second discussion took place within a Functional Skills class run by a local authority training-provider in a city centre. Four adult learners were present. In each of the two groups, tutors were present throughout the discussions and made occasional contributions to the discussion. With both groups I initiated the discussion by asking what 'literacy' meant to the learners and then conversations around this were allowed to develop. After the initial question, however, prompts from the researcher were kept to a minimum and the conversation about what literacy meant to the groups of learners was allowed to develop naturally. In the following section I consider the views of learners who participated in the discussion using the same main themes used in discussion of the findings from the interviews with literacy teachers.

What a literate adult can do

The literacy learners in the first group spoke at some length about writing when talking about what literacy meant to them. As Julie said:

> *It's … reading, spelling and writing, grammar and things.*

In this group, spelling, grammar and punctuation were only mentioned briefly though. Instead, the learners focused on the benefits they gained from their writing. For Jess, for instance, this was empowering as she used it to support her children and to express her own views and opinions. Julie, meanwhile, went on to explain that, for her, literacy was about writing creatively. Although this was mainly for her own pleasure, she also said that some of her work had been published in the local press and that she had enjoyed being able to share her writing with others. She described how the stories she wrote were often inspired by dreams and stories she had read and how, '*I just like it when people like them.*' For this learner, literacy was clearly not just an individual pursuit, but involved a sense of sharing and community.

From the discussion of writing, the conversation moved on to reading. The learners spoke about reading in different ways, including reading for pleasure, reading for information, reading books and reading using electronic devices. (The latter point will be addressed later in this section). Reading for pleasure was emphasized though, with Julie explaining how her reading had influenced her own writing:

> *I like reading as well and what other people have written it gives me ideas… I do what they might write and grammar that they use. I look at books in the shops that people have written. How they've put it out you know and chapters and stuff like that.*

The learners in the first group also identified speaking and listening as key aspects of literacy. Unlike the teachers interviewed, however, they particularly focused on listening, as the following exchange illustrates:

Jess: [Talking about discussion] *you have to let other people take their turn and listen …*

Gwyneth: *So do you think listening is an important part of literacy?*

Jess: *Well it all comes hand in hand really. We need to be able to listen as well as put our own discussion forward.*

Julie: *Other people's [opinions] matter as well, to listen to what they're saying and what they think.*

In the second group the discussion took a rather different direction initially. Again it began with the question, 'What does 'literacy' mean to you?' but it met with an interesting response from one learner who understood the term as a rather more negative concept:

Someone who can't spell or write and someone who has trouble with mathematics, things like that. (Martin)

Very few participants, however, suggested negative or deficit notions of literacy in which literacy is viewed as an attribute lacking in illiterate individuals (Taylor 2008b; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). The group went on to identify reading, writing and communication as what literacy meant to them.

The learners' responses suggested that they gave equal importance to reading and writing as key aspects of literacy. However, they clearly associated writing with spelling and vocabulary. No one mentioned punctuation and grammar. Creative writing did not feature in this group's discussion either. The learners discussed at some length the relationship between reading and the ability to spell, concluding that reading widely and well did not necessarily aid a person's spelling. Martin went on to describe how he had dealt with spelling difficulties in the past:

All through my life I've got away with blagging it by instead of using the word I'd like to use, like big words, by abbreviating everything. It makes the same sense but it doesn't look professional.

It was interesting that he seemed to imply greater value for 'big' words and the need to look professional and also that he didn't recognise any skill in his ability to find alternative approaches in his writing.

The conversation in this group returned to spelling when learners were talking about confidence gained through their developing literacy. For this member of the group, at least, it seemed impossible to separate the notion of literacy from spelling:

> *Confidence … so that's a barrier that you've got to break down as well. People's confidence and saying, 'Well you have spelled it right. It looks right to me.'* (Martin)

Handwriting also seemed to be important, with several learners mentioning this and the need for writing to be 'joined up':

Eli: *I can't write joined up writing. I can't read it either at all.*
Gwyneth: *And do you think it's important to do both of them as well as each other?*
Eli: *Oh yeah.*

Martin described himself as a lot older than the rest of the group and felt that the handwriting he had been taught at school was different:

> *It was all capital letters. No joined up writing or anything like that. So I forgot about doing small letters. That was part of the education in the days of the 70s. We used to just do things in capital letters and black pens, things like that.* (Martin)

Speaking to make oneself understood also arose as an important aspect of literacy. Work and social contexts were discussed in relation to this. One member of the group, for example, described how using '*accurate*' spoken language was important to her in her job as a waitress but also recognised how this was different to the way her teenage son and his friends spoke:

> *The kind of words that just the kids use. Adults, we don't use that kind of words.* (Zara)

It was interesting that it was not just the use of standard English that featured in this learner's view of literacy. She seems to recognise that there are different varieties of the language and this is also suggested in her comments about the use of language in the workplace too:

> *After school I was a waitress for four years and basically all the customers out there were English and this was a basis for English I learned with English people not at school.*

Although the issues of speaking arose in discussion, no one in the group mentioned listening.

The relationship between maths and literacy also emerged in the second group discussion. It was interesting that Martin had mentioned '*trouble with mathematics*' when explaining what literacy meant to him. Zara also recognised the link:

> *If you don't understand English how are you going to do maths? … If we don't understand what we are reading, then we are not going to resolve the problem.*

However, learners agreed that it was easier to admit to difficulties with maths than it was with literacy:

Gwyneth: *Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about literacy? Anything you haven't already mentioned?*

Martin: *It can be embarrassing for people.*

Eli: *I think confidence is a massive thing*

Martin: *Yeah, confidence. I know quite a few illiterate people who won't talk about it … It's something you can get really embarrassed about.*

Tutor: *Though some people have said to me that it's kind of easier to admit to not being good at maths than to not being good at literacy. I don't know if you agree with that.*

Martin: *Yeah, I'd agree with that.*

Eli: *It's more accepted that it's difficult, maths, isn't it?*

All learners made a link between literacy and the use of technology. Jess, for example, said that, '*I think they're probably both on a par, aren't they, computers and literacy*.' Increasing confidence in digital environments was apparent in some of their responses. Some group members told me that they had never used computers until they had started attending literacy classes, but were now able to type letters and other documents, use the Internet for research and contribute to blogs. Others talked about reading using Kindles, being active on social media and texting. Everyone considered that this still counted as literacy despite using a digital rather than print-based format. In the first group, however, the learners debated the benefits of reading electronic documents against those of reading print based-books and decided that they preferred books, as Jess explained:

> [Computers] *I think they're handy for research aren't they? If you want to research something you've got it at your fingertips but I think that it takes away from the book …it's quite sad because it's just like that. Many years ago you just had to go and geta book and research it, didn't you? But now you can just put it in to your search engine and then it's there.*

Julie agreed that, '*You can't beat a book*' and said she still preferred handwriting to using the computer:

> *I just do handwriting when I write. I don't bother with the computer.*

The wider benefits of being literate

Learners in both groups identified an increase in their self-confidence as a result of their literacy development. In the first group, Jess, for example, said being literate gave her the '*confidence to speak*'. She added that:

> *… sometimes when you haven't got that it could be off-putting and you don't want to engage.*

She said she felt different now though and she described how this confidence had allowed her to become more active within her community by becoming a Reading Friend at her son's school. She explained this in terms of breaking down barriers and empowerment:

I think that it's breaking down barriers, you know, because you feel like a little voice but once you break through that barrier and you can do it, you know, you feel so much power. (Jess)

The benefits for a person's children also arose in both groups. Members of the first group discussed how literate adults are important role models to their children, helping them through school and beyond. This was echoed in the second group, with one learner responding to the question, 'What do you think is the most important reason to be literate?' with:

'…*it's very important because I have kids at school, to help them with their homework.*' (Zara)

Both groups talked about the ways in which literacy had allowed them greater access to education in other areas. This was particularly the case with the second group. In addition to maths (as previously discussed) a couple of learners explained how it underpinned their study as mature learners in other subjects, such as business studies.

You need it to do other subjects as well don't you? (Eli)

Functional literacy

The learners participating in the group discussions did not mention functioning in everyday life in the way that many of the teachers interviewed had, though some of their responses hinted at the more functional aspects of literacy. General communication was important to both groups, as Julie said, for example. '*It's like communication with different people*'.

There was also some consideration of employment:

So you can get a better job as well, because if you cannot write and read and spell very well, most of your time you're gonna be working alone so you have to be able to do things yourself. (Daniel)

You can use it [literacy] *anywhere can't you out there, in the workplace or classroom.* (Julie)

Martin mentioned filling in forms on four occasions during the discussion, suggesting that, for him, this was a significant reason for being literate. However, there was also a general, though unspecific, sense of functionality in his comment that, '*You have to learn to read and write to get on*'. This was supported by Zara, '*You have to move on*'. Other than this, there was no discussion of functioning on a day-to-day basis in this group.

The relationship between English and literacy

Although I did not ask the groups of literacy learners the question I asked the interview participants about the difference between 'English' and 'literacy', it was still interesting to note how learners used these terms during the discussions. In the first group 'literacy' was used throughout. No one mentioned 'English'. In contrast, members of the second group only used the word 'literacy' once: '*I think literacy is learning about English.*' (Daniel). There was also one mention of '*illiterate people*' (Martin). Instead, they preferred to use the word 'English' when responding to questions and comments about literacy. Martin, for example, consistently talked about 'English' when asked about literacy:

Martin: *When I was at school English was boring …*
Gwyneth: *It's interesting that you mentioned English? Do you think literacy and English are the same thing?*
Martin: *It was always just maths and English, never anything else.*
Gwyneth: *So do you think that literacy is something different to that?*

Martin: *Because English when I went to school was boring I used to wag off school. Oh it's English today. I'll go off and have a cig. Something like that.*

It appeared that the terms 'literacy' and 'English' meant the same thing to the learners. It was interesting, however, to note the distinction they made between the 'English' they learned at school and the 'English' they learned in other contexts, such as the workplace as previously mentioned by Zara and '*in the street*' (Daniel) which may not be as 'correct' but enabled them to communicate with colleagues, customers and friends.

Learners' views compared

There were some similarities between the views of the two groups of learners regarding what literacy is and why an adult should be literate. In particular, they both placed little emphasis on day-to-day functioning and employability, but acknowledged the benefits of literacy to children and families, and recognised the centrality of computers and other technologies to literacy. The two groups of learners also expressed some quite different perceptions, one group focusing on community involvement, creativity and self-expression as key aspects of being a literate adult. Education, meanwhile, seemed of more significance to the second group. A possible reason for these differences in perception might relate to the purposes of the classes the learners were attending. The first group mentioned above, for instance, being privately run and funded, without the influence of local education authorities or a provider such as a school or college. The second group was local authority funded and more concerned with skills and qualifications (as seen in their comments about how improving their literacy helps them with study on other courses, such as maths). However, the range of responses given by the learners involved shows a broad range of perceptions of what literacy means. Differences of opinion within the groups themselves, also suggest that the understanding of what it means to be literate varies from person to person among learners.

In the following section of the chapter I discuss the data provided by two of the teacher participants, who shared with me the outcome of discussions about literacy they had held with some of their learners.

Additional data

Two of the teachers interviewed had discussed what it meant to be literate with other groups of adult literacy learners they were teaching (in addition to the groups I met for discussion). One class was taking place in a charitable educational organisation in a deprived urban area. The other was a group studying in an organisation working with vulnerable adults in the centre of a large city. The teachers asked the learners my questions about what they could do as literate adults and why they needed to be literate, and they shared the outcome of the discussions with me. Although these learners were not part of the actual sample of participants and therefore not part of the primary data, I have included their views here as they made an additional and valuable contribution to my understanding of learners' perceptions. Sarah summarised her group's responses as follows:

The biggest reason they gave was they wanted to be independent and they didn't want to have to rely on other people to read things for them. They didn't want to give that power to other people. They wanted that power for themselves. The other thing they said was that being literate made them feel confident, it made them have some self-esteem, it empowered them to be able to face life's challenges and it gave them an identity for themselves rather than passing things on to other people and living in other people's shadows.

Sonia's group gave rather different responses:

Basically they were saying that it helps them to get better jobs. A lot of them left school without any qualifications or sometimes school did not just connect or engage them at all and they're coming back to give themselves better prospects. It helps build their skills… It helps them with their children … Some of them said they can actually read now and read confidently, so when they go into a shop or something, looking at a timetable or maybe just doing a job search they're able to understand what they're doing rather than just sort of guessing. (Sonia)

Although the two groups expressed rather different views of what being literate meant to them, between them, their responses reflect many of the issues raised by the teachers in the interviews or by the literacy learners in the two groups I met. Comments about independence, empowerment, employability, future prospects, children, identity and self-esteem echo the findings from the main sample of participants.

Conclusion

A comparison of teachers' and learner's perceptions of literacy reveals common ground between the two in relation to what literacy is and what a literate adult can do. For example, the interview participants and the learners' discussion groups expressed similar views on the centrality to literacy of reading and writing for different purposes and using different forms of text. Different though was the extent to which grammar and punctuation featured in responses. On the whole, teachers felt this played a far more important role than is suggested by the learners' comments. Speaking and listening featured in both teachers' and learners' responses in addition, though there was greater variety in the emphasis placed on this. Some learners stressed the importance of listening, for example, while others did not mention it. Some teachers had plenty to say about speaking but there was far less mention of listening and this was not discussed in isolation from speaking. The use of computers and digital technologies, however, was recognised by both teachers and learners as a key aspect of being literate and there was also some agreement about the relationship between literacy and maths / numeracy.

In terms of the wider benefits of being literate, teachers' views covered such varied issues as independence, empowerment, identity, self-confidence, participation, inclusion and family life. While perhaps less broad in scope than the views of the teachers interviewed, the learners who participated in the group discussions shared with them some perceptions of what literacy meant more widely. The benefits for people's children in terms of schooling and future prospects, for instance, along with self-confidence and participation in their communities were all factors mentioned by learners in the group discussions.

A shared understanding also emerges through the way most participants (teachers and learners), refer to literacy in terms of 'skills', perhaps suggesting a traditional approach to literacy in which the concept is understood as an 'autonomous' skill set based in reading and writing and also including speaking and listening that are acquired separately from any social context (Street, 1995). Such an approach, which some writers and researchers argue is the basis of much policy for adult literacy education, is concerned with measuring literacy against set standards (Edwards, et al. 2009). Some of the teachers, certainly, talked about literacy in terms of levels, sometimes 'basic', sometimes 'sophisticated' or perhaps 'level 1', 'level 2' etc. In some participants' views (both teachers' and learners') there is also perhaps an element of 'schooled' literacy (Street and Street, 1995), with its focus on rules for writing, correctness and value judgements about what does and what does not constitute literacy. There may also be a certain amount of privileging of 'extended forms of reading and writing' within some quarters (Edwards et al. 2009, p.485). On occasions there is a hint of a 'deficit' view of literacy within a small number of participants' responses, in their consideration of literacy (or illiteracy in one case) as something a person either possesses or does not possess and in mention of 'barriers' which need to be overcome; perhaps the 'illiterate identity' as described by Kendall and McGrath (2014, p.59).

Where teachers' and learners' perceptions appear to differ significantly, however, is around the issue of functional literacy. Many of the teachers, for instance, felt that literacy was about functioning on an everyday basis, in contexts such as the workplace, the home, health care, public transport and so on. Some also talked about functioning in society. In the learners' responses, any notions of functional literacy were implied rather than explicit. There was no mention of shopping, reading timetables, letters from schools and the doctor in their perceptions of what it meant to be literate. Instead, there seemed to be more of a general sense of literacy enabling a person to 'get on' in life. There was much less said directly about work and employability in learners' responses. The participants in the first group instead concentrated more on their creative writing, reading for pleasure and how their literacy development had empowered them in social situations and had allowed them to find their 'voice'. In the second group there was more consideration of the ways in which literacy could support them further in their education and personal development, and

also some recognition of varieties of English and their use in different contexts. There are similarities, therefore, between teachers' and learners' perceptions of what it means to be literate, but also some interesting differences.

Overall, however, the perceptions shared by literacy teachers and literacy learners appear to outweigh the differences of opinion. Similarly, what is described in the research literature as a traditional, autonomous understanding of literacy (Street, 1995), although present in some participants' responses, is less prominent than a broad view of literacy. This broader perception encompasses not just the functional aspects of being literate, but also the use of literacy in a range of contexts and that includes its use for pleasure and recreation, with goals that are aspirational as well as economic. Some participants' responses seemed to reflect a social practice approach to literacy (Street, 1995) in that they suggested the existence of different literacies, such as the learners who made distinction between the literacy learned and used at school and that relating to other contexts. Although some were keen to preserve what they saw as more traditional aspects of literacy, involving books and handwriting, for instance, a more 'progressive' approach can be seen in those who have embraced or at least accepted digital literacies. The fact that a number of participants remarked on the changing nature of literacy, shows acknowledgement of it as a shifting rather than a fixed concept.

In the next chapter I consider the ways in which policy for adult literacy education is enacted by literacy practitioners.

Chapter 6: How is policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

Introduction

Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010, p. 558) describe policies as 'processes' and understand policy enactment as the ways in which policies are 'interpreted and translated' rather than being 'simply implemented' by 'policy actors' in an educational setting (ibid., p. 549). The authors suggest that ways of interpreting and enacting educational policy may often be original or even creative and may be influenced by teachers' values and the culture of their organisations. As Ball (1994, p.10) commented much earlier, 'policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map onto the "wild profusion of local practice"'. With these comments in mind, this chapter considers the ways in which national policy for adult literacy education is enacted at a local level (Allatt and Tett, 2018), that is, the ways in which adult literacy practitioners respond to government policy within their organisations and how they translate it into practice. I draw upon the data from seventeen telephone and three face-to-face interviews conducted with teachers of adult literacy in a range of educational settings in South and West Yorkshire and from two discussion groups with adult literacy learners (in which the teachers also participated). These data are used to address the question:

How is literacy policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

The chapter begins with a brief summary of policy for adult literacy education in England (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4) followed by an overview of participants' responses to interview questions about policy. It then explores their reactions to policy, both positive and critical, along with the ways in which they work within the policy framework. Consideration is also given to possible connections between the nature of the organisations in which participants work and their responses to policy.

Policy for adult literacy education in England

In 2001, the Skills for Life initiative, in response to the Moser Report (Department for Education and Employment, 1999) and concerns for the literacy and numeracy skills of adults in the UK, had introduced for the first time a core curriculum and set of national standards in these subjects along with a suite of qualifications at a number of different levels and new professional qualifications for teachers (Taylor, 2008b; Hamilton, 2012). The initiative was replaced by Functional Skills qualifications for adults in 2012 which brought about changes in assessment, including the removal of the national multiple choice tests (Taylor, 2012). Since then, there appears to have been little in the way of major new policy for adult literacy education (Tett et. al, 2012). As explained in Chapter 4 of the thesis, however, a number of more recent government documents outline the main features of current policy for adult literacy in England, including free tuition for adults who do not have a level 2 qualification in literacy. The focus of current policy is on GCSE English as the preferred qualification for adults, while acknowledging that Functional Skills may still be more appropriate for some learners. Certain categories of learners are prioritized in current policy, including the unemployed, people serving time in prison, those in the army, the homeless and young people aged between eighteen and twenty-one. Another aspect of current policy, meanwhile, is the recommendation that the term 'literacy' is replaced by 'English'. In addition, reforms to Functional Skills qualifications from September 2018 were announced, indicating that these are still an important aspect of policy (Department of Business, Information and Skills, 2011b; 2014; Department of Business, Information and Skills / Department for Education, 2016; Department for Education, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 4, literacy within policy is understood in terms of skills in reading and writing, along with speaking and listening (Department of Business, Information and Skills, 2014) that can be measured according to levels (Bartlett, 2008). Reading and writing involve predominantly print-based materials, as implied by the very limited consideration given to digital technologies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). Criticism levied against policy making centres on its basis in an 'autonomous' view of literacy as a series of cognitive skills that are based on a fixed set of rules and standards for language use with little consideration of social context (Street, 2005; Ivanic and Mannion, 2009; Cope and Kalantis, 2009; St Clair,

2012). A focus on literacy as a means to employment has also been identified in the literature (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). Indeed, all the policy documents analysed for this study emphasize the link between literacy and employability. This, combined with a focus on economic issues, targets and outcomes, means that a strong discourse of functionalism pervades and further criticism has been made against its focus on a 'human resource' model of literacy, which is concerned with formal approaches to learning and with measurement and standardisation (Hamilton, 2012). Adult literacy education has also been linked with neo-liberalism (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015); an economic system based on a free-market and competition which when applied to education results in monitoring, measurement, standardisation and a focus on outcomes, competencies and skills (Ball, 2016) rather than on the needs, interests and literacies of learners themselves (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015).

In the following section I examine teachers' responses to questions about policy.

Policies and practice

In the telephone interviews, participants were asked about the policies that governed practice (either local or national) in adult literacy education in their organisations. Some specified Functional Skills or the emphasis on GCSE English for adult learners. Skills for Life appeared to be still influential, although no longer current, with a number of teachers identifying this and the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum as governing their practice. The policy of replacing 'literacy' with 'English' was identified by some participants. In general, however, there seemed to be a lack of clarity about exactly what the current policy for adult literacy education was. Seven out of the seventeen teachers interviewed said that they did not know anything about policy or were uncertain about current policy for adult literacy education, with some implying that there was a certain distance between themselves as teachers and the implementation of policy within their organisations (Maguire, Braun and Ball, 2015). As Clare put it:

> *Well the White Papers and all the reports all filter to us eventually … I understand where decisions are made and how they come to get to us I just can't tell you what they're called at the moment.*

Other teachers implied that the situation was quite complex, with a number of policy influences affecting their practice. Carol, for instance, felt that there wasn't one specific

policy governing practice now, but that Skills for Life was still influential to some extent, though being eroded by more recent policy with its focus on functional skills qualifications and changes to funding mechanisms. She commented that there was:

> *… no college-wide policy. We are governed by competing pressures of funding and qualifications, such as 'English' rather than 'literacy'*

A focus on employability in both national and local policy for adult literacy education was also identified by some practitioners. Sarah, for example, in the telephone interview explained how her organisation was:

> *committed to aligning its English provision to four themes, one of which is employability and that's the key driver really … to beginning to develop literacy skills.*

The emphasis on examinations and qualifications made some of them feel that they were *'teaching to a test'* (Clare). Comments were made about the *'target driven'* nature of practice (Carol).

Two interviewees identified a specific organisational policy as influencing their practice, that is, a commitment to social purpose education:

> *We're a social purpose organisation and so we're very focused on making sure our education is extending, expanding, relevant, topical … political in the broadest sense, social issues …* (Jane)

> *(*the organisation's*) vision and mission informs our curriculum planning such as the promotion of education for social purpose* (Sarah)

According to Mycroft (2018, p. 96) such an approach to education is concerned with 'social action' and 'personal transformation'. It combines 'transformative learning' for the individual with 'community action approaches and in doing so 'sidesteps neo-liberal norms'. It suggests a very different educational ethos to that described by other commentators as functional, instrumental, target-driven and focused on the economy (Williams, 2008; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015).

Sarah's comment also hinted at a social practice approach to literacy (Street, 1997) within her organisation in the way her approach was:

> not presenting literacy or English as we now call it as a kind of neutral skill that people have or haven't got.

However, few others were aware of local or institutional policies. The majority of policies to which participants referred were national, or *'massive national top-down stuff'* as one interviewee described them (Donna). This was echoed by Moira:

> I think in colleges it's government led. It's reactive. It's not like proactive … it's reactive to government initiatives and stuff like that. I don't think college as a sector has an input really in deciding what the literacy curriculum involves. I think it's outside their remit.

Three of the practitioners talked about the presence of ESOL learners in their literacy classes, and although no one mentioned Government policy on this issue specifically, it was clearly influential. (This issue is discussed in more detail later in the chapter).

Four interviewees also mentioned learners who were sent to them from the Job Centres thus indicating another policy influencing their practice. Clare, for example, explained that:

> We do get a certain percentage that are mandated from the Job Centre which would mean if they didn't attend classes their benefits would be cut.

This section of the chapter has identified literacy teachers' awareness of the policies affecting their practice. It became clear from participants' responses that were several areas of specific policy which were influential, particularly the move from Skills for Life to Functional Skills qualifications for adult learners and also the Government's push for GCSE English rather than Functional Skills for most learners. Policies relating to ESOL learners and mandating job seekers from the Job Centres were also influential. More generally, issues of employability and funding mechanisms linked to testing and the achievement of qualifications featured in responses to questions regarding policy. With two exceptions (tutors from the same, 'social purpose' organisation) all policies identified were at the national level.

Next I consider practitioners' reactions to policy initiatives affecting their practice, beginning with positive responses. I then explore the difficulties experienced by some of the teachers along with the frustration expressed towards the policy contexts in which they work.

Positive reactions to policy

In this section I consider the ways in which the practitioners interviewed had responded positively to government policy. Despite the apparent lack of clarity in relation to current policy (discussed in the previous section) when asked about the influences on their practice, some teachers outlined how they had worked to implement key aspects of current policy and many were positive about this. For example, they felt that the replacement of Skills for Life qualifications with Functional Skills had improved their practice. Sarah, for example, spoke about having greater flexibility in the approaches she could use:

> *I might now take a theme or a topic which we might explore and do some research on by reading and then we do a lot of discussion about that and then writing about it … last term the focus was mainly on women and the vote … if I take that approach we're quite naturally using all of those skills in a way that before had to be more broken down ... We've had some fantastic discussions which I probably didn't have when I was working towards the national literacy test so I feel it's opened things up a little bit …*

Others spoke about the difference in approaches to assessment and the shift away from multiple choice tests. Interviewees who commented on this felt it was a positive move because it assessed a broader range of skills and was more robust and challenging.

> *It has made a difference to our practice and we feel that we can spend a lot more time on the skills that the learners need rather than what the end test dictates.* (Pauline).

Many of the interviewees also responded positively to the move from the use of the term 'literacy' to 'English' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b). When asked if this made a difference to their practice, some participants felt it had not really affected them. Others, however, talked about differing perceptions of the two

terms and the effects both on their learners and on potential employers, with 'English' being seen to have a clearer meaning:

> *I also think it makes a difference to the learners as well because they understand the term 'English' and I think they didn't always understand the term 'literacy...* (Pauline)

> *… it does make a difference to the client base that I'm working with because literacy is something they don't understand, but English is something they do … literacy they go, 'What's that?' We just go, 'It's reading and writing.' 'Oh, why don't they say that?' … It's more tangible for them.* (Sonia)

As discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, practitioners spoke about 'English' having more positive connotations than literacy, being less '*stigmatising*' (Jane) and having more '*status'* (Moira) while also being recognised as a more '*robust qualification'* by employers (Pauline).

Generally, those who felt there was a difference thought that 'English' required a deeper level of study than 'literacy' and that this was reflected in their practice through the context of their lessons. Some explained that it affected their curriculum planning through the need to spend more time on spelling, grammar and punctuation and on the analysis of written texts:

> *English …would seem to suggest more in depth techniques, a higher level of knowledge.* (Felicity)

> *The English side seems to be not necessarily being able to pick out where an apostrophe should go in a sentence but actually being able to use the apostrophe in your own writing.* (Joe)

Practitioners viewed this in a positive light, rather than seeing it as detrimental to their practice, though.

It did seem, however, that a number of the teachers who felt it had made a difference seemed to associate 'English' with the Functional Skills qualification and 'literacy' with earlier policies, such as Skills for Life. This may have been a result of the way in which one of the telephone interview questions was worded. The question stated that 'Functional Skills documents refer to "English' now rather than 'literacy' and then asked

'Does this make any difference to your practice? If so, how?' I suspect using the term 'Functional Skills' may have influenced some participants' thinking. In hindsight, it would have been better to have used the less specific phrase 'policy documents' instead.

Difficulties and frustration

While responses to questions about policy were often positive and showed how participants had embraced various changes and developments within their practice, teachers also described the challenges they faced in relation to current policy. Some expressed frustration towards current policy, its requirements and its effects, including the constraints resulting from the '*pressures of achievement and funding'* (Mary). The emphasis on exams in current policy, and the restrictions on practice teachers felt this caused was also a particular source of frustration. Jane, for instance, in describing how her course was now 'exam-led', felt that:

> *I'm expected to be demonstrating progress and taking students through to the appropriate level of exam … There's not really much room in terms of our funding and our policy for having people who just come along because they want to learn a bit.*

She was not the only participant to express frustration at funding issues, along with the emphasis given to employability:

> *The big thing really is the funding … and being a post-19 provider we are funded for less and less … When I first started delivering here we were able to put on courses that would help people to grow in their confidence and in themselves. It didn't matter so much if you didn't have an end formal exam whereas now all our learners have to achieve a formal exam… and we seem to be looking more and more at work skills … which is going to help the local economy* (Pauline).

Donna also questioned the employability agenda and what could be lost as a result of its limitations:

Should people be trained up just to do the jobs they do … what about a love of language and things like that as well?

A number of other practitioners expressed the view that current policy resulted in an impoverished literacy curriculum, with some saying that they felt they were now '*teaching to the test*' and questioned the relationship between this and meeting learners' particular needs, as Debbie put it:

As a major widening participation college we would like to think that our policy is dynamic and reflects the needs of our students. In reality, we have sound bites that sound good, we have banners across our emails and walls in our reception areas, but we still teach to the exam.

Some practitioners also questioned the preference in policy for GCSE English rather than Functional Skills qualifications for most adults (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). For instance, Donna felt that:

Sometimes that's a slightly unrealistic ambition for where they're at now and it's working out how to get them there…

She explained the difficulties with examinations for some of the learners:

… it's all on two great long exams in the summer now … and it's a real barrier because we're an adult college. Because it's a second chance college we do have a much higher proportion of learners with disabilities … that's a massive barrier to that as well.

In fact, it appears that the Government's push for GCSE English as the preferred qualification does not always sit easily with the aims and values of adult literacy teachers and the institutions within which they work, as Pauline explained:

Part of our mission and purpose as well within the council is that we reach the more deprived areas and the hard to reach areas … so we're going out to people rather than them having to come to us all the time and that also affects what we

deliver in our curriculum. But with the way things are funded as well we can only deliver English classes if they are one of the stepping stones towards people reaching GCSE so anything that we deliver has to be a way of them eventually reaching the GCSE … So I think that the biggest thing for us was the round of funding that really made us change our curriculum of what we offer drastically over the last few years.

The issue of time pressure around GCSE English was mentioned by two tutors:

We have to deliver GCSE English to anyone that has a D grade and whether they are at the bottom end of a D grade we still have to deliver and get them to pass at grade C in one year. (Heather)

We've got the new syllabus for GCSE. We're having to do it in nine months with people maybe who had previously failed. You know it's getting quite, it's tricky, it's difficult. (Felicity)

Debbie also questioned the appropriateness of the policy regarding GCSE English:

I totally disagree with the government when they say that everyone has to reach the gold standard of a GCSE. A lot of our students won't do that. They've not got the ability …

Her response suggests she has interpreted the policy slightly differently to how it was intended, however, applying the target of GCSE to all learners rather than as the policy states, to most adults with the acknowledgment that it might not be appropriate for everyone (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014).

The policy of referring learners to literacy classes from the Job Centres, with sanctions for non-attendance (i.e. the benefits payments being withheld) was also proving a challenge for some of the interviewees, including Joe, who said that it had:

a massive effect because … suddenly we were having people who were being forced to come … and it feels completely different … almost like a crowd control

> *type of situation because they are quite forthright in putting across how little*
> *they want to be there.*

Meanwhile, for some interviewees, the issue was finding a way of implementing policy while presenting a curriculum offer that appealed to a broad range of potential learners. Donna, for example, spoke about the effects of '*top down changes'* and the need to make it *'so that people still want to come on things.'* She explained though, that current policy meant they had to be increasingly careful about allowing people on to courses, particularly as funding depended on learners successfully completing qualifications:

> *We can't just let you come on to it without knowing where you're at because*
> *there's so much riding on it and they are so much harder than they used to be.'*

Although policy for ESOL learners was not mentioned specifically when I asked practitioners about the policies governing their practice, it became clear during the interviews and focus group discussions that, for some, their work was being influenced by this, particularly, changes to funding for ESOL provision. The National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA), for instance, reports how state funding for ESOL has been cut from £203,000,000 in 2009/10 to £104,000,000 in 2014/15 (2017, p. 8). Changes also mean that ESOL classes funded by the state are now only available for free to certain categories of learner, including those who are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance. Learners must be seeking employment to claim free state-funded ESOL classes, otherwise they must pay for them themselves (Foster and Bolton, 2017). The NATECLA report (2017) points out that while many learners are unable to afford to participate in an ESOL class, attending adult literacy or numeracy provision is free to all (if they do not already have a level 2 qualification). Five of the teachers interviewed spoke about these issues around funding for ESOL learners and how they made it difficult or impossible for them to be taught in separate classes to literacy learners:

We talk about adult literacy, but that also involves ESOL learners as well and the policy for them, the funding makes it very difficult for us to deliver ESOL classes as we used to… (Pauline)

Instead, ESOL learners were often being taught alongside native English speakers and this brought with it certain challenges:

A lot of our learners on our functional skills workshops have English as a second language so you're teaching English as a language rather than a skill that you would teach to people with English as a first language. You're teaching them – English as first language speakers – to use their language properly, whereas sometimes with ESOL people then you're kind of … it's very much more difficult for them to understand what you're trying to teach them. That's the problem we have. (Faye)

Some of the challenges seemed to be particularly around meeting so many different needs within the classes. Sonia described the 'massive differentiation' within her classes due to the mix of learners, adding that, *'… it's quite challenging and very, very varied.'*

Sarah also remarked on the difference between literacy learners who were native English speakers and those for whom it was not the first language:

… native English speakers have very different needs to ESOL learners … What they're wanting is different. How you teach them is different.

She went on to argue that the context of a piece of writing is even more important for ESOL learners than it is for native speakers and that in literacy classes ESOL learners do not always *'get those basic building blocks of grammar'* that they need, whereas native English speakers, *'have that grammar innately … They might not know what the terminology is, but they've got it.'* She explained that as a result of this the approach to teaching ESOL learners needed to be different to that used with native English speaking adult literacy learners because the grammar needed to be embedded throughout.

In questioning the appropriateness of teaching ESOL and native English speakers in the same class, Sarah also raised the issue of ESOL learners having to pass a literacy exam:

They may start off at the beginning and come through a number of levels because they're able to listen, to speak, but then they reach a barrier because they are having to pass a literacy exam … it's a massive step and it takes a long time and unfortunately we don't have the luxury of time in the exam system. It's because of the funding and so on.

Faye also had some concerns regarding the suitability of literacy exams for ESOL learners, arguing that, depending on their personal circumstances and the situations that brought them to the UK:

… they don't always have the life experience that is needed … to imagine your ideal holiday or your ideal car and they find it really difficult to do that, so it's more important to make it easier for them to understand by making it applicable to their lives.'

Mary felt that that presence of ESOL learners in her functional skills class was significant in that it blurred the distinction between 'literacy' and 'English'. This was echoed by Sarah's comment that, *'the difference between ESOL learning and adult literacy has narrowed and narrowed and narrowed.'* Both felt that this was problematic:

English, for the ESOL learners seems to be a much broader thing. It's not just about reading and writing. It's everything. It's about being able to live in this country. (Sarah)

Literacy is not just in English, is it? (Mary)

For Debbie, implementing policy seemed to result in a battle to maintain standards in literacy classes. Most of her opinions were very different to those of the other interview participants, and she expressed very fixed views on what literacy is and what a literate adult should be able to do. She clearly felt very passionate about English / literacy and expressed concern with falling standards:

I think we all agree that standards are really really going down. That what's expected of someone in literacy is a lot less than what was expected three or four years ago … All the standards even loosely related to literacy are just going lower and lower.

Debbie raised the issue of standards ten times in an hour long interview, indicating the extent of her concern. She described how, in her opinion, the adult learners she worked with gave little importance to accurate spelling:

They might get too many Cs, too many Ss, not enough, get them the wrong way round and I'll point it out to them and they'll say, 'Well, you know what I meant. Does it matter?'

Her concerns focused particularly on handwriting, spelling and speaking, and she described how she was working to discourage the use of 'text-speak' in any context, how she brought in special paper for her learners to use to improve their handwriting, emphasized speaking without abbreviating words (such as 'wiv' to 'with') or dropping aitches because, *'The way we speak is really important. It says something about us.'* She also taught her learners about body language, which she saw as important because *'It's the unspoken word. It's communication.'* Unlike some of the other participants, Debbie's approach seems to be the opposite of a social practice approach to literacy. (Kendall and McGrath, 2014; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015).

Carol described the effects of policy for adult literacy education in her organisation, in particular, that '*The clear agenda that existed under Skills of Life doesn't really exist anymore'* and also that there was a move away from being student-centred to being more driven by the syllabus:

Some of the individualisation is being lost. Funding changes have forced people to change their model of practice – bigger classes and calling it `English' rather than `literacy' is a move away from a social practice model to a skills model. There is more of a concern with young people leaving school without English and maths, i.e. 16-19 year olds and Functional Skills, but not adult literacy as it used to be known. The subject is being vocationalised and taught in colleges now

rather than community-based learning but the removal of the National Test is an improvement.

Working within policy frameworks

For some participants, this frustration at the restrictions caused by policy had a significant influence on their practice. One of the teachers (Sarah) who participated in the follow-up interviews, for example, had changed her role during the period between the telephone interview and our face-to-face meeting. Sarah described her frustration at what she saw as the restrictions on her practice at her previous organisation that resulted from funding constraints and assessment processes and felt that the required focus on employability was limiting as *'Literacy is not just about filling in a form.'* She explained how this had motivated her to resign from her post and become a freelance teacher, offering literacy classes that she felt were more geared towards learners' individual interests in which they would develop their literacy through involvement in project work, creative writing and reading for pleasure. Teaching in this way allowed her to maintain her own personal and professional values relating to literacy education and to focus more on her learners' own goals and preferences. In this way she was able to resist the policy requirements of a publicly funded literacy programme.

While Sarah felt so strongly against the current policy agenda she was motivated to leave her job, for other practitioners, the ways in which they worked within these constraints also suggest a certain amount of resistance. For example, although many practitioners viewed the change in terminology from 'literacy' to 'English' positively, feeling that it gave them the opportunity to offer a broader and more challenging curriculum, some were less enthusiastic and for Carol this was an aspect of policy she was trying to resist:

> *'English' implies a Standard English for particular purposes leading to a top-down approach. I am trying to avoid this to focus on learners' own needs and purposes. Trying to hold on to the term literacy rather than English.*

Depending on the nature of their organisations, some participants, such as Faye, still had some flexibility in what they were able to teach: *It's quite flexible really is the stuff that we teach there'* or were able to offer short, unaccredited courses in spelling,

punctuation or creative writing to build learners' confidence before they progressed on to Functional Skills or GCSE courses. As Felicity explained:

I guess we have a lot more leniency with that than some colleges which are just maybe offering Functional Skills at different levels.

This flexibility provided the opportunity to avoid the constraints of a narrow employability-based or qualifications-focused literacy curriculum (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton, 2014; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). In fact, adopting a broad approach to literacy teaching, despite the restrictions of funding and the requirement for learners to achieve qualifications, was a common feature in teachers' responses and Felicity went on to explain how she incorporates literature and creative writing into her literacy classes in order to avoid an approach to literacy that focused solely on examinations and outcomes:

It's not just about an exam … I feel we're in danger of losing the love of literature, the love of writing ... we are having to just drill it in … I suppose hopefully you're going to engender some kind of interest … you know lots of people say, 'I've never read a book before.' You know there is that introducing them to little snippets of literature and hopefully there is that wider thing of it's not just about an exam. It's about enjoyment as well.

Sarah seemed to resist the constraints created by adult literacy focused on employability through the recognition that learners had different motivations for developing their literacy:

I don't think it's just about work actually. A lot of people come here because they have to. Sometimes pressure from the Job Centre and so on … but for some people in the class their reasons for coming are very different. I think it's more about being amongst people who are in a similar position to them socially, as well as to do with being literate and about gaining confidence generally … They might then feel more able to go out into the wider world whether it's to get a job or progress on to a college course … I'm not sure when they joined the class that that could have been their aspiration.

Meanwhile, Carol described the strategy she had adopted as a means of negotiating 'policy requirements and professional commitments' (Dennis, 2015, p.66) as 's*trategic compliance'.* She explained how she worked within policy frameworks, but by not allowing their requirements to dominate her practice she protected her own values in relation to what is important in literacy teaching, keeping the particular needs of her group of learners at the forefront of her practice. One way she did this was through:

> *… making space for things like creative writing as well as meeting regulations. It's not part of the curriculum but learners often respond well to it using genres they are familiar with.*

Some responses to policy were pragmatic. Sonia, for instance, explained that in her organisation, due to the requirements of their funding:

> *Instead of calling it English or literacy we have to call it 'Communication for Employment … anything to do with personal development and we have to put the word 'employability' in it or 'employment skills'. It's jargon basically to get the funding.*

However, she still managed to keep her learners' (or clients') individual needs, interests and preferences central to her practice:

> *… quite a lot of them in recovery will come here in the afternoon to keep themselves busy, to keep themselves occupied … it's client–led basically. We have to have a consultation with our clients about what it is they want to do and we'll try to incorporate that. We've had a lot of, 'Will you help us with our spelling?' because a few of them have had problems with helping their children with their homework ... we work together … and the differentiation is phenomenal.*

The ways in which Sonia, along with other literacy practitioners, worked within policy frameworks, reflect what Smythe (2015, p. 6) refers to as 'workarounds', that is, strategies of 'problem-solving, improvisation, deviation, creative interpretation, short

cuts and so on' they used when policies conflicted with their own values or did not work well within the reality of their own particular settings.

Debbie's approach to her practice might also be seen as strategic, though perhaps in a different way to some of the other practitioners interviewed. As explained previously in this chapter, her views and values expressed in the telephone and face-to-face interviews were very different to those of the other participants, and while she acknowledged that, '*There are prescribed things you have to do*' she was also able to incorporate within her teaching the things she felt were important in literacy, such as handwriting and observing certain conventions in speech and writing. She was very clearly working to preserve her own values in relation to literacy education, in the way that Hodgson, Edward and Gregson (2007, p.223) described how literacy teachers' practice in their study was influenced by their professional values above all else, values are the 'ultimate driver' in fact. They argue that, although practitioners acknowledged they had targets to address, their own values, such as meeting learners' needs and creating an appropriate learning environment for their communities took priority. Similar priorities are demonstrated by the participants in my research where the requirements for end examinations and the learners' achievement of qualifications linked to course funding appears at times to be in conflict with their personal and professional values.

Edwards et al. (2009) argue that much policy making is based on an autonomous view of literacy and some teachers in their practice seem to resist this by refusing to treat literacy as a collection of separate skills. Sarah, for instance, described her approach to a topic:

> *… we might watch a short video on the internet, then we might talk about it, we might read something about it, we might do some writing about it so all those skills were combined.*

Some practitioners also seem to balance the constraints of an employability and qualifications focused curriculum by valuing and celebrating the successes of their learners in non-work based contexts. The ways in which learners use their literacy to support their children with school work, for instance, was a commonly recurring theme

in the interviews and focus groups, as was learners' increased involvement in their communities as a result of their literacy development. Sarah was especially proud of her learners' achievements, one of whom had become a 'Reading Friend' at her child's school, providing support and encouragement for the children's reading, after improving her own confidence through attending literacy classes. Another member of the group had recently had some of her creative writing published in the local newspaper (Julie). In a different organisation, a teacher working with learners recovering from substance addiction praised their ability to stick at the course, to engage and to demonstrate commitment:

> *A lot of the clients said that coming to classes actually helps them to commit to things. Because of the nature of their addiction they don't tend to stick to things … Obviously we have to be very engaging with them to get them to stay but the majority of them do come back, which is very good.* (Sonia).

A strong sense of collaboration and equity within adult literacy classes also emerged from the interviews and focus groups. The constant use of the pronoun 'we' in the first focus group illustrates this well:

Sarah (teacher): *We used computers quite a lot, didn't we, last time. What did we use them for?*

Jess (learner): *On the blog. We went on the blog.*

Sarah: *We had a class blog.*

Julie: *And we'd leave a message. Yes, we used them. Yes, we did.*

Sarah: *And we would do things sometimes online. We did a lot of using Google to do research.*

A spirit of collaboration was also apparent in the way learners' preferences and interests were used as the basis for literacy development. Sarah, for example, encouraged one learner's particular flair for creative writing within the literacy class and also outside it, *'You do a lot of writing at home, don't you? Writing creatively'.* She also promoted peer support:

There's a very warm co-operative feeling in the classes and also the sense that people are in the same boat.

This was echoed by the learners in the focus group:

We all look out for one another. (Jess)

Sarah: *You particularly [Julie] were very hesitant about using the computer, weren't you?*

Julie: *Yeah, I was.*

Sarah: *But it was a very co-operative class, with a lot of peer help and by the end of it you were a lot better weren't you?*

Julie: *Yeah, I could do it by the end of the class.*

Jess: *You got there, yeah.*

The collaborative and supportive nature of the work carried out in the class was more suggestive of an approach that valued learners' well-being and personal achievement than one which was predominantly focused on employability outcomes. In other collaborative approaches, two of the other teachers interviewed discussed some of the interview questions with their learners (i.e. what can a literate adult do and why an adult should be literate) as in this comment made by one interview participant who had spoken to her group of learners prior to the interview:

Well, I was talking to the clients today about this. I was telling them what I was doing this afternoon. They were all very very thrilled to be part of this. (Sonia)

… they're in a welcoming, friendly environment. It's just like a big family really. (Faye)

These tutors and learners seemed to be working in a 'democratic learning space' in which participation is equal and where learners have input into what and how they learn and into setting their own objectives. (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017, p.392). Ade-Ojo and Duckworth argue that democratic learning spaces can be in conflict with a human capital approach to education which is concerned with 'quantifiable

productivity, resources and the opportunity cost of investment in education, earnings and marketability' (ibid.) An 'affinity space' in which the focus is on shared interests and goals (Gee, cited in Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015, p.4) may also be a fitting description of the learning environments some of these practitioners created which appear to resist what they see as the constraints of a target driven, qualifications oriented and employability focused curriculum.

Influence of participants' organisations

As explained in Chapter 3, interview participants were drawn from a number of different types of organisation. Six participants worked in further education colleges, two in an adult education college which they described as a 'second chance' college, three were from local education authority providers, four from private training organisations and two from an educational charity. An observation, although not a generalisation due to the relatively small size of the sample, is that there appears to be a link between the nature of the institutions in which they work and the ways in which they responded to policy. The teachers from the further education colleges, for example, seemed to be the ones who felt most restricted by policy, expressing the most concerns about it being driven by targets, qualifications and examinations with the ensuing loss of focus on learners and their individual needs and about the pressures resulting from funding processes. Their responses were very focused on the policy around GCSE English and the challenges that brought.

Practitioners in the local education authority training provider, meanwhile, experienced similar frustrations, with the added challenge of learners being mandated from the Job Centres and the effects of this on motivation in the classroom, along with cuts to funding due to their provision being post-19. They also recognised funding and the need for end examinations as the driver behind their provision but were able to counter this to some extent by offering leisure courses (such as sewing) and aimed to give learners *'wider knowledge'* than that purely needed to pass an exam (Joe).

All four participants from private training providers stressed employability as influencing their practice, but they expressed less of the frustration experienced by practitioners from further education colleges and the local education authority training provider. Within their employability remit they had some flexibility about what they

could teach in literacy classes, though as explained earlier, one organisation had to take a pragmatic approach as to how these courses were labelled and marketed.

The educational charity and the adult education college were both described by participants employed by them as 'social purpose' organisations, and would, therefore, lay claim to an ethos of equality, concern for the individual and 'personal transformation' as well as community benefit and social action (Mycroft, 2018, p.96); a very different to situation to the funding driven approach described by teachers from other organisations. Although the practitioners in these organisations still worked within government policy frameworks for Functional Skills or GCSE English, local policy also had a significant influence on their practice, including the learners they worked with and the content of their classes. They are the participants who described the greatest flexibility in the way policy was enacted within their practice.

Conclusion

Interview participants showed differing levels of knowledge regarding the specific policies governing adult literacy education in their organisations. Some demonstrated a very keen awareness, while others admitted to not knowing. Some identified national, government policy as being the most influential. For others, institutional policy was also very prominent. All discussed the effects of these polices on their practice, however, regardless of their awareness of what that policy might be called. There are evident differences in the ways in which participants respond to, interpret, implement and negotiate policy relating to adult literacy education, such as some viewing the change in terminology from 'literacy' to 'English' in a positive light, while others saw it more negatively. Similarly, there were varied opinions on Functional Skills and GCSE examinations, which some found constraining, but others thought were an improvement to the end tests required by the older Skills for Life qualifications. However, there are also major similarities, particularly the shared frustration around the constraints resulting from funding mechanisms, along with the adoption of pragmatic approaches, 'strategic compliance' and even subtle methods of resistance in response to policy for adult literacy.

In some cases, there seems to be a link between the type of organisation in which practitioners teach and their response; more constraints being identified by teachers

in further education colleges and local education authority training providers, for instance, alongside greater flexibility to respond in more creative ways in the private and charity organisations. However, widely shared were the measures practitioners were taking to ensure that their own personal professional values, including the recognition of the wider benefits to be gained from attending literacy classes and concern for the individual needs and interests of their learners, survived these constraints.

Equally significant are participants' understandings of literacy as a concept. The majority of participants took a broad view of what adult literacy education entails, including creative writing, a love of reading, working collaboratively and learning for enjoyment, rather than the need to improve one's literacy purely to gain and maintain employment and acquire qualifications. None completely accepted the focus on employability, targets and qualifications they identified as surrounding adult literacy education.

In the next and final chapter of the thesis I summarise the findings of the research and consider the contribution it has made to knowledge in the field of adult literacy. I consider possible directions for further research and draw final conclusions on the ways in which literacy is perceived by policy-makers, practitioners and learners.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

The aim of the research was to determine the ways in which literacy is currently perceived and conceptualised by teachers, learners and policy-makers within adult literacy education in England and also to investigate how policy for adult literacy is enacted by practitioners. My intention was to build on, and also to extend, work previously carried out on the development of adult literacy education, such as that which analysed the Skills for Life initiative and Functional Skills policy (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Taylor, 2008b; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011) while also making a contribution to theoretical understandings of literacy. I set out to address the following research questions:

- How is literacy conceptualised within current educational policy?
- What does the term 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?
- How is policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

To access the perceptions of policy makers I used a Critical Discourse Analysis approach to analyse policy texts and identify the perceptions of literacy on which they are based. Interviews with teachers of adult literacy and discussion groups with learners allowed access to their opinions regarding the nature and purpose of literacy and, in relation to teachers, provided insight into the ways in which they enacted policy within their practice.

In this concluding chapter I summarise the main findings from the research and make links where appropriate with the key themes which emerged from the literature review. I present the conclusions to which my findings have led in relation to each of the research questions identified at the beginning of the study. I identify the contribution to knowledge made by my study and consider its implications, along with possible directions for further research.

Summary

Research question 1: How is literacy conceptualised within current educational policy?

In order to answer the first research question, I analysed a series of policy documents, ranging in date from 2010 to 2016, which provided the most up to date statement of government policy for adult literacy education in England. (An overview of this policy is given in Chapters 4 and 6). Within the policy documents, literacy is understood as reading and writing along with speaking and listening. Technology is mentioned only very briefly, suggesting that policy-makers view literacy as involving predominantly print-based texts. Analysis of the documents revealed a view of literacy in which it is consistently perceived as a skill or collection of skills to be judged against a set of standards and which can be measured in levels and stages, without giving consideration to social context. This view echoes the 'autonomous' model identified in analyses of earlier policies for adult literacy (Street, 1995; Bartlett, 2008; Crowther and Tett, 2011; Edwards et al., 2009) which is also described as a 'traditional approach' to literacy, and is based on reading and writing using paper-based materials with literacy being understood as a set of measurable, technical skills that are acquired by learners and that are independent of any social context. This approach to literacy also values certain forms of reading and writing above others, an interesting point when compared with the comments about 'good' literacy in current policy (Street, 1995; Bartlett, 2008; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; St Clair, 2012). Edwards et al. (2009) argued that much policy-making seemed to have been based on this model and this appears to be the case with current policy.

References to 'good' literacy (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.4; Department for Education, 2016, p.10) although not fully explained in the documents, are suggestive of the view that some literacy is better than others, and again fit the 'autonomous' model of literacy mentioned above, a key feature of which is the making of value judgements about literacy. The privileging of certain aspects of literacy may also be seen in the shift in preferred terminology from 'literacy' to 'English' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11). Although no reason or justification for this is given, it may reflect a view of literacy which privileges 'schooled'

literacy (Street and Street, 1997, p.72) and focuses on Standard English without acknowledging that literacy exists in other languages.

Through the language used in the documents: 'needs', 'problem', 'tackle' and so on (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.16) and the emphasis they place on the need to make individuals recognise when their literacy skills are insufficient for their work and everyday lives, the documents also suggest a 'deficit' approach to literacy in which literacy is perceived as a barrier in people's lives or as a problem that needs to be addressed or overcome (Taylor, 2008b; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Kendall and McGrath, 2014).

My analysis of the policy documents relating to adult literacy education in England revealed a clear discourse of functionalism, as identified in previous analyses of UK policy and international literacy surveys (Burgess and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b; Black and Yasukawa, 2014). This discourse emerges through the use of economic and financial vocabulary and through the regular repetition of terms relating to employability; *impact, outcomes, performance, investment, earnings and employers and Net Present Value* are typical examples. The current policy approach to literacy education is still predominantly target-driven and focused particularly on issues relating to employability and the economy (Maclellan, 2011; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). The influence of a human resource model of literacy (Hamilton, 2012) is discernible in the focus on economic success through increased literacy and also in the expectation that individuals will recognise when they need to develop their literacy and will take responsibility for this in order to contribute to the prosperity of the nation as a whole as well as their own well-being. While there is recognition, in some of the documents, of the broader social and personal benefits to be gained from literacy, including a greater possibility of social mobility, increased self-confidence, improved family and individual well-being, the emphasis on employability and economic issues outweighs this. The focus on employability and vocational issues in the documents suggests that literacy is perceived by policy-makers as a means of progression towards work or further study, rather than being a desirable goal in itself. This is further emphasized by absences within the texts of the use and development of literacy for pleasure, personal satisfaction or creativity. Issues of social justice (Hamilton, 2012)

and the notion of literacy as a human right (Benavot, 2015; Post, 2016) do not feature in the documents.

These features of the policy documents present a perception of literacy that is predominantly instrumental and focused on the production and maintenance of a skilled workforce for the benefit of national prosperity and global competitiveness (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2015a; Williams, 2008). This also suggests a neo-liberal perspective on literacy and literacy education through the focus on employability (Allatt and Tett, 2018) and individual responsibility (Davies and Bansel, 2007).

Research question 2: What does 'literacy' mean to teachers of adult literacy and their learners?

The second question I addressed was to an extent in response to the literature review which had found little coverage of the views of literacy practitioners, with the exception of Kendall and McGrath's study of reading (2014) and no consideration at all of the learners' perceptions. It seemed particularly important to ask this question, therefore. To access the views of teachers and learners I conducted seventeen telephone and three face-to-face interviews with teachers, along with discussions with two groups of literacy learners. During the interviews I had asked the teachers why, in their opinions, adults should be literate and what, as literate adults, they should be able to do. In the discussion groups I asked the learners what literacy meant to them in order to initiate discussion about the nature of literacy. A variety of views about literacy was revealed by their responses, with some common ground between teachers and learners, along with certain differences in viewpoint. The teachers all included reading and writing in their perceptions of literacy, for instance, but with differing views on what these entailed. For some, reading was predominantly for day-to-day purposes or functions, but others added that this involved doing so with critical awareness and also with enjoyment. Writing ranged from being able to communicate through the written word and express one's opinions, to using accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling and having neat handwriting. Speaking and listening featured in their views, but to varying degrees. Generally, though, communication was a regular feature amongst their responses. Some teachers felt that numeracy was an important part of being literate, as were digital skills. The use of texting, email and social media were included in a

third of the teachers' views of what literacy entailed, an interesting comparison with Kendall and McGrath's study (2014) in which none of the teachers surveyed felt that digital skills were a feature of being literate. Their study was about reading, rather than literacy more generally, which may account for the different outcome to my research. The difference in response does, however, further highlight the variation in perceptions of literacy.

Most practitioners in my study felt that the Government's preference for the use of 'English' rather than 'literacy' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11) had made little difference to their practice. Some did express views about the connotations of the two terms, though, feeling that 'English' was a broader concept which, to employers and learners, may seem more academic and might carry more status. 'Literacy' meanwhile, could be associated with a lack of success in a learner's previous education.

Notions of 'functioning' in everyday life were also common within the responses, as in the policy documents, but in teachers' views functioning was also about being an active member of one's community and participating in society. Literacy was related to work to a certain degree, but greater emphasis was given to the wider benefits of literacy, such as personal autonomy, independence, and empowerment. In Kendall and McGrath's research the literacy teachers surveyed understood literacy in ways which reflected the 'dominant policy discourse' (2014, p.71). With one notable exception (Debbie – who was particularly concerned about standards) this was not the case in my sample. Practitioners' views were much broader than those presented in policy discourse.

Within the two groups of learners I met, literacy was discussed in quite different ways. For one group, literacy was very much about reading and writing for pleasure. Speaking and listening were also important, but with an emphasis on listening. Literacy also had implications for community and family, self-confidence and empowerment. Digital skills were seen as part of being literate, but books and handwriting were still valued. In the other group, equal importance was given to reading and writing, but different aspects of literacy were emphasized, including vocabulary (using 'big' words), spelling, handwriting ('joined-up') and the use of standard English for work. No one

mentioned listening, but speaking to make oneself understood and communication in general featured in their responses, as did the additional benefits of being better able to support their children with schoolwork and of having access to further study as a result of improving their literacy. They expressed a more functional view of literacy, and also clearly linked maths / numeracy with literacy and identified having digital skills as another aspect of being literate. It was interesting that in the first focus group the term 'literacy' was used throughout, whereas in the second group, although my opening question asked about 'literacy', the learners referred to 'English' without exception. This could be due to the influence of the type of organisation and the nature of their programme of study. The first group took place in an adult literacy class in a village community centre with a freelance teacher and the learners were not working towards a qualification. In comparison, the second group met in a local education authority run inner city adult education centre where the learners (a mixture of native English speakers and ESOL learners) were working towards Functional Skills qualifications so would be accustomed to their subject being referred to as 'English'.

In addition to my findings from the interviews and focus groups, I also made use of data shared with me by two of the teachers interviewed who had asked their groups of learners the questions about what a literate adult can do and why they should be literate. Similar responses to those outlined above were given and these reinforce the findings from my own data. One group stressed independence, power and confidence and the other talked about better jobs, reading for everyday activities such as shopping and using public transport, helping their children through school and having greater self-confidence.

Common ground between the teachers' and learners' views included the perception of literacy as involving reading and writing for different purposes, though there were differences of opinion on what those purposes included. The role of technology as an aspect of literacy and, to a lesser extent, the relationship between literacy and numeracy / maths were also shared. In addition, the benefits for learners' families and children, personal confidence and social participation were amongst the shared perceptions of literacy. Differences were related to the issue of functional literacy, where many of the teachers spoke about everyday tasks to do with the home, transport, shopping, healthcare and so on, while learners gave little explicit

consideration to this. Their perception of the need for literacy was more to do with participation and getting on in life. Generally, however, teachers' and learners' views were broadly similar.

Particularly apparent in the teachers' views was the range of responses, from one teacher who expressed the most fixed view of what literacy entailed and who privileged certain forms of literacy or aspects of it above others to the one who rejected the instrumental, functionalist view of literacy for one which was much broader. There were various views in between. Again, the potential influence of the type of organisation in which teachers work may be of significance. The teachers interviewed who taught in colleges were more likely to take a more instrumental view than those working in private or community based settings with less or no managerial control and different funding mechanisms.

Research question 3: How is literacy policy enacted by teachers of adult literacy?

The third and final research question was based on an understanding of policy enactment as not just implementing policy, but also interpreting and translating it (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010). To address the question, I used the data from the interviews with practitioners. I found that responses ranged from fully embracing policy to resisting its effects, with various practical and pragmatic solutions in between. Teachers replied to questions about policy in different ways, with an apparent lack of certainty about the exact policy for adult literacy education at present. I find it interesting, and perhaps significant, that this reflects my own experience of struggling to identify current policy in the early stages of my research. Some of the practitioners interviewed claimed to know little or nothing about the policies that influenced their practice. Others named a range of policies, including Skills for Life (2001), the move towards GCSE English rather than Functional Skills as the preferred qualification for most adult literacy learners (2015) and the replacement of the term 'literacy' with 'English' (2011). Some identified organisational policies, such as following a social purpose approach to adult education, alongside national ones as governing practice. Some practitioners identified benefits arising from policy, such as Functional Skills

allowing greater flexibility for topics and approaches that could be used in the adult literacy classroom and assessment processes that were more rigorous and robust than multiple choice tests. The general view, in addition, was that referring to 'English' rather than 'literacy' was a positive move, with the former being more widely understood by learners and employers, carrying less of a stigma and, because of its greater breadth, allowing more in depth study of written texts and greater opportunity to focus on punctuation, grammar and spelling. There were exceptions to this, with some criticism that this implied a top down approach that was not appreciated by some interviewees.

The challenges presented by current policy were also commented upon by interview participants. This included the constraints some identified as resulting from funding mechanisms, the focus on examinations and learners' achievement of qualifications within relatively short timescales, along with the employability agenda, all of which resulted in a curriculum which may not address learners' particular needs or preferences. In some cases, the expectation that learners will achieve qualifications, including GCSE English, was felt to be unrealistic. Changes to funding for ESOL learners had resulted in some practitioners having to change their classroom practice to cater for mixed groups of ESOL and native English speakers. The referral of unemployed people from the Job Centres to literacy classes had also brought challenges.

Some of the teachers discussed ways in which they resisted to an extent the constraints they felt policy presented for their practice. One way of doing this, for instance, was by taking an approach of 'strategic compliance' which entailed working within policy frameworks while ensuring their practice was still led by their own values in relation to literacy teaching, such as the focus on the particular needs and preferences of learners. Certain responses to policy were, by necessity, also pragmatic, such as the titles literacy courses were given in order to attract funding. Meanwhile, acknowledging and valuing their learners' success in contexts other than work and examinations was, for some interviewees, a way of resisting the constraining effects of a literacy curriculum concerned with employability and the achievement of qualifications. The teaching environment was a further means by which some teachers countered a curriculum that is target driven and employability focused. Collaboration

and mutual support between learners was encouraged, for example, along with classrooms in which learners have some influence over what they learn and how.

In relation to policy, there appears to be a link between teachers' and learners' views and the nature of the organisations in which they work or study. The teachers from the educational charity and the adult education college with their 'social purpose' approaches had the greatest flexibility as to how policy was enacted within their practice. Meanwhile, the teachers from the further education colleges expressed the most frustration at their practice being restricted by targets, examinations and funding pressures. The range of responses in between included some frustration from practitioners in local education authority and private training providers, at employability focused policies, for instance, but this was generally to a lesser extent than the frustration expressed by teachers in further education colleges and was often mediated by greater flexibility in relation to what they could teach in their classes. There seems to be a connection between the type of organisation in which teachers work and learners study and their views of what literacy is too. For example, teachers and learners in further education colleges and local education authority training providers take a view of literacy that seems to be more aligned with policy (i.e. a fixed view of what literacy is, along with a focus on employability and vocational outcomes). Private training providers have more flexibility in what and how they teach and can focus more on creativity and learners' preferences.

In the next section of the chapter I consider the contribution my research has made to knowledge in relation to adult literacy.

Contribution to knowledge

By analysing more recent policy documents (up to the present day), this study has built on and extended previous work that considered the ways in which literacy was defined and understood within policy for adult literacy education up to and including the implementation of the Skills for Life Strategy in 2001. In doing so it has contributed to knowledge by providing a view of the present situation, that is, the view of literacy on which current policy making is based. Since 2001 and the last major policy development for adult literacy, governments have changed, as has the economic

climate and there have been further advances in digital technologies. My research therefore, considers the situation regarding adult literacy in a very different context to that in which previous analyses took place.

In responding to the question, 'How is literacy conceptualised within current education policy?' my research has reinforced the findings of previous analyses, in that the policy view of literacy largely conforms to Street's 'autonomous' model of literacy (1995) in the way it presents literacy as a distinct set of skills separated from social context. Within current policy, as in earlier policies (Edwards et al., 2009) literacy is understood as comprising measurable skills in the reading and writing of mainly printed texts and, to a lesser extent, speaking and listening. My research also found the same discourses of functionalism and deficit. Additionally, it found that the emphasis on employability and economic issues identified in earlier analyses is just as strong in current policy, as indicated by the naming of certain groups of people the government feels should be a priority in literacy education, such as 18 to 21 year olds, the unemployed, the homeless (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b). According to current policy, literacy is an individual's responsibility and not necessarily a right and, although it has a small role to play in a person's well-being, family-life and potential for social mobility, it is understood predominantly as a means to achieving employability and vocational outcomes for the benefit of the nation as a whole as well as for the individual. Literacy, in current policy, would seem to possess little, if any, value in its own right.

In addition to reinforcing the findings of previous studies, my research finds a new perspective on literacy in the policy decision to replace 'literacy' with 'English' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011b, p.11). Although most of the teachers interviewed said that the change had little or no effect on their practice, the comments they made about the possible different connotations of the two terms, particularly in relation to status and academic rigour is of significance. The association of 'English' with academic study and qualifications which was implied by some teachers' responses and also by the ways in which the terms were used by learners in the group discussions with learners (see summary relating to Research Question 2) also raises questions about the Government's preference for 'English'. With its connotations of qualifications, academic study and higher status than literacy, the preference for the use of 'English' suggests a devaluing of literacy, or at least adult

literacy in policy, a suggestion that is supported by the lack of specific policy for adult learners. It also suggests further limitations to the curriculum in the way in which this development reinforces a restricted view of a set of skills in a national language which is taught through formal education (Bartlett, 2008; Edwards et al., 2009; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; St Clair, 2012).

This study makes a further contribution to knowledge by accessing the views of teachers of adult literacy and their learners on what it means to be literate; opinions that have been little heard until now. Although based on a small sample of practitioners and learners, my data show the variety of ways in which literacy is understood in practice. The interviews with teachers and discussions with learners illustrated how literacy means different things to different people. Overall, literacy meant reading and writing for a range of different purposes, though some practitioners and learners included the use and creation of texts for pleasure and self-expression and with critical awareness, as well as for work and study purposes. Speaking to make oneself understood and to voice one's opinions, along with the ability to listen, were also important aspects of being literate. My study compares teachers' and learners' views and finds that they generally matched in that they felt literacy played a role not just in functioning in work and everyday tasks, but also in allowing people to be active members of their communities, to gain individual empowerment, independence and autonomy, to grow in self-confidence and to support their families.

My study compares policy views of literacy with those of teachers and learners and the implications of the functional, instrumental view of literacy represented in policy for practitioners are seen in the constraints on their practice and the struggle to deliver a curriculum based on a broader understanding of literacy, which accommodates learners who may wish to develop their literacy skills for reasons other than, or additional to, employability and economic prosperity. For the adult literacy curriculum, the implications of the policy understanding of literacy are in the potential for it to lead to an impoverished curriculum based on the skills and competences policy-makers deem necessary to gain and maintain employment and economic success, with little scope for literacy development that is intended for enjoyment, personal satisfaction, self-expression and the benefit of the learner's community. My work shows, however, that practitioners, while working within the requirements, and sometimes the

constraints, of policy find ways of delivering literacy classes and enacting policy which allow them to maintain their own views of what is important in literacy along with those of their learners. Teachers demonstrated how they worked within national policy frameworks, often with a pragmatic response which allowed them to meet the requirements of policy while maintaining their own personal values or the values of their organisations in relation to learner-centred literacy provision. They work within, and, in some cases, resist the constraints of funding and of an outcomes focussed curriculum by adapting classroom practices to cater for mixed ability groups, ESOL and native English speakers and Job Centre referrals. Some also take creative approaches to the delivery of the adult literacy curriculum.

I have suggested that current policy is based on the same autonomous, functionalist, instrumental view of literacy that has been identified in earlier policies for adult literacy education in England. The opposite view to this would be the social practice approach identified in the literature review (Street, 1995) which acknowledges the existence of multiple literacies, understands literacy as varied 'social practices' rather than a series of skills and is more concerned with people's use of literacy in their everyday lives and own contexts. With one or two exceptions, however, interview and focus group participants' perceptions of literacy do not fully reflect this approach either. Although they, on the whole, take a broader view than that of policy in considering the benefits to family life, social participation, individual well-being and learning for pleasure as well as employment and functioning on a basic level, the notion of the plurality of literacy and the existence of 'literacies', for instance, does not feature in their responses. Most teachers' views of literacy seem to be practical and pragmatic. For learners it reflects their needs and interests at the time.

In terms of theoretical understandings of literacy, my study has reinforced the notion that literacy is not a fixed concept, that it may be perceived in a variety of ways and that these meanings evolve over time. It has supported the social practice model of literacy (Street, 1995; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Duckworth and Ade-Ojo, 2016) in finding some links between the setting or context in which practitioners were teaching and learners were studying and the ways in which literacy is understood. However, in exploring practitioners' responses to the policy and considering learners' use of the terms, I believe it has also raised a new question about literacy's relationship to English

that may call for a re-examination of these terms and whether or not they are actually different concepts in addition to the difference in the connotations they carry.

Implications for practice

The findings of this study have implications for practitioners in the field of adult literacy. Policy perceptions of literacy, I have shown, present a largely instrumental viewpoint that is predominantly concerned with employability and economic issues. This view of literacy exists potentially at the expense of the many other wider benefits of literacy such as the social and community participation, self-expression, power and independence and so on identified by teachers and learners. For teachers, recognising that literacy learners have different ways of understanding literacy, along with a variety of motivations for attending literacy classes which may not necessarily be related to employment or simply functioning in their every-day lives, could influence the curriculum in a positive way allowing for learners' interests to be accommodated. While working within the policy frameworks in order to meet the requirements of their organisations and funding mechanisms while still providing for learners' interests and motivations is challenging, some of the practitioners interviewed showed how they had found ways of working which allowed them to do this. Literacy practitioners are in a position to prevent the impoverished adult literacy curriculum that a neoliberal policy agenda threatens to create through its emphasis on economic success and vocational issues.

There are implications too for teacher educators in increasing the awareness of trainee teachers with regard to literacy learners' varied motivations and how these can be used to shape a diverse adult literacy curriculum which caters for adults who choose to develop their literacy, whether for employment or other reasons, and those who are required to do so by the Job Centre or because of conditions affecting the funding of their main courses of study.

Suggestions for further research

In my study, interviews with adult literacy practitioners and discussions with learners were based on small samples and, bearing in mind the relative absence of their views within the literature relating to literacy, there is scope for further research regarding

their perceptions and experiences. Consulting a larger number of learners would, for example, lead to a broader understanding of the ways in which the concept of literacy is understood by learners, of their motivations in studying it and of the expected benefits. Influencing policy is beyond the remit of this study, but future research into teachers' views might support a move towards a curriculum for adult literacy which acknowledges that people of all ages (i.e. not just school leavers) and from all areas of society might wish to develop their literacy, recognises that they may have different motivations and is based on an understanding of literacy which accommodates this.

A further topic for future research is the social practice view of literacy which features strongly in the literature relating to adult literacy education. An exploration of the extent to which the social practice model is reflected in teachers' practice, along with its capacity to resist or to work within the effects of current policy and a neoliberal approach to adult literacy education, would also make a contribution to understandings of the relationship between theory and practice within the field of adult literacy.

Future research could also utilize methods that are more collaborative and democratic (Duckworth and Hamilton, 2016, p. 175). The interest some practitioners showed in my research, with two of the teachers interviewed seeking my permission to ask some of the interview questions to their own groups of learners (as discussed in Chapter 5) suggests there may be scope for collaboration with practitioners in the research process. Collaboration with researcher practitioners would link research and practice in a way that was more 'empowering' for teachers and learners (ibid., p. 168). There is also scope for more creative methods that were more 'empowering' for participants. Mannion et al. (2007) describe some of the research methods used in the Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LfLFE) study in which researchers, teachers and college students investigated the students' uses of literacy within college and at home. The project involved students 'mapping' their literacy practices using floor maps of the college, photographing their 'interactions with texts' or 'photo-elicitation' (ibid., p. 22) and a participatory task which involved them selecting pre-prepared icons relating to literacy practices (with the option to make their own) and then grouping them in meaningful ways. Similar approaches would work in exploring adult literacy learners' perceptions. As explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology) I had originally considered using some form of visual and participatory approach with literacy learners in place of the

discussion groups, but decided against this, partly due to concerns for the amount of class time required. However, working alongside practitioner researchers would make this a more feasible method, especially where the task could be incorporated into their existing schedule rather than being an additional demand on their time and the curriculum. An approach which involved learners working together to produce a visual representation showing what literacy meant to them, a collage or mind map, for example, using terms, phrases and images provided for them but also allowing them to add their own, would be a viable alternative to a group discussion and may have the added advantage of supporting quieter learners who may not be confident to speak out in group situations.

Conclusion

The difficulty I experienced in finding a definitive statement of government policy for adult literacy education in England, combined with practitioners' uncertainty regarding the current policy situation, suggests that the focus on adult literacy has diminished in comparison to the introduction of the 'Skills for Life' initiative in 2001. This is supported by the lack of specific measures for adult learners within current policy. Although policy-makers expressed a commitment to funding adults to achieve level 2 qualifications in English, preferably GCSE (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014), no one significant policy has replaced Skills for Life. Rather, adult literacy education features as just one of a range of issues covered by several policy statements, with a focus on young people who have left school without Level 2 qualifications in English. It would seem, therefore, that adult literacy education is a small part of a broader skills agenda within policy, and the view of literacy on which government policy making is based is of literacy as a set of fixed or prescribed skills in reading and writing (using print-based materials) and also in speaking and listening. This perception of literacy is instrumental and functional, with an assumption on the part of policy-makers that adult literacy learning involves the acquisition of qualifications in order to find and maintain employment or to cope with everyday life. The view of literacy on which the policy documents are based is predominantly instrumental with suggestions of a neo-liberal perspective. The preference for the term 'English' suggests that certain forms of literacy use are privileged above others. Absent from the texts is any consideration of the possibility that learners might wish to develop their literacy in order to support their children with their own literacy and with

schoolwork, to enable them to be more active within their communities or simply for the pleasure to be derived from learning.

The research data suggest that there are some similarities between the views of literacy held by policy-makers, teachers of adult literacy and literacy learners; concerns regarding employability and the need to function in everyday life are among the views shared by policy and some research participants, for example. However, policy document analysis found discourses of functionalism and employability to a far greater extent than was present in the interview and discussion group transcripts. The ways in which teachers and learners understand literacy are much broader and varied than the perceptions on which policy-making is based. Teachers' and learners' responses link literacy far more to an individual's independence and well-being, to their self-esteem, personal confidence and social participation. They also present broader definitions of literacy which acknowledge the role played by digital technologies, creative writing, reading for pleasure and numeracy / maths, unlike the reading, writing and print-based and work-context focus of policy. Helping with their children's schooling and greater community involvement were also amongst the reasons learners and practitioners identified for being literate.

In investigating the ways in which literacy is currently perceived by teachers, learners and policy-makers, I found a complex situation in which the policy documents presented a fixed understanding of the meaning and purposes of literacy which has changed little over time, being very similar to the perceptions identified in analyses of the Skills for Life strategy (Hodgson, et al., 2007; Hamilton and Pitt, 2011b; Hamilton, 2014; Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2017) despite several changes in government and various social and technological developments. In contrast, however, teachers' and learners' views varied significantly, both from policy perceptions and amongst themselves. In some cases, these differences in perception create tension, with practitioners needing to find ways of working which meet the requirements of policy and the organisations in which they teach, while allowing them to maintain their own and their learners' views and values about what it is to be literate in the 21st century.

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Appendix 1: Pilot telephone interview questions

1. Briefly describe your role within the organisation eg. position, courses you teach on, nature of learners you work with.

2. In your opinion, what can a 'literate' adult do?

3. Why should adults be literate?

4. Functional Skills documents refer to "English' now rather than 'literacy'. Does this make any difference to your practice? If so, how?

5. What policy governs practice in adult literacy education within your college / organisation? (Or does your college / organisation have its own policy / strategy in relation to adult literacy education?).

6. Do you work full-time, part-time or voluntary?

7. How long have you worked in adult literacy (approximately)?

8. Which is your age group? 21-25: 26-35; 36-45; 45-55; 56-65; over 65

9. What is your highest qualification?

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development

<u>**Participant Information Sheet**</u>

Research Project Title: What does 'literacy' mean to adult literacy teachers, learners and policy-makers?

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. May I take this opportunity to thank you for taking time to read this.

What is the purpose of the project?

The project is being undertaken as part of the Doctor in Education programme at the University of Huddersfield. Its purpose is to investigate how literacy is currently perceived and conceptualised by teachers, learners and policy within adult literacy education and to identify the factors that influence these perceptions.

Why have I been chosen?

Your experience, views and perceptions as a practitioner within the field of adult literacy will be of value in determining the meaning of 'literacy' to teachers along with the factors that might influence this.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form, but please note that you will still be free to withdraw at any time and without giving an explanation.

What do I have to do?
You will be invited to take part in a telephone interview. This should take no more than 15 minutes of your time. You will be provided with the questions in advance of the interview.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?
There should be no foreseeable disadvantages to your participation. If you are unhappy or have further questions at any stage in the process, please address your concerns initially to the researcher if this is appropriate. Alternatively, please contact the research supervisor, School of Education & Professional Development, University of Huddersfield.

Will all my details be kept confidential?
All information which is collected will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in the thesis, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research will be written up in a doctoral thesis and presented for assessment in August 2018. If you would like a copy please contact the researcher.

Who has reviewed and approved the study, and who can be contacted for further information?

The research supervisor is Professor Lyn Tett.

School of Education and Professional Development

University of Huddersfield

01484 478247

L.tett@hud.ac.uk

Name and contact details of researcher:

Gwyneth Allatt, Senior Lecturer

School of Education and Professional Development

University of Huddersfield

01484 478280

G.A llatt@hud.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participant consent form (teachers)

University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development

<u>Participant Consent Form</u>

Title of Research Study: What does 'literacy' mean to adult literacy teachers, learners and policy-makers?

Name of Researcher: Gwyneth Allatt

Participant Identifier Number:

☐   I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet related to this research, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

☐   I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.

☐   I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

☐   I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant: …………………………………………………………

Signature of Participant: ……………………………………………………….

Date: …………………………

Name of Researcher:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Appendix 4: Participant consent form (learners)

University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development

<u>Participant Consent Form</u>

Title of Research Study: What does 'literacy' mean to adult literacy teachers, learners and policy-makers?

Name of Researcher: Gwyneth Allatt

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the following statements:

☐   I have been given information about the research and the chance to ask questions about it.

☐   I understand that I do not have to take part in the discussion and can leave at any time without giving a reason.

☐   I understand that my name will not be revealed.

☐   I give permission for my responses to be recorded

☐   I agree to take part in the research.

Name: ……………………………………………………………

Signature : ……………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………

Appendix 5: Telephone interview questions

1. Briefly describe the nature of your organisation (eg. further education college, offender learning etc.) and your role within it eg. position, courses you teach on, nature of learners you work with.

2. Why should adults be literate?

3. In your opinion, what skills or abilities should a 'literate' adult have?

4. Functional Skills documents refer to "English' now rather than 'literacy'. Does this make any difference to your practice? If so, how?

5. What, in your opinion, influences the literacy curriculum in your organisation?

6. *Follow-up to question 5. What policy governs practice in adult literacy education within your college / organisation? (Or does your college / organisation have its own policy / strategy in relation to adult literacy education?).*

   Supplementary question: What policy on adult literacy do you feel is currently influencing the curriculum in your organisation?

7. Do you work full-time, part-time or voluntary?

8. How long have you worked in adult literacy (approximately)

9. Which is your age group? 21-25: 26-35; 36-45; 45-55; 56-65; over 65

10. What is your highest qualification?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 6: Example of Wordsmith wordlist

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	% Lemm s Set
	THE	611	5.48	1	100.0(
2	AND	534	4.79	1	100.0(
3	TO	415	3.72	1	100.0(
4	OF	342	3.07	1	100.0(
5	#	320	2.87	1	100.0(
6	**IN**	233	2.09	1	100.0(
7	FOR	184	1.65	1	100.0(
8	A	163	1.46	1	100.0(
9	WE	136	1.22	1	100.0(
10	THAT	134	1.20	1	100.0(
11	IS	119	1.07	1	100.0(
12	SKILLS	118	1.06	1	100.0(
13	MATHS	99	0.89	1	100.0(
14	THIS	94	0.84	1	100.0(
15	BE	88	0.79	1	100.0(
16	ON	86	0.77	1	100.0(
17	ARE	85	0.76	1	100.0(
18	ENGLISH	85	0.76	1	100.0(
19	WITH	82	0.74	1	100.0(
20	GOVERNMENT	75	0.67	1	100.0(
21	HAVE	74	0.66	1	100.0(
22	LEARNING	73	0.65	1	100.0(
23	AS	66	0.59	1	100.0(
24	WILL	59	0.53	1	100.0(
25	WORK	59	0.53	1	100.0(
26	ADULT	56	0.50	1	100.0(
27	EDUCATION	55	0.49	1	100.0(
28	FUNDING	53	0.48	1	100.0(
29	THEIR	53	0.48	1	100.0(
30	BY	52	0.47	1	100.0(
31	NUMERACY	48	0.43	1	100.0(
32	HOW	44	0.39	1	100.0(
33	IT	**44**	0.39	1	100.0(
34	**S**	**44**	0.39	1	100.0(
35	LITERACY	42	0.38	1	100.0(
36	TRAINING	41	0.37	1	100.0(
37	AT	39	0.35	1	100.0(

Appendix 7: Face-to-face interview schedule

45 minute (max) interview (semi-structured):

Chat, intro and explanation – 5 mins

Main section of interview – 30 mins approx.

NB Remind interviewees what they said before.

Opening questions:

- What does 'literacy' mean to you?
- Is there a difference between 'literacy' and 'English'? If so, what?
  What do you think is the most important reason for an adult to be literate?
- Do you think there is a relationship between literacy and other issues? (Such as employability, participation in society, personal autonomy, empowerment etc.).

Possible prompts:

- Do you think the meaning of literacy has changed over time?
- Are reading and writing of equal importance?
- Does I.T. play a role?

Anything else participant would like to add? (5 mins)

Summary, close and thanks (5 mins).

Appendix 8: Prompts for discussions with learners

Main question:

- What does 'literacy' mean?

Possible prompts if needed:

- ☐ What is the most important reason for a person to be literate?
- ☐ What are the benefits of being literate?
- ☐ Are reading and writing of the same importance in literacy or is one more important than the other?
- ☐ Are computers important in literacy?

Appendix 9a: Example of document analysis (linguistic features)

Part One: Introduction

1. The Government is grateful for the opportunity to address the issues raised in this thoughtful and informative report on <u>adult literacy</u> and <u>numeracy We</u> have considered the wide ranging and construjctive recommendations contained within the report very carefully and our responses to the specific recommendations made by the Select Committee are set out below.

2. <u>Wef</u> are pleased that the Committee, through this Inquiry, has iidentified <u>thafliteracy</u> (that is, speaking, listening, reading and writing) is <u>essential</u> for learning and <u>for 'bperating in ork</u> and in <u>veryday life</u>. Similarly we are encouraged that th! Committee understands/ numeracy to be the foundation for <u>labour market</u> success and has used this opportunity to highlight the importance of this in <u>everyday problem solving.</u> We agree with the Committee on these two fundamental points.

3. There is clear evidence of the <u>benefits to the individual</u> and to: the wider economy and to society of improving people's 1ite racy and numeracy <u>levels</u>. The NPV per pound spent on <u>English</u> and maths in adult learning <u>is'-esti'mated to be around £28</u> and there are <u>demonstrable</u> "'fl.... positive effects on <u>employment and earning's</u> - in short adults;who study these subjects subsequently improve their likelihood of peing'n <u>work and/or irwreasing their wages</u> and this plays back into a <u>stronge</u>r <u>economy</u> and <u>returns for the taxpayer?-In</u> addition, there are <u>wider</u> <u>social and personal benefits</u> associated with study such as . improvements <u>to self-confidence, personal efficacy, health, stjcial mobility and family life</u>.

4. We do not pretend that improving adult <u>literacy</u> and numeracy is an <u>easy problem to tackl€.</u> It is not.E'J _relationship between studying and <u>positivEf outcomes</u> is <u>highly corftingent on</u> people's motivcltions and circumstances and these can change rapidly. Over the last fifteen years, successive administrations have made a considerable : <u>investment</u> in both schools and adult ducation. Some of thi <u>has paid off</u> in terms of <u>improved ratel of literacy</u> in the adult population. However our numeracy levels remain largely static. This Government has put in place a major research programme on English and maths precisely because we need to understand the <u>challenge</u>fin rriuch greater detail than we do currently in order that future <u>investrnent an</u> be smarter and more focused than it has been in the past. This includes research into areas which, to date, have been relatively unexplored, through the new Behavioural Research Centre for Adult

Skills and Knowledge. Details of the full research programm are set out in this response.

5. Given the primacy of good literacy and numeracy to success i.n other learning and the !aboutmarket, the Government continues to !prioritise English and maths for all adults who have not yet reached GCSE standard in these subjects. In the 2013/14 academic year 951,800 adults aged 19 or over participated in government funded English and maths further education training courses. Last year 16-18 year old students taking English GCSE increased by 53% (or 52,000) nd maths GCSE by 36% (or 63,000).

6. We have a strong focus on enabJing participation by ttiose w o would benefit most, especially the more disadvantaged and unemployed. A significant proportion of learners are^{4}w orking at the lowest levels! many are,...unemployed or inactive and are embarking on a journey to improve their and their family's prospects. We have increasedJhe flexipility that providers have to tailor their progiammes to meet the needs ,of their learners and, as a result, English and maths courses take many forms, from work-based learning to community classes. We suppotiEnglish'· and maths in prisons, in community centres and in colleges'as stand-alone night classes or embedded in vocational programmes!We now plan to assess the role that Children's Centres can play in this area. We are also seeing a significant growth in online training and the widespread use of technology to enhance the curriculum and!facilitate self-study.

7. Such diversity is essential if we are to support the wide range!of needs s-in the population and foster innovation. But it should not becqme an excuse for compromising on quality. Pwe have reformed the "{ay in which the quality of further education is assured and we parti ularly welcome Ofsted's increasing focus on English and maths teaching and learning in schools and in further education We have improv d the quality and relevance of GCSEs in English and mathematics and now intend to do the same for other qualifications, including Functipnal Skills, which are also widely studied. We have an increased emphasis on raising the capacity and quality of the FE workforce, with a; £30m investment over two years, and on identifying new ways of te ching English and maths that are more engaging for those adults w o have 5 not succeeded in more formal education.

8. Attitudes to English and maths run very deep and many peop!e with low skills^{7}approach the subjects with a sense of failure Our mbition,P not just for the Government but for the country as a whole, must be to

create a culture of aspiration and expectation that achievement of

English and maths at level 2 is the norm and to encourage pe;ople to recognise that they have simply not yet achieved: Our reform to early years' education and schools place acquiring good <u>literacy</u> arid numeracy at the heart of the curriculum, and this is now beginning to bear fruit. For example, in 2013, 85% of students at Key Stage 2 were national curriculum level 4 or above in maths compared with 0% in 2010.

9. Once people are out of full-time education and training, it is   . increasingly clea that <u>labour market engagement, i.e. work</u> i the biggesfdriver <u>of skills</u> development. We have already embed ed <u>English and maths</u> into our work-based training programmes, :notably apprenticeships and traineeships.

1O. In our response, we set out how our programme of work and reforms to the funding, quality and delivery <u>ofiEnglish</u> and maths for aduits helps to address the Committee's observations and recommendatiqns. This subject is of <u>critical importance to the whole country</u> and one pot wholly owned by Government but by all of usP We welcome the Selejct Committee's report as the <u>opportunity to</u> further this national ebate.

Refs.)
Emph .

Appendix 9b: Example of document analysis (main discourses)

Part One: Introduction

1. The Government is grateful for the opportunity to address the,issues raised in this thoughtful and informative report on adult literacy and numeracy. We have considered the wide ranging and constructive recommendations contained within the report very carefully and our responses to the specific recommendations made by the Select Committee are set out below.

2. We are ple sed that the Committee, through this Inquiry, has identified bE.F that literacy (that is, speaking, listening, reading and writing) i essential for learning and for operating in work and in everyd y life. 1>1_ J)z_ Similarly we are encouraged that the Committee understands: numeracy to be the foundation for labour market success and has used "D3 this opportunity to highlight the importance of this in everyday:problem b, solving. We agree with the Committee on these two fundamental points.

3. There is clear evide c f he be efits to the in ividual and to: the wider l:>3 economy and to society of improving people's literacy and numeracy levels. The NPV per pound spent on English and maths in adult learning is estimated to be around £28 and there are demonstrable J)Q :; t)3 positive effects on employment and earnings - in short adults: who study these subjects subsequently improve their likelihood of peing'in "h2._ work and/or increasing their wages and this plays back into a stronger 1) 3 economy and returns for the taxpayer. In addition, there are wider social and personal benefits associated with study such as D1t- improvements to self-confidence, personal efficacy, health, social mobility and family life.

4. We do not pretend that improving adult literacy and numeracy is an o 5 easy problem to tackle. It is not. The relationship between studying and positiv outcomes is highly contingent on people's motivations and 1 circumstances and these can change rapidly. Over the last fifteen years, successive administrations have made a considerable : 1:> 3 investment in both schools and adult education. Some of this: has paidb 1 b   I off in terms of improved rates of literacy in the adult population. However our numeracy levels remain largely static. This Government has put in place a major research programme on English and maths precisely because we need to understand the challenges in rriuch o5 greater detail than we do currently in order that future investment can -p 3 be smarter and more focused than it has been in the past. This includes research into areas which, to date, have been relatively unexplored, through the new Behavioural Research Centre f6r Adult

Skills and Knowledge. Details of the full research programme are set out in this response.

5. Given the primacy of good literacy and numeracy to success in other learning and the labour market, the Government continues to prioritise English and maths for all adults who have not yet reached GCSE standard in these subjects. In the 2013/14 academic year 951,800 adults aged 19 or over participated in government funded English and maths further education training courses. Last year 16-18 year old students taking English GCSE increased by 53% (or 52,000) nd maths GCSE by 36% (or 63,000).

6. We have a strong focus on enabling_g.articipation by those who would benefit most, especially the mor lsaavantaged and unempl9yed. AD?.., ?.. significant proportio_n of l_earners are workin at the l west level_s; many) , are unemployed or inactive and are embarking on a Journey to improve their and their family's prospects. We have increased the flexibility that providers have to tailor their programmes to meet the needs qt their u5 learners and, as a result, English and maths courses take many forms, from work-based learning to community classes. We support English and maths in prisons, in community centres and in colleges as stand-alone night classes or embedded in vocational programmes. :We now plan to assess the role that Children's Centres can play in this area. We are also seeing a significant growth in online training and the widespread use of technology to enhance the curriculum and:facilitate self-study.

7. Such diversity is essential if we are to support the wide range:of needs 1)5 in the population and foster innovation. But it should not become an excuse for compromising on quality. We have reformed the ay in which the quality of further education is assured and we parti ularly welcome Ofsted's increasing focus on English and maths tea¢hing and learning in schools and in further education. We have improv d the quality and relevance of GCSEs in English and mathematics and now intend to do the same for other qualifications, including Functional Skills, which are also widely studied. We have an increased mphasis on raising the capacity and quality of the FE workforce, with a: £30m investment over two years, and on identifying new **ways** of teaching English and maths that are more engaging for those adults who have not succeeded in more formal education.

8. Attitudes to English and maths run very deep and many peopie with low skills approach the subjects with a sense of failure. Our ambition, not just for the Government but for the country as a whole, must be to

n5 create a culture of aspiration and expectation that <u>achievement of English and maths at level 2 is the norm and to encourage pe:ople to recognise that they have simply not yet achieved.</u> Our reforms to early years' education and schools place acquiring good literacy and numeracy at the heart of the curriculum, and this is now beginning to

b, <u>bear fruit.</u> For example, in 2013, 85% of students at Key Stage 2 were national curriculum level 4 or above in maths compared with 80% in 2010.

9. Once people are out of full-time education and training, it is increasingly clear that <u>labour market engagement, i.e. work, i the</u> 1::>1. <u>biggest driver of skills development.</u> We have a rea y embe : e English and maths into our work-b·asedtraining programmes, :notably apprenticeships and traineeships.

1O.In our response, we set out how our programme of work and reforms to the funding, quality and delivery of English and maths for adults helps to address the Committee's observations and recommendations. This subject is of critical importance to the whole country and one riot wholly owned by Government but by all of us. We welcome the Sel ct Committee's report as the opportunity to further this national debate.

Appendix 9c: Key to document analysis

Linguistic features

Lexical choice / semantic fields:
    1   'English' or 'literacy'
    2   Finance / economy
    3   Functioning
    4   Work / employability
    5   Deficit
    6   Personal / social issues
    7   Skills

Pers. Persuasive language
Emph.   Language used for emphasis

Grammar:

    P   Pronoun
    MV   Modal verb

Main discourses

D1   Functionalism
D2   Work / employability
D3   Economy / finance / business
D4   Wider personal and social issues
D5   Deficit

DEF = definitions of literacy

Appendix 10a: Example of interview transcript with analysis

Question 2: Why should adults be literate?

Because they can't participate fully in social, economic life of the country or society without those literacy skills as effectively as other people can so I suppose that would be my view of that. It's a functional need in order to be able to have opportunity and participate as an adult member of society …to get the best advantage. (Jane)

....

Well as I said I have my thoughts and the thoughts of my learners if that's alright. So really my thoughts as a tutor it's so that they're able to access the wider world really with confidence and with some sort of critical awareness really so that they have the skills and knowledge to make some informed decisions about their own futures I think and I think it's about it's about confidently adapting to different areas of your life whether that's sort of as an individual or as a family member or in your work place, in your job or in the wider community and I tried to think about the sort of effect that being literate or not would have some of the people that I come into direct contact with. I don't know if that's of any interest but I had a young chap come through the was sent by the Job Centre to me a few weeks ago actually to enrol on my last course and he's been sent because he was having trouble just claiming benefits and he was having trouble filling in online all the stuff he has to fill in online CVs you know, evidence that he was applying for jobs and so on. When I, this was a guy from Huddersfield. I suppose he was in his late forties nice chap quite lacking sort of in confidence really but we did an assessment and he could write his name just about and her could write his address I think although he did have to copy part of it and indistinct to be honest he needed a lot of help and support which sadly I wasn't able to give him and I had to signpost him back to the Job Centre and advise him that the course that he needed a beginner level literacy course may be accessible at Kirklees College. I don't know, but he was somebody who was typical of people that we still do get who have slipped through the new for whatever reason and have somehow managed to find some strategies to cope with life. So that's at one end of the spectrum of people that I see and on the other hand I've had somebody who again has had all kinds of issues and problems through his life. He came to my literacy class, as it was then when we worked towards the National Literacy Test, with absolutely no self-confidence, no qualifications. He had done some work but very limited. Again, I suppose he's in his late forties this guy. He stayed with me, passed his literacy test stayed on for the Functional Skill, got the whole of the Functional Skills at level 1, went on to get the whole of the Functional Skills at level 2, then became a volunteer in my class and then went on to get his first paid job in many many years and just absolutely blossomed with confidence and self-esteem and went on to do all kinds of things really. He did, he had done other classes as well, not just literacy, but I think it is the literacy, the functional skills class really that enabled him to do a lot of that stuff and apart from kind of going on to function in the real world I've had people who have, one delightful woman who was in her late 60s who came to join just for fun and for something to do and she was somebody who never read and by the end of her course, she stayed with me for a year I think, for three short course, she was

devouring books   you know she said, 'Oh ... , I go home and I switch off the television because I want to find out what's going to happen next in my book. 'you know and she was actually used by the used as a case study by the Quick Reads website because of her success, you know so as I said about functioning in your day to day life but there are additional things as well. I think going on and the students sort of added to that what the biggest thing they said the biggest reason they gave was that they wanted to be independent and they didn't want to have to rely on other people to read things for them. They didn't want to give that power to other people. They wanted that power for themselves. The other thing that they said was that they felt that being literate made them feel confident, it made them have some self-esteem, it empowered them to be able to face life's challenges and it gave them an identit y which was something I hadn't really thought about you know to take an identity for themselves rather than passing things on to other people and living in other people's shadows. So that was that.
They also said as well that you know just the business of acquiring knowledge and gaining qualifications really was important to them I think ……. (Sarah)
....

It's difficult isn't it. I was thinking about the word literate as well because to me literate is not just about having a good command of English and communication. It's also about being literate in things like your maths and ICT because my take on it is about being able to manage, if you like, in everyday life so it's about being able to go to the shop and being, you know, understanding obviously the signs around you and being able to do your shopping, check your change, you know, things like that. So I think the reason that people should be literate is obviously so they can function independently in everyday life but also to give them aspirations to move on as well you know   to take enjoyment in enjoyment   of being able to read , for example, which also gives you're the other side is giving you wellbeing. I also think it helps benefit the next generation because obviously you know it's been wel   l researched hasn't it that if parents are literate then their children have got mor   e chance of sort of you know being helped at home and moving on in life as well.   I think that the main thing is really it's essential to be able to operate functionall   y within life and being independent as well you know within life. (Pauline)
....

Well it's a tricky question but I would say that it's just to function in life because nowadays more than anything with the Internet, the wider world and so on. I can't personally because I've never been illiterate so I couldn't possible sympathise properly with them. For me I don't know how they would function if they aren't literate, if they aren't able to read and write and you know everyday things you do like sorting out finances and applying for jobs and so on. I can't imagine the difficulty if you aren't literate. A couple of years ago I did an entry 1 class and they were just literate in that they had very very basic reading skills and very very basic writing skills and that sort of illustrated it for me because I did ask … I asked what is it like and they more or less said it's really really hard because everyone expects that you can just read and that's it whereas they can have difficulties. I would say generally anywhere just that I imagine they should be literate because it makes it easier to function in this world we have now. (Joe)
....

For ? purposes and now the pressure that's put upon, well not the pressure, but the expectations that are put upon people for working and expectations for communications such as email, verbal communications, written communications. (Heather)

....

I once saw a poster or campaign and it was about being able to read the world rather than reading the word and I thought that was a really good way of looking at it because there's not many things in life that doesn't require being able to read. I think it filters into so many different things and I think your life must be so limited if you're not able to read. It's not even from an educational point of view for me. I don't know how people can appreciate everything in their life if they can't read. (Clare)

....

As I teach our students, without literacy the whole world becomes a hostile place. Texting, emailing, checking the guide for tv programmes, all become a difficult place to negotiate. It must take great confidence in another person, to ask them to deal with your financial affairs and booking holidays etc. There is the obvious 'knock on effect' of their offspring being illiterate or not being in a position to help them through their school and study years. There is a whole world that becomes accessible once a person is literate, and the days of being taught at a masters' knee to progress through work are over. Now, I teach cleaners literacy and numeracy, so there is nowhere to hide once in the world of work. (Debbie)

....

In my opinion adults should be literate so that they can function in society at a decent capacity or decent rate really. So that they can access all sorts of things without having to have the level of support that some people need in terms of banking, in terms of managing the house, in terms of parenting, things like that. (Moira)

…………………………

Well I was talking to clients today about this. I was telling them what I was doing this afternoon. They were all very very thrilled to be part of this (indistinct) basically they were saying that it helps them get better jobs. A lot of them left school without any qualifications or sometimes school did not just connect or engage at all and they're coming back to do (indistinct) to give themselves better prospects. It helps build their skills – the bank basically, it helps them with their children, because quite a lot of them have got children who are coming home from school and do reading and all sorts of activities which they have had to give help with in the past. They're frightened basically. So it's helping some of them to communicate better with their children and some of them have said that they can actually read now and read confidently, so it's making them when they go into a shop or something, looking at a timetable, or may be just doing a job search, they're able to understand what they're doing rather than just sort of guessing. (Sonia)

………………………….

I think it's important because it empowers you, I guess – the biggest reason – it gives you so many more opportunities than if you're not. It you're reading and writing up to a certain standard job-wise you stand more of a chance of being able to gain employment if you can read and write and for your own pleasure as well, being able to read and get information from reading is really important. (Faye)

………………………….

I think that specifically for us, or for our organisation, it's really because, it's to improve employment prospects really. There are a lot of young people that are coming to us

that aren't as literate as we would hope, you know. That can be for a number of reasons. It could be a symptom of their own educational needs or it could be that they've not had the sort of education that they might get through secondary school, so occasionally we find that they're not ready for employment as a result of that so it's quite important that we support them on that. Also to carry out basic tasks at home and at work as well as to be able to listen and speak in a way that's appropriate to the workplace. And also do things, tasks that we might see as menial like completing a CV or completing an application form or being able to read simple instructions. That's one of the prime reasons to being literate. Also from an income perspective, being literate can help support them, support themselves with income coming into the family. Being able to support their own family, develop their own children down the line because obviously they may have children that have literacy needs. If they become literate themselves that would help. (John)

……………………

So they can participate and so they've got choices, basically. (Mary)

………………………

I think, particularly with technology, with advances in technology, not being literate is like having a disability these days. It's always been a disadvantage not being literate, but so much now depends on the ability to read and write and even for someone who is functionally not literate 20 or 30 years ago there were still jobs you could do. That's no longer true really and ideally we want everybody to be really really literate. We want people to be more than functionally literate but you can't survive in society without literacy these days. (Donna)

……………………………

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. I suppose it's being able to read and write effectively for different purposes. Just from everyday things like being able to pay bills, choosing a gas and electricity provider, things like that, to more sophisticated things like being able to interact through writing in different forms for different purposes, to be able to be an effective member of society, I suppose. So it's not just being able to read. It's being able to read and write for different purposes. (Felicity)

…………………………………

Appendix 10b: Key to analysis of interview data

Themes (interviews with teachers):

Reading

Autonomy and independence

Functional literacy

Literacy and well-being (including confidence, self-esteem, enjoyment)

Power / empowerment

Digital literacy

Children and family

Numeracy / maths

Writing

Employability / work

Inclusion / participation

Appendix 11: Qualification levels

Level		Example criteria (writing)	Equivalent
Entry Level: 3 sub-levels	Entry Level 1	'Write short, simple sentences.'	Below GCSE
	Entry Level 2	'Write short texts with some awareness of the intended audience.'	
	Entry Level 3	'Write texts with some adaptation to the intended audience.'	
Level 1		'Write a range of texts to communicate information, ideas and opinions, using formats and styles suitable for their purpose and audience.'	GCSE Grade 2/3 (E/D)
Level 2		'Write a range of texts, including extended written documents, communicating information, ideas and opinions effectively and persuasively'	GCSE Grade 4 (C)

(Ofqual, 2011, pp. 5-10.)